



INTRODUCTION TO THE DOSSIER

Religious discourses on sex, violence and gender: emerging voices from the global south

“Reading and interpretation presents problems when we do not see ourselves in the text. There are problems too, when we do see ourselves but can barely recognize ourselves through representation.”¹ (Carla Wilson, 2001).

The realities of the Global South have frequently been interpreted and narrated through a Western worldview. This approach often results in narratives that fail to capture the contextual complexities and lived experiences of the South accurately, as they are conveyed through perspectives that need to fully comprehend the intricacies of the issues at hand. This phenomenon is rooted in the pervasive belief that the South cannot articulate its own stories, a belief perpetuated by a deeply entrenched Western worldview. This process can be seen as a continuation of the colonial mindset, where "people and places are relegated to the boundaries of the usual, the edges of normal, the blurry side of comfortable," and are consequently perceived as the 'Other' in contrast to the idealized North². This problematic conceptualization of the Global South often results in a distorted self-image, where the people of the South struggle to recognize their own identities within the imposed narrative.

This ideology has historically silenced the Global South, oppressing bodies that carry rich voices — voices deeply rooted in various cultural and religious traditions, expressed through a diverse array of languages and knowledge systems. By only recognising the epistemological contributions of the North, this oppressive notion has pushed the people of the South to the periphery, effectively erasing their perspectives and wisdom from the global narrative. However, this landscape is shifting, as the South

¹ WILSON, Carla. Decolonizing Methodologies: research and indigenous peoples. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 214-218, 2001, p. 37.

² BISHOP, Sara S. V. Hospitality, Othering, and the Infinity of Worlds. In: HAVEA, Jione (Org.). *Bordered Bodies, Bothered Voices: Native and Migrant Theologies*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022, p. 66-72.



increasingly reclaims and asserts its voice on the global stage. Jione Havea (2022)³ asserts that "we must learn to sit and listen with respect, to all the voices, we must also listen to the still, small voices in the silences," carrying their narratives and reflecting experiences, that are distinctly their own and rooted in specific contexts. These contexts are intricately inscribed on the body, shaped by indigenous practices, cultural norms, traditions, and religious beliefs. These narratives are conveyed through the South's unique languages and worldviews, offering a rich, alternative perspective that challenges the dominance of Northern epistemologies.

This is an act of resistance and a process of decolonization, wherein the bodies of the Global South are beginning to tell their own stories, drawing from their lived realities - realities that have long been dismissed as inadequate, uninformed, or substandard, and relegated to the margins of academic excellence. Through the production of knowledge emerging from the South, a disruption of entrenched knowledge systems within the religious space is occurring, particularly concerning gender, sexuality, and power dynamics. This disruption is shaped by contextual understandings of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and masculinity, challenging the traditional narratives that have dominated these discourses. As Jione Havea, (2022)⁴ rightly observes, "listening to and learning the story of the 'Other' must be an intentional part of life." The Global South is actively redefining itself, purposefully sharing alternative narratives that provide a true representation of their identities—narratives they can finally recognize and claim as their own. This process of self-definition is not solitary; it is a collaborative effort by the Global South, a collective journey of becoming, where the South is taking ownership of its narratives and refusing to be spoken for by others.

This dossier is therefore the result of South-South concerns and engagements with the possibilities and challenges of developing critical reflections that stand in rupture with restrictive and violent perspectives on religion, especially in terms of gender and sexuality. We emphasize that the Global South refers not only to a geographical reference but above all to a category that encompasses historically

³ HAVEA, Jione (Org.). *Bordered Bodies, Bothered Voices: Native and Migrant Theologies*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022, p.62.

⁴ HAVEA, Jione (Org.). *Bordered Bodies, Bothered Voices: Native and Migrant Theologies*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022, p. 63.



marginalized experiences of power and knowledge. Dialogue between the various perspectives that the diversity of the Global South evokes can reveal how religion can and has been both a source of violence and a means of resistance and resilience. By examining the connection between religion and violence, we seek to highlight the nuances and complexities that are often simplified in dominant discourses and to expose the pervasive systemic nature of hetero-patriarchy that finds expression through the exclusion and othering of bodies. In doing so, we also aim to reveal the complexities of power that inform the experiences of the Global South within religious discourse, at the foundation of our realities.

In the Humanities and Social Sciences, and especially in Theology and Religious Studies, researchers from the Global South began to ask who had been doing it, why and from which theoretical and methodological perspectives. In this exercise, it was identified that there is a predominance of Eurocentric, hetero-patriarchal and normative worldviews, which have valued privileged experiences of power and knowledge and guaranteed the maintenance of inequalities, exclusion and silencing of the peoples and communities of Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. In academia, the voices of dissident researchers are often not heard because they are seen as categorically “other” and systematically limited in terms of language and theoretical perspective. As previously noted, it is important to emphasise, that this is an idea that is informed and reinforced by a history of colonization and the belief that only the academic thoughts and writings of the Western view meet the standards of excellence regarding this matter, which leaves the “other” voices at the limits of knowledge production.

In contrast to this kind of view, our effort has focused on bringing to light investigations that are committed to decoloniality and that, more than just deconstructing hegemonic readings, are also committed to reconstructing other possibilities for religion, sex and gender. A common feature of this kind of work is the valorization of histories and knowledge that, although often marginalized, offers a rich and indispensable vision for a contextual and diverse understanding of religion. It is worth emphasizing that we assume that all language is a contextual language because it is enunciated and articulated based on meanings specific to the experience of its signifier. In this sense, theological discourse itself is used as one of the languages



through which religion is elaborated, and which, when challenged, can be an interesting and contradictory tool that can both render invisible and also make visible the most diverse contradictions that run through people's bodies, genders and experiences. Through an interdisciplinary approach, we bring together contributions from Religious Studies, Theology and Queer studies, to question and expand traditional understandings of religion and violence.

The articles included in this dossier offer a critical analysis of how religious narratives interact with different aspects of power, identity and difference. In addition, they address how the intersectionality of race, gender and sexuality influence these interactions, often exacerbating or mitigating violence. Kisiang'ani argues that "A major stereotype, and one whose longevity and perseverance seem to override any contradiction, is that the - Global South - is static, unchanged since the Stone Age because - the inhabitants of this geographical area - have neither creativity nor desire to bring about change"⁵. These articles challenge this reductive view by demonstrating how the Global South is, in fact, dynamic and deeply engaged in reinterpreting and resisting the power structures embedded within religious narratives.

We hope that this volume and the articles it contains will continue to inspire and contribute to an ever deeper and more nuanced dialogue on the intersections between religion, sex, violence and gender in the context of the Global South.

Have a great read!

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⁵KISIANG'ANI, Edward Namisiko Waswa. Decolonising gender studies in Africa. In: AFRICAN gender scholarship: Concepts, methodologies and paradigms, 2004, p. 24-36.



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