



Ritual, myth and transnational giving within the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa in Johannesburg, South Africa

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This article interrogates how rituals and myths may reshape Pentecostal ideology and practice in ways that resonate with the practical concerns of born-again congregants in an exclusive foreign labour market. It draws on a series of field observations conducted in Johannesburg, at two congregations of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) – a born-again movement with roots in Zimbabwe – between 2009 and 2016. The authors critically examine the shifting architecture of the ritual of Working Talents and its contradictory use of myths. The authors consider the intended consequences of both the ritual of Working Talents and often contradictory myths used to bolster it, for the transnational growth of the church and its involvement in the development of the nation. A phenomenological observation qualitative research was utilised to establish the experiences, feelings and behaviours of the ZAOGA congregants regarding the gospel of Working Talents at two of their assemblies in Johannesburg. A key finding was that Working Talents contains ethical action and empowerment narratives, and it aspires to create Pentecostal congregants with collective cultural identities, disposed to give money to support the causes of the church. In doing so, myths and rituals have reshaped the ZAOGA Pentecostal ideology into a nuanced version of the Prosperity Gospel, one that emphasises notions of indigenisation, empowerment and self-propagation.

Keywords: ritual; myths; transnational; Pentecostal; talents; Zimbabwe; Johannesburg.

Introduction

Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa Forward in Faith Mission International (ZAOGA FIFMI) occasionally refers to its congregants as *workers*. This name (*workers*) is part of nomenclature, a system of names, which this born-again movement strategically deploys to establish the *orders* that constitute its ministry. Regularly, congregants of ZAOGA FIFMI each practices the working of talents according to loosely prescribed criteria. They remit proceeds to the church bureaucracy to fund a specific cause. In 2016, the spiritual leader of ZAOGA FIFMI, Ezekiel Guti, earmarked the proceeds from Working Talents to fund the construction of a university in Zimbabwe that was founded in 2012. The university was named after the spiritual leader as the Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University. Although ZAOGA FIFMI's Talents echoes the parable of talents in the New Testament in many respects – for example, the notion of multiplication – this Pentecostal movement traces the idea of *Working Talents* to a conversation between their spiritual leader, Ezekiel Guti, and God himself. In this article, this conversation is interpreted as mythology.

The practices of Working Talents at two congregations (known as assemblies) that worshipped in Johannesburg's inner-city precincts, namely, the City Christian Centre and Berea, which were observed during fieldwork conducted between 2009 and 2012 and subsequently in 2016, provide the greater part of data for this article. In addition, the writings and utterances of Working Talents by the church elites were also considered as information-rich sources for this study. Congregants of ZAOGA FIFMI with whom one of the researchers of this study collaborated for many years doing his doctoral fieldwork do not call Working Talents a ritual, nor do they understand those activities central to Working Talents such as ritualisation. In the context of the foregoing, this study seeks to examine how the mythological knowledge system is used to sacredly spiritualise the traditional concept of ritual in ZAOGA FIFMI transnational giving approaches, namely, the Working Talents.

The study also considers the dynamics of Working Talents as ritualisation and how non-state cross-border transfers of money from ordinary people may sometimes be discussed in the literature as remitting behaviours and transnational social protection and transnational helping practices

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(Boccagni 2010, 2011). More broadly, the study explores what such ritualised acts of Working Talents, which translate into transnational giving forms that support national development at home, might imply for how transnationalism is understood (Smith et al. 1998). Drawing on these data, the article attempts to realise two main related objectives:

- To represent Working Talents as a ritual albeit with the full knowledge that ritual is an etic category, one that scientists impose on a set of activities under specific situations (Kyriakidis 2007, cited in Sanders 2013).
- To reveal the workings of Working Talents and related myths and clarify their function in this Pentecostal movement. This line of analysis leads one to clarify the mechanisms of Working Talents and the practical ways in which it assigns 'persons, relationships, conditions and events under a description, fitting them into larger orders' (Lambek 2013:20).

The study commences by introducing the context of the study on ritual, myth and transnational giving in ZAOGA FIFMI with a special focus on its two diaspora assemblies in Johannesburg. This was followed by the conceptualisation of the rituals, Working Talents and myth, which forms part of the critical literature review of the study. The article also explains the phenomenological observation qualitative method, data collection and analysis methods in its methodological approach. Subsequently, the data were presented and discussed for two key thematic areas: the ideological context of the 'Working Talents' and the pragmatic mechanisms of the 'Working Talents' before the conclusion and the implications of the study on the gospel of social transformation were discussed in concluding the study.

Conceptualisation of rituals, ritual acts and religion

Even when defining the term *ritual* for an empirical article, it is worth heeding Sax's (2010:3) caution: '... most ritual theorists are guilty of the academic sin of reification ... they mistake an analytic category for a natural kind'. This is pointedly so because in its simplest form, ritual is an aspect of human action; it is basic to social activity and social life at large (Rappaport 1999). Scientists, however, largely agree that, at a very simple level, there are certain attributes that are common to the form and structure of all ritual acts, for example, fixity, formality, repetitiveness and performance. In other words, the structure of ritual differentiates it from other coterminous human acts (Rappaport 1999). The formality dimension speaks to the idea that rituals follow some pre-established sequence and rules. Repetition and fixity imply that rituals are conducted (performed) with some regularity. Moreover, the performance (acting out) of rituals, while inventing something new, always retains the old (Klingbeil 2006). Yet, none of the dimensions that make up ritual acts are entirely exclusive to the analytic category of ritual (Bell 1992; Sanders 2013). Rappaport (1999) states that it is the relationships among elements that make up rituals that make the form of a ritual unique.

One might therefore think of ritual as a distinctive set of activities that one can isolate, analytically, from other human acts (Lambek 2013). Bell (1992) agrees with the idea of ritual as a sort of activity that is distinguishable from other acts in the same context, but provides a rather nuanced view of ritual. She specifies that ritual is a 'culturally strategic way of acting in the world' (Bell 1992:vii). This line of thinking underscores Bell's (1992) focus on ritual practice or, in the view of the authors, the way rituals are manifested as distinct and serving a distinct purpose. For Bell (1992), this way of acting strategically *must* be understood and analysed in context because, as Klingbeil (2006:205) observes, 'a ritual is never an isolated event, executed in a "clean-room atmosphere"'. This implies that as a strategic manner of acting in real contexts, ritual invariably employs different conceptual, technological and other strategies, including myths and ideology. Therefore, when viewed in context, ritual is entangled in, even as it implicates, the conceptual aspects of everyday.

To further clarify the notion of ritual activity, it is pertinent to draw on Bell's (1992) insightful review of theoretical discussions of ritual. Bell (1992) observed that theoretical narratives of ritual tend to establish two structural patterns of ritual. On the one hand, ritual as action is set apart from thought, that is, mental content that includes ideology, belief, myths and symbols. From this optic, ritual is understood as '*thoughtless* action' which merely expresses prefigured 'conceptual orientations' (Bell 1992:19). On the other hand, ritual is depicted in theoretical discussions as a *mechanism* for synthesising thought and action. For Geertz (1988), religious ritual transcends this twofold theorisation of the structure of ritual because ritual fuses ethos (or ethical action) and worldview (e.g. ideology), that is, it unifies thought and action. Similarly, Lambek (2013) argues that, at least in a religious context, making, thinking (e.g. generating myths) and doing, that is, reciting and performing for different strategic outcomes, can be combined in practice.

Building on Bourdieu's notion of habitus,¹ Bell's (1992) notion of sense of ritual represents 'socially acquired', culturally dependent practical mastery of ritual. In Quack's (2010:169,175) view, the practical mastery of ritual constitutes a 'form of embodied knowledge about how to perform ritual ... which generates a feel for what is and what is not acceptable in ritual'. In the view of the authors, Bell's (1992) notion of ritual sense can amount to an efficacious familiarity with the practical logic of ritual, which does not make reference to a particular ritual even as it becomes the organising principle of ritual activity. A ritual sense is generated in ritual activities and works to construct a differentiation between the ritualised and non-ritualised (Bell 1992; Quack 2010).

Bell's (1992:90) discussion of ritual sense develops into how agents act as per rituals given that ritual behaviour 'is not an

1. Embodied dispositions or corporeal and mental schemes that provide the basis of social action in a given situation. Habitus functions to provide knowledge, guiding how one acts in a given social context. According to Bourdieu (1977:18), habitus becomes the '*modus operandi* of all thought and action'.

entirely separate way of acting'. Her profound insight states that ritual is constituted in the ritual activity through *ritualisation* – a strategic manner of acting that differentiates ritualised from other ordinary actions in the social context. Moreover, ritualisation as practice marks out ritualised acts as more significant, powerful and dominant than their ordinary counterparts (Bell 1992). As a strategic way of acting, ritualisation enlists and privileges certain ritual acts even as it distinguishes them from other strategic acts in the same cultural context. Furthermore, as a culture-specific and context-dependent dynamic, *ritualisation* results in a ritualised agent – 'a body invested with a "sense" of ritual' (Bell 1992:98). What drew the authors to Bell's (1992) theorisation of ritual is its potential to provide conceptual tools with which to mark out and describe Working Talents as a ritual and, more importantly, reveal its practical logic. Significantly, Bell's (1992) contribution provides not only the tools to pin down the strategic means by which Working Talents activities are made to stand out, thereby assuming a sacred status, but also the ends they accomplish in the process.

On the premise of the foregoing, Mangany and Buitendag (2013) argue that there was a common perception among Western missionaries that Africa had no prior religion and hence was a dark continent that needed to be civilised with regard to religious, educational and technological aspects. These views and the related actions in using the Gospel to declare the superiority of Western value systems and justifying the European conquest and exploitation of Africa and its people were given by African scholars such as Enuwosa (2015). However, in the midst of those Western religious ideological beliefs, Africans continued to espouse their African traditional religion (ATR) value systems and beliefs. In doing so, Ringson (2017) argues that, religiously, Africans do not separate their ancestors from the God of the Universe. They believe that their ancestors are part of the hierarchy of the Godhead (Trinity). Thus, within their liturgical form of worship, ancestral rituals form part of their ways of worship and this has made most of the African independent churches grow exponentially. This is, therefore, the context that ZAOGA FIFMI capitalised on to ritually and religiously motivate its members to engage in the 'Working Talents'. While both male and female congregants participated in the 'Working Talents', the female counterparts in ZAOGA FIFMI predominantly dominate the scene. This corroborates with the findings of Mapuranga (2018) in that women were used as lubricants to politically and religiously deify God or leaders by singing, dancing and practically engaging in projects before men take the centre stage. Thus, according to Mapuranga, Pentecostal businesswomen currently dominate the religious social and economic entrepreneurship in Southern Africa and Zimbabwe in particular.

Working Talents: Morphology and ideological context

Does Working Talents consist of ritual activity? If one poses this question to a group of Pentecostal elites from ZAOGA

FIFMI, he or she will less likely get a response to suggest that Working Talents contains ritualised acts. To illustrate why this is the case, ZAOGA FIFMI elites invariably reject any representation of the Pentecostal movement, which sends out an unintended message about the church, despite the quality of data the authors draw upon. This was learned first-hand during fieldwork for the authors' doctoral studies (Chereni 2014) when church leadership in Johannesburg condemned the world of Maxwell (2006, 2000) as a polemic advanced by an enemy of the church. They took the issue first with Maxwell's use of semantics in the representation of the Pentecostal movement's history, particularly the way he expressed or implied that Ezekiel Guti was a sectarian leader who had 'effectively edged out his colleagues and co-founders, replacing respect with fear' (Maxwell 2006:116). The point being made is that ZAOGA FIFMI leaderships and congregants are more inclined to reject any naming or classification of Pentecostal practices as ritual. This is especially the case when the scientist's classification tends to be at variance with the Pentecostal movement's own nomenclature of their Pentecostal practices. When delivering a lecture about how Work Talents to congregants at a high profile church event dubbed 'School of Talents' in Zimbabwe's Midlands Province in 2016, Apostle Eunor Guti – the wife of Ezekiel Guti, ZAOGA FIFMI's spiritual leader – declared that, 'Working Talents is not a philosophy ... Talents were made by God so that we cannot remain poor'. To briefly examine what Eunor intended to communicate, Lambek's (2013) appraisal of Aristotle is useful. Activity, wrote Lambek (2013), can be understood as comprising three dimensions, namely, making or creative production (i.e. *poiesis*); doing or ethical action (*praxis*); and thinking, that is, philosophical contemplation (*theoria*). From the viewpoint of church leadership, Working Talents is neither the product of human imaginative creativity nor philosophical contemplation. Instead, it is God's plan, the promise made to the spiritual leader, Ezekiel Guti, to uplift his people. As will be illustrated in subsequent sections, Eunor Guti's description of Working Talents is indicative of ritual but her strong position on what Working Talents is and what it is not potentially sets the tone for a debate on semantics and meanings. As explained in subsequent sections, nomenclature – assigning culture-specific names to Pentecostal practices – is one of the movement's many lexical and other technologies for 'soliciting ... intense involvement on the part of its members' (Robbins 2009:57).

Although ZAOGA FIFMI congregants are more predisposed to reject the idea that they do engage in ritual, Robbins (2009) contends that ritual saturates all the spheres of Pentecostal life including the sacred and the profane. Along with Robbins (2009), the authors assert that ZAOGA FIFMI members are Pentecostals who live an intensely ritualised life, not least because ZAOGA FIFMI allows its members to participate in mutual ritual acts during praise and worship, prayer and various forms of giving, of which Working Talents is one. The assertion is that Working Talents comprises ritual acts and should be analysed as such. When discussing ritual and ritual

texts in the Bible, Klingbeil (2006) provided a typology of the common dimension of ritual, which speaks to various classic readings on ritual (Bell 1992; Geertz 1988; Rappaport 1999). A ritual has interactive, collective, innovative, transformative and communicative dimensions, among others.

This sequence is pre-figured and rather fixed. This makes Working Talents a type of intentionally structured ritual activity (Klingbeil 2006). Part of the rationale and end of Working Talents is to put congregants in a place where they are better able to worship God, free from material deprivation. This means Working Talents satisfies the transformative criteria. Another important aspect of ritual is consecration, which is done in step 3. Interestingly, consecration is performed by the individual congregant when he or she dedicates the project to God.

Congregants usually work talents each year except where talents for the church take place every other year. Congregants work Home Talents in between. Unlike talents for the church, in Home Talents congregants work towards their own household and farm projects. However, talents for the home and for the collective follow the same sequence. We now turn to rules, prescriptions and sanctions. Many a time the sanction is that the congregant who used God's money will be in trouble with God. The rules speak to the formality dimension of Working Talents. After listening to numerous articulations of Working Talents, the impression formed is that there are many don'ts in this ritual activity: don't share the wares or goods you are selling (instead give money); don't take away or use money from a project dedicated to Working Talents; don't mix wares or goods for Working Talent with other projects; and don't mix the money obtained from Working Talents with other money (i.e. money which you may have with you or in your house). These rules appear to be a recent articulation of the Working Talents – or a post-script.

Methodology

This study is a phenomenological observation qualitative research that seeks to establish the experiences, feelings and behaviours of the ZAOGA FIFMI congregants on the gospel of Working Talents at two of their assemblies in the Johannesburg area of South Africa. Phenomenological observation is defined as the process of observing events, people, processes and objects while actively avoiding the attachment of the observer's prior prejudices, opinions, associative memories, filtering mechanisms and dogma to those observations (Freeby 2013:62). Phenomenological qualitative design was invented and developed by Husserl (1970) and its main thrust focusses on the lived experiences or life world as the unit of analysis to understand human behaviour. The researchers were part of the church organisation together with their families and hence they had extensive opportunities to observe all the proceedings towards the Working Talents fundraising project in the organisation. The researchers not only observed but also participated in the fundraising project model of the Working

Talents. The observation took place over a period of 2 years from 2014 to 2016 and its historical narrative in South Africa was traced back from 2009 to 2016.

The two assemblies of ZAOGA FIFMI in the Johannesburg area of South Africa are presided over by senior pastors who preside over all the spiritual and administrative matters on behalf of Archbishop Ezekiel Guti and his wife. Both assemblies have assembly boards constituted of seven appointed spiritually mature and seasoned members who administratively work together with the presiding pastor. Each of these church assemblies has approximately 250 members whose fellowship and participation in various activities deemed appropriate for their spiritual development. The presiding pastor teaches and explains the vision of the Archbishop to his leadership and all the assembly members who fall under his jurisdiction. In this regard, information related to the Working Talents Fundraising is not secret or confidential, but is for every member or non-member who voluntarily subscribes to the vision of the Archbishop Ezekiel Guti. Thus, the researchers capitalised on their membership and fellowship within these assemblies to phenomenologically observe and participate in all the proceedings of the Working Talents in the period 2014–2016.

Because this study was dealing with human beings, the ethical issues were observed which include establishing informed consent with the church leadership to conduct observational phenomenological participatory study on the ritual, myth and transnational giving within the ZAOGA FIFMI Church with special reference to the two assemblies located in the Johannesburg area of South Africa. These two were purposively selected from among the numerous ZAOGA FIFMI assemblies around Johannesburg and South Africa because of the proximity to the University of Johannesburg where one of the researchers was conducting doctoral studies. The two assemblies are the City Christian Centre and Berea. Data were easily accessed from the church media recordings on Compact Disc (CDs), audio recordings and the sermons preached by both the local presiding pastors and the Archbishop Ezekiel Guti himself and his wife. All the recordings were publicly accessed from the ZAOGA FIFMI libraries, websites, Facebook page and Ezekiel Guti satellite television. In addition to those sources, the researchers would write notes on what they would have observed to substantiate the information they publicly accessed on the grey literature mentioned above. This observed phenomenological information was used to respond to the following questions:

- How does the concept of the Working Talents in ZAOGA FIFMI relate to the traditional indigenous mythological practices and knowledge systems?
- How can the Working Talents be utilised to clarify myths in the functions of the Pentecostal Movement and the gospel of social transformation?
- How have the ritualised acts of the Working Talents translated into the transnational giving fundraising approach that subsequently fosters human development?

The data collected through phenomenological observation were analysed using the model of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Braun and Clarke argue that thematic analysis provides an accessible and theoretically open-coding approach to analysing qualitative data. This involved familiarisation with the data, reviewing themes and refining themes. The trustworthiness (according to Lincoln & Guba 1985) of the study was enhanced by triangulation of sites and sources, using purposive sampling and providing a detailed description of the methods used. The data were therefore presented within the two main themes that emerged after a thorough scrutiny of the data, namely, the ideological context of the Working Talents, and the pragmatism and mechanisms of the Working Talents.

Ethical consideration

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Discussion of the findings

The ideological context of Working Talents

From Klingbeil's (2006) work on 'Ritual and ritual texts in the Bible', one gets the idea that it is worthwhile to first examine the dominant worldview – those dominant narratives and beliefs that orient the ritual – in order to understand the ritual and the mechanisms employed to accomplish its functions. Given its historical ties with the US-based Pentecostal movements (Maxwell 2006), ZAOGA FIFMI's Pentecostal theology emphasises the 'gifts of the Spirit' – which (Niemandt 2017) labels charismata (i.e. speaking in tongues and the centrality of prophesy) – but draws largely on the Prosperity Gospel. According to Niemandt (2017:205), the cultural roots of the Prosperity Gospel are firmly embedded in 'USA-style religion with a tendency towards a materialist orientation'. While the Prosperity Gospel has morphed into a more inclusive theological category that represents Pentecostalism, theoretically speaking, it is marred by controversies. Critiques claim that, rather than 'deconstructing the political, social, and cultural domination established by Europeans and their Euro-North American descendants', the Pentecostal belief system represented by the Prosperity Gospel is more inclined towards embracing 'the worldview of global capitalism' (Niemandt 2017:214; see also Fitzgerald 2000 for a general discussion on religious ideology).

Perhaps from the early years of his ministry, Ezekiel Guti was fully aware of this line of criticism and he sought to differentiate his Pentecostal ideology and practice from those of other Pentecostal formations. Maxwell (2006) claims that he strategically depended on white patronage for providing resources to build church buildings and bankroll proselytisation programmes while maintaining a façade of ZAOGA as a self-reliant African Church. In 2012, when preaching about prosperity, Ezekiel Guti sought to separate his Pentecostal movement's theology from the mainstream Prosperity Gospel. In a recorded sermon in March 2015, Dr Ezekiel Guti, the founder and visionary of ZAOGA FIFMI, asserted:

'I teach people to work hard, that's where I am different from people who just talk about prosperity, prosperity, prosperity ... you never work, and you want to be rich ... that's wrong prosperity. I don't teach that kind of prosperity. I teach people ... use your hands, work hard, work hard. You will be there [*gesturing to indicate a higher level*].'

It is possible that, on the face of it, what sets Ezekiel Guti's theology apart from other born-again movements is the emphasis on using one's hands to work one's way up. What is implied in his sermon, however, is the pursuit of self-reliance, self-propagation and self-supporting as the material ends of the Gospel of Christ. In this sense, Guti's prosperity teachings are contextualised (Niemandt 2017), at once speaking to material deprivations of his flock and the virtues and mores they should absorb in order to cope with the liberal capital order (Maxwell 2000).

The teachings of his wife, Eunor Guti in Midlands Province in 2016, provide greater insight into ZAOGA FIFMI's Pentecostal epistemology. In her recorded sermon in February 2016, she preached:

'It is the principle of God that when you sow you reap ... I can preach about healing and God will do great things now, now, now. But let's hear this: After healing so what? I have been healed. Yes. But I remain poor, miserable ... God wants us to have all the benefits. And now I am going to tell you how you [*can*] have everything including healing ...'

The greater part of Eunor's sermon first emphasises a principle at the heart of Pentecostal theology, namely, the cause-effect relationship between God the creator and the believer: you reap what you sow (Niemandt 2017). She then contrasts faith healing, one dimension of Pentecostal ideology, with another – material prosperity – in a manner that privileges the latter. Eunor Guti's preaching corroborates an observation commonly made by scholars of Pentecostalism (see Heuser 2016) that the emphasis on the potency of faith-healing, which has been front and centre of Pentecostalism, has shifted to a knack for theologising 'material richness' (Heuser 2016:3). Interestingly, while Eunor Guti seems to affirm the prosperity promise typical of Pentecostalism (Heuser 2016), she equally stresses that material well-being was not automatically tenable outside of ritual enactments. This is where Working Talents comes in. The sense derived from the utterances of the Gutis is that the Prosperity Gospel stands for the worldview (Geertz 1988), that is a bottom-up yet universal theorisation in Pentecostal imagination. Working Talents, however, represents a model – a practical how-to recipe – that contains rather mundane localised explanations of how congregants may access all the benefits of their covenantal relationship with God in their cultural context. Another insight derived from the preaching of the Gutis is their strategic use of contrasts, sometimes in subtle ways. Although Ezekiel Guti contrasts his Prosperity Gospel from the rest, Eunor Guti contrasts the benefits that come with the covenantal relationship, that is, faith healing vis-à-vis material well-being with God even as she assigns a higher premium to the latter. Informed by Bell's (1992) notion

of ritual as a culturally strategic activity that employs strategies to differentiate itself from ordinary acts, the authors shall reveal more instances where lexical strategies of differentiation were employed in the articulation of myths and the ritual of Working Talents. The role of myths in the articulation of Working Talents is now discussed.

Along came the myths: The founding myth and post-script deviations

The 'History of ZAOGA Forward in Faith' describes a critical moment in the church's history, in which the founding myth of Working Talents and Working Talents ritual are shown to have a coetaneous creation. It captures conversations between Ezekiel Guti and a potential benefactor of the church's early expansion – described as 'a certain man who had a lot of money' (Guti 1984:45) – and another between Guti and God. The setting of the conversations is the United States, where Guti had temporarily relocated to study theology. The potential benefactor promised resources to bankroll ZAOGA's evangelism drive and build places of worship. In return, Guti would work in a subordinate relationship to the benefactor. Effectively, this arrangement would have appended ZAOGA to the benefactor's religious formation in the United States. After ostensibly consulting with God, it is written that Guti replied, 'God has forbidden me to work under you but under Him'.

One of the elders who was motivating the congregants to participate in the 'Working Talents' narrated the journey in which Ezekiel Guti had an encounter with God about the fundraising of money in the church. This elder indicated that when Guti consulted God, he had confessed that he wanted the money to motivate people to do God's work. God's response contained both sanctions and promises: in the premises of the foregoing, the elder remarked from the pulpit preaching:

'If you work under this man, you will do so, but I will not be with you. If you humble yourself and obey me, I will be your money. Go and teach the people my word and teach them to give and to work talents ... I am going to bless to build many church buildings of worship.'

At once, this instance founded the myth and the ritual of Working Talents, and established their symbiotic relationship (Segal 2000) as dependent implements of ZAOGA's Prosperity Gospel. Thus, from the onset, myth and ritual of Working Talents serve each other (Segal 2000). Yet, because myth and ritual of Working Talents speak to the ideology of ZAOGA, one is inclined to speculate that, combined, the two components can be appropriated to serve the interests of powerful church elites, not least the spiritual leader. Arguably, the founding myth of Working Talents simultaneously establishes Guti as the indisputable, God-chosen and sacrosanct leader of ZAOGA FIFMI, as well as the sanctity of Working Talents. The founding myth effectively establishes the premises for the pre-eminence of Guti's role in the ritualisation of Working Talents, which consists in naming and designating the Talents, earmarking the proceeds for

specific ends. Consider what a female Pastor who is Guti's daughter-in-law said when mobilising congregants to work talents at an Assembly in Johannesburg in August 2016: 'Our Father [Ezekiel Guti] and his God, they told us that these [ZEGU *Miracle Talents*] are miracle talents because they are not just any talents'. While casting Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University (ZEGU) *Miracle Talents* as *sui generis* talents, Pastor Guti intentionally affirms the sacred role of Ezekiel Guti in the ritualisation of Working Talents.

When viewed in the context of the early history of ZAOGA, the founding myth could be shown to represent a response to two related critical problems, which confronted the survival of the movement and that of its leader (Ezekiel Guti) in the early years. In 'African Gifts of the Spirit', Maxwell (2006) demonstrated that, especially during its early years when the Pentecostal movement operated as a prayer band in colonial Salisbury, resource constraints and white patronage curtailed Ezekiel Guti's proselytisation efforts. Equally, Maxwell (2006) observed, resource shortages and white patronage restricted Ezekiel Guti's assertion of his leadership over the membership of his evangelical group. Motivated largely by white racism and political alliances with the Rhodesian government, the white missionaries from South Africa – who had promoted Pentecostalism in Southern Africa under the auspices of the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) – had sought to control and regulate the evangelical activities of various Pentecostal movements in Zimbabwe. This then meant that the missionaries sought to reign in Ezekiel Guti's prayer band. Maxwell (2006) observed that Guti and his prayer band yearned to:

[P]roselytise unfettered by structure and oversight ... instead they found themselves under the oversight of missionaries from the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, whose finances they readily accepted but whose authority they resented. (pp. 69–70)

The authors' interpretation of the founding myth of Working Talents is that it is a metanarrative of ZAOGA FIFMI, which simultaneously seeks to put an end to resource dependence on sources outside of the church as well as white patronage. Indeed, as Maxwell (2006) contends, missionary efforts to regulate the activities of Guti and his prayer band were characteristically branded strategies to keep Africa from moving forward.

However, if Guti agonised over external missionary influence, he had greater challenges within his own movement. Maxwell (2006) demonstrated that, especially in the early years of the movement, schisms rocked ZAOGA FIFMI, with high-profile breakaways. While many Africans were attracted to Guti's character and skills to perform healing miracles, there were contenders to his leadership, men who were equally young, energetic, ambitious and charismatic. Therefore, in addition to the idea that the founding myth constitutes a metanarrative for black pride, self-reliance and self-propagation, one is tempted to see the myth and ritual of Working Talents as stratagems at the disposal of the spiritual leader.

So far, the authors have claimed, among other things, that as an indispensable element of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa's (ZAOGA) theology – a nuanced version of the Prosperity Gospel – the founding myth of Working Talents establishes the sacred nature of Working Talents ritual acts and also validates the sacrosanct leadership of Ezekiel Guti. The authors will now explain how the rendition of the founding myth achieves other strategic ends.

The founding myth of Working Talents has attained a life of its own, slightly changing every time it is retold. Politicians, ZAOGA FIFMI congregants in migrant communities scattered abroad and church-ordained speakers all relate it, emphasising and modifying different things. State media, especially daily and weekly papers occasionally publish the founding myth, often infused with the voice of the writer. Interestingly, rather than breaking it, that is, rendering it less useful, the multiple articulations of the founding myth tend to reify it. Speaking at the official ground-breaking ceremony of the ZEGU in March 2017, the former President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe related the founding myth. In the same breath, he narrated his own struggles for independence from white colonial rule. Notably, Mugabe cast the American potential benefactor captured in the founding myth (as a certain man) as a white man. In the recordings of the ceremony in March 2017, Robert Mugabe remarked:

'On my side, I did not say let us continue praying ... we were told you have your hands, liberate yourself. That is where our minds meet ... You don't have to pay a cent [for the land on which the Church will build ZEGU] this [land] is what we fought for.'

From Mugabe's point of view, Ezekiel Guti's refusal to accept funding from the American man – which action would have annexed his movement to the American born-again movement – represented a quest for economic liberation. His resistance to the manipulative agendas of those in resource-rich countries in the West resonated well with Mugabe's indigenisation paradigms. Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa's Pentecostal ideology is intertwined with the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) Party's liberation narratives. Mugabe's articulation of founding myth tends to officialise ZAOGA's Prosperity Gospel, reifying it as the vanguard for indigenisation, empowerment, own-boss mentality, self-reliance and self-propagation.

Yet, it is not in question that ZAOGA has always emphasised the teaching of morals and mores, focusing on the economic improvement of the individual and that of the church (Maxwell 2000). Interestingly, there is little evidence, if at all, to suggest that economic liberation in ZAOGA FIFMI has been targeted at undoing the matrix of colonial power and global capitalism (Heuser 2016; Niemandt 2017). Instead, ZAOGA's ideological posture vis-à-vis global capitalism is narrowly defined in terms of the rejection of symbols of white patronage. Consider how Eunor Guti reminisced on what the Talents have achieved in the church as she mobilised support for the ZEGU Miracle Talents: 'We have built many church [buildings]... no money [came] from missionaries overseas.

We built houses, no cent [came] from missionaries ... we built hospitals, no cent from missionaries ... '. She had effectively extended the motif of self-propagation, which lies at the heart of the founding myth. However, if Maxwell (2006) is right, Eunor Guti's version of the church's history is rather selective. By omitting the facts about white patronage, she effectively effaces those persons who sponsored the church's projects in the early years.

Eunor Guti's utterances to suggest an absence of white patronage in the church's history speak to the strategy observable in many other articulations: making ZAOGA FIFMI's ideology and practice, including the Working Talents ritual, stand out by way of contrast (Bell 1992). The goal is to set ZAOGA's evangelising drive apart from the proselytising efforts of foreign-born Pentecostal-inclined missionaries, the very people who baptised Ezekiel Guti. The founding myth similarly makes the contrast between the poor African Pentecostals who live under conditions of collective insecurity and the people with 'a lot of money' in resource-rich countries in the West (Guti 1984).

Indeed, these contrasts are marked out to intentionally make ZAOGA's Pentecostal practice stand out. To emphasise the uniqueness and sanctity of ZEGU Miracle Talents to a congregation in one assembly in inner-city Johannesburg, Pastor Guti related a testimony, where a certain woman gave the church 30 ha of land in a prime location, after God had spoken to her. In narrating this phenomenon in one of her sermon recordings, Pastor Guti exclaimed that the woman gave up her title deeds to the church leadership:

'She was handing out papers ... When we [studied] the papers [we learnt that] she was giving us a plot 30 000 hectares in size. The plot is [not just located] in any place. It is in the Vumba Mountains area ... a beautiful place, with beautiful weather ... You can make a resort ... We saw that this is a miracle.'

Pastor Guti's quote corroborates an observation well made in Pentecostal literature that Pentecostals have a penchant for, and venerate, luxury consumer goods (Heuser 2016; Maxwell 2006; Niemandt 2017). Her testimony contradicts the prime objective of Working Talents. Note that, having used the example of a gift from an individual woman to promote support for ZEGU Miracle Talents, Pastor Guti simultaneously cautioned the congregation against giving wares: 'You have to give money, not the wares you are selling'. Yet, at another inner-city Assembly, which the authors observed in August 2016, the invited speaker, a woman in her fifties, used a different testimony to achieve more or less the same end of mobilising the congregation around ZEGU Miracle Talents. In the presence of the authors, she narrated that:

'A successful businessman came forward and said he could build ZEGU all by himself. But Father Guti said, 'No'. He loves you very much. He wants you to be a part of [ZEGU's] blessings ... Talents will continue to make money for us.'

The manner in which Ezekiel Guti rejected the gift of the successful businessman in the quote echoes the way Guti refused to accept the offer from the American benefactor.

Instead of allowing one man to singlehandedly fund a large construction Talents project, Ezekiel Guti opted for small contributions from the multitudes of his congregants, in keeping with the movement's ideology of empowerment and self-reliance (Maxwell 2006). It seems for Ezekiel Guti, as ritualisation, Working Talents ritual serves much grander ends than the project earmarked for Talents money. The authors now turn to Working Talents as ritualisation.

Pragmatism and mechanisms of Working Talents

Working Talents does not monopolise the acts of giving. It merely asserts its giving acts as *sui generis*. Moreover, the symbolic nature of Working Talent acts is held to actuate the flow of those blessings that unlock the entrepreneurial potential of congregants. Ritualisation acts, particularly consecration, bestow a higher symbolic value on Working Talents ritual acts. In a typical Sunday service – and more so in the Big Sunday service – different forms of giving occur alongside the collection of talents proceeds: based on Love Offering for the invited speaker, regular collections for the orphans or an occasional funeral, contributions for the Champions (for Ezekiel Guti Television), an outsider will most likely think that these multiple forms of giving will ultimately discourage the congregants, most of whom live on a shoestring budget, from Working Talents. On the contrary, allowing various forms of giving in the same service works to distinguish Working Talents acts from their counterparts.

Indeed, as Bell (1992:90) theorises, ritualised acts stand out and derive their significance through 'interplay and contrast with other practices' in the same spatial and temporal environment, such as when Working Talents congregants were instructed to separate wares meant for a Working Talents project from other wares. In addition, they can keep all monies in one place, but they *must* keep proceeds of Working Talents in a separate pocket, wallet, cache, bank account or safe. These ritual acts are symbolic acts. They are designed to cast ritualised Working Talents acts as symbolically superior to their counterparts in the same context (Bell 1992).

Another strategy appeals to temporality. In between two Talents for a church cause, congregants work Home Talents designed to help them acquire material possessions for the home or farm. A more elaborate strategy employed is to differentiate current church Working Talents from previous Talents for the church cause by way of naming. Although church Talents for 2011 were named ZEGU Talents, church Talents for 2017 were dubbed ZEGU Miracle Talents. Introducing the word miracle not only sets ZEGU Miracle Talents apart from previous causes for the proposed university, it also engenders what Parker and Horton (1996:91) termed an 'archaic conception of "word" [as] a living, creative power'. Think about how, when giving a testimony about her own Working Talents project of quail farming, Pastor Guti made congregants see the power of the word miracle: She revealed that:

'[T]his business [niche] was flooded, in Zimbabwe. Everybody was doing [the business of quails] ... But since these [Talents for building the University] are miracle talents, I see myself surviving in this business ...'.

This suggests that it is the veneration of words uttered in everyday parlance and names assigned to things in the Pentecostal orders that sets ritualised acts apart from their counterparts. For instance, assigning the name 'worker' to poor African Pentecostals who typically contend with poverty, insecurity and lack of economic opportunities, engenders specific cultural identities with which congregants confront the failures of the liberal global capitalist order (Heuser 2016).

Working Talents in ZAOGA FIFMI captures Gluckman's sense of the term ritualisation, which means the 'assignment of ritual roles to individuals in conformity to their ... relations and statuses' (Rappaport 1999:40). Except where Gluckman's ritualisation emphasises secular relations and statuses, Working Talents accentuates a hierarchy, at least, within the liturgical order itself. Metaphorically, one can think of the congregants, who are called workers in Working Talents, as worker bees who generate the proceeds, except that in Working Talents, workers also have a more divine role, that of consecration, or communicating with God to dedicate a Working Talents project. Consecration can take the form of a formal prayer or simply a conversation with God, such as the one Pastor Guti had with God when her quail farming business was on the verge of collapse:

'I told God. I said God these are not my quails. I have never done the business of quails in my life. I started doing this business because of the talents [ZEGU Miracle Talents]. All this is for you.'

The idea of consecration captured in Pastor Guti's quote corroborates Robbins's (2009) observation that in all contexts of Pentecostal life, liturgical or otherwise, the separation of the sacred from the profane is somewhat untenable. Interestingly, Working Talents retains the sacred-profane distinction in terms of goal-setting naming talents. The other rungs of the ladder are occupied by elites – those who shuttle in between assemblies in different regions and countries to mobilise people to work talents. During the authors' observations in Johannesburg, it was learnt that this role is often assumed by members of the Guti family and others with close secular relations with Ezekiel Guti, although there may be exceptions.

The elite mobilisers for Working Talents often provide different lay theorisations of Working Talents. Working Talents as an apprenticeship is one such theorisation. In ZAOGA FIFMI, Working Talents has recently come to be regarded as a 'school'. Writings in popular media go as far as labelling Working Talents a school of business. Often congregants credit Eunor Guti with turning Working Talents into a school that emphasises training of practical entrepreneurial skills in the liturgical sphere. Her daughter-in-law Pastor Guti described

Working Talents as more of a deal than a ritual, when speaking at one Assembly in Johannesburg. She declared:

'Working Talents is a win-win situation: I win, God wins and ZEGU is built ... When I give, ZEGU is built and God is winning. At the same time, I win because God is going to bless me.'

This confused the authors momentarily, as to what winning meant. But as Pastor Guti continued with her preaching in the presence of the authors, she quickly clarified:

'The issue is growing the money ... Father Guti gave us an example: 'in a soccer match, winning is not how you dribble [*with*] the ball, it is the number of scores you make'. Winning is about giving money to God ... You have to give money, not the wares you are selling ...'

Pastor Guti's mother-in-law, Eunor Guti's talk further qualifies winning when teaching during an event in Midlands Province, named 'The School of Talents'. For example, she first declared that 'Talents will teach you how to control [*the*] dollar'. Then she went on, in a Socratic manner of speaking in preaching:

'When you have worked talents ... you did not use the money because it is for God, the discipline that you have [*acquired/shown*] does it go with the money when the money goes to build the university? It stays with you.'

These bottom-up and top-bottom theorisations suggest that Working Talents ritual acts are a non-rational action, thereby confirming Rappaport's (1999:26) claim that 'ritual is not entirely symbolic'. Certainly there is something tangible and more mundane in it for congregants (Heuser 2016; Niemandt 2017; Robbins 2009). As ritual, Working Talents at once promises not only tangible and spiritual benefits but also persistent psychic implements, which enable them to reconstitute, reorder and live in the world, notwithstanding the failings of global capitalism (Heuser 2016; Maxwell 2006). In a sense, Working Talents harmonises ethical action of congregants in everyday life with the Prosperity Gospel worldview. The Prosperity Gospel is manifested in Working Talents. The latter not only validates it but also recasts it as a nuanced, contextualised Prosperity Gospel unique to ZAOGA FIFMI (Maxwell 2006; Niemandt 2017).

The strategies described in this part of the section are largely intrinsic to Working Talents. However, it is interesting to note that Working Talents ritualisation also exploits the context to achieve its ends. Robbins (2009) and (Maxwell 2006) have observed that the singing, dancing and manifestation of the 'gifts of the Spirit' in the liturgical sphere generate frames which orient congregants towards ritual appreciation. To that, however, the authors add, alongside Heuser (2016), that Working Talent acts chime appropriately with Shona ATRs' proclivity towards ritual and ritual enactments. Gelfand's (1965) discussion of the Father Temples' notion of the vital force is informative here. Gelfand (1965) notes that the vital force – known as *Shave* in Shona – is a unique supernatural spirit, distinguished from ancestral spirits. Although, among the living, the latter

play a protective role, the former distinguishes a man's talents from men of similar gifts, for example, hunting, farming and knowledge of healing herbs, of the ordinary men. However, the man has to consecrate to the *Shave* his gifts by performing a ritual in the name of the *Shave* before he can become a distinguished hunter, farmer or witch doctor. Working Talents appears to follow the same logic.

In Zimbabwe's Midlands Province in 2016, Eunor Guti taught the congregation about talents by way of questioning: when we work talents, what happens? Do we remain the same? The answer she was expecting was something along the lines of 'No. We do not. We become extraordinary entrepreneurs'. Speaking to a congregation in one of the assemblies in inner-city Johannesburg, her daughter-in-law Pastor Guti echoed this line of thinking. She taught that:

'Some of us, God gave us talents. When you work talents with your business, God is going to bless your business ... God is going to create more businesses so that you become a better businessperson.'

Talents in ZAOGA FIFMI are capabilities or competences by which individuals generate material wealth for themselves and their descendants. In both the Shona ritual to the *Shave* and Working Talents, one finds 'a spiritualisation of material reality' (Niemandt 2017:206). However, where the former is more symbolic so that the ends do not justify the means (Sanders 2013), there are elements of rationality in the latter. Notwithstanding these differences, it is interesting to note that, strategically, 'Working Talents' draw on an appreciation of ritual, which is part of traditional Shona epistemology.

The implications of the Working Talents on the gospel of social transformation

This article examined the morphology of the founding myth of talents and the ritual of Working Talents. Working Talents contains ritualised acts and should be analysed as a ritual. The myths around Working Talents in ZAOGA FIFMI as well as the ritual of Working Talents were created in response to enduring personal anxieties over two related issues: the first is the lack of resources, which are central to the expansion of this Pentecostal movement; the second relates to the church's desire to secure resources for the church's projects and transnational expansion without white patronage. Undeniably, these anxieties have, since the formation of the movement, influenced both the articulation of myths and performance of Working Talents ritual acts. Ritualisation of giving employs various strategies including nomenclature and lexical devices, which effectively separate Working Talents ritual acts from other giving acts. Working talents contains ethical action and empowerment narratives synthesised and it aspires to create Pentecostal congregants with collective cultural identities, disposed to give money to support the causes of the church. In doing so, myths and ritual have reshaped ZAOGA FIFMI's Pentecostal ideology into a nuanced version of the Prosperity Gospel, one that

emphasises notions of indigenisation, empowerment and self-propagation.

It is through these ideological and ritual implements that the church successfully mobilised resources from its flock scattered in communities abroad and at home. The literature on non-state transfers from individuals suggests that moral obligations between family members are the drivers of transnational helping practices and non-state transfers between individuals (Boccagni 2013). The case of Working Talents considered here suggests that ritual activity may play a significant role in shaping the motivational agency of those who contribute towards development in the country of origin.

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