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Christological Foundations for Political Participation: Women in the Global South Building Agency as Risen Beings

By Leocadie Lushombo¹

Abstract

This paper draws upon the theologies of Jon Sobrino and Engelbert Mveng to construct a social ethics of participation for those who have been marginalized by corrupt political and economic institutions, focusing on the agency of women in SubSahara Africa. In light of the philosophy of political participation in developing countries, I examine Sobrino's insights that the victims of the evil of this world have to live as risen beings, I consider the African Theologian Engelbert Mveng's concept of anthropological pauperization, and argue that it makes a difference to consider historical events that influence the contexts in which we view the victims. I also argue that both Sobrino and Mveng provide foundations for political participation of the victims, but there is a need to reinforce the agency of the victims, and their own ability to come down from the cross and live as risen beings. Such agency suggests the need for reinforcing the political participation of the victims. Finally, I supplement Mveng's thoughts with the cultural features of the African philosophy of Ubuntu - related to African Humanism - to show that Ubuntu, as well as Mveng, reinforce Sobrino's claims.

Introduction

This essay will draw upon the theologies of Jon Sobrino and Engelbert Mveng² to construct a social ethics of participation for those who have been marginalized by corrupt political and economic institutions, focusing on the agency of women in Sub-Sahara Africa. Jon Sobrino's insights in *Christ the Liberator* are relevant in providing Christological foundations for this

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² "Engelbert Mveng was born in 1930 near Yaoundé, Cameroon, to Presbyterian parents. He eventually became a Jesuit priest, as well as a historian, poet, artist, philosopher, and theologian...As a historian and theologian he made a great contribution to the study of African culture and history, especially in the realms of cultural and religious anthropology and iconology." See "Engelbert Mveng: A Theology of Life Expressed in Art," in *Indigenous Jesus*, May, 2012. Accessed on November, 2015. <http://indigenesusjesus.blogspot.com/2012/05/engelbert-mveng-theology-of-life.html>.

project. However, Sobrino tends to talk in terms of taking the victims down from the cross as an appeal to the more elite to be conscious of the ways their behavior and politics affect the victims and to call on those systems to change. This paper argues that there is a need to reinforce the agency of the victims, and their own ability to come down from the cross and live as risen beings. Such agency suggests the need for reinforcing the political participation of the victims.

There is a need for Sobrino to consider not only economic conditions, but the anthropological poverty suggested by the theology of Engelbert Mveng: the poverty created by the slave trade and colonization from which many black African countries continue to suffer. Any contemporary Christological analysis related to the participation of the victims of the Global South should take into account the facts that slavery continues under multiple forms and that women, especially, are still excluded and abused in many regions. This paper will also demonstrate that women's particular poverty does not seem to be taken seriously into account in either Mveng's or Sobrino's liberation theology. As I will illustrate in concluding examples, the experience of women in achieving literacy and economic productivity help us to recognize that it is important not only to consider women specific situations of poverty, but also to recognize the importance of women's own agency in improving their poverty.

Jon Sobrino, in *Christ the Liberator*, argues that the deeper roots of poverty lie in structural injustice: the poor are impoverished, and the indigenous are deprived of their cultural identity.³ Given this reality, Sobrino argues against the limits of a Christology-soteriology centered on individual salvation through Jesus Christ. He proposes that the concept of salvation has to be plural, involving body, soul, "person and society, transcendent and historical."⁴ He adds, first, that the hope of resurrection as explained by European Catholic and Protestant theology is important, but it has to recognize the partiality which is essential to it. Second, this partiality asserts that Jesus' resurrection offers hope, especially for the victims. Jesus' resurrection should be

³ Jon Sobrino, *Christ The Liberator: A View From The Victims* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2001), 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 236.

experienced in the present and this experience is the source of living as risen beings. Third, the understanding of the resurrection in its relationship to the victims is more fundamental for the Global South, in which many consider the hope of resurrection to be the hope of the victims.⁵ Such hope reminds us that we have to participate in ending injustice,⁶ taking victims down from the cross, and transforming social, political, and economic structures that produce so many victims today.⁷

Following Sobrino's insights, the question is not whether the unjust systems must end for the victims to be fully liberated, but whether the victims must participate completely in order to liberate themselves from the cross, fulfill the hope of the resurrection in their current struggle, and live as risen beings. With regard to African victims, some cultural features – related to the theory of African Humanism⁸ of *Ubuntu* – put in relation with the theology of Engelbert Mveng, may serve as means to overcome the limits of a Chalcedonian Christology pointed out by Sobrino and strengthen Sobrino's insights in order to boost political participation for African victims. In reinforcing the claims of the theology of liberation and Sobrino's view of the victims, Mveng's historical and anthropological insights are not only relevant to boost agency of the victims in black African countries, but also for the learning of Western theologians, particularly those interested in the theology of liberation.

First, this essay will elucidate Sobrino's insights that can ground political participation of the victims. Second, I will juxtapose some of Sobrino's insights on living as risen beings with some features of the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, in order to reinforce foundations, methods, and practices of political participation for black Africans. Third, I will compare Sobrino's and Mveng's insights and propose a framework to empower Africans to come down from the cross, live as risen beings, and transform unjust structures. Finally, I will address some limits of both

⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁷ Ibid., 48.

⁸ Erasmus D. Prinsloo, "Ubuntu Culture And Participatory Management," in *The African Philosophy Reader*, ed. P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998), 42.

Mveng's and Sobrino's perspectives by looking at the particular situations of women as victims and unjust structures which women face in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). These limits will be highlighted with reference to my lived experience and some documented facts about women's political participation in the DRC.

Understanding Agency and Political Participation

Even if individual agency is very important to bolster political participation, political participation is more about collective agency than individual agency. What do I mean by agency, collective agency, and political participation? And how do these three concepts relate to politics? Agency is defined as "the ability of the individual to act freely and independently,"⁹ it suggests that "we are not just passive recipients of all the influences around us. We are active participants."¹⁰ My understanding of agency also includes the notion of moral agency which implies the obligation to act in a more humane way.¹¹ The Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church affirms the notion of moral agency when they argue that agency is affirming true humanity, since "man is truly human only if he is the master of his own actions...only if he is the architect of his own progress."¹² Moral agency can have different meaning depending on the conditions in which people live. For Paulo Freire, agency is taken as the potential power of "the masses" versus the power of the elite. Building human agency is to enforce "human capacity to act as subject"¹³ in facing and correcting what is dehumanizing. Collective agency refers to people acting collectively in order to positively and effectively influence the systems which affect their

⁹ Kerry Ferris and Jill Stein, *The Real World: An Introduction to Sociology*, Fourth edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2014), G-1.

¹⁰ Ibid., 121.

¹¹ Albert Bandura, "Selective Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency," *Journal of Moral Education* 31, no. 2 (June 2002): 16, doi:10.1080/0305724022014322.

¹² Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, n° 84, 1967.

¹³ Review of Paulo Freire's books, Paulo Freire and Paulo Freire, "Education as the practice of freedom" in *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Continuum, by Alison Kreider (UCLA), The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). Accessed: September 12, 2015. http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~daniel_sc/freire/ak.html.

lives and those of the future generations. As William Gamson puts it, “Being a collective agent implies being part of a “we” who can do something.”¹⁴

The idea of political participation used in this paper is drawn from Samuel P. Huntington’s and Joan M. Nelson’s understanding of political participation in the Global South.¹⁵ Their understanding aligns with the way I want to analyze political participation as building the agency of victims – as described above – for them to live as risen beings in light of Sobrino’s insights. It is drawn from the book *No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries* which is the result of a participatory process combining “comparative sector studies and aggregate modeling” of several developing countries including Colombia and Kenya. Huntington and Nelson argue that these comparative studies also included “cross-national studies of participation patterns among two low-income groups: the peasantry and the urban poor.”¹⁶ They define “political participation” as, “activity by private citizens designed to influence government decision-making.”¹⁷ For them, “participation may be individual or collective, organized or spontaneous, sustained or sporadic, peaceful or violent, legal or illegal, effective or ineffective,”¹⁸ Huntington’s and Nelson’s understanding of political participation is relevant because it bolsters the agency of those who are participating.

Huntington’s and Nelson’s statement is related to Sobrino’s view that Jesus’ resurrection is best seen not as an historical fact or a supernatural event, but as an eschatological reality that should affect present history.¹⁹ In other words, it should affect the reality of the victims in their

¹⁴ William A. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 84.

¹⁵ While recognizing Huntington’s more conservative influence in the 1970s and 1980s in relation to foreign policy in the USA, I am using his understanding of political participation because it provides a set of components which is suitable to realities of some developing countries, including the urban and rural poor of some countries of Global South. Huntington and Nelson’s particular book, *No Easy Choice: political participation in developing countries* focuses on political participation rather than political stability which seem to be the trend of Huntington which has brought him many criticisms from liberative decolonization movements.

¹⁶ Samuel P. Huntington and Joan M. Nelson, *No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1976), v–vi.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 12.

present struggle which leads us to the concept of agency of the victims which is not the focus Sobrinos' book. The concepts of agency and political participation align with the general idea of politics understood as "Governance; the means by which the will of a society is derived and implemented; the actions of a government, politician, or political party; the pursuit and exercise of political power necessary to make binding policy decisions for a society; the interpersonal negotiations that lead to consensus within, and action by, groups."²⁰ All of the meanings of these concepts reflect Huntington's and Nelson's definition of political participation.

Sobrino's Foundational Insights.

Sobrino links the resurrection of Jesus with justice for the victims. Jesus' resurrection brings hope to the victims: the power that keeps them in situations of marginalization will end. For him, taking victims down from the cross implies performing actions for "the service of eschatological ideals: justice, peace, solidarity, the life of the weak, community, dignity, celebration, and so on."²¹ In other words, the task is to work for the triumph of life over death so that victims may live as risen beings. Indeed, the transformation of unjust social, political, and economic structures demands a set of activities, methods, beliefs, approaches, practices, etc., that can influence government decision-making in favor of the victims, the marginalized, or the oppressed. All of this work provides foundations for political participation for the victims. However, victims will be raised up to the extent that they participate in the practices of dismantling the many crosses that marginalize them, and transforming unjust structures. They will live as risen beings only when they participate politically, either directly or indirectly, in decision-making processes that affect their lives. That is to say, they will begin to experience resurrection when they become agents of their destiny and participate in transforming the structures that keep them on crosses of suffering, and deny them their human dignity.

²⁰ Jay M. Shafritz, Phil Williams, and Ronald Calinger, *The Dictionary of 20th-Century World Politics*, 1st ed, A Henry Holt Reference Book (New York: H. Holt, 1993), 542.

²¹ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 49.

Sobrino names different titles, including the *High Priest*, the *Messiah*, the *Lord*, the *Son of God*, the *Prophet*, and the *Servant*. Sobrino's theological reading of these titles shows that Jesus denounced and defended victims of several unjust political, economic, and socio-cultural structures of the society in which he lived in.²² His goal in analyzing Jesus' titles is to get at the importance of the meaning of their content for our contemporary time.²³ The meaning of some of Jesus' titles as suggested by Sobrino provides foundations for victims to live as risen beings. Such meanings embody political significance that grounds political participation of the victims today. Sobrino claims that the titles recover the essential aspects of Jesus' life and mystery. In analyzing the titles of Jesus, Sobrino looks to trace areas of Christian anthropology, that is to say, how human beings can exercise their humanity in a more humane way, in a salvific manner, in a "son-like manner."²⁴ I will only focus on Jesus' titles of Messiah and Lord to illustrate the extent to which they ground political participation.

For Sobrino, there is a need for re-messianisation, of the bodily, social, economic, and political aspects that are all concerned with Jesus' liberation. For Sobrino, re-messianization implies the "going back firmly to Jesus and making his relationship with the poor central."²⁵ It is about going back to a messianism that demands justice for the oppressed. Far from turning Christ into a politician, or turning Jesus' messianism into a messianic triumphalism, by re-messianisation, Sobrino emphasizes the messianism of Christ as liberating and transforming through its power of love, truth, and witness. These powers need to be brought back for the hope of the poor as masses of people, not only as individual beings.

Sobrino's arguments for the need of "re-messianization"²⁶ are relevant to foster political participation of the contemporary victims in the Global South because the victims need not only spiritual salvation, but also and even more so the alleviation of their material and human poverty.

²² Ibid., 136–138.

²³ Ibid., 123.

²⁴ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 122.

²⁵ Ibid., 147.

²⁶ Ibid., 147.

Sobrino argues that Jesus is given the title of *Messiah* in relation of His salvific work. He states that Jesus' messianism is essential and is needed in the Global South because it "expresses the hope for the poor for liberation" not only in a spiritual, but in a social and political sense.²⁷ In the Old Testament, the people waited for a Messiah who would be a public figure, sent by God to save them, restore God's Kingdom, institute justice, defend the powerless, and bring about reconciliation and peace. After the resurrection, the hope for economic salvation that transforms structures – implying the restoration of political and economic justice as well as peace for the oppressed – was replaced by an exclusively transcendental hope. Salvation became seen more as salvation solely from sin and death and tended to leave behind the pluralistic dimensions of salvation which involves the salvation of the body, soul, and other dimensions of the material world in need of salvation. Secondly, the cultural, social, and political aspirations of the people tended to disappear, despite the fact that Christian communities were reinforced. Third, even if the Christian communities included the Gentiles and other excluded classes, the concern for having a just king, or political leader, and for justice for orphans and widows, was not essential to salvation.²⁸ For them, the most important aspect to consider was the fact that Jesus the Messiah would transform the world from its sin.

For the oppressive powers to be renounced there is a need for full participation of the poor. Sobrino's liberating approach tends to override the agency of the victims. He emphasizes actions but not on the part of the victims themselves. Rather, his emphasis is on the conversion of more powerful Christians. As Maria Pilar Aquino suggests, for Sobrino, this can be the way for powerful people "to correspond to the reality of God within history."²⁹ For Sobrino, re-messianization of the Messiah requires a re-messianization of the Church itself, of the Church's theology, and an understanding that although the task of liberating the poor is utopic, it is urgent

²⁷ Ibid., 139.

²⁸ Ibid., 145.

²⁹ Maria Pilar Aquino, "Evil and Hope: A Reflection from the Victims. Response to Jon Sobrino," in *Proceedings of the Fiftieth Annual Convention : Fiftieth Anniversary Edition*, ed. Paul Crowley, 50th ed. (New York City: Catholic Theological Society of America., 1995), 85–92, 86.

and needs to be taken.³⁰ I argue that this task is relevant, but should not be taken without involving the poor themselves.

Denouncing evils is an important component of political participation. It is incoherent to proclaim the *Lordship* of Jesus without denouncing the evils that conflict with it and without making a commitment to the Kingdom of God. Sobrino argues that Jesus shows a model of power that is one of love and service, empowering his subjects for service to the oppressed. For Sobrino, today, Christians are confronted with lords of unjust political, free market, globalization, and military structures, which tyrannize the world and oppress the powerless.³¹ Indeed, any system that deprives people of life and dignity is evil. Jesus empowered the blind, making them see; the deaf, making them hear; and the hungry, providing them food.³² We are called to *sonship* and *daughtership*, which people share with Jesus as Lord and the Son of God. Sobrino argues that in addition to the salvific function of the title *Son of God*, the anthropological importance of this title is that it brings us the grace of being children – sons and daughters of God through Jesus Christ, what are given new life.

The titles described above reveal who Jesus is and what implications consequently arise for his followers. With regard to such implications, Sobrino argues that we need to commit ourselves to changing the oppressive conditions of the billions of oppressed people in three ways. First, we need to be honest and recognize the devastation of poverty, exploitation, frustration, indignation, marginalization, and so forth, as did the bishops of Latin America in Medellín and Puebla.³³ Oppressed people represent those blind, crippled, and paralyzed to whom Jesus dedicated his life through healing and saving actions. Sobrino calls on theologians not to cover up these situations and instead to show the need for the salvation of the victims in its multiple dimensions. Second,

³⁰ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 150–151.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

³² *Ibid.*, 184.

³³ *Ibid.*, 188.

we need to take the way of praxis and choose to do something concretely to make the fatherhood as well as the motherhood of God a reality.

The meaning of the titles as read by Sobrino also provides foundations for political participation as defined by Huntington and Nelson. For the victims to live as risen beings, there is a need for the victims themselves to perform the action of coming down from the cross. We are asked to undertake Jesus' works, in empowering those who are paralyzed to walk, those who are deaf to hear, those who are lepers to heal, and those who are blind to see. We are asked to make the universality of human dignity a reality for all, not only for a few powerful people. The following section will look at how the African theologian Mveng reinforces the agency of the victims from the context of black African countries.

Engelbert Mveng's Insights and Political Participation

Engelbert Mveng's insights reinforce foundations, methods, and practices of political participation for black African countries. He shares the same conviction as Sobrino that poverty and its mechanisms destroy the dignity of its victims and impede them from living as risen daughters and sons of God. Like Sobrino, Mveng looks at the structures of sin in the black African context and at liberation from the perspective of the victims. He considers that in black African countries, there is a distinctive type of victimhood that is generated by two main historical events: the slave trade and colonization.³⁴ He raises the questions as to whether the good news of our salvation can be realized in the structures of sin like those in which populations of the Global South live today, and what are the roots of such terrible denials of the human essence.³⁵ He presents an analysis of the particular situation of poverty in black African society which he qualifies as "anthropological pauperization"³⁶ and investigates its sources. Mveng's distinctive

³⁴ Engelbert Mveng and B. L. Lipawing, *Théologie, Libération et Cultures Africaines: Dialogue Sur L'anthropologie Négro-Africaine*, Essai (Yaoundé [Cameroun] : Paris: C.L.E. ; Présence africaine, 1996), 32.

³⁵ Engelbert Mveng, "Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World," in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 163.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

contribution is to address the need for a cultural liberation perspective, rather than only a political and economic liberation.

First, I will present how Mveng defines anthropological poverty, in a way that differs from liberation theology from Latin America in general, and from Sobrino's perspective on the victims in particular. Second, I will look at the consonances of his perspective with the African ethics of *Ubuntu*. As the thinker Ruel Khoza puts it,

Ubuntu is an African view of life and world-view [characterized by] the distinctive collective consciousness of Africans [which] is manifested in their behavior patterns, expressions, and spiritual self-fulfillment, in which values such as the universal brotherhood of Africans sharing and treating other people as humans are concretized.³⁷

Thus, in *Ubuntu* a person is a person through other persons; the belief that "I am, because you are"³⁸ is central in the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which takes seriously the view that man is basically a social being. I will point out how Mveng's theology reflects the values of *Ubuntu*, and converges with Sobrino's Christology of living as risen beings. Third, I will consider how Mveng's anthropological approach provides foundations for political participation grounded in black African reality, and how these foundations can reinforce Sobrino's insights drawn from his reading of the titles of Jesus.

Mveng's Anthropological Poverty

For Mveng, black African countries are characterized above all by anthropological poverty. For him, Latin American liberation theology focuses on economic and political deprivation, especially as it looks at the consequences of an imperialist and capitalist system of free markets that leaves billions of people of the Global South in poverty. On the contrary, Mveng's African theology of liberation, in addition to exploring consequences of imperialism and capitalism, looks at the two main historical events that mark black African countries: the slave trade and

³⁷ D. Prinsloo, "Ubuntu Culture And Participatory Management," 41.

³⁸ Ibid., 43.

colonization. Mveng argues that these two events, in addition to a half-century of independence of African countries, justify the relevance of the originality of their theologies.³⁹

Particular historical contexts do influence the political participation of African people in our contemporary time. As Mveng argues, historical contexts such as the slave trade and colonization influence African realities and explain some roots of many current unjust structures. Therefore, theologians, whether African or Western, need to consider these issues in their theology of liberation and their analyses of poverty in Africa. Mveng argues that these two events are the main factors that cause the “anthropological pauperization” in Africa. By anthropological pauperization he means that poverty is not only political and economic, but also cultural. It is important to state what we mean by “culture” here. For Mveng, culture implies the conception of the person, the conception of God, and the conception of the world. Additionally, as, Judith M. Bahemuka puts it “African culture is the sum total of the African experience. It includes beliefs, myths, rituals, art, language and symbols.”⁴⁰ Thus, by cultural poverty, Mveng means that all of these dimensions are impoverished.

Mveng’s concept of anthropological poverty in impeding creativity constitutes another important obstacle to political participation. It must be addressed in order to foster political participation in black, decolonized African countries. Mveng defines anthropological poverty as the dehumanization of the person – one is deprived not only of what one had, or was doing, but also of what one was. Anthropological pauperization therefore implies not only material deprivation but also spiritual and cultural deprivation. It implies a situation “when persons are bereft of their identity, their dignity, their freedom, their thought, their history, their language, their faith universe, and their basic creativity, deprived of all their rights, their hopes, their

³⁹ Mveng and Lipawing, *Théologie, Libération et Cultures Africaines*, 38–40.

⁴⁰ Judith Bahemuka M., “The Hidden Christ in African Traditional Religion,” in *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology* (Nairobi, Kenya: Initiatives Ltd., 1989), 8.

ambitions...they sink into a kind of poverty which no longer concerns only exterior or interior goods or possessions but strikes at the very being, essence, and dignity of the human person.”⁴¹

Anthropological poverty deprives people from believing in their capacity as human beings to do good and build a better life. Anthropological poverty is seen in many ways in the DRC for examples when people believe that there is nothing that can be done to move forward because everything is decided by powerful Western countries which control the world, even censoring elections. Many people in the DRC believe that Congolese leaders for example are only appointed from Western countries on the basis of these political and economic interests. As Osita G. Afoaku argues on the DRC’s case, "starting with the Portuguese in the fifteen century, followed by the Arabs and, in the end, by King Leopold II’s Belgians in the nineteenth century,"⁴² the DRC has been under foreign influence for over three centuries. Additionally, Afoaku confirms the impact of colonization in the political system of the DRC when he argues that the tyranny of the colonial masters toward the Congolese people is one of the causes of the failure of the democratic process in the Congo. As he puts it,

seventy-five years of Belgian rule set the stage for the persistent pattern of disconnect between state actions and public welfare...Like other African countries, to a very large extent the predicament of modern Congo must also be attributed to the failure of the ruling class to actualize the promise of democracy and social justice within the framework of the post-colonial state.⁴³

Afoaku’s statements show the extent to which colonization of the past can influence poverty in the present time and how anthropological poverty can continue to shape African cultures.

For Mveng, this anthropological pauperization is a danger that threatens society⁴⁴ more than material poverty. He argues that in addition to structural poverty, African societies find themselves in anthropological “annihilation.”⁴⁵ For example they are obliged to prostrate themselves to industrialized countries and the International Monetary Fund. Overwhelmed by

⁴¹ Mveng, “Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World,” 156.

⁴² Osita George Afoaku, *Explaining the Failure of Democracy in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Autocracy and Dissent in an Ambivalent World*, African Studies 76 (Lewiston, N.Y: E. Mellen Press, 2005), 2.

⁴³ Ibid., 2–3.

⁴⁴ Mveng and Lipawing, *Théologie, Libération et Cultures Africaines*, 65.

⁴⁵ Mveng, “Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World,” 157.

debt, they agree to comply with conditions that render them poorer,⁴⁶ such as those conditions imposed by the structural adjustment programs from the Washington consensus in 1989, which did not consider social programs and the criteria of exportations and income imposed to developing countries by the HIPC⁴⁷ initiatives ten years later. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD)⁴⁸ report in 2004, the very few beneficiaries of HIPC are unlikely able to attain a sustainable level of indebtedness even after fulfilling with the completion point and at long term.⁴⁹ In fact, according to Damien Millet,⁵⁰ all of the requirements of the HIPC initiatives are still embodying the logic of the structural adjustment of 1989 and they do not aim at liberating the HIPC but at rendering their debt sustainable because they relieve only the unpayable services (interests) of their debt.⁵¹ They do not relieve the debt itself.

Going back to Mveng, he acknowledges that in many African countries material poverty takes away humane conditions and dignity and reduces people to the condition of animals. This poverty is a political problem and goes with spiritual, moral, cultural, and sociological forms of poverty that are as devastating as the material.⁵² Mveng adds that in addition to being structural, anthropological poverty is "pseudophylantropic," corruptive, and linked to financial debt"⁵³ as it is shown in the above two examples: structural adjustment and HIPC's initiatives.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 162.

⁴⁷ "The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative is an international debt relief mechanism that provides special assistance to the world's poorest countries. It was launched at the G7 summit in Lyon, France in 1996 following a proposal from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Dec 14, 2005," see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV:r12402>.

⁴⁸ The UNCTAD "Seeks to maximize the trade, investment and development opportunities of developing countries while helping them face the challenges of globalization," see <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/Home.aspx>.

⁴⁹ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Economic Development in Africa: Debt Sustainability: Oasis or Mirage?* (New York: United Nations, 2004).

⁵⁰ Damien Millet is a professor of mathematics in scientific preparatory classes in Orleans, spokesperson for CADTM France (Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt), author of *L'Afrique sans dette* (CADTM-Syllepse, 2005), co-author of *des bandes dessinées Dette odieuse* (CADTM-Syllepse, 2006) and the *System Dette* (CADTM-Syllepse, 2009), co-author of the book *Les tsunamis de la dette* (CADTM-Syllepse, 2005), co-author of *La Jamaïque dans l'état du FMI* (L'esprit frappeur, 2004).

⁵¹ Damien Millet, "L'initiative PPTE : Entre Illusion et Arnaque," *CADTM (Comité Pour l'Annulation de La Dette Du Tiers Monde)*, Décembre 2003, <http://cadtm.org/L-initiative-PPTE-entre-illusion>.

⁵² Mveng, "Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World," 155–156.

⁵³ Herman-Habib Kibangou, "La Pauperisation Anthropologique : Variations Conceptuelles Dans Les Publications de Mveng," in *Engelbert Mveng : Chantre de La Liberation Du Muntu. Relecture Plurielle de Son œuvre*, ed. François-Xavier Akono (Yaoundé, Cameroun: Pucac, 2014), 56, 58.

Yet, political and economic poverty as manifest through structural adjustment and HIPC's initiatives contribute to a broader anthropological poverty and vice versa. They are all interconnected. For example, in addition to making people feel hopeless, anthropological poverty makes black people believe that they are less clever compared to white people since this is what they have been taught to believe from slavery to colonization. Such a belief shapes the mentality of people even in the post-colonial period, manifest through expressions such as “Muzungu ni Muzungu” (Swahili) or “Mundele azali kaka mundele” (Lingala)⁵⁴ suggesting that a white man is more clever than a black man. When such an expression is internalized and used by black people themselves as it is often the case in the DRC, it becomes a paralyzing factor and leads to inaction and to economic and political dependence which aggravate poverty. Indeed, in depriving people from believing in their own capabilities, anthropological poverty creates, perpetrates, and accentuates three components of poverty: cultural, economic, and political. This suggests that political participation in the Global south, particularly in the African countries which were subjected to slavery and colonization must consider that the problem to be addressed is much bigger than giving food or spreading democracy; there is a need for a paradigm change that will allow people to rethink the economy and politics while considering the challenges of anthropological poverty. Mveng reinforces this when he argues that there is a need for a cultural liberation more than an economic or political one.⁵⁵

From its historical roots, Mveng moves to the current roots of poverty in Africa, arguing that since gaining independence, African states have been deprived of sovereignty. He points out that they have been granted independence without having a proper and solid monetary and military

⁵⁴ Swahili and Lingala are both two of the four national languages of the DRC

⁵⁵ Engelbert Mveng, *L'Afrique dans l'Eglise : paroles d'un croyant* (Paris: L'Harmattan : Distributed by Jean Touzot Libraire, 1985), 209–210.

system as each sovereign country has.⁵⁶ He adds that the colonial system of tyranny, domination, and oppression has been inherited by African leaders who perpetuate the same system.⁵⁷ Indeed, instead of being concerned with investing in the country for the common good, some of the African politicians usually give priority to their own political ambitions over all else. Like the colonial masters, the DRC's leaders who inherited colonial power, did not recognize the strengths of indigenous institutions, which were rooted in the norms of local communities and in which individual and communal values were respected. On the contrary, these leaders were intent on abusing the power bequeathed to them by colonial governments; this is still seen in the corruption at the highest level of government in the country and in the lack of respect for binding laws.

The historical roots such as those described above ground the oppressive systems of some African countries. For Mveng, they deprive African people of their essence of being, dignity, fundamental rights, cultures, and capacity of creativity.⁵⁸ These constitute major obstacles for Africans to live as risen beings and fully participate in the governance of their countries. For Mveng, four centuries of slavery and almost one century of colonization have left deep wounds as well as mental and cultural impoverishment. Hence, for Mveng, the point of departure for the liberation of African people is neither economic nor political; rather it is anthropological. The concepts of life, death, and anthropological pauperization express better African realities and therefore must be considered in any theological discourse of liberation of Africa. Further, liberation for Africans implies regaining cultural identity and human rehabilitation.⁵⁹

Furthermore, Mveng reinforces Sobrino's insights on the victims in identifying some other victims of the Global South whom he considers forgotten by liberation theology in Latin America. Mveng argues that Latin American liberation theology does not consider the socio-cultural internal issues proper to Latin America which exclude the indigenous and black peoples. He argues that

⁵⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 57–58.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 60.

liberation theology as it arose in the 1960s and 1970s used a Marxist approach, denouncing the harms of imperialist capitalism in Latin America, but completely silent about racial discrimination and anthropological pauperization. Mveng adds that Latin American liberation theology began to consider these issues only in the 1990s after the Congress of the Association of Theologians of the Global South meeting in Sao Paulo in 1979, New Delhi in 1981, and Mexico in 1986.⁶⁰ It is important to note that Mario Aguilar locates the theologians who used the Marxist approach in the first generation of liberation theology. He reinforces Mveng's claim when he argues that while supporting the oppressed, the first generation of liberation theology engaged with denouncing the roots of rural and economic poverty. Aguilar includes in the first generation of theologians of liberation in Latina America: Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff, Juan Luis Segundo, and José Miguez Bonino.⁶¹

The definition of the victims of unjust oppressive systems within the countries of the Global South and the historical roots of anthropological poverty in black African countries constitute a considerable contribution of Mveng's perspective on liberation. Mveng's insights are relevant and add important value to the Latin American liberation theology as well as to Sobrino's perspective on the victims. Mveng's added value to liberation theology — considering the historical roots of anthropological poverty — is better understood when considering Osita G. Afoaku's statement concerning the DRC that "starting with the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, followed by the Arabs and, in the end, by King Leopold II's Belgians in the nineteenth century,"⁶² the DRC has been under foreign influence for over three centuries. Afoaku considers that the tyranny of the colonial masters toward the Congolese people is one of the causes of the failure of the democratic process in the Congo. From my point of view, it is true that the historical events of the DRC have an impact on people today, in the sense that they feel a kind of powerlessness which

⁶⁰ Mveng and Lipawing, *Théologie, Libération et Cultures Africaines*, 39.

⁶¹ Mario I. Aguilar, *The History and Politics of Latin American Theology. Vol. 1: [...]*, 1. ed (London: SCM Press, 2007), 8.

⁶² Afoaku, *Explaining the Failure of Democracy in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, 2.

blocks their political participation. Additionally, 32 years of dictatorship by Joseph Desiré Mobutu has contributed to the oppressive system which today shapes Congolese politics.

Mveng's Conception of Liberation Theology for Africa: Its Impact on the Political Participation of the Victims

Mveng considers that the political dimension of liberation in black African countries must take into account the oppressive systems which have influenced these countries since before their independence.⁶³ Additionally, given the anthropological pauperization in black African countries, Mveng believes that liberation theology in Africa must focus on cultural and spiritual rather than economic and political liberation. He uses the language of life versus death and proposes to reject the mechanisms of death, which threaten the African continent, and to embrace the African cosmology and anthropology of the triumph of life over death. For him, liberation for Africa is essentially cultural, that is to say, a fight for life and against death.⁶⁴

For Mveng, culture is an expression of a given civilization. It is beyond the material, and it is first of all peoples' conception of the person, the world, and God from which they organize their daily life, the world in which they live, and their thoughts. He adds that a culture is a prerequisite for all other values. He considers that the conception of the human person is very important. For if some believe like Aristotle, that some people are born to be free while others are born to be slaves; or, like Plato, that inequalities cannot be changed because they are preordained; then how can economic and political liberation be advanced? Mveng argues that racism exists because of the conception that some human beings are inferior to others because of their skin color. This conception of the human person does not necessarily change with the change of law, as was the case with apartheid in South Africa; for him apartheid in South Africa can end only with the change of the conception of the person, considering that skin color does not make any difference between human beings and that all have equal dignity.⁶⁵

⁶³ Francois-Xavier Akono, "Explorer la théologie d'Englebert Mveng" (Thesis, Boston College, 2009), 50.

⁶⁴ Mveng and Lipawing, *Théologie, Libération et Cultures Africaines*, 33, 40.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 59.

Ubuntu, in emphasizing the respect for persons, the importance of community, personhood, and morality, is therefore the heart of the African philosophy which entails patterns of good governance. Such emphasis answers, from African perspectives, Sobrino's proposition that the concept of salvation has to be plural and transcendent. *Ubuntu* offers an African perspective of liberating victims, and as L. L. Pato argues it is deeply rooted in the belief that "life is the highest gift of God to humanity."⁶⁶ *Ubuntu* indicates the heart of African philosophy concerning the human being and his or her relationship to the world. It affirms and recognizes one's dignity and humanity; therefore it is a valuable resource for liberating victims and promoting political participation.

Mveng does not use the concept of *Ubuntu* in his writings; I bring this concept out because it constitutes the heart of African philosophy of good governance, which implies promoting political participation. Further, the consonances which exist between Mveng's insights on the conception of the person and the importance of the triumph of life over death on the one hand and some other African cultural features of *Ubuntu* on the other hand are to be considered. The conception of a human person in *Ubuntu* is defined in several ways. First, as Karl E. Laman argues *bu-muntu* and *bu-muntu*,⁶⁷ both refer to humanity, bounty, benevolence, and justice. And *Bù-untu*⁶⁸ refers to bounty, amiability, and charity.⁶⁹ Mveng puts emphasis on the restoration of the humanity and dignity of Africans and on the communitarian dimension of the human person.⁷⁰ Likewise, *Ubuntu* claims a just world and its vision of human beings extends to humanity. As Nelson Mandela states,

Africans believe in something that is difficult to render in English. We call it *ubuntu*, *botho*. It means the essence of being human. You know when it is there and when it is absent. It speaks

⁶⁶ Mluleki Mnyaka and Mokgethi Motlhabi, "The African Concept of Ubuntu/Botho And Its Socio-Moral Significance," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 3, no. 2 (2005): 219.

⁶⁷ K E Laman, *Dictionnaire Kikongo-Français, Avec Une étude Phonétique Décivant Les Dialectes Le plus Importants de La Langue Dite Kikongo. A-L* (Ridgewood, N.J.: The Gregg Press Incorporated, 1964), 74.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶⁹ Both *bu-muntu* and *Bù-untu* are phonological variants of *Ubuntu* which is named differently according to different languages in different African countries. For example *Bu-muntu* is the phonological variant of *Ubuntu* in "kiSukula" and "KiHaya" languages which are spoken in Tanzania. See Mluleki Mnyaka and Mokgethi Motlhabi, "The African Concept of Ubuntu/Botho And Its Socio-Moral Significance," 216.

⁷⁰ Francois-Xavier Akono, "Explorer la théologie d'Englebert Mveng," 18–19.

about humaneness, gentleness, hospitality, putting yourself out on behalf of others, being vulnerable. It embraces compassion and toughness. It recognizes that my humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.⁷¹

Ubuntu expresses a conception of a human person whose vocation is to put oneself out on behalf of others and to live in recognition of the humanity of others to which one is bound. This conception is in convergence with Sobrino's views of the liberation of victims, for it reinforces the bond among human beings. *Ubuntu* stands against oppression, affirms solidarity with the weak, and a model of power that emphasize love, justice, self-giving, and service as Jesus's titles in Sobrino's interpretation and as a Christian focus on Christ suggests. As Mogobe argues, *Ubuntu* reaffirms the indivisibility between the "one-ness and whole-ness,"⁷² for *Ubuntu*, we can live as risen beings only together and when we use our lives for the good of others to whom we are bound by our humanity.

African ethics also underlines the triumph of love over hatred and the triumph of liberty over slavery. Mveng considers that these focuses on life in the African tradition underpin the spirituality of the Beatitudes which expresses the celebration of the triumph of life over death, and therefore they are fundamental for the liberation of Africa.⁷³ Likewise, the African collectivist worldview focusing on the interdependence of a person to the community and among the community members "helps to better explain the human relationship with God."⁷⁴

The concept of *Ubuntu* not only is a relevant foundation for a way of conceiving the world, philosophically speaking, but also its meaning is related to Christian doctrine. The last relationship is seen in *Ubuntu*'s emphasis on universal "brotherhood" and on treating others as human beings. It stresses the values such as alms-giving, sympathy, and sensitivity for those in

⁷¹ Desmond Tutu, "The Essence of Being Human," *Spirituality and Practice*, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/explorations/teachers/desmond-tutu/quotes>.

⁷² D. Prinsloo, "Ubuntu Culture And Participatory Management," 51.

⁷³ Folifack, Conrad Aurelien, "Engelbert Mveng et La Lecture de La Bible En Afrique," in *Engelbert Mveng : Chantre de La Liberation Du Muntu. Relecture Plurielle de Son œuvre* (Yaoundé, Cameroun: Presses de l'UCAC, 2014), 134.

⁷⁴ Caitlin McGill, "Culture, Missions, and Africa's Lessons for Western Christianity," in *Jesus and Ubuntu: Exploring the Social Impact of Christianity in Africa*, ed. Mwenda Ntarangwi (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011), 47–66, 49.

needs.⁷⁵ *Ubuntu* also emphasizes the diminishing of self for the sake of others and the community,⁷⁶ the caring and passionate characters⁷⁷ like those stressed for the person of Jesus toward the needy and sinners. Furthermore, *Ubuntu* stresses mutual care and human integrity which align harmoniously with the liberating message of the Gospel.⁷⁸

The African emphasis on the importance of the victory of life over death matches not only Sobrino's insight on living as risen beings, but also the Christian value of life as God's given. Mveng argues that the African conception of life and death has its roots in ancient Egypt, where the victory of life over death is the guiding point of human actions and choices. For Africans, life is an object of growth and decrease. A human person's destiny is perceived as a continual choice for life and continual refusal of the negative forces which impede life from flourishing and which kill it. A human person therefore has to distinguish those who are allies of life from those who are allies of death. Additionally, for Mveng a person's relationships do not extend only to contemporaries. In *Ubuntu*, the fullness of life is not a result of individual successes, but it resides in God and in a person's capacity to humanize his or her community and the world. The world is seen as a huge communion of beings articulated one with another. This conception is acquired through the grace of the universal participation to which every member of a community is called.

Like Sobrino, for Mveng victims have to be filled with the hope of the resurrection in their current struggle. I reflect below on how Mveng's insights provide guidelines for Africans to take action in order to come down from the cross, live as risen beings, and transform unjust structures. Mveng argues that the first good news that the oppressed are waiting for is that of liberation.⁷⁹ For him, African liberation demands the consideration and association of the convergence between

⁷⁵ D. Prinsloo, "Ubuntu Culture And Participatory Management," 41–51.

⁷⁶ Mwenda Ntarangwi, "African Christianity, Politics, And Socioeconomic Realities," in *Jesus and Ubuntu: Exploring the Social Impact of Christianity in Africa*, ed. Mwenda Ntarangwi (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011), 1–23, 4.

⁷⁷ David A. Hoekema, "Faith and Freedom In Post-Colonial African Politics," in *Jesus and Ubuntu: Exploring the Social Impact of Christianity in Africa*, ed. Mwenda Ntarangwi (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011), 25–46.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 38.

⁷⁹ Mveng and Lipawing, *Théologie, Libération et Cultures Africaines*, 28.

African ethics, as presented above, and Christian spirituality.⁸⁰ He argues that the African religious, political, economic, socio-cultural, and historical dimensions lead to important theological and Christological considerations. On the one hand, African spirituality evokes the insight that Christians have to be liberated from the forces of death and have to embrace the kingdom of the Beatitudes proclaimed and offered by Jesus. African Christians are invited to identify with Jesus Christ. Such identification consists in mobilization in daily life for the edification of Jesus' Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, which implies combat for justice, love, liberation and reconciliation. Such combat includes the oppressed themselves.⁸¹

On the other hand, the African anthropological dimension of victory of life over death provides foundations grounded in African as well as Christian traditions. It is an important key to read Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as liberating and to perform actions in order for victims to come down from the cross, live as risen beings, liberate others, and transform unjust structures. Therefore, such victorious life centered anthropology provides foundations for political participation in Africa. Yet, given African history, additionally, there is a need for an African reading of the Bible that takes into account the need for African liberation.⁸²

Sobrino has pointed out three ways that provide practical means for political participation in favor of the victims. They are (1) denouncing the many causes of poverty of the victims, (2) testifying by justice or identifying with Jesus' life in terms of committing one's life for the sake of justice, and (3) praxis – performing concrete actions. Mveng reinforces these ways, arguing that the first way of facing the many causes of poverty, including neocolonization, oppression, domination, racism, apartheid, and wars, is to denounce the unjust systems and cultural domination that perpetuate them. This is the task of every theology of liberation.

⁸⁰ Engelbert Mveng, *L'Afrique dans l'Eglise : paroles d'un croyant* (Paris: L'Harmattan : Distributed by Jean Touzot Libraire, 1985), 45–62.

⁸¹ Mveng and Lipawing, *Théologie, Libération et Cultures Africaines*, 24–25.

⁸² Ibid., 62.

For Mveng, the denunciation must be coupled with the mobilization of Christians at different levels to engage in changing the unjust structures that keep them in conditions of poverty.⁸³ Mveng insists, on the one hand, on the church's making a radical commitment to assess the economic and political "structures of sin," which guide the world, while advocating for the counter-structures that ground a sustainable basis for justice. On the other hand, he insists on the importance of "[mobilizing] Christians to follow Christ" as liberator and become themselves liberators of their brothers and sisters.⁸⁴ Indeed, becoming the liberators of other victims allows the victims to reinforce their agency and political participation without which living as risen beings would be impossible. Further, liberation for Africans implies regaining cultural identity and human rehabilitation.

Limits of Sobrino's as well as Mveng's Insights on Living as Risen Beings in Light of Political Participation for Women Victims of the Global South

Clint Le Bruyns refers to political participation as political action that "seeks to resolve moral ambiguity and to make clear the division of right over wrong."⁸⁵ For Le Bruyns, political participation upholds the significant role that ordinary persons in their individual and professional competencies can achieve for the common good.⁸⁶ He argues that, "The attention should arguably shift from the political power of the church to the empowerment of the people for responsible citizenship."⁸⁷ Therefore, the challenge is to empower the victims to come down from their cross, become liberators of others as Mveng suggests, and live as risen beings protecting their rights and those of others who are still powerless.

Cultural identity and historical contexts indeed are important factors for the empowerment of a human being. Applying Le Bruyns's perception of political participation to the victims, Mveng's consideration of anthropological pauperization and cultural liberation of the victims

⁸³ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁴ Mveng, "Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World," 165.

⁸⁵ Clint Le Bruyns, "The Church, Democracy and Responsible Citizenship," *Religion and Theology* 19, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2012): 61.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 71–72.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 67.

becomes relevant not only in considering the perspective of the African context and antecedents of the slave trade, colonization, and neocolonization; but also considering the suffering of the victims of the Global South in general, as well as the context of poverty in industrialized countries. As Paul Farmer puts it, it “is different from regarding the poor as powerless or impoverished because of historical processes and events (slavery, say, or unjust economic policies propped up by powerful parties).”⁸⁸ It makes a difference to consider all these historical events when it comes to empowering victims to come down from the cross.

Although anthropological poverty constitutes a considerable factor in economic and political poverty, and although cultural liberation is crucial for a fully political participation of the victims of black Africa, economic and political poverty should not be minimized. Mveng, focusing on giving priority to anthropological pauperization and the need for cultural liberation, claims openly that economic and political liberation are not to be given priority in the context of Africa, that Africans are not in absolute need, and that economic politics should not constitute the object of true liberation. Such a claim, from my point of view, demonstrates the limit of Mveng’s insights which is the prioritization of anthropological pauperization over economic and political poverty for black African people.

I do not think the victims who find themselves in extreme political and economic poverty, as is the case of Congolese women, would agree with Mveng in giving priority to anthropological poverty rather than to economic or political poverty. First, the last forms of poverty constitute, in the same degree as the anthropological, an obstacle for the agency of the victims, and for them to live as risen beings. Second, considering some realities of women in some African cultures, cultural liberation should be undertaken differently when the victims are men or women. As Oduyoye puts it,

The social character of the self in the African worldview seems more entrenched in women than men, for while women operate always on the principle of persons-in-relation, the African man’s

⁸⁸ Paul Farmer, “Health, Healing, and Social Justice: Insights from Liberation Theology,” in *In The Company of The Poor: Conversations with Dr Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez* (New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 54.

autonomy may lead him to independent action that tends to separate him from the unit. Men override culture when it does not suit them, or are conservative when it suits them.⁸⁹

Indeed, many African cultures favor men over women, yet, a cultural liberation that aims at leading people to live as risen beings should take into account these gender-based cultures that impede women from living as risen beings in the same way as men, as shown in the example below.

Women's Political Participation and the Legal Framework on Women's Rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Economic liberation should not be overlooked also because economic power constitutes one of the main factors impeding women from participating politically. The Liberation of African victims especially female victims must consider equally the economic as well as the cultural burdens. For example, the structural instability of the DRC put more poor women at risk than the wealthy or middle class women. Oduyoye continues that, “a preoccupation with effective participation in global politico-economic structures often works against the more specific needs of women’s development or women’s priorities.”⁹⁰ This is the case of the DRC and many other countries of the Global South. With respect to political rights, in the DRC women obtained the right to vote in 1967 and the first women were appointed to Parliament in 1970. However, there was no woman in Parliament in 1997, while in 2011 there were only 8 women elected to a parliament with over 500 members. The Congolese constitution and election laws do not require any quota to ensure the participation of women in national parliaments. There are also no constitutional or legislative quotas at the provincial or local level.⁹¹ Further, article 14 of the Congolese Constitution stipulates that the state must provide means to protect women against all forms of discrimination and ensure complete participation of women in decision-making concerning the country. It adds that the principle of parity must be applied to both men and

⁸⁹ Mercy Oduyoye Amba, “Feminist Theology in African Perspective,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 175.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ UN Women; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, “Progress of the World’s Women 2011-2012: In Pursuit of Justice : Lead Author: Laura Turquet,” Progress of the World’s Women (New York, NY : UN Women, 2011), 60.

women in order to foster such participation. However nothing is done to implement such a law from the political systems, women alone are the only ones advocating for the effectiveness of parity.

Furthermore, there is a law against sexual violence, such as rape outside marriage, but no law protects women from domestic violence or marital rape. Despite the national law against rape and the DRC's ratification to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the number of women sexually abused in the DRC has been increasing for the last decade and violence against women is widespread, particularly domestic violence and sexual violence, especially marital rape.⁹² The rape of women in the DRC is widespread in mining and war zones and the poorest women are the greatest victims of such evil.

The Rape of Women in Mining and Wars' Zones in the DRC

Since the Rwandan genocide in 1994, the DRC has been involved in an armed conflict in which nearly 5.4 million people have lost their lives. One of the characteristics of this conflict is gender-based violence, rape, and killing on a massive scale in the eastern part of the DRC. Armed groups and foreign armies, especially from Rwanda, are destroying the social status of Congolese women by means of massive sexual violence, used as a weapon of war. Dr. Denis Mukwege considers the rape of women in the Congo a new pathology, which he calls "rape with extreme violence (REV)." Mukwege states that REV has increased in the eastern part of the DRC during the last past 10 years. For example, between November 2008 and March 2009, 1,100 rapes per month have been recorded in his hospital "Panzi."⁹³ The army groups rape women while plundering mineral resources in the mining zones in the Eastern DRC. The region of Shabunda is rich in coltan, gold, and cassiterite. The Kabare region is rich in coltan, which contains the

⁹² Marie-Claire Faray-Kele and Annie Matundu, "Gender Inequality and Social Institutions in the D.R. Congo," *WILPF (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom)*, December 2010, 1–5, http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/NGO/hrinst_genderinequalityinthedrc_wilpf_december2010english.pdf.

⁹³ Denis Mukengere Mukwege and Cathy Nangini, "Rape with Extreme Violence: The New Pathology in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo," *PLoS Medicine* 6, no. 12 (December 2009).

tantalum that is used widely in electronics; the area of Walungu is rich in cassiterite and gold. All the militias in these regions have been involved in mining, rape, and the use of women as sex slaves. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of United Nations (OCHA), in 2010, more than 5,000 women were raped between January and August in the province of South Kivu alone. The Congolese case is not unique. The realities of female victims are found all over the world, even in industrialized countries. Considering only the case of rape, according to the *Penguin Atlas of Women in the World*, the evil of the rape of women is increasing.⁹⁴

It is in this context that many of the women victims find themselves at the same time in a state of anthropological pauperization and its cultural consequences as claimed by Mveng, as well as in economic and political poverty. Given the low level of political participation in decision-making of many female victims, and their lack of economic capability and freedom as seen in the case of Congolese women, one cannot disregard political and economic poverty in favor of anthropological poverty. In these cases, it becomes important to regain not only these women's cultural identities but also to obtain economic and political power for them. All of these types of poverty are interconnected and aggravate each other.

Additionally, when women find themselves in extreme political and economic deprivation, the patriarchal mentality, its language, and effects on women's economic and political participation, need to be examined and assessed. Patriarchal mentality and language exclude women from fully participating not only in the Church but also in society in general. According to the second generation of liberation theology, which includes the feminist theologians, the first generation overlooked the oppression of women since they categorized the poor too generally as a loser in a Marxist framework.⁹⁵ For example, since 1974-1979 Elsa Támez began bringing up that

⁹⁴ Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World*., Penguin Books. Fourth Edition. Completed revised & updated (Brighton, BN3 AFL, UK: Myriad Editions, 2009), 100.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 10.

the question of the marginality of women has very little in common with the general idea of the oppressed. Aquino continues on the same trend set up by Tamez and developed by many other feminist theologians. She argues that the patriarchal institutions and “hierarchical gender relations” as oppressive structures of power are ignored not only by Sobrino’s, but also by Latin American liberation theology. Aquino continues arguing that a liberation theology which leaves behind gender based oppression and what women victims are doing to overcome it does not do justice to women.⁹⁶ As she puts it, “in order to determine the characteristics of evil, how to eliminate it, and how to retrieve hope, it is necessary to have as the point of reference the actual physical, social, sexual, racial, and cultural characteristics of the victims.”⁹⁷ In addition to the latter Aquino’s concern, I argue that even considering Mveng’s anthropological pauperization and its historical sources and wounds, would not be enough to overcome all of the other forms of oppression that women in the Global South are subjected, especially Congolese women as shown above. Yet more is needed: women’s agency and participation.

Further, the feminization of poverty keeps many women in the Global South on the cross more so than men and renders women more unlikely than men to live as risen beings. The concept “Feminization of poverty” comes from the difference between women and men’s poverty that “women bear a disproportionate share of poverty worldwide, and women shoulder an unequal burden in coping with poverty at the household level.”⁹⁸ Jesus’ titles, as explained by Sobrino, are then more challenged by women’s suffering than men’s in many contexts. The re-messianization of Jesus – going back to the centrality of the poor – calls on theologians to consider the partiality of the Gospel toward women victims and the need of a pluralistic dimension of Jesus’ salvation for women victims. Jesus’ Lordship, whose model of power emphasizes love and service has to become reality for women victims rather than a means for enforcing the patriarchal power of men.

⁹⁶ Aquino, “Evil and Hope: A Reflection from the Victims. Response to Jon Sobrino,” 90.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 91.

⁹⁸ Noeleen Heyzer et al., eds., *A Commitment to the World’s Women: Perspectives on Development for Beijing and beyond* (New York: UNIFEM : Distributed by Women, Ink, 1995), 23.

The Sonship of Jesus has to be expanded to women, that is to say, it must include them in greater political participation, and not only in occupying servant-like roles.

The many ways through which women in the DRC are trying to live as risen beings and improve the political and economic power in order to increase their political participation are worthy of consideration. The first example is about improving political participation through literacy courses that in addition to teaching women to read and write, fosters awareness of women's civic and political rights. At the Kinzau-Mvute Center, in the Bas-Congo province, there were 128 women registered, none of whom could read or write. They were given a level zero at the beginning of the course. Of the 128 registered, 82 reached level 1 at the end of nine months of study, that is, they know how to read and to write basic sentences in *Kikongo*, the national language of *Bas-Congo* province. Additionally, after 9 additional months, 26 of the 128 reached level 2, that is, they can read and write in *Kikongo* and possess a basic knowledge of French. Five of these 26 women were so empowered that they established a village center for literacy in which they not only teach literacy to other women, but also teach them about their human rights. While this work is itself impressive, it is equally impressive that these five women were able to do this without outside funding. This is an exemplary case of acting in order to come down from the cross. In most cases such classes are funded by international development agencies; in the Diocese of *Matadi (Bas-Congo)* alone Trócaire⁹⁹ funds 40 literacy centers.¹⁰⁰

Matadi's CDJP reports others activities in which women are involved after completing a literacy course. For example, some women are able to establish small businesses in which they now have the ability to be responsible for book keeping, banking relationships, and other administrative functions, all of which require literacy. Other women, after finishing a literacy course, participate in advocacy activities and take leadership positions in local community

⁹⁹ Trócaire, an Irish Catholic Foundation working for the promotion of human rights and empowerment of women in the DRC

¹⁰⁰ CDJP Matadi, "Rapport Annuel: Alphabétisation Pédagogique et Participation Citoyenne de La Femme Dans La Ville de Matadi, Secteur de Lufu et Cité de Kinzau-Mvute Dans Le Diocèse de Matadi" (Unpublished work, Matadi, Avril 2012), 4.

organizations.¹⁰¹ I myself have seen the joy and light that rose from some of these women when they become readers in their local Churches for example. Such a joy and feeling of regaining dignity is a representative example of living as risen beings.

Many local women's non-governmental organizations are advocating practical measures to implement Article 14 of the Congolese Constitution in order to make parity between men and women a reality and increase women's participation in decision-making processes and positions. As stated by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, women claim to share the power with men in order to contribute to the formation of a more humane world.¹⁰² The most important point that needs to be considered here is that those who are raped become advocates for the security of other women; many of them do not stop living, but fight for justice for women. I knew a woman who as a young girl had been taken and abused for years; she was studying law and advocating against rape in the east of the DRC when I met her. She said she believed God delivered her from sexual slavery to save other women, and the best way of doing so is to become a lawyer. Such a hope is an edifying example of the hope of resurrection for the victims. These above DRC examples explain better what it means to fulfill the hope of the resurrection and live as risen beings. They also show the ways through which victims participate in coming down from the cross and contribute so that other victims fulfill with the redemption of the promise as argued by William Desmond.¹⁰³ Most importantly they show why political and economic poverty is as important as anthropological poverty for women victims.

Conclusion

I have argued that both Sobrino's and Mveng's insights provide foundations for political participation. However, the ways of denunciation of unjust structures emphasized by Sobrino and the mobilization of the victims emphasized by Mveng have to be carried out by means of the

¹⁰¹ Trocaire, "Rapport Annuel 2013" (Unpublished work, Kinshasa, 2013), 5.

¹⁰² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Anne E. Carr, and Marcus Lefébure, eds., *Women, Work, and Poverty*, Concilium 194 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 7.

¹⁰³ William Desmond, "On Evil and Political Theology," *Political Theology* 16, no. 2 (March 2015): 93.

participation of victims themselves. Without such a participation, any attempt at liberation likely will end in failure or end without any sustainable positive change in favor of the victims. The Victims' agency is crucial in order for them to live as risen beings.

This paper has presented how Sobrino's rereading of the titles of Jesus, including the *Messiah* and the *Lord* provides Christological foundations for advocating for political participation for the victims of injustice and oppression. It has also presented Mveng's perspective of liberation from the victims, which takes into account the anthropological pauperization of the victims of black African countries. This paper has concluded that combat against anthropological poverty emphasized by Mveng is as relevant as the combat against political and economic poverty emphasized by Sobrino. However, it has argued that a cultural liberation that aims at leading people to live as risen beings should take into account gender-based discrimination that impedes women from living as risen beings in the same way as men. This perspective is not considered by Mveng's neither by Sobrino's claims of liberation.

The meaning and significance of the claim that victims must take agency in order to live as risen beings as developed throughout this paper has been mainly captured in the case studies regarding female victims. This paper has argued that the feminization of poverty keeps many women in the Global South on the cross and renders women more unlikely than men to live as risen beings. Jesus' titles, as reread by Sobrino, are then more challenged by women's suffering than men's in many contexts. The re-messianization of Jesus – going back to the centrality of the poor – calls on theologians to consider partiality toward female victims and the need of a pluralistic dimension of Jesus' salvation for women victims. Therefore, the situation of female victims as demonstrated in the case studies presented in this paper demands that we consider anthropological and cultural poverty, as well as political and economic poverty when emphasizing women's agency. I have argued that even though anthropological poverty needs to be considered,

economic and political poverty are valuable motives for women to take actions to resist oppressive systems that depreciate them and restrain their political participation.

Through the case studies, I have turned from Sobrino's victims taken down from the cross to the victims who are now resisting or helping themselves; such approach makes this paper carries the knowledge which is based on the agency of the victims. Such knowledge also suggests that Jesus' titles, as reread by Sobrino and the prioritization of anthropological poverty over the economic and political poverty as suggested by Mveng, are more challenged by women's victimhood than men's in many contexts. The consideration of a gender based discrimination in theology of liberation and in the account of "living as risen beings" questions and would change the patterns of both Sobrino's and Mveng's liberation theology for the victims of the Global South.

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