

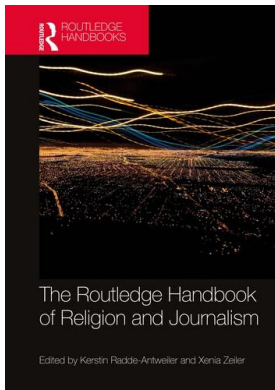
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### Gender, religion and new medias in Latin America

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## 14

GENDER, RELIGION AND NEW  
MEDIAS IN LATIN AMERICA*Kelber Pereira Gonçalves***Introduction: notes on contemporary Latin American  
religious landscapes**

It is important to realize that it is not possible to outline in depth the peculiarities of the media and journalistic and religious landscapes of each country in the region. Therefore, this chapter focuses on Latin American countries where Portuguese or Spanish are the official languages, with exception of the Caribbean countries. A more global definition of religion, understood as a “habitus expressed by the bias of spirituality, philosophies of life and experiences of the sacred which compounds a regime of beliefs” (Steil and Toniol 2013, 4–5), stands out in a landscape as plural as that of Latin America. However, the Latin American continent as a region theoretically and a priori has a number of common social and cultural characteristics inherited from Ibero-American religious-economic-colonialism by the Apostolic Roman Catholic Church. In the case of Latin America (at least for the moment), theories of secularization developed in highly industrialized societies do not apply, with the exception of Uruguay (Da Costa 2009). In this region of the globe, there is no question of a “return of the religious” (Willaime 2000, 319), in public space or in the media, because “it never left the peoples of this continent” (Löwy 1996, 52). According to Freston (2010, 2012), the polarity between Roman Catholics and evangelicals remains central in Latin American religiosity with a growth of people who identify themselves as evangelical (Parker 2005), particularly in Brazil, Chile and most Central American countries. Referring to published work by Cunha (2017) and Stoll (1993), it is also important to emphasize that although we know that the category of evangelicals is very far from homogeneous, we use the term evangelicals as an umbrella term to characterize Latin American Protestants, regardless of denominational affiliations. This chapter focuses on the polarity between Catholics and evangelicals. Recent studies (e.g., Parker 1993, 2005, 2009, Bastian 1997, Pédrón-Colombani 2001, Steil 2001, Smith and Prokopy 2005, Freston 2010, Bastian 2012, Freston 2012, Pérez 2013) seem to agree with the fact that today’s religious landscape is more heterogeneous in Latin America. According to Morello, Romero, Rabbia and Da Costa (2017, 316) this religiosity, formerly marked by Roman Catholicism as an *official religion*, has for some decades been characterized by religious pluralization, which would not be a “reaction to secularization” but a way of “coping with everyday life.” According to Parker (1993, 105), it has considerable influence

in the “constitution of the symbolic field in society” in many domains, such as journalism, politics, education or the judicial system.

This pluralization concerns not only hybridization of the most varied religious syncretism but also emerging forms of religious *bricolage* (Bastian 1992, 544) in a context of fragmentation of the actors’ identities which transforms the way of conceiving the relation between the sacred and the profane (Pérez 2013, 10). Multiple affiliations and dual affiliation (Freston 2010), religious migrations (Machado 1996, 83) or customization of faith or “individualization of belief” (Campiche 1993, 129) are also emerging in Latin America. New models of consumer culture have developed in more cosmopolitan cities organized by a more homogenous economic model and a uniformity based on the North American model. With the exception of the Cuban State, which, because of its relationship to religion as well as the peculiarities of its economic and media model makes the country an exception in the Latin American continent, the religious field is no exception to consumer culture. Garcia-Ruiz (2008, 387) states that religion “privatized at the same time as the telephone, diverse services and even the state” and finds its place as a full-fledged entrepreneurial model of independent businesses as salvation (Bastian 2012), which seeks to meet diverse and varied needs (Smith and Prokopy 2005). Religious leaders (especially Pentecostals) invest much into the best performing media.

### **Religion and gender roles: family as a nuclear entity in Latin America**

The Latin American continent has had a heterogeneous path in the development of its information and communication media and technology in society. This obviously varies among countries, but overall the continent has experienced considerable delay compared to so-called Western countries. In a historical perspective, the socio-cultural transformation of the continent begins in a more profound way from the second half of the 20th century. According to Parker (2005), the rural exodus and consequent rapid growth of big cities, the development of the mass media and more recently the new Internet-related media has reduced the geographical distances between Latin American peoples. In less than 40 years, 70% of the population that used to be peasants coexist today in cities, thus bringing a heterogeneity of cultures and ways of conceiving the world that defy notions of culture and identities (Martín-Barbero 2013). The sexual revolution and the gradual entry of women into the labor market (whether informal or not) have also shaken the notion of division of roles according to the gender and pattern characteristic of most traditional Latin American societies, in which the man was the only financial provider. Recent research by Machado (1996) and Barajas (2011) suggests that in recent decades, the very structure of the family as a hegemonic entity (father, mother, child), inherited from Catholicism, has been reconfigured. According to Vaggione (2008, 2014), this has been accentuated by the emergence of social movements, such as indigenous movements, feminist movements, movements for sexual diversity, the *queer* movement and so on. These movements have gradually gained greater visibility in the public and media spheres and as a result have gained more space in journalistic coverage. In the case of Latin America, unlike in the highly industrialized countries, these social movements emerged in the context of the establishment of “military dictatorships marked by a nationalist and family morality” (Miskolci and Campana 2017, 731). This was supported in several countries by the Catholic Church, which has slowed a deeper cultural, political and legal transformation of gender equality and reproductive and sexual rights. Although less drastic than in the so-called developed countries, these gradual transformations in the mononuclear family model have not been without traumas in a region

where the *Sagrada Familia* is not only the allegory of the legitimate family model, but also a device of control and effective social organization in delineating gendered and hierarchical roles (Duarte 2006). For the Catholic Church the family is also perceived as a domestic church and a purveyor of evangelization in society.

According to Butler (1988, 520), one of the notions of *gender* as a category is “a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief.” While the notion of performativity and the perception of masculine and feminine are not fixed and are in fact distinct according to different cultures, the categorization of gender in Latin America would also be reinforced by religion (Drogus 1990). According to Farias (2000, 78), through the culture (or cult) of the *marianismo*, inherited by Roman Catholicism, women would be interpreted as “models of submission, purity and suffering” and “apparently revalued.” But according to Stevens (1973), this presupposition of revaluation would hide only *another face of machismo*, reducing women to the “figure of a wife or mother who has suffered for a long time, and can still change men dissatisfied with their family” (Farias 2000, 80). Finally, these women would have a function or responsibility as regenerators of society. The *marianismo* would be still essentially responsible for the creation of two categories of women:

The Christian mother will have to help her daughters to cultivate ‘their Marian attributes’, by supervising them through their education so that they are faithful to the two models imitated to them, namely that of her own mother and that of her mother Mary; as for boys, they must be protected from their unfortunate tendency to ‘exercise a libertine sexuality’ that would push them to other accursed women – the seductive prostitutes, different from their well-beloved mothers.

(Farias 2000, 80)

According to Butler (2006), categories of gender are articulated in a set of social dynamics that aim to exaggerate the difference between the sexes, well beyond the biological differences, in order to naturalize it and ensure control of any non-hetero-normative deviance in the whole of society. In the case of Latin America, this exaggeration in the delineation of characteristics associated with gender also includes gender subcategories (two completely incompatible types of women), that are still represented in all the media: from confessional journalism to the serialization of television journalism to the *telenovelas* or advertising or marketing. For example, research by Villegas, Lemanski and Valdéz (2010) on the representation of these two categories of women in television advertising in Mexico revealed that, despite a positive change over the last twenty years, the media portrayal of women has remained largely traditional. Thus, in the quest for effective marketing, it is better to be careful to avoid an advertisement that would feature a wife who has knowledge about sex. In this perspective, the media can participate in the creation of culturally gendered identities.

In order to understand the complexities of gender, religion and new media in Latin America, it is important to understand how gender dynamics are experienced in the region, and how they are represented through diverse journalistic, media and religious landscapes. With regard to the media landscape, it is important to underline that the heterogeneity of the Latin American cultural and information industry is not synonymous with a plural media field, given the more or less important monopolization or oligopolization of media, depending on the country. In addition, Latin American media have historically often been marked by conservative ideological positions. As far as religion is concerned, although evangelicals (in growth) and Catholics (in recession) remain major actors – sometimes working together,

when common interests are at stake – phenomena of syncretism, forms of customization of faith or religious nomadism are also very present in the region. Emerging forms of conceiving gender and religion are multiplying, but this plurality of beliefs and opinions is not sufficiently represented in the mainstream journalistic media.

Regarding the direct relationship between religion and gender, although poorly represented in journalistic coverage by mainstream media because of their minority and deviant (or even often suggested heretical) nature, Latin America has seen a growth of many *inclusive* religious groups or churches pertaining to gender diversity and sexual diversity (see Barajas 2011, Barajas 2014, Barajas 2016 for Mexico and De Jesús 2008, De Jesús 2010, Natividade 2010, De Jesús 2013, Natividade 2017 for Brazil). Despite its controversial nature, we will use the term here to refer to churches or groups that also welcome the non-cisgender-heterosexual community. According to Vaggione (2009, 34), in recent years we could witness a *strategic secularization* through the *ONGanisation* of religion in Latin American countries from religious groups that seek to politicize sexuality in order to stop *gender ideology* and sexual and reproductive rights, including from pro-life movements organizations. According to Faúndes and Vaggione (2012) and Morán Faúndes (2018) this is a strategy that seeks to make the discourse *more scientific* because it aims to have more visibility in the journalistic agenda and more credibility in global journalistic and media coverage. While military dictatorships have caused a considerable delay in sexual rights and gender equality, new social movements such as the feminist and LGBTI movements are breaking out and gaining visibility, particularly in the journalistic and media thanks in part to social media.

## **Journalistic coverage and the interlacing of religion and gender issues in contemporary Brazil: a case study**

### ***Plural religious landscape and exclusivist journalistic coverage***

In the case of Brazil, as well as in Latin America, changes in the contemporary religious landscape and a greater incidence of religious pluralism are possible thanks to the phenomena of conversion (e.g., Catholics converting to evangelicals) and not because of dynamics related to immigration or secularization, as is the case in Europe, for example. The plurality of religions and forms of spirituality has always been part of the country's inhabitants since the *discovery* by the Portuguese. The contemporary Brazilian religious landscape can be divided into three essential spheres (Cunha 2016, 1):

- 1 The country has established itself as a predominantly Catholic country with the support of the colonial system and later by the Republic.
- 2 Catholicism tries to maintain itself as a hegemonic religion in the face of the phenomenon of religious pluralization.
- 3 The development of the Pentecostal movement today puts Catholic hegemony at risk.

Transformations in the Brazilian religious landscape are also reflected in the media landscape with an increase in the religious content in the country's media. For example, according to studies by the National Film Agency (ANCINE), the dominant television category in Brazil is currently religious. Religious programs (services, masses, various religious events or any program for the transmission of a message of faith) predominate. Confessional productions occupied 21.2% of all programs on public Brazilian television in the year 2016 (ANCINE 2017). This increase in religious content on television has been possible particularly in the

context of an amplification of religious leaders buying and using the media. This is especially common among Pentecostals – who often also perform political functions such as congressman and women or senators and many of who can be considered conservative or fundamentalist. However, the increase in programs with religious content is not synonymous with religious pluralism in the media or in the journalistic agenda.

According to Cunha (2016), despite the plurality in the Brazilian religious landscape journalistic coverage of religion remains exclusivist, centered on Christianity and more specifically on Roman Catholicism, as historically Roman Catholicism was once the official religion of the country. By focusing on understanding how journalistic coverage deals with religion, how different religious groups are represented in Brazil and how journalists producing journalistic content perceive religion, Cunha analyzed two important journalistic media in the country: the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* and the *Jornal Nacional* television news broadcast on prime time by the *Globo* channel. This research has revealed that religion remains poorly represented and since it is part of the journalistic agenda, Christianity and more particularly Catholicism is the religion treated in almost all of the journalistic coverage, followed by Islam which is presented in these media in a pejorative manner including in a global context of religious fundamentalisms represented notably by the Islamic State. Afro-Brazilian religions, spiritualism and evangelicals are not only neglected but also treated most often depreciably. The journalistic coverage seems to reinforce the idea of the evangelical movement as responsible for a fall in the number of members of the Catholic Church (in Brazil and throughout Latin-America). The various forms of popular religiosity linked to Catholicism are not part of journalistic coverage and when it enters the journalistic agenda, it is reduced to pilgrimages or festivals recognized by the institution. In the case of Christian religious holidays such as Passover and Christmas, journalistic coverage favors content restricted to Roman Catholicism. Thus Cunha, through the concept of dominant religion demonstrates how Catholicism remains anchored in the “social imagination” (Cunha 2012, 18) of the owners of the mainstream media and Brazilian journalists, despite the religious plurality and the variety of beliefs present in the country.

The journalistic media of the *Record* channel, which is part of the Record Group and one of the country’s leading media conglomerate, was bought in 1989 by Bishop Macedo, leader of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. With a mix of electronic church and secular content, Record has seen a significant increase in ratings over the years. The Record campaign *A caminho da liderança* (lit., On the path to leadership) seems to testify to the ambition of the bishop to overtake the channel *Globo*, still leader in terms of ratings. According to ANCINE, in 2016, the televised journalism of the Record Channel represents 35.85% of its programming, followed by religious content programs that correspond to 22.89% of the content broadcast by the channel. On the television channel Record, content related to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God is sometimes presented from a journalistic or informative angle. For example, *Jornal da Record*, the journal’s main journalistic product broadcast on prime time, featured a *report* of about fifteen minutes on the inauguration of the *Salomão* Temple, the world headquarters of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, inaugurated in 2014 in the popular district of Braz, São Paulo. Every year, on the anniversary of the inauguration of the temple, the Record channel grants significant coverage to the temple, not only on television, but in all the media of the Record group, such as *RecordTV*, *Record News* and *R7*. In the case of the Record group, religion (or the religious) influences the selection of events that will compose the journalistic agenda in various media (television, Internet, radio, etc.). The case of the Record group is thus exemplary for a singular representation of religion in journalism. For example, the content selected to appear in

the journalism agenda of the Record group included undercover reports and denunciations on alleged acts of questionable morality committed by religious leaders competing with Bishop Edir Macedo (see Cunha 2012). Such reporting contributes to dynamic disputes for the hegemony in the religious market. The Record channel has already been prosecuted for the dissemination of content considered intolerant toward other religions, particularly Afro-Brazilian religions.

Finally, in the case of Brazil, the journalists and owners of mainstream media, in a media monopoly, thus contribute to the negation of pluralism and sometimes even participate in attitudes of intolerance. In this sense, religion or the religious do not escape the rule that the media is the main source of what is important or valued from a social or cultural perspective (Hoover 2014). The journalistic media actively participate in this process not only through the selection of information for the media agenda but also through how they cover an event.

### ***Public policies, religion and gender: the role of mainstream media in creating moral panic***

In recent years, important public policy developments in Brazilian society in gender equality, women's rights and those of the LGBTI population have taken place (e.g., Campos Machado 2018). The right to vote for women was only acquired in 1962 (Cunha 2017). Beginning in 2002, entities within the Federal Government that aimed at ensuring the rights of minorities were created, which was a decisive turning point for gender in Brazil. Some of these developments also included a law called *Maria da Penha* that was created to more severely punish gender violence, especially domestic violence, the recognition of femicide as a hate crime, the family no longer being recognized as an institution based exclusively on marriage, progress in the field of work, e.g., regarding the rights of housekeepers (in their vast majority women) and the creation of *Casa da Mulher Brasileira* among others. With regard to the rights of the LGBTI population, since 2010, a number of rights have been ensured by the Brazilian justice system, such as the right to homo-parental adoption, the right to use the so-called social name (the name by which transvestites and transsexuals wish to be recognized) and issues related to pensions and inheritances in the event of the death of a spouse.

Cunha (2017) clarifies that this advancement of Brazilian women's rights in society and the LGBTI population has been in symbiosis with a greater presence of conservative Catholic and evangelical religious groups active in politics in the country, with some of these groups owning their own media. This strong presence of religious groups in the political and media sphere is a new phenomenon, which has also changed not only the political landscape of the country but also the relations between evangelicals and Catholics. Those who did not agree before find themselves united in the name of a religious morality with regard to the body, sexuality and a notion of traditional family modeled in the image of a father, mother and their children. In the political and media fields, these conservative groups revolve around fighting sexual, reproductive and gender equality rights and also fighting a common enemy, the ideology of gender interpreted as the politico-Marxist-leftist project of implantation of an ideology that seeks to *destroy the family* and consequently *annihilate society*. These fundamentalist groups define those responsible for the implantation of this ideology as mainly homosexuals – through the establishment of a *gay dictatorship* – and feminists – often called *feminazi*. According to Martino (2017), starting from the assumption that changes in social practices are directly related to media practices, these transformations have reverberated throughout Brazil, in the media and journalistic fields: this is done in the so-called religious media (paper, radio, television, websites and social networks) but also in the so-called secular media.

In September 2017 in São Paulo, the Latin American financial and cultural capital, an event titled the *35° Panorama da Arte Brasileira – Brasil por multiplicação* (lit., Panorama of Brazilian Art – Brazil by multiplication) promoted by the Museum of Modern Art was controversial. While the event offered a very broad panorama of Brazilian art (architecture, dance, audiovisual etc.), it was especially famous for the performance entitled *The beast* by the artist Wagner Schwartz, where a choreographer was naked and invited the public to interact with him by touching his body. During a performance, images of a little girl with her mother who touched the artist's foot were recorded and put on *YouTube* (G1 São Paulo 2017) and disseminated very quickly in other digital media and also in a wide variety of national journalistic media outlets. Conservative religious groups accused the exhibit of promoting and inciting pedophilia. The cultural event was reduced and renamed by a large number of journalists as *The exhibition of the naked man*. It has not only received extensive journalistic and media coverage in mass media, but has been investigated by the São Paulo Public Ministry. In the same month, an artistic exhibition entitled *Queermuseu, – Cartografias da diferença* (lit., Queermuseum: Cartography of Difference), which was going to take place in the city of Porto Alegre, was canceled because of virulent opposition, in particular on social media including online petitions from conservative political and religious groups. These groups felt that the exhibition promoted and encouraged pedophilia, zoophilia and homosexuality. Also in 2017, the play entitled *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus, Rainha do Céu* (lit., The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven), protagonized by the transsexual actress Renata Carvalho, has undergone numerous judicial censorship attempts and death threats against those involved in the shows in various Brazilian cities before or during presentations. The play is a rereading of the story of Jesus Christ and proposes that from a contemporary perspective, Jesus could become embodied in all marginalized bodies, such as those of transsexuals.

In November 2017, an online petition called for the annulment of Judith Butler's participation in the seminar *Os fins da democracia* (lit., The Ends of Democracy) at the SESC Pompeia in the city of São Paulo. Although the theme of the event did not concern such issues, the petition on the website *citizenGo* collected 350,000 signatures against the intervention of the person who sought to "implant an ideology that hides a Marxist political program" which "accelerates the fragmentation and corruption of society" (CitizenGo 2017, 1). On *Twitter*, the hashtag *#Forabutler* (Get out Butler) was created and presented content hostile to the researcher's communication and her gender ideology by different religious groups and/or extremist political orientations. In addition to the online campaign and thousands of signatures, groups of people protested outside the cultural center against (or in favor) of the presence of the academic. Various posters read "No to Pedophilia," "Go to Hell," "More Princes and Princesses, Fewer Witches," "Butler Out," "No to the Ideology of Gender," "Butler's Dream: to Destroy the Sexual Identity of our Children" (Garcia 2017), etc. Outside the cultural center, other protesters in favor of the presence of the academic shouted for freedom of thought and freedom of expression. At the end of the protest, an effigy depicting Judith Butler dressed as a witch was burned to public acclaim. In an interview with the *Folha* newspaper in São Paulo, Butler commented on this incident:

Throughout history, witches have been given powers they could never have had; they have become scapegoats to whom death should, purportedly, purify the community of moral and sexual corruption. [...] The fantasy of these women with the demon or its representatives, finds, today echo in the 'evil' ideology of gender. And yet, the torture and murder of these women for centuries as witches is an effort to repress dissident voices, those that questioned certain dogmas of religion. [...] When violence and hate



become tools of politics and religious morality, then democracy is threatened for those who claim to tear apart the social fabric, punish the differences and sabotage the social ties necessary to support our coexistence here on this Earth.

(Butler 2017)

In the same year, between April and October 2017, the telenovela *A Força do Querer*, broadcast in prime time by the channel *Globo Television*, the main channel in terms of ratings of the country, was partly responsible for making more visible gender issues and more specifically transsexuality in the public-media debate of Brazilian society, by depicting a transsexual character and a transvestite. The *Globo Television* channel's advertising strategy is, very often, to draw inspiration from the themes of its soap operas to create events in order to manufacture material to feed its journalistic press as well as a very wide variety of its entertainment programs. For self-marketing, *Rede Globo Television* strives to invite its cast of actors to interviews and various events to talk about their characters. Conservative groups and religious leaders have accused the chain of inculcating the ideology of gender within Brazilian society (Brum 2017, 1). In the media, many religious celebrities in the country have invested in a kind of "media education" (Douyère and Antoine 2018, 12), vis-à-vis the content offered by *Globo*, creating genuine boycott campaigns that have become more visible with the use of new information and communication technologies and especially social-digital networks such as *Twitter*, *Facebook* or *YouTube*. This is essentially done in several ways:

- 1 Through the disqualification of sexual diversity and the obstruction of progressive laws such as those on gender equality, against homophobia, in favor of women's rights or rights of those in the non-cisgender-heterosexual community, that is sexualities that are not only considered "contaminated" but "contagious" and pose the risk of "plaguing the social body" (Faúndes and Vaggione 2012, 180);
- 2 Via the mass media serving both to convey conservative religious values and the demand for political support, particularly through the demand for voting, from a perspective where "brothers vote for brothers" within a confederation or religious segment (Freston 1993, 66);
- 3 Greater visibility and the conquest of rights by the LGBTI and feminist movements seem to come together with a collective fear of the loss of bearings based in part on the traditional family structure where the theme of *ideology of gender* as a backdrop of "social and political conflicts, religiously codified" (Stolow 2014, 147) goes far beyond the individual and family sphere and enters the political and legal sphere (Natividade and Oliveira 2009).

This reflects what key gender issues do in a democratic society in the journalistic agenda as well as in the media as a whole. The visibility of its movements and the involvement of actors – including but not limited to the religious – in a digital activism testify to the extent of the phenomenon. Much of the large media in a multiplicity of journalistic media (print, TV news, radio) contributed in part to the "imaginary construction of the genre category" as "an enemy that must be fought" since on several occasions, the country's leading journalistic press has spread the term *gender ideology* without the use of quotation marks, which denotes an accreditation of the expression of the part of its media (Cunha 2017, 266). The digital environment (various sites, blogs, social networks) has become a battleground (Souza, 2014 cited in Cunha 2017) in the country.

If the study of religion and media in a globalizing perspective "takes specific forms in national and cultural contexts" (Hoover 2002, 06), it is no longer possible today to study the

relationship between the media and religion without taking into account the political field in different societies. This is the case for both religious journalistic media as well as so-called secular journalistic media. Although Cunha's research on conservative political-religious digital activism does not directly address gender issues, it demonstrates two phenomena:

- 1 The number of women in religious activism in the socio-digital networks remains inferior to men.
- 2 The assiduity of hostile media-religious content concerns the theme of *gender ideology* and the fact that the alleged safeguarding of the hetero-normative family is widely discussed between the media-religious spheres in Brazil.

Thus, a greater visibility of these actors in digital social networks can also have effects on the creation of the journalistic agenda, especially and more directly as regards to web journalism. The Internet 2.0 or participatory Internet has permitted what might be called a non-professional intervention in the production and dissemination of news. Thus, the development of citizen or participatory journalism has blurred the line between professional journalists and content producers (Canu and Datchary 2010). In this sense, the Internet user's interaction and feedback promoted by the Internet 2.0 (writing comments, sharing content on digital social networks, etc.) has gradually become an important tool for measuring reception and the economic and commercial value of a content, theme or information. According to Demers (2012, 10), "hyper-competition promoted and celebrated by the innovation industry" would have been one of the main drivers of a growing "increased dependence of the public."

For its part, the country's mainstream media, which are historically conservative in all forms (online press, print media, television news, etc.), in the name of alleged journalistic impartiality, have often given the right of speech to conservative or fundamentalist religious leaders. These actors, under the cover of *freedom of expression* may give hateful or depreciative remarks toward women or LGBTI populations. The journalistic media also give voice to journalists, columnists, commentators or *experts*, who whether they are related or not to conservative religious movements, often partake in a discourse of intolerance and hate toward minorities. In the Brazilian context, gender, religion, journalistic media and both political and legal fields are intertwined in a complex way in the social fabric. The increasing visibility, in recent years, of religious leaders in political life, some of whom also own media or are associated with mainstream conservative media, only amplify the phenomenon. Although constitutional, secularism (*laïcité*) is still not a (fully) developed principle in Brazil. While the Roman Catholic Church has always had a great influence on social dynamics in Brazil, for some years now it has been sharing this influence with evangelical groups, including Pentecostal groups. Thus, some Catholic or evangelical political groups have become more and more articulated in the political agenda and they do not hesitate to show publicly that their position in the country's public policies is articulated on the basis of religious beliefs or values. In this sense, the journalistic political coverage can possibly hide a religious dynamic.

### ***Patrícia Galvão News Agency: when religion fits into the so-called secular media***

Since 2009, the *Patrícia Galvão News Agency*, created by the institute of the same name, has presented itself as an alternative media to the mainstream media specializing in gender issues.

According to their website, the institute conducts field surveys and awareness campaigns against domestic violence, among other things

to ensure that the media fulfill their function in the public sphere: inspect the constituent powers, explain the facts, to inform on the rights of the citizens and to promote the debate of ideas to encourage the changes of attitudes and mentalities.

(*Agência Patrícia Galvão n.d.*)

The content is accessible not only to the surfer, in general, but also aims at the journalists (professionals) or content producers looking for reliable, varied and up-to-date media content on gender dynamics in Brazilian society.

When putting the term *religião* (religion) in the main search engine of the *Patrícia Galvão News Agency* site, we have so far more than 700 results directly or indirectly associated with religion and organized by date of publication and relevance of the keyword. The articles deal in most cases with the Brazilian context, followed by content encompassing issues of religion and gender in the Latin American region. Finally, more universal or universalizing themes in terms of human rights are included, e.g., on abortion and religion, the disclosure of seminars or colloquies encompassing the theme of religion, gender and feminisms, religion and sexuality, religion and sexual orientation, religion and LGBT rights, religion and discrimination, the dynamics between religion and politics (including public policies on sexual and reproductive rights), the relationship between religion and gender violence. The professionals behind the articles selected and published by the *Patrícia Galvão News Agency* are from fields as varied as the themes of the articles themselves.

This example shows that the theme of gender can be addressed in the media's agenda from a very wide range of actors in a wide variety of fields (law, theology, philosophy, medicine, journalism, anthropology, etc.). However, what seems most relevant is that religion, or the religious, appears directly or indirectly related to articles dealing with gender, particularly with regard to public policies on gender reproductive equality, sexual abuse and the fight against homophobia or transphobia, e.g., in contents that *a priori* does not come from and does not rely on religious institutions or beliefs and values themselves, but are closely related. The selection, production and the chosen content which is put online is without doubt influenced by major societal changes which are closely linked to gender issues.

The case of the *Patrícia Galvão News Agency* shows how in a secular agency dedicated to gender issues, religion or the religious is present in many contents of the journalistic agenda. In the same way that the term religious seems vague in describing a media managed by a religious institution, the term secular can seem vague, since between the two media "only the moral approach given to the information disseminated really distinguishes them" (Delporte, 2017 cited in Douyère and Antoine 2018, 4). In addition to this difficulty of establishing what is religious or secular in the journalistic agenda, we have also seen in recent years an "intensification of secular arguments" (Vaggione 2018, 25) in the public and media space by the Catholic Church with regard to gender issues and sexual rights in opposition to feminist and LGBTI movements. The use of *secular* arguments does not substitute theological and moral arguments, since these two models can be combined. The *scientification* of religious discourses can, of course, be valid in the case of certain evangelical branches. According to Bréchon, Duriez and Ion (2000, cited in Bratosin 2015, 11) it also seems true that "religion appears in the public media space through current affairs and society debates."

## Conclusion

The contemporary Latin American religious landscape is characterized by complexity, transformations and phenomena such as the customization of beliefs, religious syncretism, multiple religious affiliations or nomadism. The family as a nuclear unit in Latin America is highly important, not only in the organization of gender roles but also as a tool of social control. The very categorization of the gender, which differs according to different societies and varied historical moments, would sociologically speaking be strengthened in Latin America by the Roman Catholic heritage of Marianism.

In the case of Brazil, the public policies put in place in recent years in terms of gender equality, women's rights and LGBT populations have been largely responsible for the development of a moral panic within segments of society. This influences the growing complexity in the intersection of politic(s), religion and gender in the journalistic coverage in the country. Since many other resistances from conservative religious-political groups at the regional or municipal level have taken place, it must be suspected that this is only the tip of the iceberg. In Brazil, but also in Latin America overall, the *scientification* or secularization of religious discourses, added to the *ONGanization* of religious institutions in order to have more visibility and credibility in the journalistic and media agenda, makes the separation between that which would belong to *religious* and that which would belong to the *secular* more complex. How does one grasp the religious, political or journalistic facts and identify the boundaries (if any) when the commemoration of the victory of the president elected in Brazil in 2018 begins with a collective prayer of thanksgiving to God, followed by the reading of his official speech beginning with the verse "then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (The Bible, John 8:32), broadcasted live and re-broadcasted in the major journalistic medias of the country? I think this question represents one of the challenges in the study on gender, religion and new media in Latin America, but also in other parts of the globe.

## Further readings

Compagnon, O., 2008. La crise du catholicisme latino-américain. *L'Ordinaire des Amériques*, [e-journal] 210, 9–25. Available at <https://journals.openedition.org/ordea/2613>, accessed 28 February 2019.

The author gives a succinct view about four and a half centuries of Catholic monopoly in the Latin American continent and the turning point of the Catholic crisis in the continent by the loss of the faithful. The study demonstrates the gap between the doctrine of Rome and the reality and aspirations of Latin American society.

Machado, M. Das. D.C., 2018. O discurso cristão sobre a "ideologia de gênero". *Estudos Feministas*, [e-journal] 26(2), 1–18. Available at [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_abstract&pid=S0104-026X2018000200212&lng=es&nrm=iso&tlng=pt](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_abstract&pid=S0104-026X2018000200212&lng=es&nrm=iso&tlng=pt), accessed 28 February 2019.

The study traces a detailed genealogy of the Christian discourse of *gender ideology* built by the Catholic Church in response to feminist movements and the development of gender studies and how these discourses were spread in Brazil.

Peñas Defago, M. A., and Moran Faundes, J. M. F., 2015. Nuevas configuraciones religiosas/seculares: las ONG "pro-vida" en las disputas por las políticas sexuales en Argentina. *Religião e Sociedade*, [e-journal] 35(2), 340–362. Available at [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S0100-85872015000200340&script=sci\\_abstract&tlng=es](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S0100-85872015000200340&script=sci_abstract&tlng=es), accessed. 28 February 2019.

The research seeks to better understand the strategies and lines of action put in place by pro-life NGOs in Argentina in recent years to make their voices heard and influence public opinion regarding political policies. In the area of sexual and reproductive rights, the authors suggest the idea of *strategic secularization* and emphasize a shift from religious or theological discourse to more scientific, medical or human rights discourses.

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