Christianity, Wealth, and Spiritual Power in Ghana

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Introduction

The church was located in a school building in the Kwadaso area of Kumasi, Ghana. On Sundays, small churches occupied the classrooms of the school where they worshipped alongside one another. Banners hanging outside the school showed where each church was located (Fig. 1.1). When the churches started their services a blend of singing, preaching, and praying filled the air. The sound of drums and tambourines mixed with the loud voices of pastors preaching became a vocal symbol of the prominence and vibrancy of small charismatic churches in Ghana. The interior was sparsely decorated with plastic lace and flowers. The churchgoers were sitting in rows on the benches schoolchildren used during the week. The young pastors, who were leading these small churches, were establishing themselves as men of God not only because of a pastoral calling, but also because they could make use of their spiritual gifts more easily and freely here than while serving under a senior pastor in a larger church.

It was Edward's first visit to Alive Bible Congregation, a small charismatic church that was established in September 2004 by a Ghanaian pastor living abroad. The leadership had been delegated to a pastor in his 40s, who had just come out of Bible school. Edward was in his early 20s, a school leaver and referred to himself as prophet and pastor. Some friends had invited him to the church, and on his first visit in December 2004, the senior pastor gave him the opportunity to preach. At this time, the church had 20 members. Edward joined and left his former church, the Apostolic Church of Ghana, where he was a junior pastor. He now

Fig. 1.1 Church in class room, Kwadaso, Kumasi. *Note*: All photographs are taken by the author in all chapters

referred to himself as 'an associate pastor sort of' and a prophet of God and explained that God spoke through him about the church and the members.[1]

Edward is one among many young people in Ghana who, with the growth of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity, have embarked on pastoral career trajectories and for whom the process of becoming a pastor is about getting access to and exercising spiritual power. The many small charismatic churches provide a new platform for realising these aspirations. Although Edward joined a very small church, he had the opportunity to preach and hence to show his knowledge of the word of God, which he would not have had in a larger and more established church.

Some months later, in February 2005, the church had moved to a small storeroom located in the same area of Kumasi (see Fig. 6.1) and three young pastors had joined Edward. A Ghanaian colleague and I attended a Sunday service in the church. When we arrived, the grey metal doors that served as an entrance to the storeroom were closed and locked with

a padlock. Nobody was around and there were no signs of a church or of a church service about to start. After some 30 minutes, Edward arrived, opened the door, and put a banner with the name of the church outside. He sat down in the back of the storeroom, behind a wooden pulpit with his head bowed, and prayed while we sat waiting. The room was small with no windows. It contained eight blue plastic chairs and a drum besides the pulpit. After some time, two other young pastors arrived as well as a few church attendants, many of whom were children. An hour into the service, the senior pastor turned up and started to preach. He had not been in church for some time, the younger pastors told us, allegedly having gone back to his former church. According to him, however, he did not belong to one specific church, but 'used to move from one church to another because the head pastors in these churches did not treat [him] fairly.'[2]

By September 2005, the young pastors had taken over the leadership of the church and the senior pastor had left. They now referred to themselves as senior pastors and Edward as the head pastor and prophet. The church had moved into the premises of an old restaurant. This location was spacious and served as the young pastors' residence. Despite the new location and the link to a congregation abroad, the church had not grown much in size; the membership remained between 15–30 members and it was a changing and unstable one. Being in this church, however, allowed the young pastors, who were all in insecure positions, to set themselves up as pastors able to mediate spiritual power and in this way also to join power.

After a year or so, most of the young pastors left the church as they disagreed with the founding pastor on doctrinal issues, and he no longer allowed them to use their spiritual gifts in church for deliverance and healing. One of the young pastors, Daniel, went back to his former church, Christ Apostolic Church, and went to University College to study theology. Alongside, he helped a friend establish a Bible school and founded a fellowship himself. He remained within an established structure and hierarchy and at the same time created an independent platform on which he performed and was recognised as a man of God. A decade later, there were no signs of the church. It had collapsed.

The Aim of the Book

This book offers a study of pastorship within charismatic churches[3] as pathways to become small 'big men.' By this, I understand processes of pursuing successful careers and attaining power and wealth that resonate with

locally and historically embedded understandings of becoming 'big' and being a religious expert. The pastoral careers that I analyse are of middle-level pastors that are establishing themselves as pastors, and I focus both on the social processes of becoming a pastor and the spiritual dimensions of how power and wealth are conceptualised, achieved and legitimised in the particular context of Asante in Ghana. The book works with the premise that the social processes and moral practices at stake resonate with historical experiences and ideas. Based on this, the book offers a reading of how charismatic Christianity engages with contemporary Asante lives and identities, of how historic figures and categories get reshaped and adapted to new circumstances and influences. It combines an analysis that on the one hand historicises current expressions of charismatic Christianity, and on the other hand brings to the fore the role of religion and belief in our understanding of wealth and power more broadly in African societies (McCaskie 1995).

The book has an overarching narrative about the making of middle-level charismatic pastors and tells a story of pastors navigating relations of patronage and entrepreneurship and at the same time proving to the social surroundings that they are truthful pastors. One way of proving to be a truthful pastor is the way in which he achieves wealth and how he uses it. The book integrates the analysis of charismatic Christianity with a historically informed analysis of social mobility and of how people in subordinate positions seek to join power. Rather than focusing on the religious sector—or the church—as an isolated unit, the book analyses how charismatic Christianity is appropriated and made sense of in the local Ghanaian setting, where access to and performance of spiritual power traditionally also played an important role.

Pastorship and Charismatic Christianity

The above depiction of young and up-and-coming pastors, establishing their churches in classrooms and storerooms, is a reflection of the prominence and vitality of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in Africa. The Pew Research Centre estimates that Pentecostals in Sub-Saharan Africa constitute around 15 percent of the region's total population (Pew Research Centre 2011).[4] Ghana is the country in West Africa with the largest proportion (75 percent) of its population being Christian (Pew Research Centre 2012), with almost half the Christians being Pentecostals and neo-charismatics.[5] As the figures indicates, this form of Christianity has attracted large numbers of people and has, as noted by Maxwell (2013b),

inspired members to give large sums of money to the churches and their pastors. Moreover, adherents spend time in church, not only on Sundays for church service, but also during the week for prayer meetings, Bible study groups, and choir practice. Another salient feature of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity is the ability to mobilise and engage people in church organisation and various committees, and through this provide access to positions in the church hierarchy.

It is in relation to this tendency that we can understand the emergence of the many small and middle-sized Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Pastors (*asofo*[6]) are in many ways the pivot point of these churches that in Ghana are known as 'one-man churches', meaning a church founded by one person, belonging to one person, and in the control of one person. The pastors have since the 1980s gained prominence and have become new figures of authority and success. In common parlance, people say that everyone can start their own church, all you need is a Bible and a few plastic chairs. No one requires diplomas from Bible schools or formal approvals and registrations. But how does one become a pastor, and why is this middle-level group of aspiring younger pastors finding a pastoral career more attractive than pursuing a civil servant career, finding employment within a growing private sector, or working with an NGO with access to international networks and connections?

The book's focus on young up-and-coming pastors stands in contrast to the picture of the flamboyant mega-star pastors of the large Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa (Gifford 2004, 2015). The pastors I met in storerooms, garages, and classrooms did not fit into this image. They did not shine and were not rich, and their success depended on a variety of social connections, including family and kin. Maxwell makes a similar and more general comment: '[m]any Africanists may not have heard of these men but they are nevertheless extremely important. In the range of issues they address—moral, material and political—they are the heirs of the community and nationalist leaders of the 1950s' (Maxwell 2000: 471). The focus of this book is not on the famous superstar pastors in Accra, such as Mensa Otabil (founder and leader of The International Central Gospel Church) or Nicholas Duncan-Williams (founder and leader of Christian Action Faith Ministries), but on the middle-level pastor or the small 'big man.' The aim is to revisit how we think about power and being 'big' in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, moving the focus away from the Pentecostal 'big man' to the process of achieving 'bigness' and to becoming a small 'big man.'

Notwithstanding the apparent insignificance and smallness of these young pastors, their actions express an eagerness and motivation to succeed, to become successful 'men of God' and through this to escape subordination. Some had little educational background and therefore no qualifications for civil service employment, whereas others had university degrees and jobs. Common to all of them was the fact that by becoming pastors, they acquired status and recognition, not only in church but also more widely in society. In this book, I argue that becoming a pastor is a way to achieve status and join power, because pastors draw on both socio-political and religious criteria for success. They inscribe themselves into a global religious community that has had tremendous impact on the African continent as a whole. At the same time, their trajectories are emplaced within a local political economy that does not leave much space for social mobility and advancement. Pastoral career trajectories thus become a means to achieve social ascension and in the making of these careers, the young pastors draw on criteria of success that are historically embedded in the local Ghanaian context. Their success depends on their positioning in social networks, their ability to accumulate wealth in a legitimate way, as well as their display and possession of knowledge and wisdom. Most crucially, however, becoming a 'man of God' is about proving and performing access to spiritual power.

Small 'Big Men' and Religion in Asante

This book is about women and men seeking a path in life. It lays out the various mechanisms and social processes they draw on and engage in when becoming pastors. It looks in particular at the role of spiritual power in these processes, and at the religious connotations of power and truthfulness. I analyse the making of pastoral careers as a novel form of religious entrepreneurship as well as an expression of cultural creativity that resonates with historical ideas and practices of wealth and power. The book paints a broad picture of pastorship as a way to rise in social hierarchies and as a means through which people in insecure positions escape subordination. Consequently, I view the processes of becoming a pastor as a reflection of broader and changing trends of attaining social status.

An exploration of pastoral careers provides insight into the role of the pastor as more than a religious figure; a pastor is also a public figure of authority. His influence transgresses the field of the church, as well as boundaries of kinship, social status, ethnicity, generation, and gender.

The pastors of this book—who establish their churches in storerooms and garages—represent a larger group of aspiring people that put in play identity, spirituality, and the past in their endeavours to grow (Lauterbach 2010).

The book discusses pastorship with the aim of uncovering the social mechanisms involved in becoming a pastor, as well as the broader socio-political significance of holding religious office. In the analysis, I show that this process involves both apprenticeship and entrepreneurship. By being an apprentice, a young pastor draws on the credibility of a senior pastor, and this permits him or her to invoke the power of God. Concurrently, young pastors who aspire to leadership positions appear to be entrepreneurial and get involved in various networks (congregation, colleagues, and extended family) to realise their aspirations. Pastors are involved in networks in both a horizontal and a vertical sense: in relation to older and more established people and in relation to people who belong to the same layer as themselves. When pastors seek to become 'bigger', they do so not only in the context of the church, but also in a way that is recognised more broadly in society. Although pastors draw on former ideas of wealth, status, and power, they are innovative in the sense that the churches they establish and the hierarchies they are part of are flexible and easy to enter and leave. They create organisational forms where social ascension and status is more accessible.

Understanding the behind-the-scene processes of becoming a pastor contributes to our understanding of other forms of social ascension, as well as the broader patterns of changing power relations and emerging new elites in Ghana. The book argues that new spaces for social mobility occur in the overlapping zones between religion, politics, and social life. While seeing religion as a space that allows for a redefinition and transformation of established ideas and practices, the book also builds on the premise that pastors, as well as other emergent figures of success, are strongly embedded in their social and historical background.

The pastor is a twofold figure. He is a religious leader perceived of as possessing and invoking spiritual power and through this delivering spiritual protection and providing material success. This is a religious figure in a classic Asante sense; the mediator between the spiritual realm and the material world. It is also a religious figure in a Christian sense, one that can interpret the word of God and through this perform wisdom and knowledge.[7] At the same time, a pastor is a leader in a socio-political sense: he is a provider, a protector, and a community builder. Hence, the pursuit

of a pastoral career involves claiming authority and generates 'power and flows of patronage which are eminently worth contesting for' (Ranger 1986: 31). The construction of pastorship can be seen as merging these two fields of influence (religious and political office). The book argues that charismatic pastors constitute new versions of older religious leaders and inscribe themselves in the tradition of being a religious figure and a small 'big man' in Asante. At the same time, they are cultural innovators, drawing on both the history of Christianity in Asante and their connections to mainly Nigerian and American charismatic pastors.

Joining Power: Trajectories in Context

Most of the pastors of this book are from Asante[8] in Ghana and many had grown up and were operating in and around Kumasi, the second biggest town in Ghana, and the capital of the Asante kingdom. Kumasi is a fast-growing urban conglomeration with a vast peri-urban zone where newcomers settle (McCaskie 2009; Simon et al. 2004). It is a city that attracts many, mostly young, people with aspirations of making an income and making a life. As in other urban sites, this means pressure on social and physical infrastructure, as well as a fast transformation of the urban physical landscape (see also Esson 2013). What was once known as the Garden City is now by many seen as a site of tensions due to unequal distribution of wealth and resources. At the same time, Kumasi has a history as, and still is, a site of power: economic, political, and spiritual power. Kumasi in this sense is the place where one has the possibility of joining power (McCaskie 2007c).

With a changing economic and political environment during the 1990s and the 2000s (economic recovery and pluralisation of public and political spaces), new trajectories of social ascension were pursued by people who found themselves in insecure positions. They were most often people with no laid out trajectories of how to rise in the social hierarchy, but who were still aspiring to do so. Many were not attracted by the standard career trajectory in the public sector, which had been the emergent sector of the economy in the years after independence. At this time, education was seen as the route to employment in the public sector, which was again the way to achieve social and economic mobility (Arhin 1994: 317; Foster 1965: 196–197; King and Martin 2002: 9; Osei 2004: 431). However, with the decline in the attractiveness of a public sector trajectory, following from financial cuts in the sector, people began seeking more diverse trajectories of gaining social status.

McCaskie analyses two examples of such trajectories: that of Nana Abass who is the founder and priest (ɔkɔmfɔ) of the Medoma shrine in Kumasi and that of a blacksmith and illegal gun producer in Suame Magazine, Kumasi. Nana Abass was destined to become an ɔkɔmfɔ in his early childhood. As a young boy he experienced a number of encounters with *mmoatia* (dwarves, or supernatural beings), but for some time he resisted the calling or his fate. He worked as a taxi driver in Kumasi and converted to Islam to protect himself against the *mmoatia*. He eventually accepted the calling, went through training and initiation by the *mmoatia*, and went back to Kumasi to set up a shrine. His success as an ɔkɔmfɔ was, according to McCaskie, his ability to provide drinking water to the place, besides his spiritual qualifications and performances. This was a way for him to show that he looked after his community and was concerned about the wellbeing of people. Nana Abass has raised a critical voice against charismatic churches with regard to their sectarian touch and pastors' unscrupulous striving for wealth. In this way, he engages in a competition of faith that is about whose god/s are the most honest and efficient. Interestingly, he does that in ways that are similar to how charismatic pastors build themselves up; through spiritual performance and through striking a balance between individual accumulation and redistribution to the community. A last point about Abass worth mentioning is how the fact that he was digging in the ground for water was perceived by some as a way to get access to supernatural powers and by others as a way to show that he was a 'big man' (McCaskie 2008a: 68). Although McCaskie in his analysis does not link these two explanations (being a religious expert or a 'big man'), there is a connection in the sense that being a religious expert and having access to supernatural powers is also an aspect of being 'big.' In other words, there is an overlap or combination of religious office and political office (in some instances political power rather than office), a point that I will come back to with regard to charismatic pastors (see also Ubink 2007).

The second trajectory that I describe here more briefly is that of a gunsmith and illegal trader in weapons, a path that McCaskie also describes as a way to access power and status (McCaskie 2008c). This trajectory is of relevance here not because of its reliance on spiritual power, but because it shares in common aspects of being in insecure positions and of the morality around accumulating wealth. This man had been trained as a blacksmith, had to leave the business because of the economic crisis of the 1980s, and went to Kumasi to do all sorts of small jobs to make an income. He later trained as an electrical repairer in Suame Magazine and

eventually went into gun production and arms trading. McCaskie presents discussions he had with this man and other local Asante about the morality of making wealth through criminal activities. These discussions reveal a distinction between stealing from the rich and taking from the poor, where the former is seen as 'little thieves stealing from very big thieves' and the latter is described as 'deeply immoral' (McCaskie 2008c: 448). McCaskie compares this moral distinction to '*nkwankwaa* talk' of the 1880s and 1950s, and thereby draws a connection between the contemporary trajectories of a desperate youth and earlier subordinate groups that also expressed social critique through their practices.

The above trajectories can be related to the young pastors in the storeroom churches in at least two ways. First, a shared experience of subordination and insecurity, although dealt with in dissimilar ways, frames how young people seek their pathways in life. Second, the trajectories are all about how people who are seeking a space to grow deal with wealth. The important question is whether wealth is accumulated and redistributed in a morally acceptable way. These trajectories therefore point to the similarities between pastors and other groups of aspiring people that very much revolve around the establishment of one's public position and the cultivation of 'an image as a local "big man", giving out cash, arbitrating disputes, dispensing advice and bribing neighbourhood police' (McCaskie 2008c: 433).

In order to historicise the way pastoral careers are made sense of, I also draw on Asante political and religious historic figures as well as earlier Asante upward socially mobile groups such as the *nkwankwaa* (youngmen) and the *akonkofoɔ* (young businessmen in the early colonial period). These groups expressed a critique of the established holders of power, challenged moral views on wealth, and through this came to legitimise more individual forms of accumulation and consumption of wealth. My point is to draw attention to the forerunners of the present-day figures of success in Asante and to highlight how the tensions and debates around wealth and power are tensions that have for long been part of the shaping and shaking up of Asante and Asante identities (McCaskie 2000).

In her work on the Asante National Liberation Movement in the 1950s, Allman discusses the history of the Asante youngmen as a social group and the relation between this group and the ruling elite. She points out that 'the youngmen had been a potent and active political force since at least the mid-nineteenth century, when they were known as the *nkwankwaa* … The sense of the term was not that the *nkwankwaa* were literally young,

but that they existed in often uneasy subordination to elder or chiefly authority' (Allman 1993: 29). This is relevant for the focus of this book, since Allman's observation points to the long history in Asante of tensions between holders of power and subordinate groups that has played out differently at various moments in time. My point is that the group of charismatic pastors that has appeared in Asante (and elsewhere in Ghana and Africa) since the 1980s can be seen as a variation of former groups of people in insecure positions that aimed at joining power and escaping subordination.

In this way, the book argues that pastoral careers are not only responses to changing socio-economic conditions (such as the economic hardships of the 1980s and the ensuing neo-liberal era), but influenced by local and historically rooted norms, beliefs, and ideas. I furthermore argue that it is the combination of claiming access to divine power and operating within and between different social, economic, and political spheres that influences one's ability and success in becoming an important 'man of God' (*Onyame nnipa*). What is striking is not so much that becoming a pastor is a way through which to gain and exercise some sort of power, but more that this power is recognised and regulated by one's social surroundings and is rooted in existing social and cultural categories and configurations. The role of pastors is related to ideas around access to spiritual power and mediation between the spiritual and the material world. Historically, mediators between these spheres (such as a chief [*ohene*] and a priest [*ɔkɔmfɔ*]) have had an ascribed status. The craft and politics of pastorship is about invoking spiritual power, which enables one to gain influence in ways that transcend the spiritual or religious sphere.

Religious Institutions, Ideas and Innovators: Resonance or Response?

As follows from the above, this book builds on the premise that new religious institutions and ideas resonate with historic figures, moral practices, and values, and that they at the same time are expressions of improvisations and adaptations of them. Asking questions around how people draw on ideas from the past to render things of the present meaningful is one way of drawing out elements of continuity and change. As also argued by Barber this is about understanding 'by what specific methods people simultaneously improvise and make things stick, and why they do it' (Barber 2007b: 37).

Christianity in Asante, and in Africa more generally, has taken its form through processes of appropriation and encounters between missionaries and local adherents, of which some became pastors and priests (see for instance Greene 2002; Maxwell 2006a, 2013a; Peel 2000). Local constructions of religious narratives and ideas came out of these encounters. I see the ways in which pastors become small 'big men' and establish their careers as building on notions of status, wealth, and power that were shaped in Asante before the introduction of Christianity and the emergence of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, but that are also shaped by these. The trajectories are appropriations and adaptations of new religious and cultural influences and they are at the same time cultural improvisations of the past; they are 'neither a replica of the old nor a replica of the new' (Greene 2002: 5). However, as Greene also points out, these appropriations took place at different scales and with different intensity and we therefore need to pay attention to 'the range of cultural responses' that these encounters produce, rather than seeing them in the singular (Greene 2002: 5). Moreover, Peel analyses the idiom of 'making country fashion' as a way to dissolve the distinction between the religious and the non-religious in his study of the encounter between the Yoruba and Christian missionaries. In this way he draws everyday routines and practices that are part of and infused in the broader Yoruba understanding of religion into the analysis (Peel 2000: 88 ff.) I am inspired by these approaches when analysing pastoral careers in Asante because they offer a broad and embedded view of religion and religious encounters.

For new churches and pastors to be legitimate, there has to be resonance with former practices and experiences. New institutions require a stabilising principle and as Douglas puts it there 'needs to be an analogy by which the formal structure of a crucial set of social relations is found in the physical world, or in the supernatural world, or in eternity, anywhere, so long as it is not seen as a socially contrived arrangement' (Douglas 1986: 48). An exploration of the phenomenon of pastorship in charismatic churches in Asante thus calls for drawing on the social history of pre-colonial and colonial Asante and at the same time looking at these institutions as fields of cultural and social improvisation (see also Jones 2009: 10).

Religion as Response: The 'Social Malaise' Argument

This leads on to another premise of the book, namely that the rise of new religious movements is not necessarily a reaction to certain moments in

time such as modernity or neo-liberalism or contexts of 'social malaise.' Although present in much recent scholarship that seeks to explain the rise of charismatic Christianity in Africa, this is not a new argument. In the following quote, Baëta reacts to the argument that the rise of African Independent Churches (in Ghana known as spiritual churches—*Sunsum sorè*) was a response to the anxieties brought about by colonial impact, modernity, and Western influence:

> It appears to me that in recent studies of new cults and other movements of a religious nature among African peoples, the presumed background element of psychological upheaval, tensions and conflicts, anxieties, etc., due to 'acculturation, technology and the Western impact' has tended to be rather overdrawn. Here is a typical judgment in this connection … Whether there is more anxiety in Ghana now than at any time previously, or than in most other countries of the world at present, must probably remain a matter of opinion. After all, people have seen some very rough times here, e.g. slaving era, and the 'Western impact' has been with us already for the best part of half a millennium. (Baëta [1962] 2004: 6)

This 'social malaise' argument was (and still is) prevailing in studies of religious movements in Africa. The assumption is that the popularity of religious movements is a reaction to structural change in society, a change that brings fragmentation and chaos as well as hopes and aspirations (Meyer 1998c: 759). Comaroff and Comaroff (2003) argue that there is a conjuncture between the rise of millennial capitalism and a growing occurrence of occult economies and hereby sees a new Protestant Pentecostal ethic as a response to a new spirit of capitalism and neo-liberal ethic. Religious mobilisation is in this frame of understanding a response either in terms of providing security and order or in terms of permitting to contest new and suppressing powers. The causality is often unquestioned, and consequently, religion is seen as a response or an instrument. As Baëta some 50 years ago questioned the relationship between the hardships of a certain period in time and the rise of a particular religious movement, Marshall criticises the tendency to 'domesticate modernity' and to see new religious movements as responses to globalisation and socio-economic crises (Marshall 2009: 22).

At the same time, there is a different literature that is more concerned with *how* religious practices are part of people's lives and self-understandings (Coleman 2011: 36) and in this approach religion is 'perhaps above all, a site of *action*, invested in and appropriated by believers' (Marshall 2009:

22). There is a need to question the taken for granted assumption of connections between certain developments of time and the rise of religious movements, and instead 'treat them as problematic, as needing explanation, just as all other kinds of social and political implications of religious movements need explanation' (Ranger 1986: 51).

The point is that we cannot simply set up a causal line of argumentation, but that it rather is the interplay and affinities between the conditions through which religious phenomena emerge and the phenomena itself as a mode of action that must be explored through ethnographic fieldwork and reflection (Ranger 2007). Religious institutions and ideas have an affinity with social, political, and economic interests and practices (Weber [1930] 2001; Gerth and Wright Mills 1991: 63). What is important is not that a particular cult arose or faded in a specific moment in time, but as Ranger puts it: '[t]he point is much more that through all these periods African religious movements were flexible and responsive, reflecting a great variety of aspirations and interests, and engaged both in micro and macro politics' (Ranger 1986: 49).

Rupture and Continuity

The above discussion relates to debates about continuity and rupture that feature prominently in scholarship on Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity. Rupture and ideas of breaking with the past have been central in studies of Pentecostalism and in the anthropology of Christianity (Robbins 2004, 2014). In African contexts, it is in particular questions of making distance to traditional religious beliefs and cultural practices that have received attention, the argument being that by doing so, Pentecostal Christianity reinforces the role of, for instance, witchcraft and evil spirits (Meyer 1998a; van Dijk 1997; Lindhardt 2015). Rupture is a prominent feature in the rhetoric of many Pentecostal and charismatic churches and implies that those who are 'born-again' should distance themselves from both the immediate past (one's personality and the kind of life one has led) and the ancestral past (relations to ancestors) (Lauterbach 2005; Meyer 1998a).

Conversion in itself is an act of rupture and of transforming one's self. The Pentecostal narrative is that through accepting Jesus Christ as a personal saviour, converts start living new lives that correspond to Pentecostal ethics around, for instance, alcohol, sexuality, and family life. In his work on the Church of Pentecost in Ghana and London, Daswani (2013, 2015)

points out that rupture as an ethical practice is a dialectical process in which church members reflect upon and dispute the ideology of rupture. This implies that rupture is not exclusive, but situated within a continuum of reproduction and freedom. Likewise, Lindhardt has made the important observation that 'scholars tend to find both more continuity and more discontinuity with existing religious traditions' in studies of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity (Lindhardt 2015: 163). This is important because it invites us to go beyond the binary of change and continuity that to some degree has disrupted the debate.

The powerful discourse and imagination of rupture and breaking with the past has led many scholars to put particular emphasis on the transformative character of Pentecostalism as a process of individualisation linked to modernity (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005a; Engelke 2004; Marshall 1993; Meyer 1998a; Laurent 1999, 2003; van Dijk 1997). The focus has been on how '[b]ecoming a Christian would thus involve completely reordering all other forms of identification and all other relationships' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005a: 136) and on how conversion to Pentecostalism is a way to escape social bonds and hierarchies. Engelke (2010) provides a critical discussion of this focus on rupture. He sees the close linking of rupture with modernity as problematic because it takes away the attention from what (other) histories and traditions people relate to and draw on. Moreover, he argues that there is too strong a focus on discourse to the detriment of analysing practice: 'What people say is often striking, but it needs to be accompanied by a focus on what they do' (Engelke 2010: 179) (see also Haynes 2012: 133–134). I follow Engelke's call for differentiating between an official religious discourse and the social practice of religious actors. The rhetoric on rupture is undoubtedly distinctive, but it does not tell us much about church members' and pastors' relationships to family and kin, speaking more to ideas of a generalised condition or experience of modernity. One needs to think of the multiple factors that may influence these social relationships (education, employment, migration to mention a few). Focusing too closely on the Pentecostal break with the past distracts us from observing some of the broader trends of continuity and change with regard to social mobility, joining power, and accumulating wealth, and of how religion plays out in a particular historical, political, and social context. I wish to draw attention to continuity and change not only within a religious context, but also in relation to how a religious figure and spiritual power is understood in broader socio-political terms and in relation to the past. I accentuate context and continuity by pointing out that the Asante context

(and Southern Ghana) is a predominantly Christian area, and a context in which belief in evil forces and witchcraft has existed alongside Christianity. Most pastors come from Christian families and have often grown up in a mission church or in a classical Pentecostal church, which implies that becoming a pastor in a charismatic church might not represent that much of a break in social terms.

STATUS, WEALTH, AND POWER IN ASANTE

In this book, I interpret pastoral career trajectories in the light of what it means to be a 'big man' and a religious expert in an Asante context and argue that it can be understood as means of claiming and achieving status, wealth, and power. Status is the recognition that follows being a pastor; wealth is related to how being in religious office permits one to accumulate and distribute wealth, and power is about how pastors are in positions to bring about change and build up positions of authority. These perspectives are interlinked and reflect the Asante historical context where for instance economic wealth, access to spiritual power and political office were closely related (McCaskie 1995; Wilks 1993).

Becoming a pastor entails being recognised as a religious mediator widely in society and not only within one's church, which permits social mobility. Part of my argument is that this is so because of the role religious experts have had in Asante historically, but also because having access to spiritual power was not restricted to the traditional priest, but was accessible more broadly. Status is built up by claiming access to the spiritual realm, by being able to perform spiritually and exercising religious authority. However, recognition also depends on pastors' ability to be truthful and to do what they speak.

In Asante the accumulation, distribution, and display of wealth was and is seen as an avenue to status and power. In order to achieve status as a 'big man of God' pastors must display wealth (such as money, cars, clothing, housing, followers, and size of church), and this wealth is understood as being a blessing from God. Wealth is a way to display and prove one's spiritual capabilities. At the same time, wealth has to be accumulated and redistributed in a morally acceptable way, which means that there has to be a balance between accumulating for the individual and redistributing to the community. A premise of the book is that pastors invoke and build on ideas of wealth that resonate with an Asante experience, and that this overlaps with the focus on wealth and prosperity in the charismatic churches.

One of the questions that I address is to what extent and in what ways charismatic Christianity introduces new perceptions of wealth. I argue that within charismatic Christianity in Asante, wealth is understood as more than money; it is richness in both a material and a spiritual sense. For pastors, wealth also means control over people, over an institution, over international relations as well as possessing the capacity to heal and be in contact with God. Achieving wealth means that pastors have proven their abilities to perform as religious experts, and that God has rewarded them with wealth. However, wealth in itself does not bring power and status; wealth needs to be displayed, recognised, and legitimised (Gilbert 1988: 307).

The book also discusses how claimed spiritual power is invoked in mundane social relations. This follows an understanding of power that is more than influence and control over others in an institutional setting, but also includes 'extra-human agency' (Arens and Karp 1989: xv). Arens and Karp propose to understand power as a cultural construct, where power is not only something being exercised, but also something with a culturally informed rationale. Power takes various forms, has multiple sources and needs to be legitimised (Arens and Karp 1989: xv–xvii).

In an article on the history of power in Asante, Akyeampong and Obeng have drawn attention to forms of power that did not lie within the realm of the state. Through this they shed light on the 'complex negotiations that surrounded power relations in Asante society' and argue that '[p]ower was thus rooted in the Asante cosmology, and individuals and groups that successfully tapped into this power source translated this access into authority if they controlled social institutions' (Akyeampong and Obeng 1995: 483). This, in my view, is where the key lies to understanding religion and power in contemporary Asante. Their analysis points to the broadness of the Asante concept of power and at the same time to its accessibility to those on the ground: 'power was available to anyone who knew how to make use of *Onyame*'s[9] powerful universe for good or evil' (Akyeampong and Obeng 1995: 483). This implies that the spiritual realm is a source of power in the Asante context. Akyeampong and Obeng moreover distinguish between authority (political power) and *tumi* (the ability to bring about change). The first is the monopolisation of power, whereas access to *tumi* originates in the spiritual world and is more broadly accessible to those who have knowledge.

In a retrospect of 40 years in Asante studies, McCaskie recapitulates what he sees as central to the working dynamic of Asante society:

> … I believe the web forged by three centuries of tumi and all of its ramified manifestations still defines, structures, and binds Asante culture. "Joining power" remains a sure path to self-realisation and success in Asante society, and the door to the career open to talent—best smoothed, of course, by connections—has been held ajar, but carefully policed, throughout Asante history. (McCaskie 2007c: 151)

In the above, McCaskie suggests that the aspirations to and processes of 'joining power' is the central clue to understanding Asante society both historically and presently. Power is in this understanding about political dynamics, cultural norms, and individual trajectories. It is not political power *strictu sensu*, nor restrained to being about control over material resources or pure self-interest. It is power in its transitive form, an embedded and encompassing form of power. It is more broadly about the dynamics of realising social aspirations, attaining status, and gaining wealth.

Implicit in the idea of joining power is the understanding that power is not something that lies within the individual or something that an individual has. In the Asante understanding, power is something that lies outside the individual and something that transgresses the realm of the physical world (it is also metaphysical). By using McCaskie's metaphor of joining power, I wish to bring forth the idea that power is something that a person joins, draws upon and taps into that exists outside of the person. Power exists in both a physical and metaphysical sense, but also very much in a historical sense. Therefore, when people join power they draw on a pool of power anchored in the Asante past. Power is something that exists out there, and one needs to get access to it, master it, and use it.[10] This means that it is not only the ability to exercise control over others that matters, but just as much the ability and knowledge to get access to the source or pool of power (Akyeampong 1996; Akyeampong and Obeng 1995; McCaskie 1995).

Moreover, access to and engagements in social networks are important to the dynamics of pastoral careers (where they come from, how they are promoted, how they eventually start on their own, whom they relate to, and who assist them). Founding and leading a 'one-man church' does require relations to other churches and pastors (to both senior pastors and pastors at the same hierarchical level). Besides, if a pastor does not succeed within one church (getting the right promotion or possibility to grow) and instead creates a new church, it implies being involved in a new set of social relations or adjusting existing ones. This is to say that a pas-

toral career is not only about individual self-promotion or about having a personal calling, but it is also an investment in social relationships, which serve as the foundation for being able to operate as a figure of authority and to impose oneself as a 'man of God.' In other words, pastors operate in a web of social relations.

My analysis of pastorship consists of several layers of social relationships: the immediate religious environment, relationships with the extended family as well as wider social relations. The immediate religious environment comprises how pastors operate in the church in relation to other pastors (senior or junior), and in relation to church members or the congregation. How do they legitimise or prove their spiritual power? What kinds of performances are involved, and how do the church members take part in this? The extended family layer focuses on where pastors come from, their relationships to home and with extended family members, as well as how they take up new roles, responsibilities, and privileges after becoming pastors. Pastors are also engaged in wider social networks nationally and transnationally. These relations are crucial for their work as pastors; they get inspiration, training, and resources from these relations. Such networks provide opportunities to travel and to preach in other churches, which is a way to gain standing in pastoral networks.

The above reflections point to my understanding of religious institutions and actors as being linked up with other institutions and actors, and not as self-contained places. In this I draw on Jones who, in his work on Pentecostalism and social change in rural Uganda, makes the point that it is 'important to understand that religious identities are necessarily played out in wider social circuits' (Jones 2009: 160). In the chapters that follow, I approach pastorship as being constructed and made sense of in relation to broader social networks and in ways that have resonance with Asante experience and the past, rather than approaching pastorship as something that builds up and unfolds only in church.

Religion and Politics: Processes of Becoming Small 'Big Men'

I employ the metaphor of the small 'big man' in the book to indicate that I see pastorship as a process of achieving 'bigness', a process that involves pastors and their social surroundings. The idea is not to employ the term 'big man' as a labelling for a certain type of leadership figure, but to cast light on the social processes of becoming bigger.

In the classical literature on 'big men,' the accumulation and redistribution of wealth (or 'the art of redistribution') is central. In order to be legitimate, a 'big man' must redistribute the accumulated wealth, which gives political capital, which again permits him to accumulate further: '*il faut avoir du pouvoir politique pour être riche, il faut être riche pour le conserver*' (Médard 1992: 172). A related aspect is the strategy of straddling various positions (or accumulating positions), which means that there is changeability of accumulated resources. This also indicates that the role of the 'big man' is not only political, but also economic, social, and religious. Médard argues that straddling is not only about accumulating positions, but also about strengthening the positions one already has (Médard 1992: 176).

I argue, in the same vein, that becoming a pastor is about operating in and between various fields simultaneously. Achieving recognition as a pastor in a church or a religious community implies gaining respect within domains other than the church, for instance, within families, kinship, and community groups. In her work on 'big men' and avenues to power in Northern Ghana, Lentz questions the use of the straddling image when discussing how 'big men' become 'big' in more than one field. She argues that it upholds an idea and image of separate fields of action (Lentz 1998: 61).[11] She instead suggests to focus on the complementarity and combination of different registers of power rather than the accumulation of positions per se. Taking this critique into account, I argue that pastors combine different registers of power to achieve 'bigness' (Lentz 1998: 48).

I seek to move beyond a depiction of pastors as small 'big men' that 'are persistent performances of the patrimonialist narrative as a form of static normative labelling' (Gould 2006: 923). Pastors are not 'big men' in the sense of Médard (1992), as they are not 'trapped' in and only relying on clientilistic relations, but are able to move beyond and recreate relationships that permit them to grow. These relationships unfold both at a horizontal and vertical level, which means that they are both egalitarian and hierarchical (see also Peel 2000: 53). Moreover, with regard to redistributing wealth, pastors perform both by redistributing wealth themselves, and by making people receive wealth as a blessing from God. The themes of 'sowing and reaping' and 'receiving God's blessing' are religious forms of redistribution. While it is God who provides, the pastor is the one who enables or mediates the provision and transaction. The kind of 'big man' that I deal with here transgresses the material focus and the strict patron-client relations of Médard's 'big man.'

This book positions itself in this debate by focusing on the tension between a reproduction of hierarchical power relations and the simultaneous potential to transgress hierarchical power structures. African Pentecostalism is, in the words of Maxwell (2006a: 3), 'a religious movement animated by a dialectic between primitive egalitarian ideals on the one hand and hierarchy and authoritarianism on the other' (see also Soothill 2007).

A Note on Methodology

The fieldwork on which this book is based was organised around following pastors rather than churches. I followed the social networks of pastors and talked to their colleagues, former colleagues, mentors, friends, family members and church members. The focus was on people rather than institutions, and on how crucial decisions in their lives were taken and made sense of (Rathbone 1996: 2). I interviewed 40 pastors. Some interviews focused on various aspects of pastorship as such, and others were of a more biographical character. I interviewed some pastors several times and was able to follow a few over a period of ten years. I think this offers the most useful way of piecing together the particular and contingent nature of what is involved in becoming a pastor and becoming bigger.

The material consists of 106 interviews, participation in 35 church services and events in 15 different churches, collection of audio-visual material (videos and cassettes) from church services, religious booklets and magazines, newspaper articles, questionnaires, archival files from the Ghana National Archives in Kumasi and the archives of the Manhyia Palace, pastors' Facebook pages as well as numerous conversations and email correspondences with pastors. The material was collected during 2004, 2005, and 2014.

I did the major part of my work in Kumasi. As I studied pastors and not churches per se, I did not concentrate on one particular area of Kumasi or on one particular church. I went wherever the pastors were living and preaching. I did a few interviews in Accra mainly with church members and pastors I got connected to through Ghanaians in Denmark, as well as with scholars working on Ghanaian Pentecostalism. Moreover, part of my material was collected in Sunyani and Techiman, both in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana.

THE BOOK

The remainder of the book consists of six chapters. Chapter 2 provides a historical analysis of wealth, power, and religion in Asante and how the meaning of these categories has changed over time. The chapter is organised around two historic figures: the 'big man' (ɔbirɛmpɔn) and the religious expert (ɔkɔmfo). The chapter moreover provides an account of the introduction of Christianity in Asante as well as the growth of the Pentecostal and charismatic movement in Kumasi. The third chapter focuses on the idea of a truthful pastor and relates this to wealth, both to historic understandings of wealth as well as the Pentecostal doctrine on wealth (prosperity gospel). The discussion is organised around two sets of schisms, on the one hand a schism between accumulation for the individual or to the benefit of the community, and on the other hand a schism between being a true or a false pastor. Chapter 4 is concerned with the internal dynamics of pastorship and offers an analysis of the social processes involved in becoming a pastor. It provides an account of the various facets of becoming a pastor: the pastoral calling, training and Bible School and moreover analyses how a call to become a pastor is narrated, how it is approved and validated by the social surroundings. Chapter 5 is on performing spiritual power and knowledge. Spiritual power is shown and performed at church services, through prayers and performance of miracles, deliverance, and divination. The performance of spiritual power is a contested field in which accusations of relying on evil forces are made. In Chap. 6, I analyse pastoral trajectories and show that the process of becoming a successful pastor involves apprenticeship as well as entrepreneurship. I argue that young pastors seek relationships that, on the one hand, provide protection and legitimacy, and on the other hand, permit them to gain and exercise authority. I also discuss how pastors' authority influences their family relations. In the concluding chapter, I return to the overall discussion of the study of pastorship as a commentary on recent and historical trajectories of religious and social change in Asante. I argue that the craft of pastorship represents new ways of building up status, wealth, and power that also draw on vernacular understandings of these concepts. I further argue that one-sided analytical approaches (that focus mainly on rupture and response) are not satisfactory in explaining the attractiveness of becoming a charismatic pastor in Kumasi. It is in the conjuncture and interplay between material conditions, historic ideas of figures of authority and wealth and a new religious doctrine and practice that the craft of pastorship emerges.

Notes

1. Interview with Edward Owusu-Ansah, Kumasi, 13 December 2004.
2. Interview with James Abu, Kumasi, 13 February 2005.
3. In this book I most often use the term charismatic Christianity, but sometimes also refer to Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity. By charismatic churches, I mean the newer and independent churches that are sometimes referred to as neo-Pentecostal/charismatic churches (Meyer 2004). The latter broad labelling (Pentecostal and charismatic) refers to both the classical Pentecostal churches, introduced by missionaries, and to the newer independent charismatic churches, but does not include the charismatic movement within other Christian denominations such as the Catholic Church. When using this term I refer to the broader movement, but also to the blurred boundaries between the various categories. Some of the pastors figuring in this book came out of classical Pentecostal churches, created independent charismatic churches, but still move in and out of these different kinds of churches. The focus of the book is on young pastors in charismatic churches. This term encompasses the broad range of independent churches as well as more loosely organised fellowships. The pastors themselves use the term charismatic rather than Pentecostal. When I refer specifically to older generations of Pentecostal churches I write classical Pentecostal churches. See Omenyo (2013) on the categorisation of Ghanaian Pentecostal and charismatic churches as well as some recent figures.
4. This figure does not include charismatics within other Christian denominations or independent charismatic churches.
5. In Ghana 8,000,000 out of 17,352,722 Christians are counted as Pentecostals and neo-charismatics (*World Christian Database*, country information on Ghana, (accessed 4 March 2015)).
6. The Twi word *ɔsɔfo* (pl. *asofo*) means a priest, one who officiates in the service of God or a Fetish or who performs a religious ceremony. The word was in use before the introduction of Christianity, but has been adapted by Christianity. It is worth emphasising that the term *ɔsɔfo* does not represent an isolated vocabulary specific to Ghanaian Pentecostalism. It is part of a terminology that has a history beyond Pentecostalism and is rooted in Asante experience

(McCaskie, personal communication; McCaskie 1995: 290). See also Sackey (2000).

7. There are certain similarities with prophets, evangelists and missionaries who were also to some extent capable of achieving symbolic and political transformations and change. This is further elaborated in Chap. 2.

8. Asante was an independent Akan kingdom founded in 1701. Today part of the geographical region is administratively called the Ashanti region and other parts of the former kingdom are included in the Brong-Ahafo region. Asante exists today as a traditional state in Ghana. I use the term Asante throughout the book, whenever possible, because it alludes to the broader understanding of the historic polity of Asante, and because I draw on a specific Asante cultural and historic repertoire such as ideas of wealth and truthfulness. When referring to specifically colonial or postcolonial administrative regions or titles I use Ashanti (Boone 2003: 146, fn. 5). See Rathbone (1991: 335) for a comment on defining Asante.

9. The Supreme Being.

10. T.C. McCaskie, personal communication, 5 March 2014.

11. In her critique Lentz also questions Weber's distinction between traditional, rational and charismatic authority and the ideal types they represent. Her point is that these types of authority coexist and intersect (1998: 59).

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