**Tiyo Soga: Violence, Disruption and Dislocation in the White *Polis***

***VS Vellem***

**Abstract**

Tiyo Soga must be celebrated. Tiyo Soga is a body of knowledge pertinent for the development of foundational knowledge in examining the violence, disruptions and dislocations of the bodies, knowledge and spirit in modernity. The question of skill and memory cannot be dichotomized in epistemologies of justice, naming, space in our ambivalent history. Spatial justice, the article argues, is not just about physical space, it is spiritual and temporal. The linearity of time cannot do justice for the memory of the conquered. Land, the paper argues, by inserting the memory of Tiyo Soga, is central to spatial justice for as long the ‘wedding’ between the troublesome Bible, genocidal, espistemicidal and spirtualicidal forms of knowledge are debunked.

**Key words: ambivalence; civilization; eviction; Tiyo Soga; wedding**

**Introduction**

Urbanization at best is about the movement of people from one location, their habitat, to another one. Whatever the underlying causes, it entails scales of movement and migration to places that promise a better life for people resulting ultimately into the formation of a polis, a new city if not the expansion or growth of the polis directly linked to the factors that underlie the movement or migration of the people. Characteristically, urbanization features a dynamic displacement of human beings to new territories and in most instances disrupts the relationship of human beings with other spheres of life which combine to define their holistic endeavour’s for a living. Numerous predictions and measurements of the scales of movement and displacement in the twenty first century suggest that the city will be even more concentrated than ever before in this century as people are rapidly moving away from rural settings. In South Africa, the post 1994 democratic settlement is among the drivers of the movement of people to the city in unprecedented ways with many cities in the land constantly becoming crowded and consequently, cities facing tremendous challenges ranging from infrastructure development, access to facilities and human relations to mention but a few.

While urbanization is understandably inevitable a process, especially in the current form of the modern *polis* and its centripetal forces*,* the movement and displacement of people in scales can easily turn others into patients while others are agents in the face of changes related to these seismic movements and the migration of the people. The general challenge is that of the building of the *polis* that enhances the participation of the people not as patients but agents if these movements are by and large a result of the human quest for better life.

Our conversation in this article is centred on this broad understanding of urbanization thus far ambitiously described. More specifically, it focuses on the experience and content of urbanization among the poor and the marginalized. The article, employing the black African concept of home, *ikhaya*,[[1]](#footnote-1) throws a spotlight on the life and work of Tiyo Soga to demonstrate the protological challenges associated with the creation of a modern city or *polis* at the encounter of black and white and the clash of the epistemological frames in building the South African city. Through the life of Tiyo Soga, the features of the modern city are shown to be fraught with forms of killing in the light of black experience in South Africa. Urbanization in South Africa, for as long as the black African forms of knowledge associated with *ikhaya* are marginalized, cannot fully respond to the killing of black African body, knowledge and spirituality.

This celebratory article presents a brief backround of Tiyo Soga and moves on to discuss forms of killing associated with the violence and spirit of conquest concluding with a brief list of the implications of Tiyo Soga for spatial justice in South Africa.

**A brief Background on Tiyo Soga**

It is important first to make a caveat. A number of works on the work and life of Tiyo Soga have been written (for example Chalmers, Khabela 1996, Njeza 2002 and Williams 1993) and many others. In this article, there is no intention to repeat what others have said, especially about the biographical aspects of the Rev Tiyo Soga. Those biographical aspects of Tiyo Soga that are selected rather are deepened to argue the points related to spatial justice from a black perspective. Tiyo Soga has been interpreted and will continue to be interpreted as he remains a model of the ambivalent experience of blackness and the conundrums of modernity in Africa. This article does not pretend to be a panacea of Soga’s interpretation, but proceeds from the understanding of Soga’s life as a model of life lived in contradiction and ambivalence resulting from the conquest of the black people. Thabo Mbeki on the occasion of the unveiling of Tiyo Soga’s Memorial on the 9th September 2011 rightly said:

I believe that there can be no greater justification for us to be here today than we have come to pay tribute and indeed draw inspiration from one whom Dr Anderson correctly described as – a model African for the imitation and inspiration of his countrymen and women (2011:1)

He opened his talk by referring to two poet laureates, SK Mqayi and W.B Yeats. By appealing to the poet Mqayi— Mqayi’s poem which painted a gloomy picture of the context of amaXhosa at that time and Yeats’ poetic line, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold…” there can be no eloquent manner to describe Tiyo Soga’s life as one that was lived in crossroads and a model for imitation and inspiration for black South Africans.

The interpretation of Tiyo Soga’s life in the context of crossroads, the seismic changes of global the social order, especially the social order and world of amaXhosa, puts him at the same level with his contemporaries in the West such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and others, whose contributions to social theory remain classical in the West. Tiyo Soga’s life and critical reflections in times of change continue to influence any quest for knowledge construction in similar circumstances. Indeed following what Charles Lemert (2010:3-5) says about the common thing about those doyens of social theory in the West, especially their preoccupation with the difference between modern and traditional societies, Tiyo’s standing as one among the important theorists and symbolically lived experiences in times of the crossroads between the world of amaXhosa and Western modernity, cannot be bypassed in the development of social knowledge in South Africa. For us in this article, Tiyo Soga is not only an embodiment of theological life—the subject of our conversation—but also an embodiment of sociological, political and economic knowledge forms associated with modernity, integrated nonetheless as experience inscribed in his life and *ipso facto*, blacks. He is an embodiment of a life lived on the underside and shadows of Western constructs of knowledge. In this paper, his life is viewed from the perspective of spatial justice in South Africa and true to Tiyo’s roots, the concept of *ikhaya*, home, is prismatically assumed as a tool of interpretation for Black Urban Theology liberation.

On this day, the 10th December 1856, on a Wednesday (Njeza 2002: 98), Tiyo Soga was ordained as a minister of Word and Sacrament in Scotland. This year, 2016 marks the hundred and sixtieth (160th) anniversary of the ordination of the first, black minister in our history of Christianity in South Africa. It is thus also fitting for us, in our quest to reflecting on faith matters in relation to spatial justice to then go back to this starting point, indeed, the quintessential lived experience of a life that sought to be included in the white world— white *polis*— without any success as he was constantly reminded about his place as a black. This particular point is extremely important for the development of black urban theology because Tiyo Soga showed an attitude that espoused the white world fully and her marriage to Janet Burnside from Glasgow remains one undeniable example of a person whose conviction about racial equality and harmony cannot be questioned. Our choice to dialogue with Tiyo Soga’s life in making a contribution to urban theology in general and specifically from a black perspective is inspired by this memory we rightly should celebrate this year. It is the celebration of his ordination in the quest for racial harmony and the building of a just *polis* in South Africa as exemplified by his constant attempt to espouse the values of the white *polis* that constantly rejected him. The questions that became pertinent during his life and since his ordination as a potential citizen of the white *polis*, which persist to this day, have an impact on how we perceive space and temporality today.

Tiyo Soga belongs to the clan of amaJwara, a son to a Councillor, his father and Nosuthu, of amaNtinde clan, daughter of Jan Tshatshu, his mother. He was born when King Maqoma was expelled from the Kat River territory, an event that in the thinking of amaXhosa remains epochal both as one of the tragic occurrences in the history of dispossession and also as a marker for the very date of Tiyo Soga’s birth, 1829. Tiyo’s birth is as symbolic as its marker; the eviction of King Maqoma and the understanding of time by black Africans become inscribed in his whole life. In this sense, Tiyo Soga's life was lived in contradiction—an excruciating ambivalence to be precise—as he constantly had to traverse two worlds throughout his life. For example, what he identified later in his life as the date of his birth he did through the acquisition of Western knowledge and skills, yet without the memory of his own mother, who informed him about the event that marked his birth, the very knowledge that he later acquired, to read and search for information would have not been helpful at all. Tiyo Soga’s life is made up of foot prints at Lovedale, in Scotland and in the mission work among his own people, amaXhosa until his death on the 12 August 1871. He also wrote articles and even composed hymns. One of his most famous hymns is *Lezalis’ Idinga Lakho*— “Fulfil thy Promise God.” This hymn came second to *Nkosi, sikel’ iAfrika* during the struggle against Apartheid and at times, it was dubbed the anthem of the struggle.[[2]](#footnote-2) This brief background on Tiyo Soga will never do justice to this colossal figure and pioneer of Black African Christianity.

**Tiyo Soga: An experience of genocide, epistemicide and spiritualicide**

Tiyo Soga, responding to the myth of black extinction in an article titled “What is the Destiny of the Kaffir Race?” published on the 11 May 1865 *inter alia* says the following:

I openly at the outset avow myself to the writer of that article to be one of those who hold the very opposite views he has given forth to the public, on the important question of the extinction of the Kaffir race. If he had said that the three reasons he has advanced to prove his case form some of the difficulties in the way of elevating his people, I would have understood him clearly. But when he draws from the astounding conclusion of their extinction, that conclusion I cannot accept until it rests upon surer premises (in Williams 1983:178).

The sentiments above vividly demonstrate that Tiyo’s life is effectively an experience embedded and embroiled in various forms of killing associated with the conquest, colonization and Christianisation of black people in South Africa. The myth of “black extinction” expressed in the quotation above as “the extinction of the Kaffir race” speaks volumes to the subject of our conversation in this section.

The knowledge systems associated with conquest and colonization cannot be delinked from genocide, epistemicide and spiritualicide and pose ethical questions social justice and space in post 1994 South Africa. We have already alluded to the “ambivalence” of Tiyo’s life which according to him constantly put his life in the “impassable gulf between the degraded condition of the black and white condition” (in Khabela 1996:50ff). City life and spatial justice remain terrains of this experience and our imaginary of the post 1994 *polis*, the impassable gulf between the degraded condition of black and white relations.

Ambivalence or paradox is essentially, a pathological condition inscribed on the black bodies, in their minds and souls that became systematically responded to by pioneers of Black Theology of liberation such as James Cone and Allan Boesak in developing the distinctions between ontological blackness and black consciousness, ultimately for the affirmation of blackness in the quest humanity. Desmond Tutu in his debate with John Mbiti argues that in the paradoxical circumstances of black identity, resulting from the displacement of millions of black people from Africa during the Transatlantic slave trade, there are bonds between all Africans, including those in the diaspora because “blackness” is an “an intractable ontological surd” that defines their common experience. All Africans, Tutu argues, share an identical history of exploitation. That one could easily be identified with whiteness or blackness continues to be one of the most harrowing experiences of blackness as lived out in Tiyo’s experience with all kinds of paradoxical manifestations in real life. As a black minister and missionary in South Africa, his white colleagues could not treat him as an equal among them.

While he innocently attempted to embrace this white world view, he kept on being reminded about his identity as a black and thus where he ‘belonged’ as a black person in the white world or *polis*. At the same time, among his own people, amaXhosa, he was equally treated with suspicion. In a number of times did Tiyo have to flee in times of war to settle among the missionaries who in most instances served as the informants of the colonialists who conquered amaXhosa.

The starting point of Black Urban Theology of liberation thus begins from this excruciating experience of ambivalence by remembering that amaXhosa warriors destroyed the Bible and said, “this is the thing Tiyo troubles us with.” The Bible is too troublesome for black people; it simply enhances this ambivalence when interpreted uncritically. As Cone’s theology later illustrates, the ambivalence of the cross, especially in his most recent work on the *Cross and the Lynching Tree,* the ambivalence that leads to the ‘destroying’ the Bible, is not easy to avoid in the troublesome conditions which are not bereft of violence as the choices made, from the very word go, are a matter of life and death for the black person. Before we proceed with our brief discussion of the forms of killing imbued in Tiyo’s life, the first point is that conditions of “ambivalence,” resulting from a violent defeat of amaXhosa, encapsulates all there is to say about genocide, epistemicide and spiritualicide. Methodology is in itself a matter that cannot be dis-embodied from contradictions that amount to life or death as seen in Tiyo’s life and consequently, the quest for the development of urban theology in general. Let us then move to the question of genocide first, in relation to the life and work of Tiyo Soga.

1. **Tiyo and genocidal experience**

It is arguable that colonization was genocidal in South Africa. Colonial power in South Africa, while resulting from internecine wars of dispossession, the conquest of the black Africans does not at face value present evidence of genocide, but scales of death in the tale of violent dispossession of land. Surely there was gunfire (Storey, 2008) and untold acts of violence in the history of the Seven Frontier Wars of the Eastern Cape. The genocidal experience in relation to Tiyo Soga must be seen through the direct relationship of the colonial project itself with genocide. According to Ramos Grosfoguel, (2013:79-85), the so-called discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus was preceded by an order to wait for the conquest of Granada in the Iberian Peninsula issued to him by the monarchy. The idea of this war or conquest was to unite the whole territory under one rule, identity and religion (Grosfoguel 2013: 79). The conquest of the Iberian Peninsula finalized on the 02 January 1492, was immediately followed by the authorization of Columbus’ voyage, “only nine days later” (Gosfoguel 2013:79). Human beings were simply wiped out of the face of earth before the ‘order’ by the monarch to authorize the voyage was issued out. It is important that we grasp this picture very fully about the relationship of colonialism with genocide.

In the context of Africa, the excruciating scale of death across the Atlantic continues to shock anyone who deeply thinks about this history. The bodies hidden under the currents of the Atlantic Ocean right to the Caribbean and Cuba and through to the Americas, surely speak with the waves and swells of the Atlantic waters. The roughness of the see is an eloquent speech about this horrendous narrative in the history of humanity since the days of slavery in Africa.

Genocide and epistemicide went together, but Grosfoguel also argues that another form of killing accompanied these worldwide processes of conquest namely, spiritualicide, meaning the destruction of the spirituality (spiritualicide) of the conquered. The methods used by Columbus, became a paradigm for colonial conquests, ultimately the racial justification of the Africans and these insights by Ramos Grosfoguel are worth citing:

While “Indians” were placed in the “encomienda” under a coerced form of labour, Africans who were already classified as “people without a soul” were brought to the Americas to replace the “Indians” in slave labor. Africans were perceived at the time as Muslims and the racialization of Muslims in 16th century Spain was extended to them. The decision to bring captives from Africa to enslave them in the Americas was directly related to the conclusion of the 1522 Valladolid trial (2013:84).[[3]](#footnote-3)

The same sentiments are expressed by Storey when he says:

In the nineteenth century, the focus of the present study, guns were associated with the depopulation of game animals; the development of capitalism; and the establishment of new colonies, republics, and chiefdoms. Legal restrictions on gun ownership came to mark who was a citizen and who was not (2008:1).

The establishment of the colony was associated with guns and the dispossession of the black people. The story of Tiyo Soga must continue to be retold in relation to violent land dispossession, just as Khabela draws our attention to the legend of Makhanda, whose story is now being retold by Wells, as one centred on the question of land. In addition, it must be clarified; this violence took form of mays of killing.

Bfocusing on land alone, all these forms of killing by colonialism could be integrated because land is related to human relations, politics, economics and spirituality from an African perspective. For our purpose, Tiyo Soga’s life was immersed in the “frontier”, as Njeza (2002) rightly argues. At one stage he had to engage his own people who thought war was an option like Mlanjeni. That he, at the age of six, during the war in 1835-6, in the care of his mother, fled to the mountains (Njeza 2002:6), is even more telling. In 1846, a Frontier War, “The War of the Axe” broke out while he was at Lovedale. The relationship of black conquest with genocide is the metanarrative of colonization, applicable in South Africa and written on the body of Tiyo Soga. The Mission Station which became a geo-political space distinct from the land occupied by the red-blanketed, directly accounts for the bifurcation of the physical space originally occupied by black people but also mental and spiritual spaces.

1. **Tiyo and espistemicidal experience**

The constant battles that Tiyo Soga had with his own people, especially those who were the leaders of amaXhosa are not only one example we could cite about the destruction of the knowledge systems of amaXhosa. Khabela discusses Tiyo in comparison with such leaders as Nxele and Mlanjeni (1996:56-68) and says the following:

The new culture had caused a serious cleavage among the (sic) Xhosa. School people despised the Red blanketed ones. The general treatment meted out against the Red blanketed ones was one of inferiority. As Les Switzer observes, “communal habits of living were discouraged among the educated ones in favour of individual enterprise and self-sufficiency (1996:58-59).

This matter troubled Soga as he put this in his own journal, (Williams 1983:38-39) and later prompted the response he made cited earlier to make sense of the troubled knowledge system of his own people and the invading systems of colonial knowledge. Soga says, “The gospel has been interfered with—its good has been neutralized—the vices of Civilization, have been introduced—& never better—& hence this—*doom* of the Kaffir” (Williams 1983:39). The direct link of the doom of the black people with “the vices of Civilization” captures the sentiment very well. It is not his reflections for now that we should rather spend our time on but his lived experience as one who was doomed as a symbol and body of knowledge:

Sirs, —I was yesterday unprovokedly insulted by the toll keeper and his assistant in crossing the river on my way from Alice. After I had crossed the river, I went to pay the usual rates for horses. While doing this, the assistant would know my name, evidently with the design of taking me off. I at first took no notice of this, as I saw that the young man was not altogether sober, but he persisted in his insolence. I then told him that as an Englishman he ought to know that it was ungentlemanly and rude to ask a stranger’s name in this way. Hereupon the old gentleman took me up, and taunted me with ridiculousness of refusing to give my name, more especially as he thought that a fine gentlemen like me ought rather to wish his name to be known. During the time they were changing the money, they carried on this jeering simultaneously. Now sirs, if Mr Hall and his assistant possess a monopoly for insulting quiet individuals without reason, but because as black men, they think they must take them down for aiming at being fine gentlemen, the sooner they are informed of this self-assumed right the better (Williams 1983:182).

This letter was addressed to the Town Council of King William’s Town on the 13th October 1865. There are few things we need to observe coming out of the crux of the letter. First, the insults are unprovoked. Second, the appeasement against this insolent encounter and the perpetrator appeals to the values of the provoker, the “gentleman!” Third, insulting is a monopoly and fourth, blacks are being insulted at attempting to being “gentlemen,” and last but not least, this insolence is a self-assumed right.

Tiyo experienced this first hand. As a body that carried this experience, then Western epistemology came to know blacks by insulting them, it does so without being provoked to do so and this insolence does not exculpate those who aspire to be “gentlemen” but more harrowing, the Eurocentric knowledge of a black person that is insolent to a black who tries to espouse it is a self-assumed right! Any student of Black Theology of liberation will rather add than subtract these attributes in Tiyo’s experience of an insolent epistemological discourse that takes blacks down. The “*doom* of the Kaffir race” for the past centuries has been built along this experience. Importantly, we must bear this point in mind: Tiyo’s passage through Western education followed conquest and thus constantly challenges the persuasive character of this epistemology. Njeza evokes (2002) in his chapter that titled “Colonizing the Mind-The Lovedale Experiment” posits Soga’s education within the psychological dangers related to the transmission of knowledge to the conquered black. Graham Duncan (2003) does the same and indeed, the experimentation of education for blacks finds expression in Tiyo Soga’s life. The mental space of a black person is a habitus for Western experiments and epistemological weaponry to destroy the consciousness of the black person.

1. **Tiyo Spiritualicide experience**

The destruction of the spiritual roots of the knowledge of the black Africans is probably aggregated in the displacement of Tiyo Soga and his mother from their own land. The up-rooting of black people from their land as explicitly shown in Tiyo Soga’s life is the deepest wound on the spirituality of the black person. These words by Soga, suggest something deep about the struggles of spirituality even today: “But Christianity, and Infidelity, and Rationalism, as abstract principles, can engage in no hostile contest” (Williams 1983:194). Soga here was presenting a lecture in Cape Town in 1866, speaking about the ecclesial or ecclesiological challenges of the day.

He presented a lecture that examined among others, freedom from creeds, orthodoxy and confessions as these narrowed the view of reality and the other side of the debate namely, freeing the church from those who do not perceive the role of the clergy as important. We push this matter further by simply adopting the rationality of the Western forms of knowledge which ultimately does nothing helpful in contests of knowledge that are not disembodied in the experiences of the oppressed. The disjuncture between epistemology and spirituality is one of the challenges that Soga forecast as a spiritual battle. One can only see this struggle when we remember that Soga, had begun to integrate African culture in his theology and in the light of the spiritual assault amaXhosa suffered including himself. A number of contradictions he pondered. He was called a “blackie” in Glasgow, lost his luggage too in Glasgow and soon he saw that those who preached the gospel to the black also needed to be preached to others. Soga’s inwardness uprooted from his land remains a symbol of the paradoxical dent of the spirituality of black people. As a solution to this, he proclaimed a look into the African sources of spirituality, hence his iconic stature as a father of Black African Christianity. Projects of inculturation today simply question the chasm between cognitive knowledge and spiritual knowledge caused by conquest. The spirit to conquer is the core for the rationalization and ratiocination of the myth of the supremacy of the white race and the justification for genocide, epistemicide and spiritualicide.

**Implications for Spatial Justice in South Africa**

The implications of Tiyo Soga’s life for spatial justice are evidently numerous. In our celebration of his anniversary, we remember that the African concept of home, *ikhaya,* integrates the epistemological, the spiritual and the economic in convivial harmony with the land and God among others. Conquest was a violent displacement of the spheres of knowledge, spirituality, economics and human relations in general. Spatial justice in South Africa is not an abstract discourse.

Spatial injustice and the resultant displacement of black, their evictions, their ambivalent lives in the order of conquest, colonization and its manifold forms of killing, illustrated in Tiyo’s life is not only a matter of broken bodies but also destroyed minds and spiritualties for those who survived genocide. If Tiyo married a white woman and wedded himself into the white *polis*, for hundred and fifty years to date, at least, there is no conspicuous, adequate effort by whites to ‘marry’ or at least to be wedded to the black African space in concrete terms barring a few exceptions. Wherever there are such ‘marriages’ and ‘weddings’ they have remained examples of lives lived in utter ambivalence as shown by the informal settlements in South Africa, *mokhukhu.* Wherever they are attempted, they cheapen the covenant of marriage between Western knowledge, spirituality and the same of the black African person.

After more than a century, there is no single congregation or white space that has been named after Tiyo Soga that I know. Most recently, the Central Office of the Uniting Presbyterian Church was named after Tiyo Soga, but that was not the original intention as the papers the Executive Commission of the denomination show. While it pleases some of us, what happens though inside that Central office might need deeper examination for its mitigation against the killing forms of knowledge associated with the West. The place of Tiyo Soga in the intellectual platforms of our land including the ecclesiological ones, leaves much to be desired. One will have to live long enough to see the ‘wedding’ between the black congregation and the white one in South African generally. One still has to live long enough to experience the warmth of the ‘wedding’ between black and white epistemologies, in fact, as seen in the education of the black children in marginalized spaces, the education of a black person remains a “toxic mix.” Tiyo Soga embraced the white Western world; he was rejected by this world.

Ideas of justice in South Africa are divorced from the world of black Africans. One example is the notion of transitional justice in post 1994 South Africa, a *vat n sit* model of justice that defiles the epistemological sentiment of a black South African.

The discussion of spatial justice in South Africa without land is simply put, a discussion in the trenches of genocide, epistemicide and spiritualicide.

Evictions in South Africa have included evictions from the graves of the black person's ancestors, God, economics, politics, work, and spirituality to mention but a few. This list of the issues above is illustrative but the crux lies here: Tiyo Soga reminds us that Urban Black Theology of liberation and thus spatial justice is impossible without land justice. Given the violent dispossession of black people, land as their mother, *pacha mama*, (Boff 2014: 2 of 4), urban theology that is not wedded to the self-understanding and self-conscious view of what land is to black people is the continuation of the epistemicide, spiritualicide of black existence in a world that is undeniably genocidal today.

**Conclusion**

Spatial justice, as Soga remembered what his mother todla him about his date of birth, evokes not only geo-political questions but also temporal questions in a history marred with genocide, epistemicide and spiritualicide. The memory of the poor and marginalized for the erection of the city, the polis in post 1994, must be inserted lest the skill of a ‘westerner’ remains an instrument of injustice. Ambivalence in the discourse of spatial justice questions the texts associated with Western knowledge and treats the bible as troublesome, let alone the forms of killing associated with this foreign civilization. This we can do if we celebrate Tiyo Soga. Jwara!

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1. A detailed explanation of the implications of the concept of ikhaya is developed in VS Vellem’s 2002. The Quest for *Ikhaya*: The African Concept of Home in Public Life. Unpublished Master’s Dissertation, University of Cape Town. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. One still has a vivid memory of how the late Chris Hani sang this hymn by heart in one of the rallies in KZN, in the late nineties. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The relationship between modernity and racism is not necessarily a new insight. See also VS Vellem 2015 " Black Theology of Liberation and the Economy of Life" *The Ecumenical Review.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-3)