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Becoming a pastor Youth and social aspirations in Ghana

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Abstract

Ghana, like a number of other African countries, witnesses an increasing number of smaller independent Pentecostal churches founded by young pastors. These young pastors engage in pastoral careers as a way to achieve social mobility. It is an attractive career path for many young people as it offers opportunities of ascending religious and social hierarchies in a situation where the more conventional modes of achieving success, through education and employment as civil servant, are decreasing.

By exploring the careers of young pastors, the article discusses how this particular group of youth are innovative and entrepreneurial in the sense that they create spaces, where they can build up status and where this status is socially recognized. At the same time the young pastors are dependent on more senior pastors in order to make a career. This points to the importance of approaching youth from the perspective of generational dynamics. The argument is that in order to become successful pastors, young people have to engage in complex relations of dependency and at the same time be innovative. A religious setting, like the small independent Pentecostal churches, enables young people to be involved in and transcend these generational relations by drawing on powerful religious repertoires of invoking and claiming access to divine powers.

Keywords

Pentecostalism, young pastors, Ghana, generation, social mobility

This article is about an emerging group of political and cultural innovators in Africa: young pastors of neo-Pentecostal churches in Kumasi, Ghana. It discusses young pastors' career trajectories and analyzes these trajectories as reflections of wider trends of changing generational relations in Ghana. Becoming a young pastor can be seen as a new form of career trajectory and as a way of achieving social status and mobility in a context where employment opportunities are scarce and age based hierarchies hinder social ascension. Young pastors represent an emerging economic, political and social force that employs innovative strategies in the process of becoming 'someone' in society (Lauterbach, 2008).

Studying the careers of young neo-Pentecostal¹ pastors offers a lens to analyze generational dynamics in Ghana because neo-Pentecostalism represents a novel ideological and institutional frame within which youth act and make sense of their lives in new ways. At the same time, young pastors draw on local categories of status and power in their attempts to become recognized as someone in society. Becoming 'someone' in an Asante² context implies entering into relations with senior people that involve patronage and mutual obligations. Consequently, becoming a pastor is both about innovative forms of attaining status and power and about drawing on locally embedded notions of power and 'bigness' (Soothill, 2007).

Some scholars have argued that Pentecostal churches have the potential to strengthen civil society and that they constitute places where egalitarian relations can emerge (Marshall, 1993; Martin, 2002). Moreover, the literature on Pentecostalism in Africa has paid much attention to the notion of rupture and breaking with the past. Meyer (1998) and Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) for instance, argue that conversion to Pentecostalism leads to a break with one's past, which enables people to liberate themselves from restraining social bonds as found in, for instance, age-based social hierarchies. Along the same lines, Pentecostalism has been seen as particularly attractive for young people. The religious discourse is directed towards the youth; pastors talk about how to succeed in life, get married, get an education and employment and they also offer marriage counselling and advice on how to start a business. These churches are understood to provide a space where young people can escape social obligations and at the same time get both material and spiritual support in their attempts to lead modern lives and accumulate wealth for themselves (see Laurent, 1999; Lauterbach, 2005).

These studies have to some extent neglected the continued significance of local categories of power and have, in my view, overemphasized the emancipating potential of the Pentecostal churches. According to Soothill, the neo-Pentecostal churches 'tend to draw on traditional forms of authority and are susceptible there to reproducing the dynamics of local power relations' (2007: 139). The analytical perspective of this article is placed within this tension of neo-Pentecostalism as a framework for political and cultural innovation and at the same time as an ideological framework that resonates with historically embedded notions of power and status. The tension between the liberating

potential of this new religious setting and its reproduction of authoritative forms of leadership is central to the discussion of pastors' careers and social mobility in this article.

The cases presented in this article show that the social relationships young pastors engage in cannot be reduced to being mere reproductions of more traditional patron-client relations; they are relations that are flexible in the sense that they permit the young to grow, but they at the same time provide the necessary institutional frames and back-up. The article explores the dialectics between emancipation and dependency/patronage and analyzes how young pastors navigate generational relations in their attempts to become a pastor, which is also a transition from being a junior to being an elder (Le Meur, 2008: 212). The article thus looks at young pastors from a generational perspective. The aim is not so much to discuss youth as a social category per se, but to offer an analysis of relations between pastors and their peers in a broad religious setting (Whyte et al., 2008).

The article argues that young neo-Pentecostal pastors involve themselves in and transcend generational relations by drawing on powerful religious repertoires of invoking and claiming access to spiritual power. The young pastors draw on local historical notions in order to legitimize their new social positions and realize their social aspirations. They depend on senior pastors in order to make successful careers, but at the same time they are innovative in the way they move in and out of these generational relations, which permit them to grow and achieve 'bigness'. This argument reflects an understanding of youth that recognizes youth as living under certain restraining socio-economic conditions, and also recognizes the agency and innovativeness of this generation (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005). Both constraints and possibilities are seen in an inter-generational perspective, which in this case means relations between young and senior pastors. This perspective on youth is different from the idea of youth in Africa as a 'lost generation' or a 'problem' as discussed by Cruise O'Brien (1996).

The article draws on research from my Ph.D. thesis (Lauterbach, 2008), which is about the configurations and dynamics of pastorship in neo-Pentecostal churches in Asante, Southern Ghana. Data were collected in 2004 and 2005 both in Copenhagen and Ghana. In Ghana, fieldwork was carried out mainly in Kumasi, but also in Accra, Techiman and Sunyani. The empirical material consists of 87 interviews, participation in 32 church services in 14 different churches, collection of audio-visual material, religious booklets and magazines, newspaper articles, questionnaires, archival files, as well as many informal conversations with pastors and their families. I interviewed pastors at different levels in their careers. Most pastors were young and upcoming pastors in and around Kumasi, or pastors for whom Kumasi had been a step in their pastoral careers. In order to get a fuller picture of pastoral career trajectories I also interviewed pastors who had a longer career and who were more well-established. Some of them had become leaders of big churches with up to 2,000 members.

YOUTH AND ASPIRATIONS IN GHANA

Pastorship as an alternative career path can be seen as a reflection of a wider tendency in Africa, where one observes a decline in the attractiveness and status which was earlier attached to being a civil servant. New trajectories of ascension are emerging among young people. Becoming a pastor provides the possibility of achieving status in a way that involves other strategies and criteria of success than, for instance, a civil service career. Becoming a pastor can thus be seen as becoming '*nouvelles figures de la réussite*' (new figures of success), as discussed by Banégas and Warnier (2001). They argue that the power of well established authorities is declining in post-colonial Africa. This decline also means a change in representations of power and legitimate forms of accumulation. Signs of status are changing and new types of popular leaders are emerging among the youth like pastors, movie stars, musicians and football players. These popular figures show new ways of accumulating and attaining power that does not necessarily depend on political power or a position in political power structures. As pointed out by Marshall-Fratani (2001: 27), becoming a neo-Pentecostal pastor is part of a new strategy of accumulation in a context that is marked by 'la faillite des stratégies plus classiques (l'éducation, les diplômes, les liens avec l'administration, les réseaux de parenté et de patronage)' (the failure of the most classic strategies: education, diplomas, links to the administration, networks with kin and patronage).

I argue that although young people seek to attain status in new ways, they still refer to former ideological and cultural frameworks when realizing their social aspirations. Some authors have, on the other hand, argued that youth in Africa 'move in worlds governed by rules, norms, ethics and moralities that seem to have broken quite radically with all kinds of pasts' (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005: 11). De Boeck and Honwana refer to the trend whereby former holders of power (such as the colonial power and political leaders) have lost their appeal to young people in Africa today and they believe that this implies that 'existing frames of reference [...] have lost all epistemic power' (2005: 11). I agree that young neo-Pentecostal pastors are to be seen as part of a broader pattern of reconfiguration of elites, where young people challenge the positions of more established holders of power, but at the same time suggest that pastors do this by referring to existing frames of reference. Neo-Pentecostal pastors, for instance, draw on the idea that someone who can mediate between the spiritual and the material world is a person who possesses spiritual power. And by drawing on this locally embedded reference, they are recognized widely in society and not only by their congregants.

In Ghana the 1990s were marked by structural adjustment programmes and political and economic liberalization. Despite the fact that these programmes rarely achieved their intended effects, they have had decisive influence on the organization of power and the composition of the public sphere. This has meant that the public sphere has become more open and plural, which has

resulted in a decline of the legitimacy of the existing elites (Banégas and Marshall-Fratani, 2003: 10). The emergence and prominence of neo-Pentecostal pastors is to some extent an outcome of this more plural public sphere with diversified opportunities for social and economic ascension. In order to become legitimate public figures of authority, young pastors engage in new trajectories of ascension that are innovative and at the same time refer to notions of, for instance, power and wealth that resonate with the past (Lauterbach, 2006 [2008]).

The growth of the neo-Pentecostal churches increased in the 1980s at a time of economic decline and political instability. These socio-economic conditions also influenced the social aspirations of Ghanaian youth. In the years after Ghana's independence (in 1958) status was related to getting an education and a white collar job, which was the emergent sector of the economy at that time (King and Martin, 2002: 9). As Arhin observes, social mobility could mainly be achieved through 'higher education, successful business or involvement in politics' (1994: 317). Academic education was seen as the route to employment in the public sector, which was again seen as a way to achieve social and economic mobility (Osei, 2004: 431). There have been substantial reductions in the employment opportunities in the public sector during the structural adjustment period and many young people are employed or make an income in the informal sector (King and Martin, 2002: 6; Langevang and Gough, 2009: 743). Moreover, as noted by King and Martin (2002: 13), the attitude vis-à-vis jobs in the formal sector has changed:

it was widely felt that the salaries that could accrue from being a government clerk, or a university teacher — let alone a primary school teacher — were not sufficient for more than a part of the month. In other words, it had become even more essential for many so-called formal sector workers to have at least two jobs, and often the second and third were in what has come to be termed the informal economy.

According to King and Martin, the aspirations of students today are to be self-employed, to work for the government or to work for a private company (King and Martin, 2002: 15). Young people in Ghana are expected to make a career and earn enough income to settle a family. Success in life is measured in both social and material resources. Although young people in Ghana have aspirations of entering the civil services or gaining employment in the private sector, to which education is the route, the prestige and value of having a diploma is decreasing. The direct link between education, diploma, employment and social status has been undermined by the changing socio-economic context.

Langevang explains that youth in Ghana is understood as 'a period of life during which people are expected to acquire knowledge and skills through informal and formal education' (2008: 2044). Young people are striving to 'become someone in society' and attain status. This among other things entails getting employment and founding a family. In other words, establishing oneself

as 'someone' in society is becoming increasingly difficult, and it is in this light that the growing number of young neo-Pentecostal pastors should be understood. As Hanson (2005) shows in a study of urban livelihoods in Koforidua, Ghana, people are becoming increasingly dependent on social networks. Hanson argues that 'survival for most Ghanaians is embedded in social relationships' (2005: 1295) and these consist of ties to family members, neighbours, colleagues and various forms of associations (including religious associations). The point is that neo-Pentecostal churches constitute a new space in which young people can establish themselves and move from being considered young to 'being someone in society'. To become recognized as a neo-Pentecostal pastor they have to demonstrate that they have access to spiritual power and that they have the knowledge and ability to activate this power. In order to do so and hence succeed in their pastoral careers, young people build up and rely on social relations with senior pastors.

YOUNG PASTORS IN AN ASANTE CONTEXT

Generally speaking, neo-Pentecostal pastors include a wide range of people from different backgrounds and with varying levels of education. Most of the pastors included in this study had some formal education, both primary education and post-primary education. Many had also finished secondary school. About half of the pastors had been to polytechnic, teacher training college, or university. About a third had left school after the first level of secondary education and therefore fell in the category of 'school leavers'. The characteristics of these pastors reflect a wider picture of youth in Ghana today. First, there is a group of well-educated young people, many with university degrees, who have expectations about a job in the public or private sector and a certain standard of living. Second, there is the group of 'school leavers', who do not have much education, but who nonetheless aspire for further education, employment and the ensuing social recognition (Yamada, 2005: 74, 84). So there is a big motivation for exploring new ways of attaining status and prestige, as the more traditional ones (education, diploma) are under pressure.

Interestingly, about half of the pastors I talked to had been employed in other professions before becoming pastors, such as chartered accountant, teacher, mason and shop owner. One pastor (Emmanuel) was educated as an accountant and had worked several years as a civil servant. He started a Christian fellowship (a smaller group of Christians who gather for praying and preaching, but who still belong to their respective churches), and at the same time left his job. Emmanuel also started a printing and photocopying shop to get an income besides his activities in the fellowship. After some time he became a pastor in a big neo-Pentecostal church and worked in various church branches. While a pastor, he also invested in a poultry farm to supplement and diversify his income and had plans to set up more businesses. In another case, a female pastor (Boadicea) had established a church on her own by breaking

away from another church and taking some church members with her. She had formerly worked as a chartered accountant, but gave up her profession after becoming a full time pastor. She got her income from running a canteen at an international school, which her mother owned. It is noteworthy that these pastors actually had public sector jobs before entering into pastorship. They gave up their employment as civil servants in order to involve themselves in full-time ministry and then supplemented their income by investment in other small businesses.³

Another group of young pastors had little education and no regular employment before becoming pastors. They had, for instance, been working for a family member and had only had a limited amount of money at their disposal. After becoming pastors they did not receive a salary, but depended on donations from church members or senior pastors ('chop-money') or gifts from family and friends. In one case, three young pastors were establishing a church on behalf of a Ghanaian pastor living abroad. They did not receive an income, but got some money now and then to buy chairs and instruments for the church. They were living in a room at the church premises, because they could not live with their parents. Although their work as pastors did not provide a salary, they invested themselves in building this church, because it was important, at this stage in their careers, to create a close relationship to a pastor living abroad. This could later provide an opportunity for them to go abroad and it also created contacts with Ghanaian migrants returning home.

These observations suggest that a pastoral career is more than just a way of securing an income in a situation with less public sector jobs and a high level of unemployment. I argue that pastoral work is becoming more attractive in a situation where one cannot live off a public service salary, as pastoral work permits diversified sources of income, but also because being a pastor is associated with spiritual power and hence the ability to make things happen. A pastoral career permits an easier route to attaining power positions in society for young people, because a pastor's social status is not (only) determined by age. Other criteria of success are in play such as wealth and the ability to prove access to spiritual power. Moreover, these virtues are recognized broadly in society, and not only within the church. The pastor is a public figure who is seen as a variation of more local and historically rooted figures of success such as the Asante idea of a 'big man' and a religious leader.

In an Asante context, becoming a pastor and the ways in which this role is recognized in society (such as through the possession and display of wealth) can be related to the historical social category of 'big men'. In pre-colonial Asante status was achieved by becoming an office holder and eventually through promotion by being awarded the title *obirempon* ('big man'). The title was given to successful individuals as a sign of recognition and success was measured both in terms of individual entrepreneurship and military achievements (McCaskie, 1995: 42). The *obirempon* was both a provider and a protector: an entrepreneur who gathered followers, secured access to gold and who established and looked after the well-being of villages. Colonial rule and the

changing socio-economic context led to more opportunity for social mobility and individual accumulation of wealth. The capitalization of the economy permitted new opportunities of acquiring cash and consuming in ways that escaped certain social bonds of obligation. This change led to the emergence of new and upcoming social groups of businessmen and educated clerks among the youth with social and political aspirations. They challenged existing notions of wealth and distribution and accumulated wealth for themselves. They were seen as a new version of the Asante 'big man'. Neo-Pentecostal pastors draw on these historical repertoires of cultural norms and meaning. They achieve status and recognition by their accumulation and distribution of wealth and through their access to spiritual power. As I demonstrate in this article, becoming a Pentecostal pastor is attractive for young people in Asante because a pastor is a social figure that has historical resonance and whose status is recognized widely in society.

PENTECOSTALISM IN GHANA

Since the 1980s the neo-Pentecostal churches have grown significantly in Ghana. A recent survey has estimated that 24 per cent of the Ghanaian population (of nineteen million) defines itself as Pentecostal/charismatic (Larkin and Meyer, 2006: 290). The so-called classical Pentecostal churches have been present in Ghana for over a century and were established by missionaries coming from Europe or the United States. The emergence of the neo-Pentecostal movement started in the 1950s and 1960s. At this point in time the movement was mainly present in educational institutions and was popular among the youth. They organized in various fellowships and para-church movements (as for instance, Scripture Union). In fact many of the leaders of the big neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana today, have grown out of these fellowships.

The main characteristics of the neo-Pentecostal churches are their apparent flat organizational structure, the prominent role of the media, personal conversion and transformation and achieving material success, health and wealth as a sign of God's blessings (Soothill, 2007: 37–9). Moreover, they are characterized by a flourishing number of new and independent churches, as well as a number of mega-churches. This is different from the classical Pentecostal churches. They are organized in a number of relatively well-structured churches and have more focus on an ascetic lifestyle and the afterlife (see Maxwell, 2006; Robbins, 2004).

The churches are normally organized around one pastor, who has a number of junior pastors under him. They have various responsibilities, such as music, mission, youth, marriage counselling, etc. This means that the churches have an organizational set-up that divides responsibilities, but at the same time no one would question the power of the leading pastor. One example of this is that only leading pastors preach in church at Sunday services. One would rarely see a junior pastor deliver the sermon; they would instead lead prayers and

worship (singing). This indicates that transmitting the word of God is linked to being someone of spiritual power, and the senior pastors use this occasion to prove their charismatic power. One pastor explained that he would rather have a pastor from another church to preach if he was not present himself. Permitting a younger pastor to preach is seen as a potential threat to a senior pastor.

Some of the small churches did not have such an organizational structure, but there was a clear tendency that they tried to install rules and regulations and in this way establish the church and maintain the congregation. Regulation is for instance, installed by establishing criteria for membership and for being a pastor, for collecting tithes and by having regular church programmes and church activities. Moreover, these regulations serve as a foundation for creating pastoral authority. For instance, some of the bigger churches had record books, where they registered all church members and the church members' payment of tithes (one tenth of their income). At the church service members were asked to fill out a card with their membership number, whether they were newcomers, with their motivation for coming, and contact details. This is a way for the leadership to keep control of the congregation.

The members of the neo-Pentecostal churches are typically people with aspirations of material wealth and economic success. Some churches (the large urban churches) have a large proportion of youth in their congregations, where the congregations in other churches (such as rural and healing oriented churches) mainly are constituted by middle-aged women with low incomes. However, the churches appeal to people from very different social and economic backgrounds, which means that they propose and offer something to very different groups of the Ghanaian society. The churches offer a range of activities that appeal specifically to young people. Music is an important part of a church's brand, and often young people are involved as singers or musicians. The churches also offer marriage counselling for young couples and social events where one can learn about 'falling in love' and 'health and HIV/AIDS' (see Bochow, 2009).

The prominence of pastors is one of the more dominant features of the neo-Pentecostal churches (Gifford, 2004; Maxwell, 2006; Meyer, 2005). Pastors are incarnation of their churches, and their personal appearance and grandeur is important for the status of the church. They act as mediators between God and this world and invoke spiritual power to provide success and protection against evil forces. One can draw parallels between the role of neo-Pentecostal pastors and the role played by prophets in the spiritual churches and by traditional diviners (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). A common feature is the paramount importance of access to the divine, which enables a religious expert to provide spiritual services. Scholars like Larbi (2001) and Adubofour (1994) argue that the neo-Pentecostal movement in Ghana is a re-appropriation and reinvention of African prophetism, in particular with regard to the centrality of the person (see also Gifford, 2004).

There is a tension between the flat organizational structure of these churches and the prominence and power of the leading pastors. As mentioned above, these churches have been characterized as having an egalitarian organizational structure (and hence an empowerment potential according to Martin (2002)) in the sense that members are invited to participate and organize various groups and take up leadership roles within these groups. At the same time, some scholars have shown that these churches enable a ‘democratization of faith’, which means that all church members in principle have direct access to God, and that this contact does not have to be mediated by a pastor (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). It is interesting that spiritual power and status of pastors play such an important role despite these churches’ flat organizational structure. With regard to neo-Pentecostal churches in Kumasi, I would argue that the authority and position of a head pastor is a more prominent feature than the egalitarian organizational structure of the churches. Although there is no overall structure to control the establishment and work of the neo-Pentecostal churches, other mechanisms of social control exist. As will be discussed in the next section, there is a strong control with junior pastors within the churches. Senior pastors are very aware of younger pastors becoming too ‘big’ and being a challenge to their authority. There are various ways in which the church leadership deals with these situations. If a young upcoming pastor is viewed as being ‘mature’ (or likely to become a threat to the senior pastor), he can be allocated to a branch church in a village or encouraged to establish a church on his own.

BECOMING A PASTOR: SOCIAL RELATIONS AND CHARISMATIC GENEALOGY

Becoming a pastor is a career trajectory in the sense of being a choice of profession that constitutes an alternative at a time when other possibilities are less attractive and less accessible (Banégas and Warnier, 2001; Marshall-Fratani, 2001: 26). Yet, becoming a pastor cannot merely be understood as a choice of career or as a way of securing an income. Seen from the perspective of young pastors, becoming a pastor is not a choice of profession like any other, but rather a fulfilment of one’s destiny. The young pastors I talked with described their pastoral careers as a journey in life, which they engaged in upon a divine call. This could, in their understanding, not be refused. This is both linked to the Pentecostal understanding of God directing one’s life and to the Asante ‘[o]ntological idea of shaped destiny or individual fate (*nkrabea*)’ (McCaskie, 1992: 230). Moreover, many pastors perceived the path to become a pastor as a struggle that demanded persistence, but that at the same time was unavoidable.

A divine calling is a central element in many of the stories I was told by pastors on how and why they had become pastors. They had all received a calling through a vision or a dream, in which God talked to them. Many pastors associate the acceptance of the call with internal struggle. One pastor explains how he tried to resist a call:

But initially I wasn't opening up to God in order to take the task, because I heard many pastors complaining that it is difficult, it is not easy, the problems you face, so I had not wanted to engage myself in anything that has got to do with God. I just decided to go to church and be a normal Christian, an ordinary church member and also go about with my normal lifestyle with my business. And yet as God will have it, God just called me, he also confirmed it through many pastors that God has spoken to me, that he wants to use you, that he wants you to be his servant.⁴

Many young pastors referred to the difficulties related to doing pastoral work and the difficult living and working conditions they faced. Although struggling can be seen as part of the path to become a pastor, refusal is not a possibility. It was widely accepted that not obeying God's calling would lead to failure in life.

The way in which pastoral callings are narrated shows the importance attached to approval of the call by others. Receiving a call is not only an individual or personal experience; other pastors and church leaders often receive the call through dreams and visions and thereby confirm the call. The confirmation of the call by the social surroundings is a way to legitimize the call, proving its sincerity and showing that it is genuine. At a prayer meeting in Kumasi, the pastoral call of a young man was publicly announced. The young man was summoned by his senior pastor who told the congregation that the young man had had a call from God to become a pastor. All participants at the meeting prayed for the young man and the leading pastor and a visiting guest preacher laid hands on him while praying for his success as a pastor.⁵ This young man had taken his first step to becoming a pastor, which was demonstrated publicly, approved and supported by the church leader.

The confirmation of a call by other religious people points to the fact that becoming a pastor is not only the making of an individual career and is not feasible without the acceptance of the social networks the young pastor depends on. A young pastor needs the acceptance of established church people of his call, and thereby also their credibility. The confirmation of a call does not have to be formalized or done in an official way, but is done through pastors recounting or narrating who has received a vision or dreamt of the call. Stressing the list of senior people that have confirmed a religious calling is also a way to establish a genealogy of the people one descends from spiritually and thereby also where one's spiritual power and charisma derive from.

Even though the neo-Pentecostal movement has brought with it 'a democratization of faith' in the sense that access to becoming a pastor is relatively unrestricted and that church members can have a more direct link to God and pray themselves (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005), young pastors need a certain credibility to show that their call is divine or true. Appearing and being accepted as a genuine pastor is an issue many pastors are concerned with and this is often debated publicly, for instance, in the media. Young pastors establish this credibility by referring to senior religious people. Many pastors explain their spiritual roots by referring to those they consider their mentors and spiritual fathers, and thereby draw on the merits of these people. One pastor in Kumasi

claimed the Nigerian bishop Benson Idahosa as his spiritual mentor. By doing this, the pastor enabled himself to draw on and claim the spiritual power of Idahosa, which is widely recognized in West Africa (Kalu, 2007). Invoking the spiritual power of Idahosa can be seen as a way to build up charismatic authority by younger pastors (see also Soothill, 2007: 176).

Attending a Bible school is an important step to pursue when building up a career as a pastor. The courses normally last from one to two years and pastors pay a fee to be admitted. However, Bible school attendance is not a formal requirement when working as a pastor. This is criticized by other Christian churches, such as the Catholic Church, where five years seminary is compulsory. The Bible schools give the upcoming pastor a certificate and a title. Bible schools are places for formation and initiation of young pastors. They are, moreover, a site for creating social bonds; for instance to the head of the Bible school and other students. Many have a special relationship or attachment to the leader of the school and continue to refer to him and participate in seminars after graduation. At one Bible school in Kumasi students who graduated received a license, which they had to pay for and renew every year. This is a way for the Bible school leader to keep the graduated students attached to him.

Moreover, the graduation ceremony is an important event for young and upcoming pastors. It is an occasion to display and formalize their status as pastors in public. This status is recognized by other pastors, church members, family and friends who are invited to participate in the graduation ceremony and to give financial support.

Another important element of becoming a pastor is informal training. A young pastor from a small church in Kumasi described his training as a pastor as informal training: ‘Most of the training was practical. I was always following him [the pastor] for his evangelism in the villages. He used to take along television which we used for our movie shows to win souls’. He continued to talk about the pastor who trained him:

We had never met before, but he was able to tell me who I was and what was on my mind, so it was some kind of prophecy. So when he told me the purpose of God for my life, I decided to join hands with him to learn from him. Apart from me there were other 20 guys who he was training.⁶

Another pastor explained that if you come to a church as a young pastor and say that you have received the calling of God, you cannot be immediately appointed. You have to go through a kind of training in the church:

you go about visiting people [...] and also coming to lead prayers in the church and also you will be sent around on errands, go and do this, go and do that [...] that is the kind of training you go through [...] whenever he is praying for people you have to stand at their back, when they are falling you hold them.⁷

The process of becoming a successful pastor and attaining social ascension involves elements of apprenticeship and entrepreneurship, and often also dependency on family networks.⁸

Moreover, in order to build up and legitimize a position as pastor, they have to show that they have access to the spiritual realm, hence spiritual power. This is achieved, for instance, through display of wealth and through the ability to heal and perform miracles. As mentioned above, the idea is that the pastor is a mediator between the spiritual world and people and thus holds specific gifts and powers which give him an a priori privileged position. Being a mediator also implies controlling access to spiritual power and having the knowledge to make things change. The pastor becomes a gatekeeper or broker and is central to people's success in life. Claiming access to spiritual power has a specific meaning not only in relation to church and among church members. The influence of spiritual power is also recognized and meaningful more widely in society (Akyeampong and Obeng, 1995; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005).

RECIPROCITY AND LEGITIMACY: SPIRITUAL FATHERS AND YOUNG PASTORS

Young pastors depend on senior pastors in order to establish themselves and become recognized as pastors. By being under the tutelage of a senior pastor, young pastors draw on his credibility, which they would otherwise not have had as young pastors. One pastor explained that in order to become a pastor he needed to find the right church and the right kind of people. He spoke about 'establishing himself in the things of God'. For this young pastor, becoming a pastor meant that he had to establish himself in a way that would permit him to grow later on in his career. He did this by entering an apprentice-mentor relationship with a senior pastor ('spiritual father'). Training as a young pastor is a form of informal apprenticeship, where good reputation and success influence a prospective pastor's choice of mentor (Miescher, 2005: 49-60; Peil, 1970: 143-44).

It is important to be connected to a 'big man of God' at an early stage in a young pastor's career. Two upcoming pastors in Kumasi had been working under the guidance of one of Kumasi's most well-known and influential pastors. They saw this pastor as someone 'who had made a name' and was a 'big man'. One of them wanted to be like his senior pastor, because of his ability to heal people and therefore also the manifest spiritual power he possessed. Being associated with this pastor made their work and life as young pastors easier and they could, moreover, draw on his credibility: One of them explained:

Certain things are above your knowledge, experience and age and you need someone who is well vested in there whereby you relate with him. And also he has made a name for himself, though in the Lord, but that credibility alone makes it easy for you to make inroads into the ministry than to be alone; nobody knows you, nobody knows your root, credibility and your background and so people cannot entrust their lives to you. Because of that we are bonded in the form of a fatherly relation sort of.⁹

Being under a senior pastor is a phase of training, sometimes complemented by Bible school attendance. Moreover, training under a senior pastor is a form of transmitting knowledge and power. As described above, by claiming someone as a spiritual father, one also claims this person's access to divine power. It is in other words important to belong to someone. Being under a senior pastor is not only about learning and being an apprentice, but young pastors also draw on their spiritual fathers' eminence and in this way build up their own prestige, respect and credibility. From the perspective of the young pastors, the relationship serves a double purpose. It is a way to achieve certain skills in relation to performing as a pastor, and it furthermore provides the aspirant with status and credibility.

The junior–senior relationship is in many ways a father–son relationship (senior pastors are referred to as spiritual father, and are called 'father', 'dadda' or 'papa'), which implies protection, guidance and provision of opportunities. In this way the apprentice–mentor relation is a two-way relationship. The spiritual father conveys credibility and access to spiritual power. In return, the son (junior pastor) provides services in form of loyalty, presence and support (for instance by holding the Bible of the senior pastor when he moves from his car). The loyalty of junior pastors depends on the senior pastor's ability to permit them to grow and build up their status. The authority of the senior pastor is not constant, but continuously constituted by the loyalty of the younger pastors (as well as congregations and other religious authorities). In addition, young pastors engage in relationships with, for instance, the leader of their Bible school or some other form of religious network. This shows that young pastors not only rely on their relation to their spiritual father to make a successful career, but they simultaneously tap into other social networks that provide different sets of opportunities. They are extremely aware of the importance of social relations in their attempts to realize their social aspirations. One pastor explained that they:

always try to keep relationship, because money is a weapon, so is also a relationship, a godly relationship is also a weapon. God can reveal it to one person, who will stand and pray for me. When I need a counsel, because as a pastor, because every pastor you must also get a superior.¹⁰

So in order to succeed young pastors are dependent on their spiritual fathers, but also to some extent on other people like family members, kin relations, neighbours and colleagues.

'GROWING' AND THE LIMITS OF PATRONAGE

The relation to a senior pastor is an ambivalent relation. On the one hand, it serves as protection and legitimacy. But on the other, this relation can become an obstacle to the younger pastors' opportunities for advancement. Thus, being

an apprentice also entails limits and restrictions of one's social and individual aspirations. Pastors eventually get mature and will be inclined to take over the church leadership or start a church on their own. However, the need to be 'fathered' remains and young pastors therefore have to navigate between being protected and under someone and at the same time having enough room for manoeuvring to advance in their careers.

Seen from the perspective of the younger and upcoming pastors, there is not much room for advancement within the older and well established neo-Pentecostal churches. In fact the widespread attention to the church leader and founder is seen as an obstacle for younger pastors to advance and become recognized. Some would complain that associate pastors are not allowed to preach on Sundays, which is a sign of the strict supervision and control of younger pastors in order to keep them at a distance from the leading pastor. There is, as mentioned before, an aspect of hierarchy building within these churches that is often not recognized. The fact that there are often no formalized structures on how to rise in the system constrains some younger pastors, and they therefore attempt to create their own churches in order to grow as a pastor. One, now well-established, pastor explained how he had to leave the church he trained in as a young pastor, because 'there were a few people close to the pastor who thought I was a threat'.¹¹ When the young pastors grow they represent a threat to the authority of the senior pastors. The younger pastors might challenge their positions for instance by being allowed to preach and thereby show strong spiritual power and gifts. Young upcoming pastors are therefore directed away from the power zone of the leading pastors. There exists a generational tension between the young and the senior pastors, and the new thing in this intergenerational relationship is that the young pastors do not wait to build up their positions until they become senior by age. Because the religious institutions are fragmented, relatively flexible and non-regularized, the young pastors are able to move beyond bonds of dependency with senior pastors, mainly by setting up their own churches. This, however, also includes elements of conflict and it seems that the young pastors who are escaping control and dependency of senior pastors at the same time do this in a way that appears as non-conflictual. It is important for the young pastors to be able to claim someone as a spiritual father, although they are not under their tutelage anymore.

Especially the many small neo-Pentecostal churches provide the opportunities to rise quickly in the church hierarchy, even if the 'rewards' in terms of salary are meagre. These new religious institutional settings enable young pastors to establish their own kingdoms, and to build up a position as a powerful 'man of God'.

Van Dijk (1992) describes how young born-again preachers in Malawi act as 'religious entrepreneurs' in the sense that they combine pastoral work with their social careers (such as doing business and evangelization at the same time). He argues that the young pastors create a new urban space for social mobility and distance themselves from their seniors. I agree with van Dijk's

point on pastoral careers as new routes for social climbing, but at the same time, I argue that there is a dual process taking place. Young pastors distance themselves from some relations with their seniors, but at the same time, engage in new relations that also contain elements of seniority. Becoming a pastor does not mean becoming free from hierarchical social bonds. Becoming a pastor is, on the other hand, about building social relations and about legitimizing one's position through these relations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it could be pointed out that the process of becoming a successful pastor requires involvement in two kinds of relations. First, becoming a pastor means entering an apprentice-mentor relationship with a senior pastor and second, it means getting involved in relations that permit and provide the possibilities to grow. The first relation is a vertical relation between a junior person and an older, established and recognized person, whereas the latter set of relations takes place on both a vertical and horizontal level between the young pastors and other pastors, friends, family and colleagues. In this way we can see apprenticeship and entrepreneurship as organizing principles for the making of pastoral careers. The two complement each other in the sense that the credibility and training one gets from being in an apprentice-mentor relationship is supplemented by the creation of some sort of independence from the 'spiritual father'. However, it does not suffice to become independent. A process of re-inventing and re-installing oneself in the position of pastor follows suit. As argued above, moving beyond restricting social relations entails involvement in new relations, which allows for social ascension, but which also can be a new relation of patronage.

Often neo-Pentecostal churches have been described as network-like and hence more flexible, egalitarian and less hierarchical than for instance, mainline churches due to their informal and non-regularized form (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). However, the strong focus on the person of the leader renders these churches hierarchical, though in a different way. The church to some extent provides institutional mechanisms for dealing with impatient young pastors and also controlling their eagerness to come to power (see also Whyte et al., 2008: 14).

The point is that on the one hand pastors have to engage in a hierarchical relation with a senior pastor, they have to subdue, serve and learn under this person, and on the other hand, pastors must be able to act as entrepreneurs and be innovative in order to grow sufficiently and eventually become church leaders. Young pastors, at a certain stage in their careers, escape restraining bonds to senior pastors in order to become bigger. They draw on various social networks and are innovative in the sense that they set up new churches and establish themselves as leaders by bringing in whatever resources they have at their disposal. Pastorship is a life trajectory or a career that involves skilful

navigation between being protected and being promoted by a senior pastor and making enough space to be able to grow.

The processes described and analyzed here are not unique features of neo-Pentecostal churches. They are variations of more general processes involved when becoming 'big' and building up status, wealth and power. In a broader perspective the article has discussed social aspirations and ways of becoming someone in Africa. Trying to understand how religious careers unfold gives insight into the room for manoeuvre, which neo-Pentecostal churches provide. This new religious platform in Ghana provides opportunities for reinventing and occupying social roles in ways that build on traditional figures of status and power, and at the same time renew relations to older generations. These findings add to the understandings of changing intergenerational relations in Ghanaian and African contexts.

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Notes

- 1 Different terms are employed in the literature on Pentecostalism in Ghana and Africa. There is a distinction between Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches. The former are the so-called classical churches introduced by foreign missionaries in the first half of the twentieth century. The latter group contains the more recently established churches (neo). These are either offspring of the older Pentecostal and Protestant churches or are independent churches. In this article I am concerned with the neo-Pentecostal churches (see also Gifford, 2004; Maxwell, 2006 and Robbins, 2004 for more background on Pentecostalism in Africa and at a global level).
- 2 Asante refers to a pre-colonial kingdom located in central Ghana. I did most of my fieldwork in and around Kumasi, which was the historic kingdom of Asante.
- 3 Not all pastors succeed in establishing a church or becoming a pastor. Many of the small churches might only exist for a few months or a few years and then vanish. The pastors then move on to work for another pastor or look for another employment. Many pastors were doing several things at the same time in order to secure their livelihoods. There are no figures on the number of small neo-Pentecostal churches in Kumasi and therefore it is extremely difficult to estimate how many pastors succeed and how many fail. However, the important point is that there are no clear boundaries that define when one is a pastor and when one is not a pastor. Being a pastor is something that one has to constitute continuously in relation to others (senior pastors, church members, family and friends).
- 4 Interview with Francis Afrifa, Kumasi, 17 February 2005
- 5 Resurrected Faith in Christ Ministries in Daban, Kumasi, 16 September 2005.
- 6 Interview with Daniel Darko Kabea, Kumasi, 12 September 2005.
- 7 Interview with Francis Afrifa, Kumasi, 5 September 2005.

- 8 Pastors become pastors not merely by making careers within the church, but also through relations to family and kin. Hence, young pastors engage in several social networks and invest in social relations that transgress the realm of the church in order to succeed as pastors. Young pastors' reliance on family networks when building up their careers is however not the focus of this article, but it is an important discussion and contribution to the literature on Pentecostalism in Africa (see Lauterbach, 2008).
- 9 Interview with Edward Otu, Kumasi, 22 February 2005.
- 10 Interview with Francis Afrifa, Kumasi, 13 September 2005.
- 11 Interview with Victor Osei, Kumasi, 20 August 2005.

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