



Interfaith

Network

Our Ways of Knowing and Dialoguing

Theologies and Religious Wisdoms

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Part 1 - Introductory matters

1) Introduction

The goal of this document is to present a first draft of the conclusions and recommendations reached by Group 2 during its discussions and debates during the GIN-SSOGIE Conference in South Africa in January 2014. The 16 people of Group 2 come from very diverse backgrounds, from every corner of the globe and represent many different faiths and sexes, sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions.

In order to build what we believe could be the framework for further debate we divided our discussions around three major elements, which we understand are interconnected: *Foundations, Knowledge and Educational processes.*

Those elements cannot be separated from the two main issues that are the grounding of this network:

- Interfaith (dialogue) (GIN)
- Sexes, Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities and Expressions (SSOGIE)

2) Intersectional issues: Common understandings

There are also some **intersectional concepts** (or basic commitments) that have to be considered in any theological or religious wisdom knowledge that are intertwined with those two grounding elements, or any other issues to be addressed, and with which the three elements of our ways of knowing cannot be disconnected.

2.1) Power: Any discussion, action and/or conceptualization cannot be accomplished outside of established power relations. This does not mean that power is negative, but it can be and is used to oppress, exclude, marginalize, and commit violence against individuals or groups. These kinds of (unequal and unjust) power relations can be based, for example, on wealth, force, intellectual elitism, even within religious traditions. So, this network seeks to overcome power relations and dynamics that are used in this way and seeks to build power relations and dynamics that enable equal participation in the process of decision making over one's own life and as communities, leading to justice.

2.2) Justice: Although justice can be understood from several different perspectives and in several different traditions (Shalom, Sumak Kawsay, Human Rights Declaration), in this context we understand it broadly as recognition, integration, full participation and access to the means of production and reproduction of life (human, natural, spiritual), based on and guaranteeing peaceful and loving relations between all.

2.3) Language: We understand that language (and/or the means of communication in a broader sense) is key to establishing just and equal relations. The construction of language patterns is a creative and ongoing process that expresses the ways in which we view and understand the world collectively. Language can mask and promote unjust and unequal relations, especially

when used to refer to so-called norms and identities. With this this knowledge in mind, we seek to use and create the most inclusive possible ways of expressing ourselves, acknowledging that no words, concepts or symbols are able to encompass the fullness of any given reality, having to be permanently discussed and evaluated. On the other hand, we understand that different audiences require different linguistic codes in order to establish a more effective communication creating space for dialogue.

2.4) Dialogue: As will become clear along later in this document, dialogue is central: from the way we design it to the ways we believe it should be applied. Dialogue implies: being truthful; move beyond our own borders; seek first to understand; become well informed and celebrate the gift of diversity. We believe that all theological or religious wisdom knowledge production related to interfaith processes and sexes, sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions have to be based on dialogue.

2.5) Love: Is another complex word that can be and is misused in several ways. Despite this, we believe that it is necessary to claim Love as one of our intersectional issues (or commitments) because it resonates in many of the religious traditions (if not all) as the ultimate expression of relations that are built on power equality, justice for all, inclusive language and ongoing dialogue.

3) Three Elements for Working With Theologies and Religious Wisdoms

The following presents what we understand of each of those elements, some examples and how they should work within the context of GIN-SSOGIE.

3.1) Foundations

All religious traditions are built on foundations that base their teachings and practices and can be defined or summarized in three different ways.

3.1.1) Scriptures, Sacred Texts, and Wisdoms: where religious traditions base “ultimately” their teachings and practices.

3.1.2) Traditions: how religious traditions have used/developed/interpreted/managed the scriptures/sacred texts/wisdoms in different historical contexts.

3.1.3) Experiences: the reality we are formed in as embodied persons and what, how, and in which context do we interpret/reason about it.

3.2) Knowledge

Considering the foundations of the different religious traditions and understanding that each of them develops their own ways of knowing (epistemology) and handling their sources, it is important for GIN-SSOGIE to reflect upon different epistemologies available and set principles that we understand could be used in interfaith dialogue on sexes, sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions.

3.3) Educational Processes

Foundations and knowledges are not relevant if they do not become concrete teachings and practices communicated through educational processes. The same way, in the context of interfaith dialogue on sexes, sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions, GIN-

SSOGIE will develop educational processes that have specific subject targets, are expressed through different curricula and put in practice considering different methods and methodologies to transform religious traditions, affect public policies and be a support to people of all sexes, sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions in their personal and communal struggles.

Although the language and examples given so far are far from the myriad available and that we seek to make visible, this is a first step in mapping the tasks we have ahead of us. In the following, there are some more extended and reflected examples.

Part 2 - Deepening our Understandings

1) Foundations

1.1) Scriptures/Sacred Texts/Wisdoms

The key issues to be dealt with are the assumptions of some religious traditions that scriptures, sacred texts and forms of religious wisdom are eternal, immutable, non-negotiable, non-interpretable. In the following, some examples that were brought forward in the discussions and that will have to be looked at more carefully and thoroughly.

SHASTRA (Hinduism); Torah (written); Talmud (oral); Bible; Mahabharata, Ramayana, DaoDejing (Daoism); Tripitak, Qur'an, The four books (Confucianism) Hadith, Vedas, Book of Spirits (Spiritism/Kardec), The Heart Sutra (Buddhism); songs; dances; myths/mythology; "literature"; oral history (to be continued...)

1.2) Traditions

Tradition is always related to history. It refers to the different answers given in different times and places to religious questions. Some issues to be dealt with here are how something becomes a tradition and who has the power to define what is true tradition and how it should be understood, and how or if we can expand our notions of traditions and recuperate traditions that were lost. So far we didn't look at specific traditions from the various religions, although some examples have been given, but mostly issues related to how to deal with them, as follows:

Interpretation; syncretism; hybridity, pluralism, colonization, appropriation/recreation; in process/in construction; teachings, people, alternative/institutional/official, human rights (Yogyakarta principles), diversity within, "secular" traditions (to be continued...)

1.3) Experiences

There is a great discussion on how experience is part of theological- and religious wisdom-knowledge production. It is certain (even though denied by some) that experience is always part of any kind of knowledge production, in the sense that we cannot understand anything without its context (cultural, political, economic, religious and identity policies).

In this sense, we advocate for the understanding that all knowledge is embodied, which means including all dimensions of existence and relation, going beyond the classical dichotomies and binaries that structure most of western knowledge (thinking) in opposites (sets of 2). So, experiences relate to all the elements that form us as individuals and communities, not judging

previously what kind of experience count and which should be left out. In the following, some examples of what shapes our experiences, coming from the group discussion:

Social institutions, rites/rituals, social (sciences), cultures, pain, pleasure, family, media/pop culture/cultural experiences, lesbo/homo/transphobia, sexual desire, economics, politics, fait/interfaith, religion, environment (local, society, creation), class, nature, pathologization, school/education, sexual and gendered beings, genetics, citizenship, heteronormativity, marriage, cross-dressing, anonymous sex, bars and saunas, cruising, embodiment (to be continued...)

Specific experiences/traditions coming from the queer/LGBIQ communities were also mentioned: Hijra, Berdache (Two Spirited), Aravani, Fafafini, Tumtum...

We understand that this initial mapping gives the wider picture of the materials we have to handle in each religious tradition and as an interfaith network, making it clear that there is a myriad of understandings that somehow we will have to be familiarized with and take into account of when building our acting strategies, including our ways of producing knowledge and educational processes, regarding interfaith dialogue for people of all sexes, sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions.

2) Knowledge

Some elements related to knowledge discussed in the group

Accepting diversity, dialogue, recognition, mutuality/accountability, provided that it doesn't contravene basic human/sexually and gendered diverse (dignity) rights; individual/communal processes; love; telling stories, rules, interpretation, patriarchy, context, journey, process, historical criticism (to be continued...)

Considering the discussion, five basic epistemological principles that should be taken in account when producing materials and making available materials already produced by other people, organizations, institutions, communities were proposed.

2.1) Principles

2.1.1) The Importance of Embodied Experiences: To consider the embodied experiences of people of all sexes, sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions (now and in history) in all debates and policies regarding their lives, human rights and dignity.

2.1.2) Historical and Contextual Issues: To recognize that scriptures, sacred texts, religious wisdoms and traditions are historically situated and should be dealt with considering contextual issues (past, present and future).

2.1.3) Resistance and Subversive Traditions: To consider sources and traditions that have been lost, made invisible, destroyed, manipulated (etc.) – resistance and subversive traditions -, and also the traditions that are being built in our current contexts.

2.1.4) The use of all available knowledges: To take into account all available knowledges, especially those normally not acknowledged by normative and imperialistic epistemologies

(subaltern knowledges), their contributions to our understanding of religious sources, traditions and experiences, being aware that all knowledge (“science”) is historically situated (produced in a specific time, under certain circumstances and according to who has access to the objective and subjective conditions to produce it).

2.1.5) The reality of oppressive systems and relations: To recognize that patriarchy, racism, misogyny, homo/lesbo/trans/intersex/phobia, exploitative political and economic policies or systems, competition, sexism, anti-Semitism, colonialism, imperialism, violence, heterosexism, class, war and other oppressive systems and relations are not just part of our current reality, but have been historically constructed and structured, creating unequal and unjust relations, and that in the construing of those systems religious traditions where many times part and/or responsible for the conceptual and practical grounding of those systems, and that those systems and relations have to be overcome in order for justice to become reality.

3) Educational processes

We understand that educational processes are fundamental for the social transformation we envision as people of faith and/or engaged with religious issues. Considering the religious foundations in play and the epistemological (Knowledge production) principles set above, we addressed three issues:

3.1) Subjects: It is necessary to engage all people in those processes at some point. But for the purpose of the organization and action of GIN-SSOGIE, we defined four different target groups (presented in the following in a prioritizing order):

3.1.1) Ourselves: GIN members and LGBTIQ community

3.1.2) Communities: Faith-based and base/grassroots groups, organizations/institutions

3.1.3) Policy Makers and Civil Servants: local, regional, national, international

3.1.4) Professionals: in all areas (“media”)

3.2) Curricula: Different contents/themes/issues and how they are approached have to be considered in any form of curriculum to be developed for/with the different subjects considering their specific contexts, specifically in terms of cultures, but also context of action and assumed power. Some contents/themes/issues were raised in the group:

Internalized homo/lesbo/trans/intersexphobia; awareness and sensitivity training; stigma; rejection; up-down information exchange (and vice-versa); laws; family; sexuality and gender (in a diversity perspective) HIV, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; religious foundations, traditions and experiences (related to sexually and gendered diverse people); affection; eroticism; advocacy and lobby (to be continued...)

3.3) Methods and Methodologies: Directly connected to the subjects and the curricula is the issue of method and methodology, meaning the ways, formats, pedagogical practices, use of materials that are to be used in order to meet our goals. Some methods and methodologies were already mentioned:

Popular education (see-judge-act and/or action/reflection/action); edutainment/infotainment; creative; ethnography; participatory observation, hermeneutics of suspicion, hermeneutics of memory, cruising, phenomenology (to be continued...)

Finally, we also understand that the educational processes to be constructed, offered, suggested, applied, have to consider different levels (general education; theological training) and systems (formal, non-formal and in-formal education).

We do understand that GIN-SSOGIE will be responsible for constructing or applying it only through its members, but, considering that a lot of materials in this area have been already produced, the main goal is to offer and suggest such processes to any person or group interested, but focusing on the target groups and the priorities set above.

Conclusion

We decided to develop our process around these three elements because we understand that no theological, academic, scriptural or scholarship answers or proposals will be possible to be reached to address the issues at stake if we don't deal with them separately and at the same time interconnectedly. All religious traditions have sources on which they rely on, have different ways of producing knowledge about them and transmitting teachings and practices to/by their believers. This is also true when it comes to issues of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Understanding how those elements are dealt with in different religious traditions and in our own religious/spiritual experiences as people of all sexes, sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions will help us to find ways to dialogue among ourselves, with the different religious institutions, with government and policy makers, in academic settings, but mainly with people at a base/grassroots level (whether we are affiliated or not with any specific religious tradition). This way, we believe that the understanding of those elements have to be expanded and deepened, not losing sight of issues of power, our commitment to justice and the use of inclusive language to dialogue in love with people on all levels.

With this framework set, it will be possible to get into more specific issues that emerge from people of all sexes, sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions daily efforts to stay alive and make the most of it in societies that many times do not recognize ourselves as true citizens and also in religious institutions who deny our existence and dignity through different diabolic practices and interfere in the recognition of our human rights.