

**Annette Mehlhorn**

## **Difference as a Bridge to Religious Encounter Facing Interfaith Dialogue through Gender Studies**

Calling “difference” a “bridge” seems a paradox. And it is. We should not forget that. Otherwise the concept of “difference” becomes an empty phrase.

Nevertheless, this concept has become – and not by chance – one of the most urgent questions within any human context in a globalised and pluralistic world. We all know that the “new paradigm” that confronts us in various practical and theoretical contexts includes one thing in particular: a new and complex capacity for thinking, acting, conceiving, and developing difference. On a social level, and, we might also say, on the level of human rights we struggle with the search for, the handling of, the right to “diversity”.

The European Constitution expresses this fact in an exemplary way in the “Charter of Fundamental Rights”:

Article II-81.1

Non-discrimination

Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.

This article and its context are far more revolutionary they at first glance seem. The article conveys a new concept of social welfare and equality which moves beyond earlier ideas of group identity: being a German, a woman, a Christian, a white heterosexual person, being a foreigner, a Muslim, a black transsexual, etc. Further, it seeks to overcome a way of thinking which is couched in terms of unity or aims at unity in favour of taking on the challenge of difference and

diversity. The article demands a change in the ways in which we develop identity and the forces of social bonding.<sup>1</sup> The German sociologist Ulrich Beck has put it this way: “‘European Integration’? For a long time this meant suspension of difference, that is of national and local distinctions. This ‘policy of harmonisation’ confuses unity with uniformity or supposes that uniformity is the necessary condition for unity (...) Instead, cosmopolitan integration is based on a change of paradigms, which says: ‘diversity is not a problem but the solution’ (...). I would love to live in a ‘cosmopolitan’ Europe in this sense, in which people have roots and wings.”<sup>2</sup>

For this kind of cosmopolitan Europe, “in which people have roots and wings” we also need renewed theological concepts. What could this mean for practical theology? How can we approach this kind of unity in diversity in the context of our educational, liturgical, ethical, ecclesiastical concepts? How can we achieve this in a particular context, respecting the proper conditions of that context, but nevertheless in interchange to other contexts with other conditions?<sup>3</sup> I would contend that searching for “roots and wings” means to look for a hermeneutics of diversity without arbitrariness. This, again, is a paradoxical task. One of our foremost challenges is to cope with paradox, contradiction and a continuous changing of perspectives while at the same time deepening and continuously constructing an ever clearer concept of personal religious truth.

Respecting difference or “daring diversity” (as the Second European Women’s Synod in 2003 put it) seems such a convincing, clear aim. Nevertheless, the realisation of this aim is very complicated and will be very expensive. On the one hand, it means – as we all know, and realise that it concerns almost everyone of us and our children – that those amongst us who belong to the dominant cultures will have to give a good deal away – power, influence, material well-being, educational and career opportunities – and share

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Eberhard Eichenhofer, “Diskriminierung der Rasse, ethnischen Herkunft, des Alters und der Behinderung. Vieldeutigkeiten und Operationalisierungsprobleme aus gemeinschaftsrechtlicher Sicht”, in: Ursula Rust / Wolfgang Däubler / Josef Falke / Joachim Lange / Konstanze Plett / Kirsten Scheiwe / Klaus Sieveking (eds), *Die Gleichbehandlungsrichtlinien der EU und ihre Umsetzung in Deutschland* (Loccumer Protokolle 40/03; Rehburg-Loccum 2003), 73-90, here 86f.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Beck, “Europa neu erfinden – eine kosmopolitische Vision”, in: *Internationale Politik (IP)* Juli 2005 (Translation A. M.).

<sup>3</sup> I suppose – and would be grateful to get information about this subject – that ecumenical theology could help a lot to answer these questions.

with those who until now have been less respected and represented. However, the challenges do not stop here. Respecting difference also means looking for a way of changing our self-perception and that of the persons we encounter, in order to look for new ways of growing together which might lead us to a different form of social complexity.

For several years now I have been searching for interfaith understanding – which in a migration-society like Germany includes intercultural understanding – especially in the field of gender issues. Never before I met such a difficult and complex, but at the same time exciting and renewing context than this one. I want now to share some of the important cornerstones of this experience and reflect on them.

Two remarks in advance:

1. The question of interfaith dialogue has often been looked at in terms of practical realisation, and has not been very deeply explored theoretically. Scholars who treat the subject concede that it is a complex and multidimensional question, which can only be approached through concrete and practical experiences and interdisciplinary reflections.<sup>4</sup> This is all the more true of gender issues within interfaith dialogue. At the same time questions of religion and interfaith dialogue are often neglected within gender studies.
2. In my view, interfaith dialogue in general, and in particular at the intersection to gender issues, is above all a question of education. A new understanding, a new perception, a new and more complex concept of social wellbeing must first be gained, rather than taught. Hence we need new pedagogical concepts and reflections. I therefore present my ideas in the context of pedagogies of religion, whilst recognizing that interfaith dialogue concerns all levels of religious expression, especially hermeneutic, systematic/dogmatic questions and liturgical/symbolic issues. The main question is: how can we build a common context of reflection, out of a context

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Johannes Lähnemann “Lernergebnisse: Kompetenzen und Standards interreligiösen Lernens” in: Peter Schreiner / Ursula Sieg / Volker Elsenbast (eds), *Handbuch interreligiöses Lernen* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus: Gütersloh 2005), 409-422; Karl Ernst Nipkow, Ziele interreligiösen Lernens als mehrdimensionales Problem, in: Schreiner / Sieg / Elsenbast (eds), *Handbuch interreligiöses Lernen*, 362-380; Karl Ernst Nipkow, *Bildung in einer pluralen Welt*, vol. 2: *Religionspädagogik im Pluralismus* (Chr. Kaiser / Gütersloher Verlagshaus: Gütersloh 1998); Johannes Lähnemann, *Evangelische Religionspädagogik in interreligiöser Perspektive* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 1998).

which is often characterised by a lack of community, and which is always characterized by enormous differences?

## 1. Clearing the field, marking the cornerstones:

### Theoretical and practical contexts of the question

The following diagram<sup>5</sup> illustrates the complexity of these questions concerning different disciplines. They fall in an intersection (dark-grey), which has until now remained unknown: It lies between gender studies, educational theory and theology, seen from an interfaith/intercultural perspective, with strong relations between theory and practice.

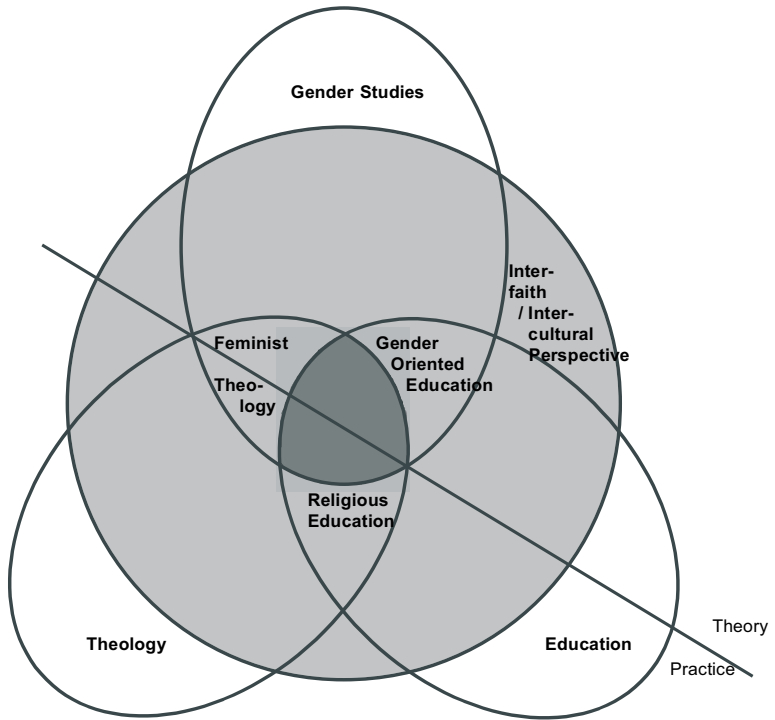
Multi-perspectivity is a characteristic of gender-oriented questions, and so too is the close relation between theoretical reflection and a (renewed) action. This makes understanding difficult, we have very little common ground. In the territory of intersection between two of the named disciplines we normally find some studies, but as soon as three disciplines come together, we have less and less knowledge. For example, so far gender-oriented education has not touched upon religious questions, and although a good deal of attention has been paid to questions in the intersection between religion and gender, at least in Christian theology, they still have a marginal position in religious education.<sup>6</sup> For the interfaith and intercultural questions this is even more the case. Thus educational theory offers profiled reflections on intercultural gender questions, but here religion is never treated as an autonomous field. Instead, if it is mentioned at all, it is subsumed in “culture”. In the field of interfaith understanding, on the other hand, questions of gender have been almost entirely neglected until now. This is extraordinary, because many social conflicts in shared neighbourhoods in migration societies focus around gender questions and expressed in religious terms, such as the wearing of the veil or the participation of girls in school-activities.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Annette Mehlhorn, “Geschlechtsspezifische Dimensionen im interreligiösen Lernen – Erkunden in Zwischenräumen”, in: Schreiner / Sieg / Elsenbast (eds), *Handbuch Interreligiöses Lernen*, 315-329, here 317.

<sup>6</sup> See Rita Burrichter, “Lebensgeschichtliche Perspektiven ernst nehmen: fachdidaktische Anfragen einer feministischen Religionspädagogik”, in: *Religionspädagogische Beiträge* 43 (1999), 13-24; Andrea Hötger / Agnes Wuckelt, “Feministische Religionspädagogik”, in: Elisabeth Gössmann et aliae (eds), *Wörterbuch der Feministischen Theologie* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus: Gütersloh 2002), 138-144.

<sup>7</sup> “Women’s great invisibility, marginality and voicelessness in world religions are paralleled by the marginality and voicelessness of women in interreligious dialogue”: Ursula King,



It is therefore important to investigate the added value which an (inter)-religious focus might offer to gender studies and intercultural research, and secondly what the consideration of gender might add to interfaith studies.

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“Feminism: The Missing Dimension in the Dialogue of Religions”, in: John May (ed.), *Pluralism and the Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions* (Cassell Academic: London 1998), 40-55, here 52. In some important and interesting approaches to interreligious and difference-oriented educational processes this is also obvious. On a global interreligious level – for example in the “Parliament of World’s Religions” – gender justice on one side belongs to the declared standard of political correctness (see “Towards a global Ethics”, Chicago 1993 and “Call to our guiding institutions”, Cape Town 1999 [www.cpwr.org](http://www.cpwr.org)). Nevertheless this request is still not at all realized. During the 4<sup>th</sup> Parliament of World’s Religions (2004 in Barcelona) this led to the formation of women-initiatives within the parliament. Their statement wasn’t taken into the official declaration of the parliament though.

I shall outline a first (tentative) answer to these two questions by the following reflections:

## 2. The question of truth makes the difference:

### Religious discrimination and the discrimination of religion

European countries have diverse histories with religion, the alliance or controversy between “throne and altar” and the process of secularisation. Consequently, different countries allocate very different spaces to public religion. In Germany, where the Protestant nobility and bourgeoisie supported the process of secularisation, there is little mutual distrust between religion and the public sphere. This led to a situation in which the two “big churches” (that is, the German Protestant Churches and the Roman Catholic Church), and with them – at least in theory – all other particularly recognized religions achieved a certain legal status which allows them to be represented or present in the public sphere.<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, the clear presence of the churches in public life, together with the power and influence which the churches continued to exercise – even after the Second World War – has in Germany, combined with a scepticism toward religion in general which increased throughout the late nineteen-sixties and -seventies, given rise to a situation in which religion is regarded exclusively as a private matter. Many people completely lack a religious consciousness. At the same time, religion as a specific aspect of human identity is generally ignored in both public reflection and the academic world.

Despite the significant differences between European countries with regard to the history of secularisation, the general outcome seems to have been similar: Religion is rarely respected as an aspect of individual and social constitution – no matter whether in the media, in social sciences, in public discussions or what so ever. This is changing with the strong public presence of Islam, which gives rise to some confusion in European public consciousness. One reason for this confusion could be the fact that many positions of power, reflection and education are taken by anticlerical representatives,<sup>9</sup> who tend not

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<sup>8</sup> Confessional religious classes in public schools, religious broadcasting in public media, religious care in military service, hospitals and prisons.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Ebertz states that the strong clerical power-structure within Europe led to an overtaking of these structures by an anticlerical elite, which now uses the same powerful structure against religion. See Michael N. Ebertz, “Religion, Christentum und Kirche in den pluralen Gesellschaften Europas”, in: Schreiner / Sieg / Elsenbast (eds), *Handbuch interreligiöses Lernen*, 41-56.

to differentiate between “church”, a religious institution of power, and “religion” or “faith”, as a constitutive moment of social communication and personal identity. This results in problems in public reflection on questions of ethics and life-orientation. The growing importance of popular culture such as soap operas, docu-soaps or even sport in addressing questions of orientation can only partly fill this gap.<sup>10</sup>

In education and in educational disciplines this leads to the paradox that education as a field of study and practice, which has by its nature a transcendental moment, continuously denies its own existential and orienting character. “Pedagogic reflection does not refer to a technical object, but an existential, education (...) and through it the future of society.”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, there has been almost no reflection on religion in pedagogic contexts.<sup>12</sup> A similar situation arises in the case of gender studies.<sup>13</sup> Although there have been a few minor changes during the past few years,<sup>14</sup> it is still the case that in general religion is a discriminated aspect in public reflections of our times. This is a massive loss for the development of the pluralistic paradigm we need, not only because “diversity” obviously includes religious diversity, but above all due to the nature of religion.

In order to develop this thesis, it is necessary to consider the interchange between religion and culture. Religion is always a part of culture; it is a concrete and personalized representation of culture. The more cultures mix and

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<sup>10</sup> Last year’s strong public presence of “pontifical events” might give a hint that there is a search for a turn in these questions within the former Christian world in reaction to the public presence of Islam.

<sup>11</sup> “Die pädagogische Reflexion betrifft keinen technischen Gegenstand, sondern ein Existenzial, die Erziehung der Kinder und damit die Zukunft der Gesellschaft, die sich einer einfachen Rationalisierung verschließt.” (Jürgen Ölkens quoted in Karl Ernst Nipkows *Bildung in einer pluralen Welt*, vol. 2, 103; translation A. M.)

<sup>12</sup> A recent manual like Edith Glaser / Dorle Klika / Annedore Prengel (eds), *Handbuch Gender und Erziehungswissenschaft* (Klinkhardt: Bad Heilbrunn 2004) contributes to all fields of educational questions except religious education. An exception is the field of historical anthropology, where for about 15 years scholars of humanities have been looking for a dialogue with religious disciplines (without reflecting the gender question though). See e.g. Christoph Wulf / Hildegard Macha / Eckart Liebau (eds), *Formen des Religiösen. Pädagogisch-anthropologische Annäherungen* (Beltz: Weinheim und Basel 2004).

<sup>13</sup> First steps in a new direction are provoked by the presence of Islam. See e.g. Mechthild Rumpf / Ute Gerhard / Mechthild M. Jansen (eds), *Facetten islamischer Welten. Geschlechterordnungen, Frauen- und Menschenrechte in der Diskussion* (transcript: Bielefeld 2003). This is significant: the “foreign” seems to be more provoking, than the “own”.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. an interdisciplinary graduate-college “Global Challenges – transnational and transcultural solutions” meeting for some years in Tübingen.

shift, the more it can be recognized how different may be the specific cultural contexts that have influenced a given faith and religiosity.<sup>15</sup> This implies that religion plays a part in cultural hierarchies, dominances and asymmetries, as we well know from the discussions within the ecumenical context. Consequently, we find different layers of dominance and difference within one religious community. These may reflect social, cultural, ethnic and gender differences. These aspects form the cultural “outfit” of a concrete religious entity and are closely linked to its cultural and symbolic representations, including dominances and hierarchies. On the other hand, one important principle of religion is to express itself – as Victor Turner<sup>16</sup> puts it – in the region of “*anti-structure*”. This means that in its character and nature, it imagines a symbolic, rational and emotionally valid world which is both in relation to and in contrast with social “normality”. Consequently, a religion inherits the continuous opportunity to critically reflect and question the “cultural outfit” of religion by the means of its own sources. As far as in religion (in all religions<sup>17</sup>) requests for justice and mutuality are virulent, the different hegemonies and dominances presented within its “cultural outfit” can be questioned. This is important in the light of some further characteristics of religion.

In religious belief emotional, rational, symbolical, ethical, social and behavioural aspects are interlinked in a holistic manner – faith contemplates the whole human being in his or her orientation in space and time. More importantly, religion has the capacity to bring the question of truth and validity onto the agenda, and this is what we desperately need to support the study and development of difference and diversity.

Religion thus has a good deal to offer: we need the questioning of historically and culturally determined dominances and hegemonies, and we need the serious and holistic positioning of the questions of truth and validity in order to develop difference and diversity. This can best be done by the encounter of different religious positions.

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<sup>15</sup> Just think about the difference between the religious surrounding you grew up in and the variety of religious forms and thoughts we encounter within our own confessional group when we open our eyes for people coming from other cultural contexts.

<sup>16</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London 1969).

<sup>17</sup> This is the common consensus found in the “golden rule” and the declaration towards a global ethics by the Parliament of World’s Religions – see “Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration”, endorsed at the 1993 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago, USA: <http://www.cpwr.org/resource/resource.htm>



In my opinion, considering the claim of a specific religious truth in profiled delimitation from other religious truths is an important key to the development of difference and diversity. This means that what we are looking for in interfaith dialogue is not so much the uncovering of consensus and similarities between religions – which undoubtedly exist – but a differentiated and nuanced view of the religious truth embodied in our specific religion. To claim that this profiled differentiation in the search for a particular truth can be the central bridge for understanding is once again a paradox. At the same time it is the big challenge to religious believers, especially professionals in all religions.<sup>18</sup> It is, in addition, the first answer to the question I formulated in the beginning about what the added value of the (inter)religious focus for gender research and intercultural studies would be.

### **3. Gender issues as a contribution to shifting perspectives on difference**

Over the last 20 years, gender studies have reached an impressive level of public acceptance and institutionalisation. Men are no longer an exception in the context of gender issues. Indeed, we are discovering increasingly that questions of gender are not only a concern of and for girls and women but also include boys and men. Again and again the discussion about “difference” or “equality” – at least in Germany – has stirred up debate, and it has become clear that these two terms do not imply an alternative or a contradiction.<sup>19</sup> For instance, statements of human rights are not a question of difference between human beings. Overcoming binary oppositions has always included the critique of hierarchies between these oppositions and the inherent search for more equal diversity. This means difference as long as “difference” is not conceived in terms of bipolar opposition. Nevertheless, the reality of the situation of women (and children) within most societies almost everywhere in this world still requires a clear positioning with respect to dominant patriarchal cultures (and opposition to them).

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<sup>18</sup> And, to be honest, it is not the only way to face interfaith dialogue. We also have approaches that head far more to universal than to the particular. The best known of them is the concept of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions, developed by John Hick. See John Hick / Paul Knitter (eds), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 1987).

<sup>19</sup> “Demokratisch orientierte Gleichheitsaussagen (...) setzen Differenz voraus. Für Differenztheorien ist darum der Gleichheitsaspekt unverzichtbar.” Annedore Prengel, “Zwischen Gender-Gesichtspunkten gleiten – Perspektivitätstheoretische Beiträge”, in: Glaser / Klika / Prengel (eds), *Handbuch Gender und Erziehungswissenschaft*, 90-101, here 98.

In most parts of the world, to be a woman still means to be excluded from the dominant patriarchal symbolic system. We do not know much about how, where and with what aims, tools and ideas women, children and – in respect to a given dominant symbolic order – “deviant” men seek the maintenance or extension of their human dignity. However, it is clear that they do it in very different ways. We must open our ears and eyes in order to see what these ways look like. This must precede any claiming and teaching of better knowledge in gender questions. If we listen carefully we may also recognize common insights and interests that could help us to understand where an interfaith and intercultural understanding of gender issues could lead us.

There is one moment that characterizes androcentric and patriarchal patterns, to which we must be alert. I call it the “fundamentalist moment”, by which I mean a certain monolithic and mono-causal way of understanding, describing and perceiving reality.<sup>20</sup> In recent years, the call for the recognition of difference and diversity and – in education – the orientation towards a contextual understanding and teaching of pupils has become widespread in humanities and social sciences, including religious education. In spite of this development, the gender aspect is often neglected in these discussions, although sexual difference and the social consequences of gender concepts is one of the first and basic experiences made. It is necessary to perceive “difference (...) as an aspect of common human condition – (...), as gendering (Geschlechtlichkeit). In my opinion, it is predestined to function as representative of difference, because gender in various ways represents (...) aspects of difference: in its connection to sexuality, birth and death and as being gendered it indicates the incompleteness of any one person and the difference of the other, which remains untouched. Sex/Gender *is* in itself difference, it distinguishes and separates radically, but it also connects people, precisely in this divide.”<sup>21</sup>

The differencing moment of gender-experience, which unifies men and women in all cultures, is hence a valuable tool for the perception of difference,

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<sup>20</sup> One could say some more words on the patriarchal character of fundamentalism – I did so in reference to the studies of Martin Riesebrodt, see my “Mit Konfliktstoff auf Tuchfühlung. Interreligiöse Aspekte einer Bekleidungsfrage”, in: Evangelische Frauenarbeit in Deutschland (ed.), *Kopftuchdialog. Interreligiöses Gespräch einer Bekleidungsfrage* (Sondernummer der “mitteilungen” der Evangelischen Frauenarbeit in Deutschland 2004, 20f).

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Rendtorff, “Theorien der Differenz – Anregungen aus Philosophie und Psychoanalyse”, in: Glaser / Klika / Prengel (eds), *Handbuch Gender und Erziehungswissenschaft*, 102-111, here 109. Translation A. M.

in spite of the cultural determination of roles. As long as patriarchal dominance prevails in most cultures, it is also an instrument for the perception of hierarchic patterns. If the consciousness of this moment is linked with the above-mentioned holistic and truth-oriented religious view, we have a perfect combination of tools to develop sensitivity for difference and diversity.

In 2001, a group of women, some from politics and others from religion, met in Hessen and Berlin and founded an interfaith women's initiative called "*Sarah and Hagar. Religion, Politics, Gender*". For four years we have worked on a consensus in social questions, condensed in "*impulses for a gender-adequate social policy*". These four years turned out to be a hard trial for all of us: Again and again we had to revise seemingly "clear" positions about what is right and wrong in our personal, social and political orientations. We had a number of severe conflicts, some of which we were unable to resolve, even with the help of a conflict-moderator. Nevertheless, we have now finally presented our impulses on the subjects "family", "labour" and "education". We all are proud and happy about the process we went through. In our impulses, we state on the subject of "education":

"Intercultural learning is one of the main preconditions for social competence. Religion has cultural shape. It is practiced differently in different contexts. That is why we recognize different cultural expressions within a given religion or confessional group. At the same time, a defined cultural group can be formed of believers from different religions. Interfaith learning helps in the perception of cultural difference within culturally or religiously homogeneous communities. An additional level of perception is added by a conscious treatment of gender-difference. It opens the perspective for the multidimensionality of processes of education and integration. Till now the interaction between these intersections is still not recognized very often. To date, the interaction between these intersections remains unrecognized in many cases. That is why we are convinced that actual educational programs go beyond gaining knowledge and include interfaith competences and competences in gender-sensitivity."<sup>22</sup>

Here the classical triple intersection, which determines many processes of integration and diversification as well as discrimination,<sup>23</sup> is of central importance

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<sup>22</sup> "Impulse für eine geschlechtergerechte Sozialpolitik auf der Basis jüdischer, christlicher und muslimischer Traditionen", 4.5.1. Epd-Dokumentation Nr. 6, 31. 1. 2006, p. 16. Translation A. M.

<sup>23</sup> This can already be seen in former processes of belonging to culturally and religiously discriminated groups, like in the case of of Berta Pappenheim (better known as "Anna O" in Freudian theory) shows. See Britta Konz, *Berta Pappenheim: Ein 'weiblich-jüdisches Projekt*

for social diversification and equal respect for difference: culture, religion, gender. This requires a critical perspective on dominant structures concerning aspects such as gender concepts, sexual orientation, ethnic origins, age, etc. but also hierarchies and differences in power and influence in institutions, language, public presence etc.

This may concern both a given specific religious or cultural group (such as “the Muslim community” or “Palestinian migrants”) and the dominant group with which that group lives (e.g. “German society”). By reflecting gender issues in interfaith encounter, we develop a learning-situation in which we permanently shift perspectives and change religious or cultural self-evidences.

This provides an answer to the second question raised above, that of what gender-questions add to interfaith studies.

The question is: Who can cope with a permanent changing of perspectives? Doesn't this mean a complete loss of profiled positioning, leading to arbitrariness, or an “anything goes” mentality?

I believe that it does not, as long as we continue to search for religious truth within our own specific tradition, because this requires of us time and time again a clear and profound positioning. While this leads to a reformulation of specific religious beliefs, it takes through the centre of the “own” to the “other” and allows a respectful dialogue without falling into the trap of proselytising.<sup>24</sup> “The ability to shift perspectives by the consideration of different life-projects with their merits and losses and to respect different desires, combined with the struggle for equal rights form elements of gender-competence which are indispensable for the education to tolerance and democracy.”<sup>25</sup>

#### **4. “Roots and wings”: towards a hermeneutics of diversity/plurality**

Looking at gender issues in the context of interfaith questions is similar to seeking to map a little known territory consisting of shifting floes. Just when you think you have grasped one of the floes, you change your position; what you have perceived vanishes when you see it from a new perspective. Traveling through moving landscapes, explorers become pilgrims. Those who look

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*der Moderne’? Die religiöse Grundlegung von Frauenemanzipation, sozialer Arbeit und Pädagogik* (Diss. Heidelberg 2004; forthcoming).

<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, the subject and its practical dimensions exceed time and space at this point, so that I will not be able to show how religious encounter in this sense is possible.

<sup>25</sup> Annedore Prengel, “Zwischen Gender-Gesichtspunkten gleiten”, 100, translation A. M.

for the right direction in such surroundings are well-advised to reassure themselves of the right positioning: the soil beneath the feet, sky above your head, alert senses and an open heart for encounters and tender moments, ancestors behind you, descendants in the focus. Supplies in your back-pack nourish you and can be divided. Pilgrims receive gifts from others. Strengthened by all this, you needn't be afraid of rocks, abysses and mountains. The land is wide. God and the others will allow themselves be found in this land.<sup>26</sup>

Ein neues Paradigma im Verständnis von kultureller und religiöser Differenz wird über paradoxe und multiperspektivische Zugänge gewonnen. Es geht darum, das Menschenrecht auf Differenz mit einem sozialen Verständigungsprozess zu verbinden, innerhalb dessen gemeinsame Maßstäbe und Orientierungen gefunden bzw. beständig neu ausgerichtet werden können. Die Schnittmenge aus unterschiedlichen theoretischen Disziplinen und praktischen Kontexten, in denen Einsichten über dieses Problemfeld gewonnen werden, ist bisher klein und wenig erkundet. In ihr ist ein großes Potential an Wegweisungen für ein religiöses und kulturell differenziertes Zusammenleben verborgen. Wir bewegen uns dabei zwischen Feministischer Theorie/Gender Studies, Pädagogik und Theologie. Am Schnittpunkt von Genderfragen und interreligiösem Dialog eröffnet sich ein wichtiges Lernfeld für Differenzenerfahrungen. Dabei gilt es, das Paradox aufrecht zu erhalten, dass der Weg zu Verständigung über die "Brücke Differenz" in Gestalt der religiösen Wahrheitsfrage daher kommt. Religion und religiöse Bildung als eigenständige psycho-soziale und kulturelle anthropologische Dimension in ihrer Bedeutung für soziale Zusammenhänge muss hierfür erneut in den Fokus wissenschaftlicher Betrachtung und öffentlicher Reflexion treten.

L'acquisition d'un nouveau paradigme pour la compréhension des différences culturelles et religieuses se gagne au moyen d'approches paradoxales et de perspectives multiples. Il s'agit de lier le droit humain à la différence à un processus social de concertation, dans le cadre duquel on pourrait soit trouver des critères communs et des orientations, les confirmer ou les modifier. L'intersection entre les différentes disciplines théoriques et les contextes pratiques, lieu où on peut parvenir à la compréhension de ces divers champs d'action, est mince et peu explorée jusqu'ici. Elle cache pourtant un important potentiel d'indications pour une cohabitation du fait religieux et culturel différenciée. On se meut là entre théologie féministe/études genre, pédagogie et théologie. A la croisée entre les questions genre et le dialogue interreligieux s'ouvre un important terrain d'études pour expérimenter les différences. En même temps, il s'agit de conserver le paradoxe qui veut que le chemin

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<sup>26</sup> See Annette Mehlhorn, "Geschlechtsspezifische Dimensionen im interreligiösen Lernen", 326.

qui mène à la compréhension réciproque par le “pont de la différence” se présente sous l’apparence de la question religieuse de la vérité. La religion et l’éducation religieuse, comme dimensions originales psycho-sociales et culturelles d’anthropologie et significatives pour la cohésion sociale, doivent être à nouveau mises au centre d’examen scientifique et de réflexion publique.

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