



'FAMILY AND TRADITIONAL VALUES'
Seminar Series

REPORT

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The Global Interfaith Network
2021

'We recognize that a whole range of individuals and families, including LGBTIQ families, have been excluded from the definition of 'natural family' promoted by certain religious groups in social and political contexts, locally, regionally, and internationally. This impact is not only negative for certain individuals and communities, but it is also harmful to everyone of us and to our traditional values and national cultures.' (Silom Manifesto)

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INTRODUCTION

The issues that cross intersect the agenda of LGBTIQ people in local, regional, and international arenas, including the United Nations, are often framed by the idea of family and traditional values. The polysemy and politicization of this concept increases the dispute over the definition of family. After all, what is family? Today, some anti-rights actors attempt to define it in limited, static and heteronormative terms. Yet, in a world that claims to be increasingly diverse and plural, would it still be possible to establish limits to what a family is and how it is organized? How do the rainbow families, mosaic families, and diverse families place themselves in this debate? To answer these and so many other questions, The Global Interfaith Network For People of All Sexes, Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions (GIN-SSOGIE) organized 7 regional seminars in its series entitled 'Family and Traditional Values'. These seminars were held from 2017 through 2020. Due to the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic, the seminars held in 2020 were all done online. All 7 meetings brought together

more than 100 activists, scholars, and human rights advocates from almost 50 different countries. The seminar series provided a platform for LGBTIQ people of diverse faith communities to share their experiences and perspectives in order to show, and give voice to the diversity of faith-based perspectives on gender, sexuality, and family that exist across regions.

From the seminar series, GIN-SSOGIE is working on developing resources that highlight the diversity of faith-based perspectives about family in lived realities and locally grounded faith-based knowledge. These contextual counterarguments aim at better equipping civil society organisations (CSOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), political, diplomatic and religious leaders, to address distortions of 'traditional family values', and provide a resource for activists showing the role of faith and family within efforts to achieve sexual orientation, gender identity or expression equality, and rights.



Long-term strategy

This project is part of a wider strategy for GIN-SSOGIE to:

1. Produce research: Help to reclaim the concept of the family and promote it at regional and global levels, including within the UN arena;
2. Carry out training: Use the output produced for training the GIN-SSOGIE Speakers Bureau;
3. Further advocacy: Support advocacy work at regional and international events, including within the UN space.

Direct Project Deliverables

As a result of the seminars, GIN-SSOGIE hopes to:

- Produce thoughtful, vetted, and regionally grounded content (i.e., speaking to specific cultures and peoples, especially in the Global South) that empowers faith-based and secular politicians, public leaders, and NGOs to better understand and engage with LGBTIQ people and communities of faith.
- Use / share content with our colleagues and members at the local level and within the United Nations so they can be better equipped to neutralize and navigate the Religious Right's 'Family and Traditional Values' framework;
- Provide a Safe Space for LGBTIQ people of faith to share without fear of reprisal and or recrimination;
- Gather concrete examples of how shared experiences offer different, more inclusive and accepting realities for LGBTIQ people of faith.

From the seminar series, GIN-SSOGIE organized this report that aims to make visible the main issues that were raised in the debates and provide important information for possible strategies against the discourses that are contrary to the experiences of LGBTIQ families and values. To do so, first, the report will briefly present the seminars, pointing out some of the main issues and ways forward that were addressed by the participants. Afterwards, an analysis will be made from a decolonial perspective of what was discussed, which will result in a glossary of essential topics for the debate. Finally, some next steps will be suggested for strengthening initiatives to recognize families and the values of LGBTIQ people.

ABOUT THE SEMINARS



Each of the dialogues became a courageous conversation. The participants shared, with their open hearts, the different contexts in which family and traditional values affect their cultures, their society and LGBTIQ communities in their contexts. There was representation from different countries, religious affiliations, backgrounds (including academics, researchers, theologians, social movement leaders, religious leaders), along with LGBTIQ representation, which reflected on the challenges of addressing religious fundamentalism within regional contexts.

The design of the dialogues involved the asking of strategic questions, allowing people to reflect upon and explore their current realities. Each region had questions culturally adapted to better explore the unique challenges in each context. Each dialogue was developed and coordinated through a series of preparatory conversations with people in each region. This participatory process ensured that the dialogues would engage with lived realities and that persons from each region felt fully represented. Having a local anchor organisation/groups of GIN partners facilitating the dialogue was a key factor in the success of the seminars.

The contexts of each region are very different, but common experiences and reflections emerged through the seminars: different LGBTIQ people need to find safe spaces to be protected from the forms of precarity and violence they are subjected to, and religion has an important role in challenging this exclusionary structure. It is for these reasons that it was essential that the discussions and perspectives emerge from the context of faith communities, defending the rights of, and the struggle for equality among all people.

After the dialogues, public statements/declarations/manifestos were also produced by the participants with the support of the GIN Secretariat with the intention of affirming the main points raised in the dialogues. These statements have resulted in the publication of official GIN-SSOGIE documents that reflect these reports and provide affirmative messaging for LGBTIQ communities in these regional contexts. The statements can be signed (directly on the webpages) and used by researchers looking for official documents, providing a basis for official reports in public institutions such as the UN or regional organizations of states.

Each historic statement/declaration/manifesto provides an analysis of the region and an in-depth understanding of how the promotion of 'Traditional Family Values' must take into consideration the true, diverse nature of the cultural context of the region. This information is important not only for developing the next steps that we will take in these territories as GIN-SSOGIE, but also for partner organizations that will have access to the understanding of the situation in each context.

During the seminars, the attendees reclaimed their own traditions, spaces, the right to express their faith and the right of being and expressing who they are – LGBTIQ and people of faith. As the Eastern and Central Europe, with Central Asia Joint Declaration affirms:

'The gathering sought to reclaim and affirm the diversity of families in the regions, which also include the families of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people and to promote and defend these families locally, regionally and internationally'.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



This seminar was held in Johannesburg, South Africa on February 19-21, 2018, with 23 participants from 10 different countries.

Key messages of the Seminar

- The family has always been more than biology, both historically and in the Sacred Texts;
- Family diversity, both in the past and in present times, must be recognized and honored;
- The natural African family was attacked and undermined by colonialism, Christianization and Wahabization, and now is under attack from the extreme religious right; and these are, in fact, the forces from which the institution of the family requires protection;
- Sexual diversity tolerance is a part of African history and tradition;
- In African traditions, sexual difference has never been a reason for exclusion from family and community life. On the contrary, those with sexual differences were generally historically revered and considered to have special powers;
- Religious freedom and freedom of consciousness is a fundamental human right that applies to all people, including LGBTIQ people, and we claim the right to practice faith in a way that affirms life, both for us and for others;

- Any religion that does not promote love, understanding and compassion is lacking and not useful;
- The practices of faiths expressions should be guided by the spirit of Ubuntu and unconditional love.

'The natural African family was attacked and undermined by colonialism, Christianity and Wahabization, and now is under attack from the extreme religious right; and these are in fact, the forces from which the institution of the family requires protection.' (Johannesburg Declaration)

The seminar's discussion raised some strategies to protect diverse families, such as the reclaiming of faith and culture to question the concept not only of family but also of sovereignty. In the context of the recognition of diverse families, the concept of national sovereignty is being used to cover human rights violations against the plurality of family formation. States are pushing back against international interference by asserting their sovereignty. According to the discussions, countering hate speech requires the use of 'do not harm' as a core life-affirming principle.

Joint Declaration: [Johannesburg Declaration](#)

¹ See: [Origins and Doctrines of Wahhabism](#) ([learnreligions.com](#)).

SOUTH EAST ASIA

This seminar was held in Bangkok, Thailand on November 20-22, 2018, with 20 participants from 11 different countries.

Key messages of the Seminar

- It is important to highlight the life-threatening impact of the discrimination and exclusion on communities, especially the most vulnerable people including children, single mothers, widows and LGBTIQ people;
- There are intersecting impacts of stigma and exclusion on LGBTIQ people including access to education and health, economic productivity, and employment;
- Discrimination and violence happen within states, also led by some state representatives, justified on the basis of the defense of national interest- that considers LGBTIQ against the national interest;
- The concept of Traditional Values are not merely a few decades old but go as far back as pre-colonial notions of tradition;
- Many of the more discriminatory interpretations of various sacred texts are strongly influenced by heteropatriarchal and male dominated religious structures;
- The international human rights system must respect all nations equally, and these same nations must respect everyone's rights, values, opinions and faiths, including the communities and families which individuals choose to build and be part of.

'We need to anchor politics in the lived realities of all human beings and in the values that guarantee the life, dignity, and sanctity of all human beings. For this purpose, we must continue decolonizing our thinking and approaches.' (Silom Manifesto)

The discussions at the seminar showed it is essential to defend indigenous culture and its diversity by confronting the rights violations against diverse families. Reclaiming diverse families includes reclaiming family along with faith and religious traditions. These processes can together foster tolerance, dignity and inclusion. When discussing traditional values today, it is important to define them as values that affirm the dignity of human beings and their right to form bonds of union based on love, consent, and mutually nourishing goals.

Joint Declaration: [Silom Manifesto](#)



LATIN AMERICA

PACIFIC



This seminar was held in São Leopoldo, Brazil on August 12-14, 2019, with 17 participants from 7 different countries.

Key messages of the Seminar

- The concept of Traditional Family has been used as a political weapon of exclusion and marginalization for our families in the region;
- Other types of families as well as their survival strategies have been criminalized, invisibilized, and systematically excluded from dignified citizenship, denying them all the rights to which they are entitled, by taking the notion of Traditional Family as a hegemonic model of family relations;
- Every constituted family is worthy of dignity, and the laws of the states must recognize any act of common agreement between adults in any family constitution;
- In theological terms, the Divine is diverse. The diversity of Divinity/ies and spiritualities is reflected in the human diversity that includes LGBTIQ people;
- Regarding the LGBTIQ population, the religious fundamentalist sectors have used a weak and

irresponsible reading and interpretation of the Sacred Texts, which has been cis-hetero-patriarchal;

- All theology or all God-talk is also a political act.

'All Rights for All People!' (São Leopoldo Declaration)

The seminar's discussions have raised important strategies to fight against the false notion of 'gender ideology', such as the recognition of the importance of the discourse and dispute over science. It is also essential to promote the dialogue between liberation Christianity and other religions, feminists, and social, urban, and rural movements, the different and transversal movements of sexual-gender diversity people and religions, and the Native movements of the region, in order to multiply possibilities when planning strategies. This rich dialogue can promote the search and the struggle for an economic and social model that frees humanity, rather than enslaving or killing it slowly with self-destructive social dynamics.

Joint Declaration: [São Leopoldo Declaration](#)

This seminar was held online on September 23, 2020, with 16 participants from 11 different countries.

Key messages of the Seminar

- It is fundamental to look at the long-term history of the different cultures in the Pacific context and their family forms before colonization;
- Culture and tradition support a wide diversity in family structures;
- The model of families of the Pacific culture is based on community, which is more important than biological relationships and has always been a central point to the social relations in the Pacific;
- Language is central to the lives of all human beings and is an important element in the whole construction of family traditional values, because embedded in the language is the diverse understanding of family;
- It is important to value indigenous cultures, and expose the restrictive colonial definition of family.

'It is not about what I can as an individual subject, but about what we can as a community.' (Pasefika Declaration)

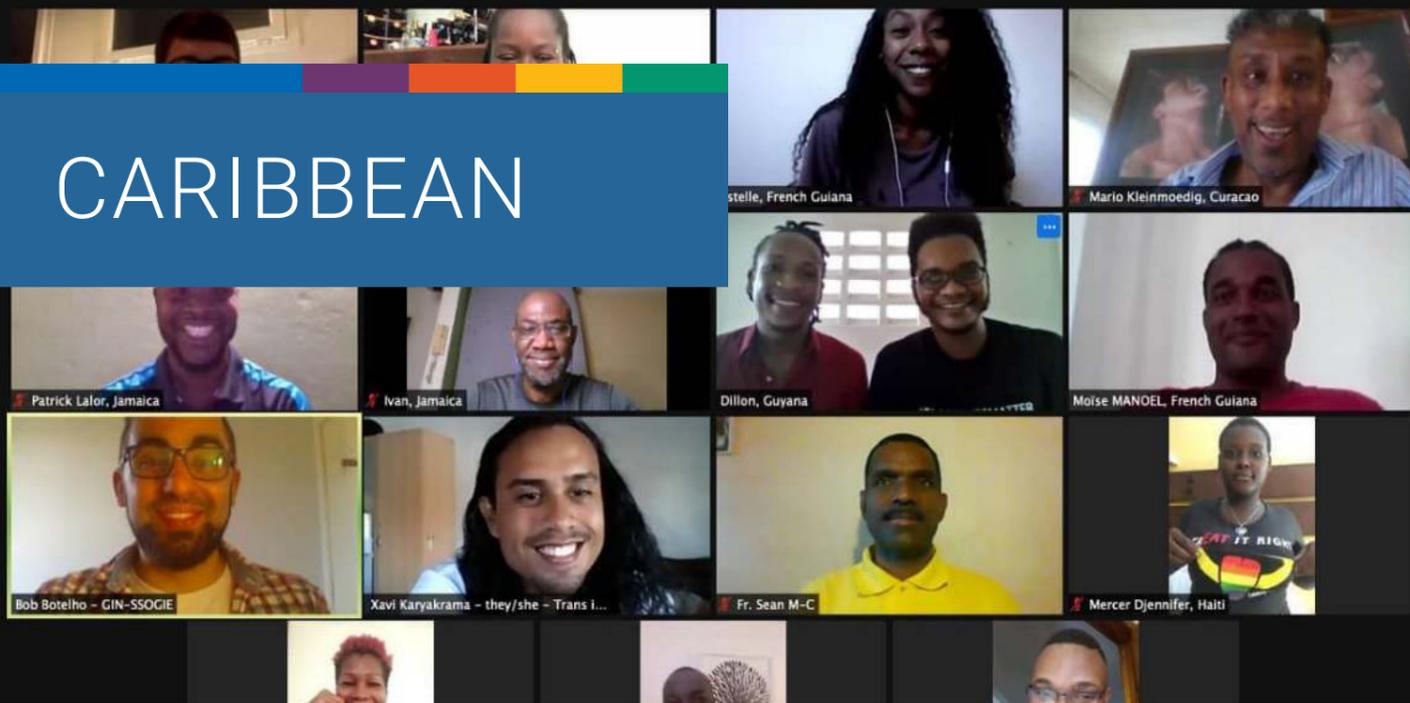
The Pacific Seminar showed the importance of emphasizing and highlighting kinship and family within Native cultures as a strategy to expose the belief systems that were imposed by colonization. The recognition of family, gender and sexuality diversity in pre-colonial history can be a means

of reclaiming LGBTIQ diversity within indigenous histories and countering the colonial notion that the nuclear family model is the only legitimate form of kinship. By rediscovering LGBTIQ diversity within indigenous history, the indigenous culture can also be valued. Another important strategy is the role of the church in this context, including for opening its doors to LGBTIQ communities.

Joint Declaration: Pasefika Declaration (to be published online soon before end of 2021)



CARIBBEAN



This seminar was held online on October 10-11, 2020, with 19 participants from 11 different countries.

Key messages of the Seminar

- It is important to recognize the exclusion of LGBTIQ families within current Caribbean societies;
- There is a life-threatening impact of the discrimination and exclusion, with implicit permission to kill sexual minorities;
- It is crucial to understand the historical, geographical and political framework of colonization, which has been firmly entrenched by seventeenth-century Christianity;
- The Christian hegemony and the colonial imposition of the nuclear family model cannot be ignored;
- It is necessary to understand the oppression created by colonization taking into consideration the complexity of the colonial norms, such as those around sex and gender.

'We no longer accept the exclusion of the LGBTIQ community from the concepts of family and traditional values and we are reclaiming these values for all members of the community.' (Caribbean Declaration)

The seminar highlighted the importance of challenging the logic of LGBTIQ family isolation and discrimination which is an instrument to maintain the structure of exclusion. To do so, one way would be to establish a partnership between religious leaders and LGBTIQ people, for example creating programs where the Bible is taught in a way that LGBTIQ can defend themselves. It is also essential to focus the work on not promoting any kind of specific behavior, but on reducing stigma, discrimination and violence.

Joint Declaration: Caribbean Declaration (to be published online soon before end of 2021)

EASTERN & CENTRAL EUROPE, WITH CENTRAL ASIA

This seminar was held online on November 28-29, 2020, with 18 participants from 12 different countries.

Key messages of the Seminar

- Family is based on love, compassion, trust, alliance, solidarity, not on laws or religion;
- The restrictive definition of family has been allied with religion for political gains;
- To be religious and to be LGBTIQ is not mutually exclusive and the promotion of this idea harms LGBTIQ people and their spirituality;
- Traditional values are a result of special political rhetoric and social construction, with strong roles of the State, the Media and the Church;
- Human Rights should not be understood as a zero-sum conflict, but make the life of individuals and society as a whole, better.

'I believe mutual love, respect, support and care for their wellbeing – this is what makes a family.' (Eastern and Central Europe, with Central Asia Joint Declaration)

The seminar came up with strategies based on education and the creation of safe spaces. Education and information about religion, sacred texts and doctrines is essential to support the idea of diversity. Safe spaces are fundamental to promote dialogue, learning and support.

Joint Declaration: Eastern and Central Europe, with Central Asia Joint Statement (to be published online soon before end of 2021)



MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA (MENA) PREPARATORY ONLINE MEETING

This seminar was held online on December 14 and 16, 2020, with 18 participants from 11 different countries. It was framed as a preparatory meeting for future upcoming seminar(s) on the issue of family and traditional values, as agreed with the participants from the region. It was also agreed that no official declaration would be published as a result of this preparatory meeting.

Key messages of the Seminar

- Colonialism is a reality, which has worked to erase pre-colonial cultures, replacing them with the beliefs and prejudices of the colonizers;
- The social context is extremely conservative, based on the acceptance of colonial values;
- Religion is connected to daily practices and therefore is ever-present in society;

- Religion and the State work together against LGBTIQ people, making the formation of LGBTIQ families difficult;
- The media is a weapon used against LGBTIQ people and to maintain intolerance.

'The 'garage' is open (not only the door) for further discussions!' (MENA preparatory meeting)

According to the discussions, the queer movement should be an opposition movement, reclaiming identities and organizing its community to have representation in the media. In this process, it is important to recognize the role of youth and the internet to protect LGBTIQ people.

FAMILY, TRADITIONAL VALUES & COLONIALITY

continues

also revealed the continued impact of the Global North on political landscapes in the Global South and East to this day. And, as a reaction to that impact, the Silom Manifesto affirms:

'We need to anchor politics in the lived realities of all human beings and in the values that guarantee the life, dignity, and sanctity of all human beings. For this purpose, we must continue decolonizing our thinking and approaches.'

The use of a postcolonial perspective not only exposes the impact of colonialism on a people's history, but it also shows how colonization is pervasive as an ongoing reality. In both situations, one of the ways in which colonial regimes of power and injustice continue is through the creation and reinforcement of ideas, concepts, and statements that limit the experience of life through categories that deny diversity. One example is the concept of family, which was a site of colonial conquest. As several scholars have shown, the idea of the 'nuclear family' functioned to impose Eurocentric social norms upon indigenous societies. Family has been

a category widely used to maintain the regulation of relationships and affections through what has been called cisheteronormativity. Within this system of sexed and gendered power relations that reproduce the gender binary and hierarchy, only one form of family is idealised and seen as legitimate: A 'nuclear family' that exclusively consists of one man and one woman who are legally married and their offspring. This definition of family disregards, invalidates, and erases countless other forms of familial relationships that have always existed across human societies.

The theme of the seminars, 'Family and Traditional Values', produced discussions centering on two different issues: what is family and what is traditional family. At first, one could assume the first issue would focus on the idea of 'the family' versus 'traditional values', because many arguments against LGBTIQ people are based on defending what is perceived as 'traditional' and 'natural'. But the discussions revealed that, not only is 'family' lived and reclaimed by LGBTIQ

² See: Anne Stoler; Anne McClintock, Haley McEwen, Oyeronke Oyewumi.

³ We refer to this term in this report as a system based on cisgender normativity and heteronormativity.

FAMILY, TRADITIONAL VALUES & COLONIALITY

The seminars occurred in different regional contexts, and even though they were based in different countries and contexts, all of them showed the impact of colonialism and imperialism on their realities. It is not the intention here to extensively explain the definitions of both terms, but it is strategically important to highlight the impact of History in contemporary political practices directed towards LGBTIQ people.

Throughout the seminars' discussions, it was possible to identify the impact of colonialism within contemporary perspectives relating to family and SOGIE. For example, for South Africans, Indians and Fijians it was the impact of British colonization, for Brazilians it was the Portuguese, for Haitians and Tunisians it was French colonization, and for Ukrainians it was the impact of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and continued imperialist tendencies of the Russian Federation. The debates



LGBTIQ people are themselves an integral part and producer of traditional values. This reclaiming asserts a postcolonial interpretation of ‘tradition’, re/reading long-term history, and acknowledging the cultural context before colonization. These discussions therefore surfaced not only a historically contextualised, but also a liberating interpretation, of traditional values.

This liberating perspective on ‘traditional family values’ exemplifies the importance of counternarratives against the claims of the LGBTIQ opponents, who have appropriated the notion of ‘traditional family values’ in a manner that excludes diverse families. One important way of articulating and asserting a liberating perspective on ‘traditional family values’ is through the creation of an affirming vocabulary that offers expanded understandings of ‘tradition’ and ‘family’ in ways that subvert the restrictive definitions being pronounced by anti-rights groups. Many different words and concepts were raised during the seminars. It is important to highlight some of them to understand the strategies of resistance that are being created and used by LGBTIQ communities of faith. As said by one participant in the Pacific Seminar:

‘Before Christianity, there were so many words referring to non-binary people in Melanesian and Polynesian languages: all those words

have not been shared by church and schools, so there is erasure of that culture’.

The vulnerability lived by most of LGBTIQ people can be a conducive context for creating new strategies that may build a world based on equal relationships, as the Pasefika Declaration indicates:

‘It is a fact that the LGBTIQ community has several challenges in the context of the Pacific Islands and that the fight for rights is necessary in our context today’.

Moreover, to reclaim the existence of LGBTIQ families and traditional values that recognize the historicity of the diverse and plural ways of being in the world, the activists, scholars, and human rights advocates who participated in the seminars brought important ‘key concepts’ that are fundamental in counternarratives to hate speech and conservatism.

To highlight the concepts that were used by the participants, the next topic will present a thematic glossary that is structured in two topics: the first is the recognition of the oppression against the families and values of LGBTIQ people, the second is the possibilities of counternarratives that could be used in public debates in favor of the rights of LGBTIQ people.

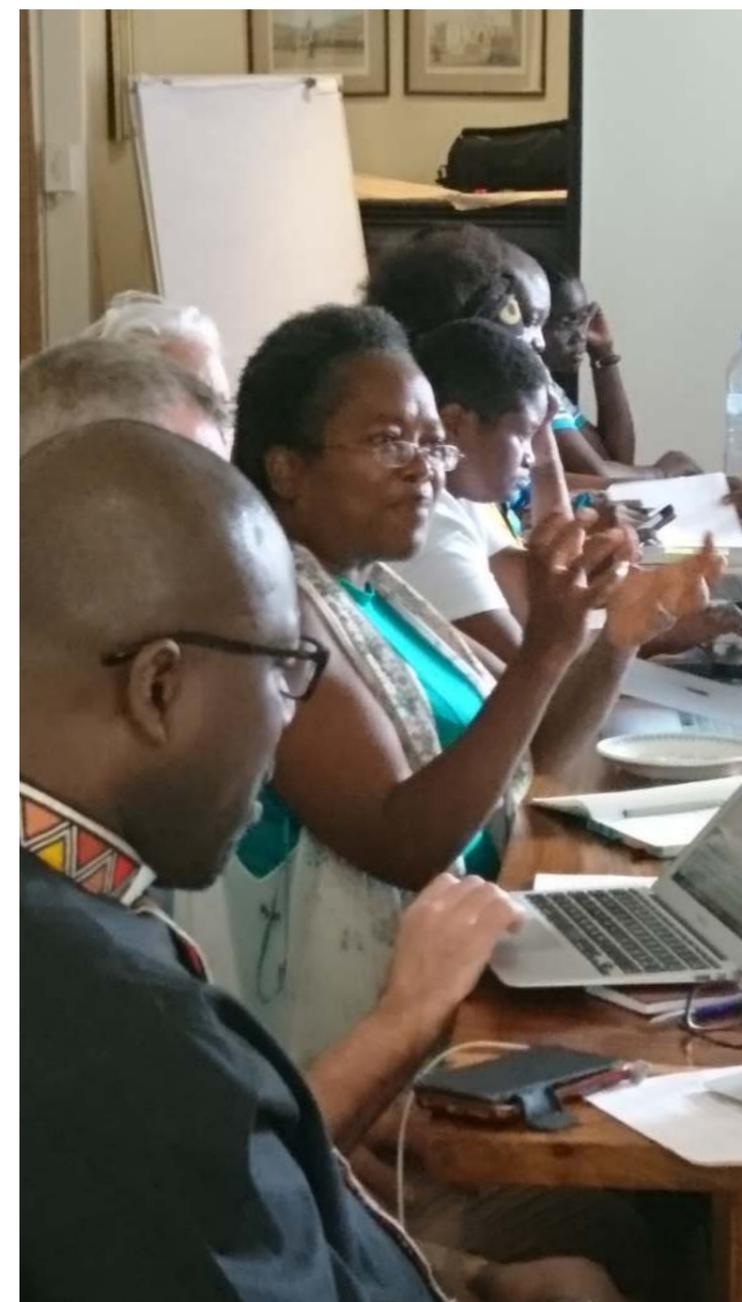


WORDS AND CONCEPTS - VOCALIZING STRATEGIES

‘Language is central to our lives and an important element in the whole construction of family traditional values. How individuals and relationships are named deeply influences power dynamics, or not. The language we use today does not necessarily correspond to what our ancestors used and how they regulated the notions of exchanges of affection and of relationship, which were deeply horizontal and anchored in shared responsibility and respect’.
(Pasefika Declaration)

The seminars were a safe space for LGBTIQ and allies to affirm the existence of diverse families and their values. From what was said by the participants, it is possible to infer that one of the words most used during the debates was to ‘reclaim’ – to reclaim identities, families, values, traditions, and religious experiences. These disputed concepts present themselves in the public arena through a very specific vocabulary, creating narratives that influence how society and governments act towards LGBTIQ people.

To recognize this vocabulary and use it in favor of the human rights struggles of LGBTIQ communities, below are two glossaries that summarize the concepts discussed by the participants in the seminars. The glossaries present definitions and quotes of what was said in the seminars and were endorsed by the statements/declarations/manifestos produced from them. The glossaries are in alphabetical order and are divided into two thematic blocks: 1) concepts used by discourses of oppression against LGBTIQ families and values; 2) concepts used by counternarratives in favor of recognizing and legitimizing diverse sex and gender experiences.



DOMINANT DISCOURSES

Colonization and Colonialism

According to the Pasefika Declaration,

‘Thinking about traditional values in the Pacific requires anchoring our reflection in a broad socio-historical and cultural process involving the impact of European colonization. [The] Pacific has been profoundly shaped by a strong infiltration of the culture of European colonizers.’

The trans activist Helena Vieira explains that colonization concerns the process of conquest or administrative, economic, and political domination of one territory over another territory, in a colony-metropolis relationship. Susan Bayly affirms that ‘it is widely agreed that modern empire produced unprecedented change and novelty, including massive and profoundly destructive material transformations, and the constitution of a new kind of person: a colonial subject with a ‘colonized mind’, painfully if never fully subordinated by the coercions and ‘othering’ effects of the colonizer’s power-knowledge’.

For the Caribbean Declaration the concept of ‘natural family’ cannot be separated from the history of the colonialism:

‘The promotion of religious messages based on the supposedly ‘natural family’ by certain religious groups in social and political contexts, locally and regionally has been extremely detrimental to human rights and social ties. This rests on a long history of colonialism, which has brought violence and discrimination against our people, including sexual and gender minorities.’

The effects of colonialism have outlived formal colonial administration. Decolonial theory offers

the term ‘coloniality’ to refer to the geopolitical power relations of Euroamerican dominance and exploitation that was established by colonial regimes, but which have endured despite the official dismantling of colonial administration. About this impact, the Johannesburg Declaration states

‘The natural African family was attacked and undermined by colonialism, Christianization and Wahabization, and now is under attack from the extreme religious right; and these are, in fact, the forces from which the institution of the family requires protection.’

The term was also referred as neo-colonialism, as in this quote from the Pasefika Declaration:

‘Today, we know that neo-colonialism is present and active in the entire structure of our society materializing in political relations, in the education system, in the media and in all the pillars that move and structure our societies.’

Family Ostracism

The debates in the seminars showed that many LGBTIQ people are expelled from their families because of their gender or sexuality. The Caribbean Declaration affirms that:

‘The issue of family ostracism is a central point throughout the Caribbean region, reflecting the current situation of ‘non-natural’ families and the different values regarding concepts of sexual diversity and gender. Family ostracism causes few LGBTIQ couples to be public.’

The same Declaration also explains that ‘family

4. Helena Vieira, class on Queer of Colour, 2020.

5. Susan Bayly, Colonialism/Postcolonialism, University of Cambridge, 2016. Available on: <https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/colonialism-postcolonialism>

ostracism is thus not only a consequence of the geographic economic, social and cultural situation, but also acts as a means and an instrument to maintain this structure of exclusion’.

Fundamentalism

In the context of the seminars, fundamentalism identifies practices and discourses of religion being used against a person or a group of people. Especially in context of the use of religion against LGBTIQ people, fundamentalism can be understood as synonymous with conservatism. As explained in the São Leopoldo Declaration

‘Regarding the LGBTIQ population, the religious fundamentalist sectors have used a weak and irresponsible reading and interpretation of the sacred texts, which has been [...] cis-hetero-patriarchal.’

For the Caribbean Declaration ‘the rise of conservatism and fundamentalism has given rise to enhanced discrimination and violence towards minority groups, including sexual and gender minorities’.

Gender Ideology

The São Leopoldo Declaration explains that ‘The notion of ‘gender ideology’ has, at its inception, the opposition to the proposals of the United Nations Conference on Population in Cairo in 1994 and the IV World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 carried out by conservative religious leaders. These leaders promoted the idea that these advances regarding women’s empowerment were ‘dangerous’ for the Traditional Family model. In 1994 the concept of the ‘gender agenda’ also emerged. That is, they presented social movements as destabilizing the social order due to the changes that transformed the logic of gender inequality. Subsequently, in 1997, these conservative sectors coined the notion of ‘gender ideology’ to pejoratively refer to women’s sexual and reproductive rights’.

The same Declaration affirms that ‘through the so-called ‘gender ideology’, political and religious

fundamentalist sectors have promoted a discrediting of the feminist movement, of women’s rights, and the LGBTIQ community’. The concept of the ‘gender ideology’ was used to identify the dominant discourses that are operating against LGBTIQ people, especially in Latin America.

National Protection, Security, and Sovereignty Narratives about national protection, security, and sovereignty are being used by some conservative interest groups to perpetuate forms of discrimination and injustice. In the context of the recognition of diverse families, the concept of national sovereignty is being used to cover human rights violation against the plurality of affective arrangements. National protection can be used as the basis for discrimination and prejudice against minority groups. As the Silom Manifesto explains

‘Today, we continuously see discrimination and violence happening within states, led by some state representatives, justified on the basis of the defense of the national interest.’

Also, these narratives are emerging in contexts where LGBTIQ rights are becoming politicized and labelled as forms of Western intervention. For the Eastern and Central Europe, with Central Asia Joint Declaration, one of its uses is the claimed ‘heterosexual protection’, which erases all others sexual, gender and identities expressions. But against this narrative of national protection, security, and sovereignty, the Johannesburg Declaration affirms

‘No nation can be truly sovereign unless all its people are full and free citizens, with equal opportunity to self-actualize, and thus able to make their fair contribution to nation-building, so that the nation can benefit from the whole spectrum of gifts, talents, skills and abilities of all its citizens.’

‘Natural family’ and ‘Traditional Family’

For the Caribbean Declaration

'The promotion of religious messages based on the supposedly 'natural family' by certain religious groups in social and political contexts, locally and regionally has been extremely detrimental to human rights and social ties'.

The concept of the 'natural' family is usually understood as a cis-hetero-nuclear family, but it can be different according to the socio-cultural context. According to the Johannesburg Declaration, 'the definition of the 'natural family' as being limited to the nuclear family, which is promoted by the extreme religious right and the proponents of so-called cultural and traditional values, does not reflect the diversity of family life in contemporary Africa'.

Echoing the Johannesburg Declaration, the Silom Manifesto declares that: 'we recognize that a whole range of individuals and families, including LGBTIQ families, have been excluded from the definition of 'natural family' promoted by certain religious groups in social and political contexts, locally, regionally, and internationally'.

The São Leopoldo Declaration considers the notion of 'traditional family' as a hegemonic model of family relations'. The definition of traditional family changes according to the culture. In a Christian context, for example, it is mainly based on a heterosexual couple with children. The São Leopoldo Declaration explains that it is

'(...) the concept that became hegemonic as a by-product of the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century, that is, the model of the modern European bourgeois heterosexual monogamous nuclear family. This model was then exported and imposed in other regions of the planet as the only way to be a family, making invisible or condemning more than 200 modes of family relations that have structured human societies in different cultures for millennia'.

Patriarchy

The impact of patriarchy is present in the Silom Manifesto, which explains that

'We believe that many of the more discriminatory interpretations of our various sacred texts are strongly influenced by the current patriarchal understanding in male dominated religious structures. This then perpetuates a religious discourse which does not respect the inherent dignity of every person regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity'.

According to the São Leopoldo Declaration, patriarchy can also be written and understood as 'kyriarchy'. The term, coined by the German American theologian Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, includes, beyond the binary idea of cis-hetero-patriarchy, the concept of a pattern of colonial-lordship domination, in which both gender and race constitute fluid elements in the construction of oppression. In other words, in the kyriarchy, white women or subaltern cis-gender men, for example, can also have relative privilege.

Violence

Violence is a form of subjugation based on strategies to maintain power. Against LGBTIQ people, violence can be understood as a gender-based way of controlling bodies and the erasure of the sexual and gender differences. It is based on social isolation and economic uncertainty. The Silom Manifesto affirms that

'We strongly highlight the life-threatening impact of this discrimination and exclusion on our human communities, especially the most vulnerable people including children, single mothers, widows and LGBTIQ peoples. (...) Today, because of largely patriarchal and conservative societies, violence against LGBTIQ people has become a normal practice. This is often experienced within families who, in using force, aim to maintain a perceived social balance. Further, punitive laws against LGBTIQ people may translate to tacit permission to commit violence and bullying'.



RECLAIMING LGBTIQ FAMILIES AND TRADITIONAL VALUES

Acknowledge and Recognize

This is an important factor in recognizing the existence of LGBTIQ people. According to the Johannesburg Declaration, it is important to acknowledge ‘the rich diversity of family experiences in sub-Saharan Africa, today and historically’. ‘To acknowledge’ was also used during the seminars as a synonym for ‘to recognize’, as in the Caribbean Declaration

‘We recognize that a whole range of individuals, including LGBTIQ communities, have been excluded by religions across the world and most especially in our region. The rise of conservatism and fundamentalism has given rise to enhanced discrimination and violence towards minority groups, including sexual and gender minorities. The promotion of religious messages based on the supposedly ‘natural family’ by certain religious groups in social and political contexts, locally and regionally has been extremely detrimental to human rights and social ties. This rests on a long history of colonialism, which has brought violence and discrimination against our people, including sexual and gender minorities.’

Affirmation and Celebration

The Johannesburg Declaration affirms that

‘In the African context human sexuality has generally been conceived as a divine life-affirming gift which holistically embraces diverse human relationships and sexual expressions that lead to sexual pleasure and renewal as well as, in some cases, procreation.’

Celebration is a way to affirm diversity, as the São Leopoldo Declaration shows: ‘We are she/males

(...) co-creating and being created in the image of a plural divinity that celebrates our existence. We are people of faith!’ To celebrate also is an example of a counternarrative/counteraction against prejudice. The Caribbean Declaration states that ‘celebrations of non-traditional family models should be read as manifestos to counteract ostracism’.

Ancestral Traditions

In a postcolonial perspective, it is important to look for the ancestral traditions as a way of (re)telling history. One of the ways of doing this is looking for oral histories/stories that were silenced through time. For example, the Pasefika Declaration affirms that

‘Indigenous culture is an ancestral culture that implies different epistemologies about relationships, about otherness and about social and community organization’.

Looking back to a culture’s history can be an important way to find stories and examples that show how diverse the human experience can be.

Community

Communities are important for protection, for well-being and also for creating social change, because it is in communities that identities are formed and strengthened. The Pasefika Declaration states:

‘We must remember and highlight that actually it is always community and community support which have been very strong pillars of Pacific societies’.

Community was used as a synonym for family, which was affirmed by the São Leopoldo Declaration: ‘We recognize the delicate situation of LGBTIQ people and their families in this region and the diversity of

cultural models in this territory that imply the variety of families and / or community models’.

Context

The significance of context was emphasized in two different ways. The first way is in re-reading and re-interpreting sacred texts that are usually used against LGBTIQ people. Religion needs to be read in text and context, as stated in the Silom Manifesto

‘We believe that religious texts must be read in the contextual settings and must be applied to our contemporary times; we believe that the interpretation of our religious texts must be anchored in inclusion and acceptance’.

The other understanding of ‘context’ is an appreciation of LGBTIQ people and their families’ realities, taking into consideration the social-political-economical contexts where LGBTIQ lives are being violated.

Decolonize and Decolonization

The Pasefika Declaration affirms

‘We promote a decolonization of our societies, at all levels, so that all of us may be equal and free to live within their communities’.

The importance of decolonization is highlighted in the Silom Manifesto:

‘We need to anchor politics in the lived realities of all human beings and in the values that guarantee the life, dignity, and sanctity of all human beings. For this purpose, we must continue decolonizing our thinking and approaches’.

The seminars were an important example of decolonization as the participants looked back in history to identify how colonialism and imperialism had impacted the ways current society understands family and traditional values.

Diversity

All the seminars were based on the comprehension

of how diversity is related to gender, sexuality, identities, and also religion and beliefs. For example, the Caribbean Declaration acknowledges ‘the rich diversity of sexualities and family experiences in the Caribbean, currently and historically’. The Silom Manifesto states

‘We also believe that diversity and difference are at the core of the human community and that both are expressions of the beauty of Creation’.

The participants from the seminars were deeply interested in showing how their own faith tradition would support the idea of diversity. For example, the the Johannesburg Declaration explains that:

‘Diversity also extends to sexuality, and this is found in our sacred texts. In the Bible there is, for example, mention of eunuchs; while in the Hadith, the Prophet refused to kill a mukhannath (female-presenting man) because, he argued, ‘I have been prohibited from killing people who pray’.

The São Leopoldo Declaration also affirms that ‘in theological terms, the divine is diverse’.

The participants were engaged in reclaiming respect for their diverse families and values. As the Silom Manifesto declares:

‘Our international human rights system must respect all nations equally, and these same nations must respect everyone’s rights, values, opinions and faiths, and this includes the communities and families individuals choose to build and be part of’.

Faith and Religion

For the Caribbean Declaration ‘Christian hegemony resulted notably in the spread of a rigid concept of family model: based on cis-heteronormativity and patriarchy’. The São Leopoldo Declaration explains that ‘We do not fight against divinity, diversity, or democracy, but against those who seek to impose

⁶ Zahed, L. A Muslim Perspective. In Behold, I make all things new. (2016). L Tulleken, J.P. Mokgethi-Heath (eds). GIN, Johannesburg.

who does not fit into their reductionist social constructions’.

The Johannesburg Declaration answered the idea of hegemonic religion by affirming that:

‘Religious freedom of consciousness is a fundamental human right that applies to all people, including LGBTIQ people, and we claim the right to practice our faith in a way that affirms life, both for us and for others’.

In the context of the seminars, faith was framed within an ‘interfaith’ multiplicity of religious traditions as opposed to the idea of hegemonic religion. The Eastern and Central Europe, with Central Asia Joint Declaration suggests that it is important to continue to create interfaith spaces for dialogue and learnings. And the São Leopoldo Declaration states ‘that we unite all our expressions of faith, beliefs, and spiritualities, and all our energies towards a global change and a reorganization of the patterns of power in which love, justice, and wisdom could guide us better.’

Family, Extended Family, and Kinship

LGBTIQ families expand the idea of family, or nuclear family, or ‘natural family’. They can be referred to as rainbow family, mosaic family, diverse family, and communal family system. The seminars investigated the nature of family across global contexts and used expanded ideas about family which included not only LGBTIQ families, but also extended families, single parent families, families with grandparents, and adoptive families.

Discussions from the seminars showed that extended families are communal, characterized by interdependence, and are constituted by mutual love, care and accountability, especially for their most vulnerable members. As stated in the Eastern and Central Europe, with Central Asia Joint Declaration:

‘The basis of family is the union and alliance of its members’.

This idea is also present in the Johannesburg Declaration: ‘indeed [it] takes a village to raise a child and therefore the communal nature of family, within the diversity of family systems and parental models, promotes the child’s own understanding of being in community’.

Traditional Values

According to the Eastern, Central Europe, and Central Asia Joint Declaration

‘The so-called ‘traditional values’ are often a modern ideological construction and have nothing to do with the real historical tradition of the ways of life. Very often it is just a justification of violence and inequalities wrapped in the clothes of tradition’.

In many cases, the idea of ‘traditional values’ is attached to moral and family values that disregard any diversity. However, during the seminars the idea of ‘traditional values’ was reclaimed as an important counternarrative against the monolithic idea of tradition. Many of the seminars expressed a (re) discovery of traditional values through a postcolonial perspective. The Silom Manifesto affirms that

‘The concept of traditional values are not merely a few decades old but go as far back as several millennia. Moreover, when discussing traditional values today, we need to define them as values that affirm the dignity of human beings and their right to form bonds of union based on love, consent, and mutually nourishing goals. These are the same values that underlie the construction of families and cooperation’.

The Manifesto also included some examples: ‘The Sanskrit language includes 68 words that speak of gender sexuality and identity’; ‘the acceptance of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions are present in traditional values around the world, including in Asia, and this has been the case for hundreds of years. For example, the Narada-smriti is a Hindu text from India put into writing sometime before the first century BCE.

Portion 12.14-18 of the Narada-smriti acknowledges the existence of homosexual people and suggests they should not be forced into a heterosexual marriage’.

The traditions and the pre-colonial history presented by the seminars reveal some important factors that can empower LGBTIQ peoples and families, and take into consideration the importance of being aware that previous religions also could be patriarchal and hierarchical, as a speaker from the Kingdom of Tonga shared.

The Johannesburg Declaration explains that ‘in African traditions, sexual difference has never been a reason for exclusion from family and community life. On the contrary, those with sexual differences were generally historically revered and considered to have special powers’. And the Pasefika Declaration affirms that ‘before Christianity, the traditional family and community arrangements of the people of the Pacific were not anchored, like it is today, in patriarchy, machismo and heteronormativity’. The Johannesburg Declaration affirms the importance of tradition by saying: ‘As African people of all sexes, sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions, we (re) claim our cultures and the right to practice them according to our own traditions’.

The dialogues revealed that it is not about considering whether a tradition is good or bad, but it is about using it against or in favor of life. As stated in the São Leopoldo Declaration: ‘We defend and promote a diverse, multiple, plural world, with ample space for differences in which both traditional monogamous marriage and any other form of family, marital, and/or sexual love have recognition and possibilities of flowering, growth, and social evolution’.



NEXT STEPS

Nothing about us without us'
(São Leopoldo Declaration)

The seminars were attended by individuals from different regions and contexts across the globe. Even considering the specificities of each location, the consensus of suggested next steps focused on building spaces for dialogue and communication, research production, training, and advocacy. The reports from all regions concluded it is critical to build alliances across movements. In order to do this, it is important to identify allies and create safe spaces for networking and interfaith forums.

Spaces of dialogue and Communication

The participants expressed a desire to keep alive the dialogues that were held in the seminars. To do this effectively, they highlighted the importance of using social media and communication tools for connecting the participants and promoting more dialogue. They suggested:

- Seminars;
- Interfaith dialogues;
- Pride interfaith services;
- Community dialogues;
- Creation of channels for sharing information going on regionally and globally;
- Involvement of parents and families as allies/networks in the dialogues;
- Establishment of space for critical analysis, reconciliation, doubt, questioning of texts and religions.

Research Production

Research should be based on stories of LGBTIQ people and promote the visibility of the different ways of being family that are not the 'natural family' model. The participants suggested different topics for research production, such as:

- Decolonizing by rewriting and retelling traditions;
- Publishing articles/stories of LGBTIQ people;
- Publishing books 'easily readable'; 'easily defensible'; 'easily referable' by translating and publishing in other languages and 'easily accessible' to communities.

Training

Participants in the majority of the seminars mentioned the importance of training in the liberational interpretation of religious texts usually used against LGBTIQ persons and their lives. They suggested webinars and workshops on the topics of:

- Reinterpretation of religious texts;
- Religious aspect of the life of refugees;
- Media strategies;
- How to adapt the language for different audiences;
- The systemic and structural discrimination against LGBTIQ people.

Advocacy

Finally, for reclaiming the diverse family values in the public space, the participants concluded that it is necessary to use all available resources in advocacy, for example: creating documents for the United Nations, issuing joint statements, hosting side events, and providing a network of experts and ambassadors for the cause. In addition, participants suggested:

- Creating channels for advocacy;
- Identifying the allies;
- Developing relationships with potential allies (LGBTIQ groups, feminist groups, religious leaders, anti-racist NGOs, schools);
- Networking with GIN's members organizations;
- Participating in interdenominational religious spaces;
- Bringing theologians to the LGBTIQ discussions;
- Working with church-based leaders;
- Reaching out to the younger generation.





CONCLUSION

From 2017 to 2020, GIN-SSOGIE created safe spaces for conversations and exchanges between activists, scholars, and human rights advocates to develop regional and culturally appropriate counter-narratives on the topic of 'Family and Traditional Values'. The seminars raised important considerations for further discussion and advocacy concerning religious LGBTIQ issues.

In 7 seminars, GIN-SSOGIE brought together more than 100 people from almost 50 different countries. The seminars were successful by guaranteeing respect for the participants in specific regional and cultural contexts. It was an important time to look at the past through a post-colonial perspective, to analyze the present, and to create a future, based on respect for LGBTIQ families, and also for all family diversity.

It also offered the opportunity to look at the ideas of family, and traditional values through the lenses of a variety of contexts, and to discover (again) that the narratives around family and traditional values

used by anti-rights actors are profoundly limiting of families, and human lives in general, and do not reflect the vibrant, diverse reality that exists.

The seminar series provided a platform for LGBTIQ people of diverse faith communities to share their experiences and perspectives. This resulted in showing, and giving voice to the diversity of faith-based perspectives on gender, sexuality, and family that exist across regions, raising alternative narratives that reveal the restrictive nature of 'pro-family' or 'anti-gender' groups.

In conclusion, GIN-SSOGIE seeks to provide continuous information and discussions on the diverse realities of religious LGBTIQ people, who find themselves in struggling movements and working to find their place in their regional contexts. We aim to celebrate inclusive faith traditions from around the world, especially from the Global South, and to promote inclusive faith-based messages to support human rights for all individuals, including the United Nations.



APPENDIX

Participants

Sub-Saharan Africa

1. Rev Phumzile Mabizela, South Africa, Christian
2. Dr Yvette Abrahams, South Africa, African traditional spirituality
3. Monica Tabengwa, South Africa
4. Davis Maclyalla, Nigeria, Christian
5. Dr Fulata Moyo, Switzerland, Christian
6. Jan Bjarne Sodal, Norway, Christian
7. Rev Patricia Ackerman, USA, Christian
8. Rev Teboho Klaas, South Africa, Christian
9. Rev Judith Kotzé, South Africa, Christian
10. Rev Dr Kapyra Kaoma, USA, Christian
11. Cole Parke, USA, Spiritual
12. Dr Nontando Hadebe, South Africa, Christian
13. Motsau Motsau, South Africa, Agnostic
14. Rev Michele Boonzaaier, South Africa, Christian
15. Rev Jide Macaulay, UK, Christian
16. Rev Nokuthula Dhladhla, South Africa, Christian
17. Dr Masiwa Gunda, Zimbabwe, Christian
18. Gershon Kapalula, Zambia, Christian
19. Dr Imam Ludovic Mohamed Zahed, France, Muslim
20. Donna Smith, South Africa, Christian
21. Ishmael Bahati Omumbwa, Kenya, Muslim
22. Simon Petitjean, France/UK, Christian
23. Toni Kruger-Ayebazibwe, South Africa, Christian

South East Asia

1. Ankit Bhuptani, India, Hindu
2. Tashi Choedup, India, Buddhist
3. Small Luk, Hong Kong, Christian
4. Shirley Lam, Hong Kong, Christian
5. Aisha Mughal, Pakistan, Muslim
6. Rev. Kakay Pamaran, Philippines, Christian
7. Revelation Velunta, Philippines, Christian
8. Sanjay Sharma, Nepal, Hindu/Sukhdeep Singh, India, Buddhist
9. Aan Anshori, Indonesia, Muslim

10. Sharyn Graham Davies, New Zealand, Researcher
11. Jerry Johnson, India, Cultural Christian/Atheist
12. Dede Oetemo, Indonesia, Muslim-Christian
13. Marly Bacaron, Thailand
14. Jape Mokgethi-Heath, Sweden, Christian
15. Shine Wara Dhammo, Thailand, Buddhism
16. Joel Barredos, Thailand, non-practicing Catholic
17. Pierre Buckley, South Africa, Christian
18. Simon Petitjean, France/UK, Christian
19. Toni Kruger-Ayebazibwe, South Africa, Christian

Latin America

1. Alexya Salvador, Brazil, Christian
2. Angelica Tostes, Brazil, Hindu-Christian
3. Jennifer Aguayo, Mexico, Christian
4. Nadia Garza, Mexico, Christian
5. Noemi Farre, Argentina, Christian
6. Nancy Cardoso, Brazil, Christian
7. Damian De La Puente, Argentina, Christian
8. Gustavo Michanie, Argentina, Jewish
9. Carlos-Alejandra Beltran Acero, Colombia, Christian
10. 1Kalvin Carillo Bautista, El Salvador, Christian
11. 1Fidel Ramirez Aristizabal, Colombia, Christian
12. 1Hugo Cordoba Quero, Argentina, Christian
13. Ana Ester Pádua Freire, Brazil, Christian
14. Ana Claudia Figueroa, Brazil, Christian
15. André Musskopf, Brazil, Christian
16. Simon Petitjean, France/UK, Christian
17. Toni Kruger-Ayebazibwe, South Africa, Christian

Pacific

1. Dr. Elizabeth Kere-kere, New Zealand, Traditional Religion from Pacific People
2. Teurakai Ukenio, Kiribati, Christian
3. Tebeio Tamton, Kiribati, Christian

6. Dr. 'Ungatea Fonua Kata, Tonga, Christian
7. Laurent Hetoua Garnier-Regal, New Caledonia, Christian
8. Amour, New Caledonia, Christian
9. Dr. Leli Darling, Fiji, Christian
10. Ken Moala, Samoa, Christian
11. Ymania Brown, Samoa, Christian-Buddhist
12. Fr. Peter Moi, Papua New Guinea, Anglican Christian
13. Parker, Papua New Guinea, Christian
14. Simon Petitjean/UK, France, Christian
15. Toni Kruger-Ayebazibwe, South Africa, Christian
16. Bob Luiz Botelho, Brazil, Christian

Caribbean

1. Anderson Antoine, Grenada, Christian
2. Kenita Placide, Saint-Lucia, Christian
3. Jonathan Beclard, Guadeloupe, Christian
4. Deodatt Tilack, Guyana, Hinduism
5. Dillon Mohamed, Guyana, Christian
6. Dominic Alleyne, Guyana, Christian
7. Joel Simpson, Guyana, Christian
8. Moïse Manoel, French Guiana, Muslim
9. Estelle Chantalou, French Guiana
10. Stéphenon Meus, Haiti, Voodoo
11. Djennifer Mercer, Haiti, Voodoo
12. Sean Campbell, Jamaica, Christian
13. Jevaughn Williams-Satchwell, Jamaica, Christian
14. Patrick Lalor, Jamaica, Christian
15. Ivan Cruickshank, Jamaica
16. 15 Mario Kleinmoedig, ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao), Christian
17. Dudley Ferdinandus, ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao), Santeria
18. Simon Petitjean, France/UK, Christian
19. Toni Kruger-Ayebazibwe, South Africa, Christian
20. Bob Luiz Botelho, Brazil, Christian

Eastern and Central Europe, with Central Asia

1. Hanna Medko, Ukrain, Christian
2. Olga Gerassimenko, Estonia, Christian
3. Arman Sahakyan, Armenia, Christian
4. Ola Górska, Poland, Christian
5. Aleksandra Kabatova, Russia, Christian
6. Polina Kislitsyna, Russia, Christian
7. Mark Kandolsky, Russia, Christian

8. Julie Esse, Russia, Christian
9. Natallia Vasilevich, Belarus, Christian
10. Judit Gyárfás, Hungria, Christian
11. Amir Mukambetov, Uzbekistan, Sunni Muslim
12. Shuhrat Saidov, Tajikistan, Muslim
13. Misha Thumassov, Russian based in Germany, Christian
14. Tatiana Lekhatkova, Russian based in France, Christian
15. Misza Czerniak, Poland and Russia (double pertain), Christian
16. Simon Petitjean, France/UK, Christian
17. Toni Kruger-Ayebazibwe, South Africa, Christian
18. Bob Luiz Botelho, Brazil, Christian

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The participants of the MENA preparatory online meeting requested to remain anonymous.

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