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Introduction: religions in the news in Brazil

In the 16th century, when the Portuguese colonizers came and took possession of the land that was later called Brazil, a variety of religious forms had already been experienced for centuries in the most different traditions. The encounter of diverse peoples with the colonizers also meant the encounter with a different culture and religion: Christianity and its expression of Iberian Catholicism. With the power of colonial occupation, Roman Catholicism became the religion of the Continent, demonizing and marginalizing indigenous religions.

The religious meetings did not end with that experience (Brandão 2004). The arrival of the millions of people forcibly brought from Africa to live and work in the New World also promoted a new encounter with different cultures and religious forms. Once again, Roman Catholicism linked to the colonial system as an official religion demonized and marginalized the religion of the other. However, black slaves found ways to keep their traditions alive by adapting them to the dominant tradition. Brazil then began to experience its first syncretic expressions of religion.

The meeting of these different religious traditions – Iberian Roman Catholicism, indigenous religions and African religions – and their subsequent practices, close to life and culture, made it possible for Brazil to become a plural country. This scenery became even more complex in the 19th century, with new encounters: the arrival of Protestant missions (Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, Episcopal, Lutheran), mainly from the USA but also from Europe, as well as the arrival of immigrants from Asia to work on agriculture, replacing the black slaves, who had gained freedom in 1888. The result of such a variety of cultural encounters was the formation and development of a multiplicity of religious expressions of indigenous, European, African, Asian and North American origins in Brazil.

At this point it is important to remember that Pentecostalism and its myriad denominations found fertile ground in the country and became the Latin American most significant religious phenomenon (Shaull and Cesar 2000). The numerical and geographical growth of Pentecostalism in Brazil, since the beginning of the 20th century, has been consolidated with the expansion of the presence of these religious groups in the media and in political parties. This increasing incidence has potentiated the numerical decline of Catholicism, which was considered, until the 1970s, a sovereign religious group due to its large majority of believers in these lands (Levine 2000).
In a research carried out in 2014, we proceeded to survey if this religious plurality was present in the stories produced by Brazilian news media (Cunha 2018). We developed a survey on the content by two of the most expressive Brazilian news media in that year: *Folha de S. Paulo* (FSP) and *Jornal Nacional* (JN). The first was the daily newspaper with the largest run and largest national circulation among the national papers in that year and a leader in digital editions. The second was (and still is) the leading daily television newscast *Globo Network* and reference in TV news production in the country.

The survey has raised 28,360 news reports, informative matters in 2014. There were 22,000 in FSP and 6,260 in JN while 427 in total contained keywords in the theme *religion*: 312 in FSP and 115 in JN. The unimpressive numbers, in terms of the general picture of the stories produced (1.5% of all that was reported in one year), indicate that the theme *religion* is not a priority for these prominent media in Brazil and there is no specific section or editor for specialized coverage. We also verified that among the 427 news reports found, the highest incidence is the news coverage of themes related to Christianity (73%), followed by Islam (19%). The predominance of Christianity as the most valued religion in the news is evident, which corresponds to the fact that Brazil is a predominantly Christian country. However, the second religion of the country, Spiritism, according to the Brazilian Census Bureau (Teixeira and Menezes 2013), is not frequently represented in the news. This can be explained by the position of Islam in the global political context, especially in the year 2014, when the Islamic State was in great evidence. However, it is important to note the wide difference in the number of stories. The other religions gained a much lower approach in numerical terms in both media. Therefore, the numbers indicate that religion in the news is information about Christianity, perhaps about Islam, according to the journalism practiced in the most read and most watched media channels in Brazil. In this context, other religions are not subject to attention and valorization, receiving a small space in the news, just when they carry out themes that reach the level of relevance defined by these media, usually themes that involve violence and curiosities, as we will see ahead.

It is important to point out that, in our 2014 research, the predominance of Christianity in news coverage does not represent the plurality that this religious segment experiences in Brazil. In the sub-theme *Christianity* surveyed, there is clear predominance of institutionalized Catholicism: 77.3% of all subjects in the two media (FSP and JN). Protestants appear as the second Christian group most present in stories about religion, however, with an inferior numerical difference: 17.5% in both vehicles. It is clear that Christian groups who are not Catholic are heavily disregarded in the general framework of the stories. The research included the categorization of the news found according to the value assignment to their content (positive or negative approach to the religious group). Catholicism was positively represented in 100% of the articles (even in those dealing with cases of pedophilia in the Church). The major content emphasis was on the Catholic agenda and approaches on social themes and events of the religious calendar, with highlights on papal speeches and visits. On the other hand, Muslims and Protestant Christians had the highest incidence of negative approach (82% and 72%, respectively). The African-Brazilian religions and Spiritism had such insignificant approach in the news coverage (only 1.4% of the news about religion published) that the 100% positive categorization of value assignment is not significant in this evaluation. These elements show that the plurality that signals the place of religions in Brazilian past and present history is disregarded by the news coverage in the country. Essentially, the news production is anchored in the notion of the so-called *dominant religion* focused on Catholicism, a concept that will be developed later in this chapter.
This disregard of themes on religion in Brazilian news media is reflected in the coverage of cases of religious intolerance, as it will be identified in the case study proposed ahead. By emphasizing violence and curiosity around the few narrated situations that involve religious intolerance, the news media does not address the issue in depth, as a historical and sociocultural problem. In this sense, Brazilian journalism becomes a promoter of religious intolerance, since superficial and sensationalist approach of non-Christian and non-Catholic religious expressions end up encouraging intolerance itself under the imaginary around a so-called true religion.

**Understanding religions, journalism and religious intolerance and violence**

*Religions*

In general, religion can be popularly defined as the universe of beliefs that involve the transcendent that is beyond the palpable and concretely experienced by the five senses of the body. Hence, the general idea of religion is directed toward belief in one or more higher divine beings (called God or gods and goddesses), in spirits, in supernatural beings, in life beyond death.

The origin of the term is related to the Latin word for ordinary use in ancient Rome *religio*, to refer to scruples, observance of laws and rules, warnings and prohibitions against the neglected with the collective. The word was not related to religion as we conceive it. It originates from the term *relegere*, meaning of scrupulous attention, patience, modesty and piety, while the derivative term *religiosus* was related to the worship to the gods in the Roman daily life, with the idea of “being scrupulous in relation to the cult” (Derrida 2002, 73). This meaning that connects the term *religio* to the worship of the gods is recorded in the writings of Cicero (1994).

The way the term journeyed in the history of religions provoked profound transformations in its meaning. In the times of consolidation of Christianity, the conception of *religare* emerges as a re-signification of *religio*, from the pagan Romans, now tied to the true religion, of the true and unique God. Daniel Dubuisson (2003) assigns this re-signification to Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius (2nd century), one of the first Christians, adviser of the Roman emperor, Constantine I. In the work *Divinae Institutiones*, Lactantius uses the new etymology in opposition to the pagan expression *relegere-religio*: *religare*, religion, devotion, the link that binds the human being to the one true God, the Christian God revealed in Jesus Christ. The word goes beyond the idea of careful observance of the worship to signify the relationship of dependence of the human being with the God of Jesus. Augustine contributes to the consolidation of this notion in the 5th century, when he takes up the work of Lactantius.

All this leads us to recognize that the concept of religion is a historical and cultural construction, used almost as synonymous to Christianity. Jacques Derrida (1998, 71–73) argues that although *relegere-religio* and *religare* are distinct etymologies, apparently competitors, they have a common point: they relate to the link, the bond that highlights a relation of responsibility to the divine. He proposes that the relation of complementarity between *relegere* and *religare* be the possibility of a common thought: the zealous, scrupulous observance of worship, of religious practice, and the links/bonds of devotion and loving relationship that unite human beings with the one and true god.
In this sense, Otto Maduro (1982, 4) affirms that it is possible for us to be open to a “rich meaning, no doubt, but one that, by reason of its vital particularity, is complex, variable, ambiguous and obscure.” Consequently, since there are many social groups and many related dynamics of history, we need to take the term religion in the plural, in order to consider the variety of phenomena correlated to the religious universe. Otto Maduro’s definition of religions takes this direction:

A structure of discourses and practices common to a social group, referring to certain forces (personified or not, multiplied or unified) that believers consider as anterior or superior to their natural and social surroundings, in whose regard they express their sense of dependency (through creation, control, protection, threat, or the like), and before which they consider themselves obliged to a particular pattern of conduct in society.

(Maduro 1982, 6)

In this sense, religions must be comprehensively understood in their universality, taking into account the diversity of particular forms, related to beliefs, myths, rites and collective organizations, within specific social, cultural and historical contexts. This common system of beliefs is socially, culturally and historically constructed from grand narratives that move society with a force that goes beyond what the materializing logic says (Gasbarro 2006).

When we base ourselves on a socio-historical definition of religion, we are promoting a dialogue between social communication, sociology and history and giving up lexical, philosophical theological definitions, which certainly does not cover elements that refer to religions such as faith, revelation, conversion, mystical experience, the Holy Scriptures. It is a sociological view of what religions represent both as a social field and as a form of social communication (Pace 2011).

**Journalism**

We can start from the understanding that journalism is a communication process fed by a narrative centered on the presentation of a punctual knowledge about the current state, concerning a more immediate social group and also the world. Therefore, the journalistic narrative becomes the periodic (routine, daily) report of current events. It is born from the correlation between event and news, or recent fact and immediate announcement, which gives the sense of topicality. All these dynamics result on a technical activity that aims to inform, produce information.

Thus, journalism is based on the existence of events with newsworthy characteristics, and from the point of view of journalists and readers/listeners/viewers/users of digital media, they become news. The contents of journalism are, therefore, the events with the greatest degree of newsworthiness. News are “what newspapermen make it” (Gieber 1964, 173), which means that it is not something with particular existence, but rather a construction by those who produce it. This is what the notion of news-value in journalism signifies, those criteria for valuing events in order to be considered sufficiently interesting, meaningful and relevant to be transformed into news (Bednarek and Caple 2017). Journalism can be done in print, television, radio or digital media and the process takes place through professionals (journalists), in journalistic organizations (companies, associations, NGOs), in the midst of a production process (journalistic practices) producing a specific type of product (the news), which unfolds in genres such as reporting, commenting, analysis and opinion.
All these elements are united by time through the senses of periodicity, instantaneity and topicality to capture the events of the world. Language must be objective and focused on the public interest, which shapes the fundamental character of journalism: neutrality. It means that news producers deal with events that are transformed into news under the principle of freedom of expression, with no committed to governments, political groups, movements and anything that prevents them from being impartial. This neutral understanding is a target for critics of the theories of communication who question every idea of impartiality and exemption in journalism. This evaluation is supported by the realization that every narrative carries semantic and emotive associations (Franklin et al. 2005). Like any discourse, journalistic narratives carry value judgments from the process of defining what is news and what is not; through the selection of contents, what contains images and what images, titles and headlines; on the words used to classify characters or situations. This theoretical critique also includes in this process the role of companies, institutions, organizations, movements and sponsors that produce journalistic stories, which guide news content based on their criteria and interests, making journalists as hostages in their own jobs.

Nevertheless, for a long time the (utopic) notion of the journalistic statement of impartiality prevailed as a set of representations focused exclusively on the explicit objective of informing, formulated according to the presumed codes and values of the public (Franklin et al. 2005). The studies that relate philosophy, sociology and anthropology to journalism strengthen criticism on the neutral understanding. They call attention to the human dimension and to the social time present in the process of journalistic production, considering the dynamics that involve the use of verbal language, the raw material of journalism. These studies criticize the understanding that journalism is the result of a technical work of reporting, but affirm that it is the result of a construction process that begins with the journalist’s understanding of the social reality, in which the events he/she reports take place. Miquel Rodrigo Alsina approaches this perspective:

> Reality cannot be completely different from the way actors interpret it, internalize it, rethink it and define it historically and culturally. The construction of reality, therefore, is the production of meaning through productive practice and routines of the organization of the journalistic profession.

*(Alsina 2005, 48, translated by the author)*

In producing news, a journalist draws on a worldview derived from the concepts built into the society and the social institutions with which he/she has interacted. These concepts help to construct a collective imaginary. In reporting a story, the journalist brings a social imaginary to the issues that in turn shape the writing of the story. Cornelius Castoriadis (1987) calls this collection of products of social interactions (figures/forms/images) *imaginary significations*, which form a coherent whole, the social imaginary. This collection of images is socially created and shared to give sense and cohesion to the existence of a group. Castoriadis considers that only from these *imaginary significations* it is possible to discuss something.

The imaginary is, therefore, a component of human existence as a significantly social experience, which gives meaning to the collective life and is re-signified by it, becoming an element in permanent construction. It is the social elaboration of the collection of images formed by the human being related to everything that he/she visually and experimentally learns from the world (Castoriadis 1987). This dynamic is made possible by communicational processes, which allow human beings to interact, in an interpersonal and massive way, mediated or not. Journalism is among them.
A collection of social meanings determines each person’s knowledge and worldview. A journalist, like any other member of society, experiences this process. His/her understanding of religion may or may not be the result of a religious experience but is directly linked to his/her understanding on beliefs. This means that the editorial approach to different facts and themes is related to the journalists’ imaginary connected to the social imaginary. The comprehension of the cultural and imaginary construction from a particular collective is important to understand how journalistic coverage of certain themes around religions is given.

**Dominant religion**

The concept *dominant religion* or *predominant religion*, which comes out of the religious studies field, can be evoked here. The great world religions and the majority of Christian denominations in the continents often gain this classification of *dominant religion* or *dominant group*, which is related to numerical superiority and long-standing political positions and result in a variety of social privileges. This approach resonates with the reality in Brazil and Latin America to the extent that it identifies some of the same aspects that determine the dominance of Christianity and especially of Roman Catholicism. From the list made by Lewis Z. Scholosser (2003), reflecting the topic in USA, we can correlate: numerical superiority, historically higher political positioning, privileges in the public sphere and the classification of some groups within Christianity itself as non-Christian, such as the case of Pentecostals in Latin America, still classified by Catholic-Roman leaders as so-called *sects*. Scholosser highlights the role of the media in this process, once newspaper headlines reproduce these perspectives.

Number, political position, privileges and disqualification of the other can be aspects that related to the status do Roman Catholicism in Latin America. However, considering the growth of Pentecostalism and its intense occupation of the public space in the continent (through media and politics) added to the consequent loss of believers in the Catholic Church (Teixeira and Menezes 2013), we must also relate the understanding of dominant religion to another perspective: the notion of hegemony. This notion, as developed by Antonio Gramsci (1998), is related to power strategies that produce both a worldview and its acceptance. Hegemony thus produces reality and produces the naturalizations that lead to its acceptance. The success of hegemony occurs when the dominance of certain beliefs and practices are treated as natural and unquestionable elements that make up the *natural order of things*.

Hence, we find the place of religion being identified in a given society as a natural and obvious presence in the public sphere – a place that is guaranteed and reserved – even if a given religious group is numerically shaken, as in the case of Catholicism in Brazil. In addition, even if there is competition in the religious field and losses in the position historically assumed, the hegemony of one religion is supported by the role it plays in the process of constructing reality, the *natural order of things*. This hegemonic process also includes the cultural dynamics that results from the construction of the collective religious imagination. Raymond Williams (1976, 145) establishes the relationship between hegemony and culture when he indicates that “the result of the exercise of hegemony can be identified in its acceptance as ‘normal reality’ or ‘common sense’ by those who, in practice, are subordinated by it”. In other words, the idea of *dominant religion* associated to Roman Catholicism in Brazil results from a cultural practice built from the social imaginary of a so-called *true and valid religion*. This is where the role of the media becomes crucial, since this imaginary permeates the understanding of religion of news producers.
Religious violence and intolerance

Tolerance is the human beings’ capacity to maintain coexistence positively. Tolerance does not mean patience, but it is the valorization of the right that every person has to be what he/she is and to continue to be. The opposite, intolerance, is the reduction of reality to only one side: the intolerant attitude is the denial of the right of the one who is different from existing. Hence, it is necessary to recognize the violent manipulation of intolerance to the other for the sake of power, a word that can be substituted in this understanding by violence (Freud 1964). It is concretized and taken to the extreme in segregation, exclusion and even elimination of the other through wars, regimes of separation (such as apartheid in South Africa, caste system in India), genocide, ethnic cleansing and persecution.

Violent human actions are generated by different forms of intolerance (racism, machismo, classism, xenophobia, homophobia, ageism, hate for political options, hate against people with disabilities, hate against obese people). The subject of this chapter, religious intolerance, is another form. The first records of intolerance and violence for religious reasons in Brazil are from the process of colonization of the country by the Portuguese at the threshold of the 16th century. The hundreds of indigenous peoples who inhabited the conquered land practiced very old religions. After the Portuguese invasion, they began to suffer from the rejection and demonization imposed by Roman Catholic Christianity, brought as the official religion of colonizers and presented as the only truth of faith. Groups that did not submit to the catechism of Catholic missionaries and did not convert to the imposed religion, had their expressions of faith forcibly eliminated in a process of decimation of cultures that marks the history of the country, or transformed by means of syncretism of rites and practices (Gonçalves 2012). The same process was experienced by millions of Africans enslaved and trafficked for centuries, brought to Brazil to work especially on coffee, sugar cane, cotton and tobacco plantations. They were mainly from Angola, Mozambique, Congo and Guinea and had distinct cultures and religions, not only those of tribal roots but also related to the Islamic faith. Collectiveness was forbidden, therefore they were separated and prevented from nurturing their beliefs. The slaves were impelled to the conversion to the Catholic faith and their religions were demonized and rejected by the religious leaderships allied to the colonial power.

The religious intolerance experienced by natives and Africans motivated by Catholic exclusivism and by the ideology of European superiority was experienced by Lutheran and Reformed Protestants as well. When these groups attempted to migrate to Northeastern Brazil, coming from France and the Netherlands in the 16th and 17th centuries, they were violently expelled. The same intolerance was directed to Jews who populated the country in the same centuries, coming from Portugal and from Holland, under the power of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, installed in Portugal for 3 centuries, which acted in Brazil through visits and delegation of power to local bishops (Wiznitzer 1960).

The coming of the Portuguese Royal Family to Brazil in 1808 (escaping from Napoleon attacks) promoted religious diversity within the Christian faith. Immigration of English, German and Swiss people, resulting from commercial agreements, navigation and colonization processes, brought Anglican, Episcopal and Lutheran Protestant faiths to the colony. However, only with the Imperial Constitution, after the independence of Portugal, in 1822, the freedom of worship of non-Catholics was recognized, although Catholicism was maintained as the official religion. This limited opening allowed the arrival of Protestant missionaries with proselytizing purposes in the second half of the 19th century, although there
were several restrictions such as the requirement that the place of worship should not have the traditional architecture of Christian churches. Catholic leaders, however, who opposed any practice of faith other than their own, promoted many violent acts against Protestants (physical assault, stoning of temples, among others). On the other side, Protestant leaders closed to dialogue with Catholicism and deniers of the very existence of this Christian faith, in turn, also developed violent actions such as the public destruction of images of saints and offensive public preaching.

During the 20th century, Brazil slowly opened for the rights on religious freedom. It was more difficult to the African-Brazilian religions that until 1950s were demonized and subjected to police persecution. Other religious groups found space during this period, such as Spiritism, Eastern religions, surviving indigenous religions and others that emerge from syncretic processes, favoring the experience of plurality in Brazilian lands (Brandão 2004). However, even when advances are recognized, the culture of intolerance stimulated by religious exclusivism is still alive. It is promoted by Christian hegemony in the history of the country (fundamentally Roman Catholic) and by the ideology of racism rooted in white and Judeo-Christian civilization superiority.

Religious intolerance is present as a culture, in the most diverse social practices, and is propagated not only by intolerant religious groups but also by institutions, such as schools, the judiciary and the media. This is due to the various forms of expression of intolerance, ranging from attitudes of prejudice, to offenses to freedom of belief and even persecution and physical violence against religious minorities (Kunsch and Fischmann 2002).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Brazilian Federal Constitution (1988) recognize freedoms of expression and worship as human and citizen rights. This means that religions and beliefs of members of the human family and of Brazilians should not constitute barriers to living and establishing human relationships. In this sense, people should be respected in public and private settings and equally treated before the law, regardless of having or not a religious confession. The most recent Report on Intolerance and Religious Violence in Brazil (2011–2015): Preliminary Results (Fonseca and Adad 2016), conducted by the Brazilian Government, shows eight types of violations of human beings due to religious motivation occurring in the country: psychological, physical, moral, institutional, patrimonial, sexual violence, violence relative to the practice of religious acts/rites and negligence. The report lists 394 cases in the period, raised through denunciations collected by ten Brazilian Public Ombudsmen Offices for Human Rights. The majority of the cases are psychological violence (66%) and the highest incidence of violence occurs in houses (36%), where the perpetrators are mostly white (53%), family members (23%) and neighbors (27%). The majority of the victims are black and brown (64%) and linked to African-Brazilian religions (27%). This Report is the subject of the study case presented in the next session.

Journalism, religious intolerance and violence as study object

As intolerance is an element present in different social experiences, it is possible to identify practices around the world that represent violence and intolerance in regard to freedom of expression and information. They take form of censorship, prohibitions, intimidation and physical violence against news producers. We can also consider the constitution of media monopolies, the restricted definition in the concept of news and the criteria of newsworthy as well as the insufficiency in the training of media professionals.
The media are mediations, so they reflect, signify and re-signify imaginaries, cultures and attitudes of societies (Alsina 2005). Considering a plural society, such as Brazil, if tolerance and the right to freedom of expression and belief prevail in society, the tendency is for the media to reproduce these dimensions. Otherwise, in the prevalence of intolerance and denial of freedom, the media end up not expressing this plurality.

The Catalog of Theses and Dissertations by CAPES Foundation (Coordination for Improvement of Higher Education Personnel), a department of the Brazilian Ministry of Education, records 14 researches in Humanities on the relationship between journalism and religious intolerance, from 2002 to the first half of 2018. Among these 14 studies, four deal, in general, with religions in the news coverage by the Brazilian mainstream media, four deal with the way Islam is represented, three evaluate journalistic approaches to African-Brazilian religions, three show the relation between journalism, respectively, and Protestants, Catholics and indigenous religiosities. All the studies attest the superficial content with which religious intolerance is referred by Brazilian mainstream media and how intolerance ends up being propagated through these journalistic practices. The report of the Brazilian government on religious intolerance quoted here has a chapter on how news media approached cases of religious intolerance in the country from 2011 to 2015. It is an official report and source for the deepening of these elements regarding journalism-intolerance-violence, which will be detailed in the following case study.

Religious intolerance and violence in Brazilian journalism: a case study

The Report on Intolerance and Religious Violence in Brazil (2011–2015): Preliminary Results (RIRVB) (Fonseca and Adad 2016) is the result of a survey promoted by the Human Rights Ministry of the Brazilian Government, which gathered data of national scope, from October 2011 to December 2015. The project was developed in partnership with the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI), with the support of the (Lutheran) Superior School of Theology (Brazil). Data collection covered all 27 states of Brazil and sources such as press materials, public human rights ombudsmen offices, judicial processes, registrations in specialized police stations, interviews with religious leaders involved in emblematic cases. The categories for analysis were based on the complaints received by the Ombudsman Office of the Ministry of Human Rights:

• Psychological violence due to religious motivation
• Physical violence due to religious motivation
• Violence regarding the practice of religious acts/rites
• Moral violence due to religious motivation
• Institutional violence due to religious motivation
• Violence on the basis of religious motivation
• Sexual violence due to religious motivation
• Negligence due to religious motivation

The 146-page report is divided into five chapters. The text presents a portrait about the crimes of hatred practiced in contemporary Brazil that violate freedom and human dignity, violence and persecution for religious reasons. They are, as stated in the report, “practices of extreme gravity and are often characterized by offense, discrimination and even acts that affect life” (Fonseca and Adad 2016, 9, translated by the author).

In this study, we analyze elements contained in Chapter 3 (data related to cases of intolerance and religious violence in Brazil reported by the written press), to search for ways to
encourage journalistic practices aimed at the full development of human and citizens’ rights. RIRVB Chapter 3 draws attention to two elements directly related to journalism: (1) the low incidence of news about religious intolerance and violence; (2) trends in news production (‘editorial line’).

**The low incidence of news**

RIRVB identified 65 news media in the 27 states of Brazil, classified as *main news printed papers and portals* and *main news magazines in the country*. The report registers 399 stories about intolerance and religious violence in Brazil published between 2011 and 2015. Considering the cases approached in more than one vehicle, there are 274 stories. Based on an equitable distribution with the use of a simple parameter, we identify little more than four stories per vehicle in five years, a number that is very small: less than one story per year in each news media surveyed.

Since RIRVB highlights a high number of cases per year (Table 20.1), the journalistic coverage is quite far from what reality indicates.

The low number of stories has an important meaning considered the report itself:

> … the subject of intolerance and religious violence is still an incipient matter in the journalistic environment so that there is not an adequate approach in relation to several aspects connected to it.  

*(Fonseca and Adad 2016, 35, translated by the author)*

In this respect, it is important to emphasize that it is not only the issue of intolerance and religious violence that needs to be examined but that of religion itself.

Religion has been a neglected subject in the Brazilian news media, as it was concluded in the study carried out by the author of this chapter in 2014, described above (Cunha 2018). In that study, we showed the inexpressive numbers regarding the general picture of the stories on religion in the two news media with the largest public reach in the country, a newspaper (print and digital) and a television newscast. Only 1.5% of all that was reported in a year dealt with religion. These figures revealed that the theme is not a priority in these prominent media in Brazil, a plural and very religious country, lacking a specific section or editor for specialized coverage. In this sense, if religion does not become a prominent topic for the news media, religious intolerance and violence become irrelevant, consequently. According to studies in journalism, it can be classified as a thematic that do not have *news-value*.

Bad news (tragedies, crime, violence), in general, have news value, attracts public attention, as well as curious, unusual facts (surprises) (Franklin et al. 2005). This is confirmed by the RIRVB, which shows that the largest number of stories researched concerns subjects that deal with violence and curiosities. Major incidence is news on physical aggressions and depredations and situations like Muslim women and Catholic nuns wearing veils in public

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denunciations</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From Odobar.*

*(Fonseca and Adad 2016, 61).*
institutions and in photos of official documents, and disputes related to ritual practices in public spaces (see Table 20.2). This observation points to the conclusion that, in the perspective of journalistic coverage, the relevant element is not the religious motivation related to the cases but violence itself.

This element may contribute to the deepening of the report’s analysis, which registers:

… the occurrence of religious intolerance as a fact in itself is despised and the intolerant act as such is de-characterized, turning it into a mere artifice to exemplify prejudice. This leads to the lack of recognition of the act of religious intolerance as a type of violence that deserves attention/denunciation by the press.

(Fonseca and Adad 2016, 35, translated by the author)

The news value violence and curiosities silence the relationship between religious intolerance and violence and minimize the problem by characterizing it as simply prejudice. This categorization may be considered a result of the understanding of religion that is part of the imaginary of the news producers and make up editorial lines.

### Table 20.2 Themes of the most repeated stories in the press

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Girl is hit by stone in her head after leaving candomble cult” (2015)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“For judge, candomble and Umbanda are not religions” (2014)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Justice compels Protestant church to indemnify candomble temple after death of a priest in Camacari” (2015)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Police chief is arrested for shooting a Protestant believer”</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Muslim women are victims of attack in streets of Rio”</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Religious fight between TV actor Henri Castelli and his ex-girlfriend gets an end in Police Station”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FONSECA, ADAD (2016, 43).

The “editorial line” of the media channels

One of RIRVB highlights concerns the editorial line of the 65 vehicles surveyed. The text highlights that the editorial line of the newspaper needs to be sensitive to occurrences on religious intolerance or there will be a repressed demand. The report also considers the difficulty that journalists and news producers have to deal with cases of religious intolerance and violence due to lack of knowledge, a way of making the occurrences invisible (Fonseca and Adad 2016, 36).

It is necessary to relate this aspect to what was emphasized above in this chapter: the fact that such position of insensitivity to intolerance, which results in ignorance and invisibility of the theme, concerns the very relationship of disregard of news media with the theme religion.

First, there is no specialized editor or section in the vehicles, which results in the lack of enabled/qualified journalists to deal with the issue, promoting superficial and/or misleading content. The report offers an example of the story of a boy murdered in 2012 in the outskirts of a city in the Northeast of Brazil published as a case of black magic practices. Black magic is not included in the report as a key word as it is not considered a religious practice in Brazilian culture. As the researchers analyzed the case, it was evident that it would not fit
as religious intolerance and violence because the boy had suffered violence but it was not an episode motivated by religion. The report concludes: “Actually, religious intolerance could be identified in the way the press portrayed the fact” (Fonseca and Adad 2016, 38, translated by the author).

This type of approach can be evaluated as lack of knowledge or ignorance in the way news producers (editors and reporters) deal with the issue. However, it can also refer to a second aspect contained in this element and that is prior to the news production itself: the predominant understanding of religion among news producers.

We raised in the 2014 research on religion in the Brazilian news (Cunha 2018), elements that demonstrate that we do not only deal with the issue of editorial line, but rather an element before it: news producers work from a reality constructed by a collective imaginary. Further these producers, having or not religious formation, also feed themselves with information from the news media that is a constructor of this reality. In this sense, it is important to consider that there is a predominant imaginary on religion permeating Brazilian culture. It dates back to the time of the Portuguese colony catechized by Catholic missionaries. In that conception, which still prevails, these lands were chosen by God to be made Christians, a faith that must remain exalted through sentences like: God is Brazilian, “Brazil is a tropical country blessed by God” (Ianni 2000). News producers, Brazilians who interact with this imaginary and cultural form, end up rebuilding and reissuing in the media the image of God, related to Christianity, and that of the true and valid religion concerning Catholicism.

Despite the fact that Roman Catholic numerical dominance has been put in check in Brazil since the 1980s, especially with the vertiginous growth of Pentecostalism (Teixeira and Menezes 2013), the news media reconstruct the Catholic image of the dominant religion, the one that is true and valid. Then, the published news privileges the status of this religious group through the predominant amount of texts and the positive quality of the contents, guaranteeing its hegemony (Scholosser 2003). In this dynamic, the journalism practiced silences events that involve other religious expressions, or treats them pejoratively, denying the complex framework of religious diversity in Brazil, even within Catholicism itself, avoiding the deep report of situations of intolerance and violence practiced in the name of this true religion.

This comprehension may explain why RIVRGB has identified the trend to a large number of stories on religious intolerance and violence published related to international events. The report concludes that this journalistic practice suggests that the news producers understanding restrict the theme to “ethnic wars and conflicts in the Middle East or in Europe involving populations particularly faithful to Islam” (Fonseca and Adad 2016, 36, translated by the author). This approach negates the subject coverage at the local level because denies its relevance or even its existence.

For this reason, RIRVB identifies expressions of intolerance in the news media themselves – papers, magazines and portals as aggressors:

Depending on the sensitivity given to this type of occurrence, this theme [religious intolerance and violence] is contemplated or not, and can be repressed, considered or even narrated in a biased way. This aspect result in newspapers with little news about local cases of religious intolerance and violence, giving more publicity to international, national cases (mainly those in the Southeast) and about demonstrations against religious intolerance in Brazil, such as marches, shows and cultural events.

(Fonseca and Adad 2016, 45, translated by the author)
Conclusion: learnings and perspectives for future studies

The cases of violence against religions reported in the media researched and recorded in Chapter 3 of RIRVB are part of the dense portrait that permeates the daily experiences marked by prejudice, hatred and all kinds of aggression by many Brazilian religious groups. Aiming at communication studies that focus on the defense of human rights and citizenship, we must consider what is contained in the report: the discursive dimension of the approach of Brazilian journalism to religions, which is intolerant in the form of verbalizing cases of religious intolerance and also in the silences (the non-sayings). Religious violence in Brazil is also revealed in the discourse of the media. These approaches ultimately serve to promote intolerance and the intensification of disputes between religious groups. One of the conclusions registered in RIRVB points out:

The search in the newspapers resulted in fewer news than expected. The conclusions can be several: or these cases do not even take a public dimension, staying in the private sphere, or they reach the public sphere seen as minor issues. An observation of the cases found shows the difficulty of the authorities themselves in dealing with religious conflicts, identifying the aggressors and the criminal type itself. Concerning the press, there is a low interest in the subject and a challenge that represents the promotion of critical and transformative thinking. Access to information and the establishment of new fronts, which corroborate the need for a better and more comprehensive press coverage.

(Fonseca and Adad 2016, 55, translated by the author)

Religious plurality, even within the hegemonic Christianity in the country, is a factor that seems to be ignored or even denied by news media in Brazil.

This study still brings out other two elements when the subject is the role of communication and the media in the actions of defense of human and citizen rights. First, the need to challenge educational processes, especially in Universities, in courses of journalism, to train professionals to take pluralism, diversity and responsibility into account. Second, RIRVB needs to be a source for challenging news producers (media owners, publishers, journalists) to take responsibility for handling such content. Another important indicator from the case study is the need to focus more attention on independent, alternative media, which has played a significant role in building journalism committed to human and citizen rights, in actions around freedom of expression and belief, by guaranteeing visibility and voice for minorities (Peruzzo 2009).

A forth aspect that is relevant to this area of studies is the increasing number of actions, institutionalized or not, that face the challenge around religious intolerance and violence in Brazil. The progress of the number of cases of violence and religious intolerance in the country in recent years, as shown in RIRVB, has motivated movements of civil society such as marches and periodic events against intolerance and for religious freedom. These events were launched in Rio de Janeiro in 2008, and have been amplified throughout the country. In the field of institutional politics, the creation of the Parliamentary Front in Defense of Traditional Peoples African-Brazilian Religions in 2014 is a significant action.

The institution of public policies on human rights through organs linked to the Federal Government of Brazil began in the period of re-democratization after the military dictatorship (1964–1985), with the creation of the Secretariat of Human Rights of the Presidency of the Republic. In the 2000s, the secretariat gained the status of Federal Ministry, and the Human Rights Ombudsman Office was created, responsible for receiving reports of violations related to intolerance.
Both the expressions of greater awareness of the Brazilian population and the consolidation of public policies in the face of this serious social and political conflict reflected in this chapter impact academic studies. The survey in the Catalog of Theses and Dissertations by CAPES Foundation shows 14 researches developed on the theme from 2002 to 2018, and indicates a significant increase in number of studies from the year 2009, when the periodic activist actions were intensified: There are 11 studies from that year. Brazilian academy is clearly challenged to pay more attention to the subject of religious intolerance, communication and journalism both in researches and in courses to be offered. This handbook represents a significant contribution.

Further readings

This chapter is part of a book that explores how the news media shape and reflect what the public knows about religion. A look on how American press covers Latin-American religion offers content to deepen the notion of an exclusivist approach on religion through news media that is a source for religious intolerance and violence.

This chapter deepen the approach on the mosaic formed by the religions in Latin America through a critical observation on how the news media treat the subject insufficiently or make invisible the religious diversity that shapes the continent.

References


