

The Overlap between Tradition Based Sexual Violence and Women's under-Representation in Political Activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Abstract

Women's participation in political activities is extremely low in the Democratic Republic of Congo amongst the lowest ranked countries on Gender equality in the political arena where the score regarding of women's political activities is 0.089 out of 1.00. Similarly, DR Congo has a number of problems with the continued prevalence of sexual violence. Previous research has studied the issues of women's participation in political activities and sexual violence separately. In order to provide a clear way of understanding both of these issues, this paper submits that sexual violence, women's lack of participation in political activities and traditional beliefs are inter-connected. Relying on a Bourdieuan analysis, and the concepts of Practice, Habitus and Field, Symbolic violence and power this study frames and interprets the traditional beliefs in Congo which undergird practices of violence against women and at the same time, women's exclusion in political life.

Key words

Relationship – Tradition – Sexual Violence – Political Activities – DR. Congo – Women

1. Introduction

Women's participation in political activities is extremely low in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The 2020 Global Gender Gap report by the World Economic Forum has classified DR Congo among the latest countries on Gender equality with a great inequality in the political arena where the score of women political activities is 0.089 out of 1.00. The Congolese Election Commission Reports (2018) have also shown that women's participation in political activities is almost inexistent compared to that of men. Beyond political exclusion, women suffer in other areas of political life as well. Previous literature like the study of McLaren (2008), UNFPA (2012), Nef (2017), Pax Christi (2018), AFD (2017) and others have established a deep relationship between traditional beliefs and sexual violence claiming that some traditional practices lead to various violations against women.

Given that practices of violence and domination against women will often have political repercussions, this article explores the possibility of a connection between women's political participation, sexual violence against women and overarching traditional beliefs which might lead to both. This matter has gained some limited attention in the literature, but remains relatively under researched. Some studies including those of Tinuke (2012:23), Mubalama (2018), Adu (2008:23) and Mutale (2013:72) state that cultural obligations or norms affect the number of women in politics. Another vein of scholarship presents traditional practices as an important fact leading to sexual violence against women. But this paper aims to study the field of connections between the three issues together, not separately as in previous researches. It puts traditional beliefs at the center of sexual violence against women and women under-participation in political career.

This is an interpretative study grounding its claims on the concept of practice, habitus & field, symbolic violence and power relation developed by Pierre Bourdieu through which the attitudes of people towards traditional beliefs are academically explained. This study also uses quantitative data from the 2019 world economic forum on gender equality published in February 2020 as well as from the 2018 report of the Congolese National Election Commission. Some opinions of women in political activities from interviews conducted in January 2020 were used to establish a connection between traditional beliefs, sexual violence against women and women's under- participation in political life. The article starts by establishing a theoretical ground in which important concepts of Bourdieu's theory related to traditional beliefs, violence and women activities in Congo are presented; it then presents traditional beliefs leading to sexual violence in the Congo and moves on in to presenting the situation of women's participation in political activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo and finally, it establishes the inter-connection between the grounds of beliefs leading to sexual violence against women and to women under representation in political activities before concluding. Before proceeding, a caveat. The present paper does not propose solution to any of these issues, but, by analyzing traditional beliefs in relation to sexual violence and to women's participation in political activities will provide a clear view of the dimensions in which women in the DR Congo require protection and empowerment, as well as considerations relevant to promoting their participation in political activities and decision-making processes in the future.

2. Theoretical Ground

This study is grounded on the theory developed by Pierre Bourdieu. Pierre Bourdieu in his study on stratified society, links traditional practices to social origins accumulated through formal education. Human beings learn to live according to traditions and that education differs depending on social class (Jenkins, 1992:138). Bourdieu's important analytical tools are the concepts of practice and field, Habitus, symbolic violence and power relation among many others. This work will employ the concepts above which are interrelated with the traditional beliefs grounding sexual violence against women and those leading to women's non-participation in political activities.

1) Practice

One of the key thinking tools of Bourdieu is the practice and its logic where he concentrates on the visible social world of practice. He researches social interaction, people's everyday lives, and social behavior trying to build a theoretical model of social practice. He doesn't take what people say or do as granted or as a mere result of what is going on in their heads but he looks for deep reasons behind social behavior and observes while keeping the sight of wider patterns of social life. He questions the production source of behavior in case they are not produced by cultural knowledge which he also takes as the product of some other social system and structure's reality (Seminar, 2013; Bourdieu, 1984:101; Jenkins, 1992:69).

Bourdieu argues firstly that time and spaces serve as a constraint and at the same time as a resource for any social interaction. Over a certain period of time, some social behaviors are seemed to be natural in a certain social space but not definitely in another. Secondly, he argues that social practices are not conscious or they are not fully consciously planned by social actors. Social actors don't live under the circumstances they have chosen but they have grown up in them, they have learned them and they have acquired a certain practical cultural competences in which those circumstances determine the position one occupies in the society (social roles). Thirdly, those so called rules existing in a certain social structure that become traditions are characterized by their fluidity and indeterminacy in the sense that social life is accomplished based on a certain rules, recipes or normative models. From the beginning, traditions were made

by a group of powerful social members who decided that things should be done in a certain way and they imposed those ways on the powerless social groups and finally with time flow, those ways became social rules and traditions (Bourdieu, 1984:120; Jenkins, 1992:69-71).

2) Habitus

Habitus establishes many kinds of differences in practical social life deriving from a set of beliefs. For example the difference between up and down, hot and cold, good and bad, authorized and unauthorized, success and failure are established by the habitus. Habitus then leads individuals and group actions based on those differences (Bourdieu, 1998:9). Elis understands habitus as a sort of second nature that refers to the way of thinking, feeling and behaving learned from childhood. Habitus is a base from which predispositions for ordered social actions come from (Haugaard, 2008:189). Sayer also agrees with Bourdieu stating that habitus establishes a difference between one object and another, it connects an object to another, gives value to some relations and not to others, and it builds social relevance onto basic arbitrary distinctions (Sayer, 2007:89-90). This explains how women's behavior is shaped in the Congolese society. Either in political, social or familial environment traditional beliefs control women and restrain their freedom. A woman can wear this and not that in public, a woman cannot raise her voice in public or in front of a man, a woman cannot dominate where there is a man present, a woman cannot refuse sex to her husband, etc. are some of the rules shaped by traditional beliefs as a range of habitus in the Congolese society.

The habitus sets a conduct code with conscious or unconscious bases protected (or made) by a certain group. Each adaptation of a habitus means the application of each code or rule which is well understood and accepted by the individual so that the adaptation does not seem to be a deviation (Bourdieu, 2000:272). The habitus makes social rules important and automatic, imposed by the social order in a structural way and are reproduced by each social actor who maintain them. The habitus forms a social heritage that is manifested in people's everyday life.

Habitus is a Latin word that refers to habitual or a typical condition state or appearance like the appearance of the body (Jenkins, 1992:74). Bourdieu provides a meaning to the relationship between the body and the habitus; social structure and mental structure (Wacquant, 2004). He argues that the essences of habitus are embodied in real human beings. According to

Bourdieu, this embodiment has three meanings: firstly, in a simple sense, habitus exists only when it is inside the heads of actors and the head is part of the body. Secondly, the habitus exists by, in and because of the practices of actors, by their interaction with each other and with the rest of their environment; it is part of social actors. Thirdly, principal classifications which are the center of production of habitus are rooted in the body. The habitus embodiment has another expression in the Greek word “hexis” meaning deportment, the manner and the style in which actors carry themselves. This meaning is very similar to the Latin word *Habitus*. And the similarity of these two words indicates the centrality of the body in Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (Jenkins, 1992:75, Bourdieu, 1992:36-38) because it is in the body that the personal combines with the social.

Habitus is inculcated by teaching (education, learning) and if not, by experience (socialization) and the learning process starts since childhood. The power of the habitus is that it is an unconscious habit just as mentioned above in social practice theory. Habitus is thoughtless rather than consciously learned rules (Jenkins, 1992:76; McNay, 1999:101). Social rules are morally arbitrary as what is considered in the society as good or bad, right or wrong. And those arbitrary social rules are mistaken as natural and accepted as premises of social interaction.

3) Power Relation

Bourdieu developed two areas of political inquiry which are the politics of language and that of power relations. With the attention drawn to power relation, we see that Bourdieu articulates a sociology of power that explore both micro-politics of human’s everyday lives and macro-politics of institutions silencing and excluding a certain group of people from the ruling position (Topper, 2001:31). In the context of this paper, when talking about micro-politics we see women marginalized in their daily lives, exploited, dominated, violated, silenced in their homes and families. By macro-politics we see education system, justice system, election system, social system that doesn’t put women at the first place that is insensitive to women and to their issues, unequal opportunities, etc. The politics of everyday life refers to all the violence, domination, denigration and exclusion in daily affairs that go without being noticed because they are normal (Topper, 2001:42).

Habitus is related to power in the sense of empowerment or power to do something, to impose something, to make someone do something, to make someone behave a certain way, etc. Power can be also referred to as violence and power over. The last has two sources which are violence and authority; and these two sources are usually interconnected (Haugaard, 2008). Violence derives from natural power and involves also physical coercion like rape, slavery etc. Beside natural power, there is also social power which is legitimized by the less powerful social actors just like habitus. While violence is more about practice, authority is about institution, rules that give legitimacy to habitus. The position of authority gives to a social actor the capacity or the authorization to exercise power over others like a dominant-subaltern habitus (Haugaard, 2008:196). Authority allows powerful actors to dominate the powerless and to impose their rules on them. And institutions like money, marriage, police, bureaucratic officials, parliament, etc. all work in inter-dependence to provide authority to ones and not to others depending on every social system.

We cannot talk about power relation without mentioning men's domination on women bodies. Merleau-Ponty in her writings against women domination stated "I am my body". Bourdieu used her statement and argued that a body is not something you own but something you are. And as such, the body is not something someone can possess; it is a state of being (Topper, 2001:43). Congolese traditional practices towards women and their sexuality are completely ignorant of the fact that a woman's body is her, is the reflection of who she is. Women should not be controlled or possessed through their bodies. The respect accorded to human being ought to be accorded to women as a whole; their bodies must be part of their dignity and their rights.

The control of men on women's bodies result in men controlling all the aspects of women's lives. The denial of women to have control over their bodies extends into the denial to control their careers, their dreams, their choices and their lives in general. Violence against women starts by the domination of women's bodies. Bourdieu refers to the definition given by Marx and states that the three basic elements of violence are the relation of domination, use of tools and physical force on the body and finally instrumental means-end character. The relation of domination between men and women is supported by legitimate means like traditional and social rules (Topper, 2001:47).

4) Symbolic Violence

Pierre Bourdieu uses the concept of symbolic violence to explain the imposition and the natural application of rules that violate women's rights. He defines symbolic violence as an invisible power exercised only with the collaboration of those who don't want to recognize that they are being violated or even that they violate themselves (Bourdieu, 1991:164). Jenkins also, similarly to Bourdieu, he defines symbolic violence as the imposition of symbolism like culture for example on groups or social structure in a way that they are acknowledged and applied with legitimacy. (Jenkins, 1992:104). Samuel mentions symbolic violence as a condition in which rules and decisions of a dominants are accepted willingly by the submissive even when those conditions are disadvantageous to the dominated actor. The acceptance is based on the embodiment of dispositions organized in the habitus and the acceptance of the submissive agent is manifested also by the acceptance of some ways of living proposed or imposed by the dominant (Samuel, 2013:401). Women's under-representation in political arena in Congo is one of the clear evidence that women have accepted the situation they were put in for a very long period of time.

The exercise of symbolic violence is made through education. It is a pedagogic action. The imposition of cultural norms is made through three modes: diffuse education made through interaction with members of the social formation; family education and lastly institutionalized education like age set cultural initiations (like virginity test and labia minora in Congo) or school education system (Jenkins, 1992:105; Samuel, 2013:339-400). The whole social system has an impact on the perpetuation of traditions and education is the learning foundation of every tradition and culture. Traditions on women submission, women domination, power relation between men and women are learnt from the family set through role's distributions based on gender and continue in the society when individual inter influence each other and are institutionalized in schools which also affect the social status, social roles and professional life of women. This is referred to as social reproduction function of cultural reproduction by Richard Jenkins. This serves also to explain how traditional beliefs have an impact on all the aspects of one person's life.

Symbolic violence, a misunderstanding of social norms as natural and its legitimation no matter the impact they have on the most disadvantaged by its outcomes brings up subjective and

objective outcomes on victims of domination. Objectively, in real life the dominated ones like women become poor, less represented in various areas, they become economically dependents, they are forced into marriage they don't want, they are obliged to have virginity tests, they have to marry the brother of their dead husbands if they are asked to do so,... they have to consent to real life challenges in the name of traditions or identity. On the subjective side, women lack confidence in themselves (that's one of the reasons why they even don't vote for their fellow women; they cannot trust them or their ability), they feel out of space, they feel stupid, ashamed, incapable, hesitant, self-blaming, etc. due to the inability and lack of resource to make appropriate actions when needed (Samuel, 2013:402). Someone with low self-esteem or low confidence will not be able to give a speech in front of 1000 people, or to defend her campaign plan to people and be able to convince them. Political career needs people who have a certain level of confidence, trust in themselves, convincing ability, etc. but Congolese traditions so far have made women lack those abilities.

This section has presented the theoretical concepts that will be used every now and then in the interpretation and the understanding of how women's sexual violence is linked to women's under participation in political activities by traditional beliefs. The following section will present quantitative data proving that indeed, Congolese women's political activities are low.

3. Women's Participation in Political activities in the DR Congo

The participation of women in political activities is extremely low in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Not only in the political activities but also in other public, institutional and professional areas the presence of women is lower than that of men. This section provides factual information or data proving that women's presence in political, social, economic and educational arena is comparatively lower than that of men. Data used are from the World economic forum (2020) and from the official website of the Congolese National Independent Election Commission (2018).

Gender equality score per sector:

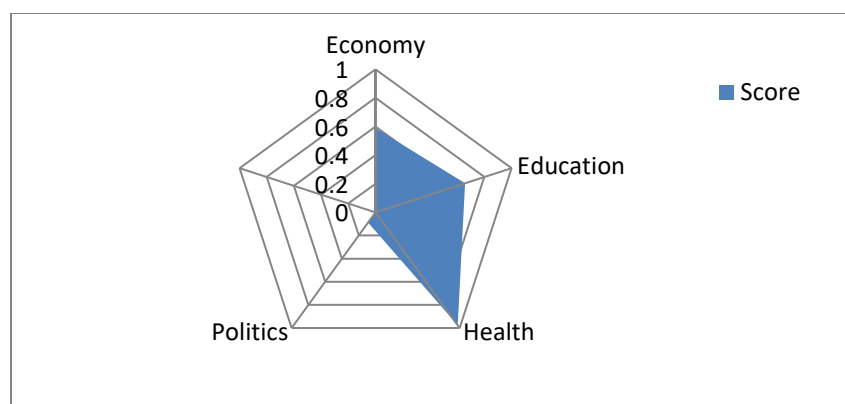


Figure 1 gender equality score (0.00=impairty & 1.00= parity). Average Score: 0.578.

Ranked 149th out of 153 Countries

Economic participation score

| Economic participation | Rank/153 | Score/1.00 | Female | Male |
|---|----------|------------|--------|------|
| Labor force participation rate, % | 24 | 0.661 | 61.7 | 66.5 |
| Wage equality for similar work | 97 | 0.613 | - | - |
| Estimated earned income, int'l \$ 1,000 | 65 | 0.499 | 0.6 | 0.9 |
| Legislators, senior officials and managers, % | 117 | 0.356 | 20.2 | 79.8 |
| Professional and technical workers, % | 139 | 0.756 | 24.4 | 75.6 |

Mean score: 0.578 out of 1.00

Political Participation score

| Political empowerment | Rank/153 | Score /1.00 | Female | Male |
|---|----------|----------------|--------|------|
| Women in Parliament, % | 136 | 0.298 | 10.0 | 90 |
| Women in Ministerial position, % | 93 | 0.255 | 18.2 | 81.8 |
| Years with Female head of State (last 50) | 73 | 0.000 | 0.0 | 50.0 |

Mean score: 0.089 out of 1.00

Data from the web site of National Electoral Independent Commission have also provided numbers allowing us to analyze women's participation in political activities in Congo. The results of the latest elections held in Congo in December 2018 have shown how low women's participation in political activities in DR. Congo is. Because political participation does not mean only pass the elections, we are going to present in the following data the number of

women candidates to the elections as well as that of those who passed. In Bukavu for example, there was a number of only 18 women who were national deputy candidates out of 149 men. In Uvira there were 9 women candidates out 116 men. For presidential elections, there was 1 woman candidate out 21 men in total. At the end, nationwide out of 500 seats in parliaments, less than 30 were occupied by women. In the senate, out of 108 seats only 5 were occupied by women. From the president who is a man, only 13 percent of ministers are women. At the local executive level among 44 governors and vice governors, only 3 people are women and the remaining are men as of December 2019.

This section has presented various quantitative data showing that women's participation in political activities is relatively low compared to men. In all other sectors women inequality and imparity is clearly displayed but in political sector the inequality between men and women's participation is extreme. The connection between women's participation in political life and traditional beliefs will be shown in section 5. The following section presents a short analysis of Congolese traditional habitus resulting in the practices that sexually violate women.

4. Traditional Beliefs and Sexual Violence Against Women

Traditional beliefs reflect the values and the identity of a community for periods often crossing over generations (Maluke, 2012). The word tradition in this work is taken just as defined by the Webster as an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action or behavior. Tradition is also understood as a belief or story or body of beliefs relating to the past and that are commonly accepted as historical though not verifiable. We also consider traditions as an appellation given to cultural features which were supposed to be handed on; unthought-of, unchallenged, preserved from generation to generation even in situation of change (Graburn, 2001). This paper aims to show that inculcation of traditional beliefs on women results in sexual violence against women and affects their participation in political activities. For that, there is a need to give an analysis of some of the more salient traditional beliefs and how those traditional beliefs lead to sexual violence against women in Congo. This section gives that analysis.

Like most African countries' traditions, Congolese traditions consider men as rulers, power holders, superior, heads, etc. while women are subordinates and men's possessions. Women's place is in their homes and they are excluded from what is called important activities

in the society. Culture and traditions contribute to the violation of women's rights and they are not to be questioned because they are traditional rules (Mbatha, 1988). As claimed by Bourdieu in the concept of practice, because for generations men were considered superior to women in the Congolese social structure, all practices resulting from their supremacy were and are accepted and applied naturally in all areas of women's lives and the sexual side is not to be excluded because it is the epicenter of all violence practices resulting from traditional beliefs.

This work analyses three grounds of beliefs leading to sexual violence against women. Firstly male domination or supremacy and women's subordination; secondly, Beliefs around Women role and lastly, traditional beliefs around women leadership and decision making ability.

Firstly, on male's supremacy we see that male dominance is an accepted way of life in Congolese traditional beliefs. This acceptance can be explained through Symbolic Violence of Bourdieu where both women and men willingly accept a certain way of living despite the consequences they may suffer. Dominance and aggression is a province of men while nurturance is the province of women. Women themselves believe that it is cultural and natural for women to be dominated by men (Sweetman 1995:20). By accepting conditions defined by traditional norms, they lose their rights, they are abused physically and sexually but they go along with it. As Mbatha also said, traditions of male supremacy are taken as a natural fact by both men and women and trying to think the opposite becomes a crime. According to traditions, it is generally assumed that women have to be always maintained by men (Mbatha, 1988:16-17). Women, before marriage they are under uncles, fathers, brothers' control and once married, they are controlled and possessed by their husbands. They become voiceless, rightless in their husbands' families (Boyce-Davies, 1986:09). A woman once married, she gives up on some of her rights, her identity as well as the right to accuse her husband of rape; she agrees to provide sexual services to her husband according to the husband's will without considering her own feelings (Basow, 1992: 221). This domination is a kind of natural contract between both parties, agreed by both and witnessed by their respective families. We understand that it is not only about one woman willingly giving up her own rights but it is the entire society's structure.

If symbolic violence provided an academic explanation on why women agree to be maltreated by men, Power relation as developed by Bourdieu gives a light on how men use power over women and end up abusing them sexually. Bourdieu articulated a study of power

exploring the micro-politics and macro-politics. The study by the Jeremie asbl (2014) has shown that women in South-Kivu are forced to have intercourse without wanting and many times in worse conditions; they keep it secret for the sake of their marriage dignity and respect. This shows how men use power at micro-political level, where they exploit women in their every day's life; they are marginalized, reduced to human being without any decision making ability on their own lives. Also, because the system in which they live gives to men the absolute power to dominate and control, whatever they do is already justified by the patriarchal social construction (Jeremie, 2014). This last statement of Jeremie asbl shows that men exercise their power in macro-politics, in institutions and in the entire society. Because even a legal move that a woman can take against her sexual abusive husband is controlled by other men (judge, lawyers, prosecutors, elders,...) who are more likely to tell the victim to take it easy, to understand, to cover up the case, to find a way to satisfy her husband. In worst situation they will tell her she is abused by her fault. It is clear that the domination of men over women is supported by legitimate means such as traditional beliefs and social rules.

Secondly, there is the traditional belief on Gender role in the Congolese social structure. As habitus establishes differences derived from a set of beliefs in a defined social life, traditional rules in Congo define different roles for men and women. Traditional habitus give predispositions for the ordered actions in the Congolese society defining actions that can be made by men and actions that can be made by women. The social roles accorded to women are defined by men and for the interests of men (Mbatha, 1988: 29). For example, men are not supposed to do housework because it was established as one of women's work (Wolpe, 1997:23). Many studies including that of UCOFEM (2012), AFD report (2012), UNFPA report (2012; 2017), Pax Christi (2017), International Alert (2012) and a series of interviews conducted with women in Congo in 2018 have all shown that Congolese traditions accord to women the role of sexually please their husbands, the reproductive and the house keeper role. The pre-established dispositions create a certain form of responsibility in women through the process of education since childhood leading them to ignore their rights in order to live according to their status. To fulfill their reproductive role, women in Congo don't have the right to refuse to bear children, they cannot abort without the consent of their partners, and they cannot decide to adopt or to use surrogate mothers because it implies that they are not able to fulfill their responsibility.

Also, in order to fulfill their roles as house keepers and to keep up with the reproductive role, women are refrained from receiving adequate education, they have to marry when they are still young in order to maximize all the chances to have children (leading to early and forced marriage) and once they are married, they have to have children even without their willing. Because they are the people made for their husbands, they have to support all the mistreatments they face in their homes. They have no rights to divorce or to ask for divorce unless the husband wants it (Jeffreys, 2002: 2000). Social structure affects the mental structure of society members. These traditional rules on women roles are embodied in the Congolese people by practices and interaction. Just as the embodiment process of the habitus, these rules on how different men and women are, what is the role of a men and that of women are inculcated in people's heads even before they know who they really are and they end up identifying themselves not as who they really are, but by what they taught them they are.

The third point is women's decision making ability and control over their person. Traditional rules give to men the ability to be the main decision maker for the entire family. In African traditions, women have a limited ability to make choice concerning their own lives be it choice of their partners or that of their sexual lives, professional lives and social activities. If we consider for example the marriage negotiations are conducted by men only, without the consent or the participation of women. Pleased or not, women have to conform to the decisions taken (Boyce-Davies, 1986:28). In some cases, parents even choose marriage partners for their children who are not born yet (Magesa, 1998:128). This tradition results in forced and earlier marriage of women and girls but also in Levirate which is traditional practice pushing a widow woman to marry her husband's brother (Pax Christi, 2017).

The example of virginity test is also considered as a violence resulting in the lack of women decision making freedom. Without asking to a girl her opinion, whenever parents judge necessary or before marriage, they take their daughters to be tested if they are still virgin or not. The way the test is done constitutes violence in itself but the reasons why the test is done and the fact that the test is not conducted by the free consent of the girl is also violence. Traditional virginity test is an inspection of a girl's vagina by fingers or other tools to verify if the girl didn't have any intercourse with other men before her marriage. The test is done under the assumption that women's hymen can be torn only as a result of sexual intercourse and that women have to

preserve their virginity to their husbands in honor of her family and to be honored by her husband. This practice not only is a sign of inequality between boys and girls but also objectifies and threatens girls' dignity and privacy (Maluleke, 2012:10, Pax Christi, 2017).

To force women into marriages, to make them take virginity test, to suppress women freedom of choice and freedom on their own bodies portray the use of power of men over women. As Haugaard (2008) mentioned, power related to habitus refers to the fact of imposing something on someone, to make someone do something or make someone behave a certain way. The above traditional belief and their practices show that the power relation existing between men and women in Congo is extremely unequal and favorable to men. And because of their powerlessness, women agree to any rule and tradition imposed to them.

This section, in explaining how some traditional beliefs result into sexual violence against women, it has shown that the traditional belief of male domination or women subordination, the traditional beliefs of women roles and the belief around women leadership or decision making ability has led to various practices such as forced marriage, genital mutilations, virginity test, marital rape, etc. which violate women rights. We have explained how traditional habitus result in practices that violate and oppress women using one specific notion of Bourdieu for one specific traditional belief but what is clear is that both power relation, habitus, symbolic violence or the concept of practice are suitable to explain each of these traditional beliefs because for a rule to become a habitus there is a process which starts by a certain group of people establishing a rule and imposing it to others (power relation), the established rule is accepted and adopted by all society members (symbolic violence), that rule is practiced by everyone (practice) and it becomes a second identity of that social structure through education and inculcation (habitus). So, both the four concepts of Bourdieu help us understand how a pre-established rule becomes a common life of individuals despite the consequences it may have on those individuals.

5. Inter-connection between grounds of Beliefs leading to sexual violence against women and to women Under representation in Political Activities

Some traditional beliefs and customs, habits and cultural convictions lead to sexual violence against women and at the same time discredit women's participation in political

activities. Previous sections have shown that women's participation in political activities is low and that some Congolese traditional beliefs lead to sexual violence against them. This section justifies the claim that traditional beliefs lead at the same time to sexual violence and to women under participation in political activities. It shows how the habitus based on traditional beliefs result in practices that undermine women and create power imbalance between men and women. By dint of getting used to those social and traditional habitus, the state of symbolic violence is observed among women making them to accept the fact that they should not hold decision making positions in the society. In the first instance, this session will show that the traditional beliefs on male supremacy male has played a role in lessening women competences (acquired through education) to effectively participate in political activities. Also, it defines the power holder in the household as well as in the society. The beliefs on gender role and Women decision making ability make women stay home because they know that their role is household chores and child rearing while the opened political space is a role of men. In the second place, the theorization of the connection between women's sexual violence, traditional beliefs and women's political engagement will be done based on the Bourdieuan framework.

1) Women's political participation and traditional beliefs

As shown earlier in this paper, beliefs and habitus give a shape to any social structure. Many researchers have confirmed that traditional beliefs and other social or religious beliefs hinder women's participation in political activities. Before digging deep into how traditional beliefs affect women involvement in political activities, let us have a glimpse on how social and religious beliefs holdback women political presence. Bourdieu states that social beliefs have the magic power to transform people by telling them that they are different. Differences existing in a social structure are produced by the fact of pointing them as different (2002:240). The gendered division of labor gives men political activities, outside activities, public activities, and economic activities with monetary remuneration but allocates indoor, dark, and invisible activities to women (Bourdieu, 2002:240). Emile Durkheim had recognized something similar in relation to religion when he argued that religion is defined by the instauration of a limit between the sacred and the profane, it is a particular case among other cases of institutional barriers through which difference between realities is constructed naturally (Durkheim, 1912:50-52; Jones, 1986:115-155). In many African societies, these divisions intersect. In terms of religious beliefs and

women's domination, religious beliefs and instructions given to boys since the colonial period have contributed greatly to women's inequalities in African societies by assigning men important skills while limiting women to domestic sciences. The doctrine of men being superior, deserving better education and opportunity than women was strengthened by religious beliefs together with traditional beliefs (Adu, 2008: 17). Lusamba Tatcher (2014) stated that in the DR Congo, patriarchal beliefs on women and misconception, misunderstanding of religious rules about the place of women in the society abstain women involvement in political affairs. Differently with Durkheim and Adu, she didn't blame religious beliefs but according to her, religious beliefs on women position in the society are misconceived by Congolese people who link them to traditional beliefs which result in women non-participation in political arena.

Because of tradition and culture, people naturally agree that men are technically more competent in politics than women because the difference between men and women in all other professional practices is based on a social force and on an assignment based on competence. The opinion that political activities are taught to be suitable for men is also shared by Adu. Changing this requires a significant alternation of people's mindset for Adu (2008) recognizes women also have the ability as much as men to be local, national and international political leaders were it not for entrenched habitus and power relations. Technical capacity is a very important factor for political career. But it is accorded to those who are socially designated as competent. And those who are acknowledged as competent are given tasks according to their competence and are provided opportunities to ameliorate their capacities. Men who are considered as capable of doing political activities are given priority when it comes to school attendance while women are pushed behind. Bourdieu refers to that hypothesis as education capital (Bourdieu, 2002:241). O'Neil and Domingo and many other researchers also mentioned education of women as one of the most important keys of women's low participation in political activities (O'Neil, 2015). The inequality in the education sector in DR Congo which is the base of capacity building is observed through quantitative data provided in section 3.

Talking about traditional beliefs and women's involvement in political activities, we will focus on the following traditional grounds of beliefs: Male supremacy and gender role. Firstly, as for male supremacy, we saw earlier that it results in a power imbalance between men and women. Men control women in the family level and also at the institutional level. The secondary status

accorded to women in their households makes them inferior in other social and economic activities outside their homes (Karl, 1995:03).

As the 2019 gender equality report by the UN have shown, in Congo men constitute the majority of workers, of parliament members, senators, professionals and in others fields. Male supremacy and power, not only restricts women from participating in political activities, but also affects those women who have striven into the political scene. Reflecting on a similar situation, President Johnson Sirleaf (2010) states that traditional beliefs castigating women's political persist among men and women, and those traditions are often reflected through media coverage of women politicians, as well as the attempts to undermine women's assertion of political opinions (Sirleaf, 2010). In the study conducted by UCOFEM on women's participation in political activities, 49% of women interviewed stated that men use an aggressive control over women. They even tend to sexually harass politician women, and this leads many women to give up on their political career and even pushes others away from politics even before they start. On the other side, the power, pressure, tension, sexual abuse and harassments women go through in the political arena encourage men to keep their wives or daughters away from political careers in order to protect them paternalistically from just these practices (UCOFEM, 2012: 43).

Secondly, the traditional belief on gender roles impedes women politically in the additional sense that their role of taking care of their families, household chores, and childcare renders them too busy to effectively participate in government or activism. In Congo, it is observed that when the wife becomes a public figure, the husband feels as if she is not at her place anymore, that she has lost her values as woman, and for women who are still single, it becomes harder to get married because it is assumed that they will be defiant or contentious (Kellow, 2010). Gender role bias puts women at a disadvantage also in a way that political activities require multiple travels and many nights away from home. Congolese and other African traditions don't allow women to sleep outside their homes without the consent of their husbands or fathers (Mubalama, 2018). Furthermore, the fact that the wife is sleeping outside and the husband stays home with children is not acknowledged by traditional rules because it is seemed as the roles have changed (Sirleaf, 2010).

Traditional beliefs constitute an obstacle to women's participation in Congolese politics in a third way because many women themselves are radically supportive of traditional belief

according to which women place is not in public but at home. 11% of women interviewed in a study conducted by UCOFEM Congo were extremely reluctant towards women's participation in political activities for reasons like women are not competent, women have to stay home, women are weak, etc. 16% of the women interviewed were uncertain about women's participation in political activities. They did not state clearly if they should or should not participate in political activities (UCOFEM, 2012:37-39). Tripp (1999: 6) argues that the prohibitive traditional attitudes against women's involvement in other activities outside their homes are reflected also in voting patterns where women who do participate in politics are not chosen by men or women because of the belief that they do not belong there. Similarly, Johnson Sirleaf (2010) also points out that voting patterns are affected by traditional beliefs which limit women's place to domestic spaces.

About the influence of traditions on voters' behavior in Congo and in South Kivu in particular, Kinja and her fellow women¹ politicians we interviewed said that women do not vote for their fellow women because they don't believe that women have enough competence or ability to lead a country. For the 2018 elections in Congo, for the first time there was a woman presidential candidate named Mm. Ifoku² she came 5th while all 4 candidates before her were men (Kibangula & Mulega, 2019). According to Kinja's remarks, it is obvious that women did not choose her because she had fewer votes even though the majority (64%) of voters in Congo are women (CENI, 2018). If women would believe that women are also able to lead just as men, we might hypothesize that Mm. Ifoku would receive a greater share of votes from women in the electorate. Not only the presidential candidate but other deputy candidates also did not receive enough votes and now more than 85% of national assembly and senate members are men, despite the large number of women voters. The voting pattern and the above mentioned women's attitude towards women political activities brings us back to the Bourdieuan ideology on symbolic violence that explains better these kinds of situation where victims agree to be abused or dominated because being abused has become part of their nature and their normal lives.

¹ When we conducted the interview with Kinja, we also had an interview with other politician women in South Kivu, in Bukavu and Uvira but they preferred to be referred anonymously.

² Marie-Josée Ifoku Mputa Mpunga is a Congolese politician and was the only female candidate in the 2018 DRC election and was the governor of Tshuapa province.

This section has presented the way in which traditional beliefs affect women's political careers. To start, it has shown that not only beliefs based on tradition but other social and religious beliefs also affect how women are perceived towards political activities. Social rules, religious rules associated to traditional beliefs, social construction based on traditional understanding of women's role and male supremacy both lead to women's under-participation in political activities. This section has not shown clearly the connection between these traditional beliefs and Bourdieuan framework because that analysis will be done in the following session.

2) Theorizing the connection between women's sexual violence, traditional beliefs and women's political participation

As observed in previous sections, traditional beliefs are related to both sexual violence against women and women under participation in political activities. Traditional beliefs on women role, women nature, male supremacy and power were established by a certain group of people who had power and influence in the society (Adu 2008:117). Established norms portrayed women as dependent, weak, home keepers, men's objects, life givers, etc. as such, strict norms were established in terms of what women can or cannot do. Those differences were imposed to people and established as social norms perpetuated by education process. It makes sense, as I will show here, to see this social phenomenon in terms of field, habitus, power relations, and symbolic violence. As Bourdieu, Smith & Johnson stated habitus and gender education start from home in the family environment but continues through higher institutions like school, church, etc. by learning and interacting (McNay, 1999:101; Johnson & Smith, 2020). After the inculcation period, traditional rules learnt since childhood become a nature, they become habit and part of the people's identity leading women to let their husbands rape them, or to let their fathers choose their partners or again to refuse to raise their voices if there is a man in the audience. It becomes natural for them to be dominated, to be silenced or abused by men. Worse, they even agree themselves to be treated as subordinates because the education they had so far has defined women nature as subordinate to men. This is explained in the theoretical section as symbolic violence.

In other words, just as the habitus sets differences in social practices defining what is good and what is wrong, traditional beliefs in Congo establish roles, behaviors, limitations and position of women differently with those of men in the society. And social patterns and actions

are based on those beliefs that have been followed and protected for generations and seem unmalleable. Women are trapped in a tradition according to which there are specific roles of men and those of women. Leading is not a woman's role but that of men. And men are not supposed to do housework because it is woman's work (Wolpe, 1997:23). Women are supposed to be dependent of men's leadership and should not lead alongside men, on behalf of men or to lead a man (Mbatha, 1998). Traditional habitus established in the Congolese social structure after shaping social actors, these last will act accordingly and those actions result in a certain practices. In our case, traditional beliefs result into a range of practices such as domination of women, subordination of women, and violence against women in their everyday lives, which might be described as micro-politics. Meanwhile, in other social institutions, economic or political institutions, or macro-politics, the traditions are also evident.. At a micro level, traditional beliefs shaped in the Congolese society have consequences like marital rape, early and forced marriage, virginity tests, and restriction from appropriate education. Also at the micro level, the status of "woman" obliges her to stay at home and to respond to her family needs, it hinders her from doing any job without the full consent of her husband; it makes her unwilling and unable to take any leading position in the family. This consequence is also observed at the macro level where women are not allowed to lead a meeting if men are there, not acknowledged as political parties' leaders, they are abused and asked for sexual favors in their work place, etc. All these are the results of not being acknowledged originally in the family set as human being equal to men, with equal capabilities and dignity.

Also, in order to understand how traditional beliefs, political activities and women sexual violence are inter-connected, let us consider specifically the understanding of field by Bourdieu. Fields are sets of practices bound together by relativity, autonomous, homologous structured logics in which economic, cultural and political field belong to. Social members exist in many fields at the same time and they bring the same habitus to each field they are in. This is the reason why people who are dominants in one area can easily be dominants in other areas (Bourdieu, 1998:77). Bourdieu argues that there is a connection between traditional elites and economic elites and that the so called connection contributes to the legitimacy of their super ordination (Jenkins, 1992:113). Men who are dominants in their families also dominate the economic, social, political, professional sphere in Congo. As the same man who dominates his wife is also a parliamentarian, he will more likely tend to dominate his fellow parliamentarian

women and will more likely support laws that protect his dominator status. The data provided in section 3 shows how women, who are dominated in the family, are also treated as minorities in all other sectors of economic, political and social life.

This section has presented the correlation between women's political participation and traditional beliefs. It has shown that women's under-participation in political life is linked to some traditional beliefs on women role, women decision making ability and male power or male supremacy. Most importantly, this section has provided a justification to the claim made in the introduction according to which there is an inter-connection between sexual violence against women, traditional beliefs and women's under-representation in political affairs. We have argued that the process of habitus' inculcation presented by Bourdieu is also the process by which traditional beliefs on women status and women roles are taught starting from the family to a broad scale. We have also argued that the habitus learnt become a second nature to society members producing actions that lead to violence against women and hinder their participation in political career due to traditional beliefs that present women as not suitable for political career. Through the concept of field, we have also argued that men who are dominants in their families thanks to traditions that give them power and legitimize their power over women; are also dominants in other social fields at the same time. The power they are given provide to them access to anything they need for political career and make them dominate even women who are already in politics.

6. Conclusion

This study has analyzed the relationship between traditional beliefs leading to sexual violence against women and to women's under representation in political activities. It has been done in the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo in general but much of the detailed casework was drawn from the East of Congo like Bukavu and Uvira located in the South Kivu province. An interpretative analysis of data was done borrowing qualitative data from the CENI, World Economic Forum and developing the concepts of practice, habitus, power relations, and symbolic violence from the theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Based on the analysis done all along the study, we can conclude the following:

The traditions based on the belief of male supremacy and absolute power over women, the traditions based on the belief that there are separated roles of women and men and the belief according to which women don't have the right and the ability to take decisions concerning their own lives lead to women's violations like marital rape, forced marriage, levirate and so on. The same grounds of beliefs also affect negatively women's participation in political activities. Traditional beliefs that give to men supremacy and absolute power hindering women decision making ability make women not being able to join political activities effectively because they have to look for the consent of their husbands or their fathers to whom they belong according to traditions. The tradition of gender role suggesting that women's place is the kitchen makes both men and women believe that women don't fit in the political arena and that their place is their homes where they have to take care of their children, of house chores and childbearing.

The concept of habitus and symbolic violence are observed through the attachment of both men and women to traditional practices that they consider as natural and normal no matter the consequences they have on the most violated by them. Also, thanks to the concept of practice by Bourdieu, we understand that under representation of women in political arena is not a hazard but a result of a long period traditional way of living of Congolese people sourced in traditional beliefs. Traditional beliefs affect the voting pattern in Congo. Voters vote for people who they think are able or competent enough to lead them. As in Congo most of people believe that women are not good for being political leaders, even few women who present themselves as candidates are not chosen neither by their fellow women nor by men.

Bourdieu was questioned on the statement he made on decision making ability where he argued that the appearing decision making that the powerless have is either a shadow or a reflection of what the habitus is doing any way or the appearance of decision making is an option which under some circumstances is part of habitus' repertoire; it is an autonomous or chosen process (Jenkins, 1992:77). Bourdieu's response to this question of decision making ability seems to be exaggerated or pessimistic because habitus can change by the influence from another social structure. Also, in the same perspective, the possibility of change at the individual level as well as at the social level is obvious because habitus is embodied in the individual and at the same time it is a social phenomenon (Jenkins, 1992:79). Like most social studies, this problem was also addressed with a hope of bringing a change to the situation of Congolese women in the

future. Nevertheless, this paper refrained from proposing any solution to women's sexual violence or to women's under participation in political activities. Also, beside its necessity, this paper does not establish a causal frame to women's under participation in political activities in Congo. Those points will be addressed in the follow-up studies.

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