

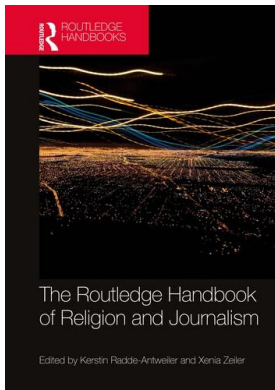
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SHUKURA

Gratitude, faith and the unlikely relationship
between gender, religion and journalism in Brazil*Priscila Vieira-Souza and Andréia Coutinho Louback***Introduction**

Our work takes the thematic quartet of religion, journalism and race and gender as its structural basis. We commence from a Latin-American perspective, with primary emphasis on the Brazilian context to illustrate the key concepts. The first challenge for addressing such a theme is the absence of academic studies on the intersection between religion and news media. Facing this challenge brings us to the methodological perspective adopted: the analysis of a life-story and its context. The life-story as a case study is coherent with feminist theory and its methods, following here the critique developed by Matsuda (1986). Hence, the case study presents the narrative of a black, Brazilian and Catholic, woman journalist, who found in the feeling of gratitude a lifestyle and catalyst for her accomplishments.

We also take a historical perspective that emphasizes the local historical processes and the different contexts. We consider great narratives of Western modernity culture, assuming its influence in the intellectual production of South America. Simultaneously, we face the diverse, different and proper characteristics of the local contexts. Remarkably, the text moves from general, abstracts concepts to rooted, local contexts.

Concepts, absences and intersections

Works on the intersection between religion and journalism are rarely encountered in Brazil or by Hispano-American authors. All the reflections of this chapter are marked by this absence, as are the definitions that follow.

Religion: conceptualizing in interdisciplinarity

As a theoretical concept, religion has two specifics: first, the challenge of providing *one* definition of the term; and, second, the interdisciplinarity of the concept. We therefore agree with Anne-Marie Korte (2011, 12) who notes the diversity of concepts of religion in the field and asserts: “we need to acknowledge our own various but often not explicated understandings of ‘religion’, since this creates one of the most stubborn and unrecognized incompatibilities of interdisciplinary research in religion and gender.”

In the field of Sociology of Religion, the Brazilian Alexandre Fonseca gives an overview of the conceptualization, categorizing current definitions in two directions. According to Fonseca (2011, 11), the first direction “sees it from the substantive understanding” and defines religion through questions such as “who am I, where did I come from and where am I going?” The second direction comprises religion “from within a functionalist perspective” and defines it through its operation, “that is, as a set of beliefs and actions defined through understanding of the existence of a superhuman reality.”

We follow Fonseca (2011, 11) in understanding religion “for its content and not for its function.” As such, we consider that religion “implies beliefs, practices and institutions” based on the existence of the supernatural (Fonseca 2011, 11). We emphasize the inclusion of beliefs and institutions, covering the dimension of the religious both for institutional practices and for the actions of individuals, based on their beliefs. We therefore propose to begin from Fonseca’s (2011) position and highlight the need to maintain the concept fluid. Korte (2011), as a way of retaining the interdisciplinary approach that is necessary to understand the gender and religion intersection, also takes this position. In addition, the fluid concept is strategic in maintaining the tension between the institutional and individual dimensions of the religious. We therefore consider religion as an experience of the sacred, capable of developing different forms of spirituality, with individual and collective consequences. It is simultaneously a phenomenon of institutional and social structure, capable of shaping subjectivity.

Journalism: modern, theoretical-practical

The tension between institutional and individual is relevant to the trajectory constructed through this chapter. We refer in the case study to the intersections present in the person but also question the ways in which religion is absent or present in the public sphere and particularly in journalism – as the primary modern public space of political debate and social structure.

We consider journalism an eminently modern phenomenon (Wolton 2004, Traquina 2005). The historical and modern perspectives of journalism demonstrates its dual character, theoretical-conceptual and practical-professional (Lopes 2013). As a phenomenon born in the era in which science dominates as a manner of producing truths, journalism emerges as a practice marked by the constant demand for concept and with institutionalizing implications.

For this reason, discussing journalism opens many windows. There is complexity as a mere concept, without reflecting on the press, the role of the media and the systemic scenario of communication. Due to its dual character, the conceptual dimension of journalism is formed through practice, modifying itself through the new configurations that have emerged since its 19th-century birth. Thus, communication technologies and their technological developments are fundamental to consider and (re)define journalism. Therefore, journalism is a theoretical-practical composite; intrinsically modern and moldable to contexts and scenarios.

Gender: overlapping race

In this approach, gender and race are intersectional concepts. Considering the multiple ways of being male and female outside the determinism of a biological and single division between the sexes, gender defines *being a woman* and *being a man* within a social construction. Therefore, being a woman is already challenging, because women are inserted into a system that overvalues and privileges men. Added to this is a degree of exclusion of black women,

seen as synonymous to subordination and social inferiority. Therefore, as we will see later in our case study, our character Shukura problematizes a crucial point of our investigation: combating the impacts of the gender and race dimensions for the displacement of white hegemony, so that society becomes diverse in all possible sectors, including journalism. The social meaning of being a woman – and black – makes us reflect on the effects of the combination of racism and sexism. In view of this, the gender category cannot be universalized without paying particular attention to the theme of black women. The feminist movement needs to recognize that the intersectional dimension of gender and race favored – and still favors – white women before black women. There are networks of independent institutions and collectives moving toward deepening this theoretical and practical debate in order to sketch a path toward equity and mitigation of racial inequalities.

The Brazilian political scientist Djamila Ribeiro (2017, 61) stresses that in prioritizing the “diversity of experiences, there is a consequent breakdown of a universal vision. A black woman will have distinct experiences from a white woman because of her social position, she will experience gender in another way.” Only from the understanding of multiple experiences, vulnerabilities, privileges and challenges can we solidify the basis of understanding the logical-linear concept of gender. The author brings the perspective that “when we talk about the right to a dignified existence, to a voice, we are talking about social *locus*, how this imposed position hinders the possibility of transcendence” (Ribeiro 2017, 64).

On religion, journalism, gender and blackness: a Latin-American perspective

Research on journalism and religion in Latin America is almost entirely absent in academic studies. However, Magali Cunha (2018) traces the development of research regarding media and religion, particularly in Brazil. She notes there are two groups of studies. First, there are those focused on content analysis of religious media, predominantly in the 1970s. Secondly, there are those on the reception of religious media, specially from the 1990s. What seems to be missing, is an analysis on how the media approaches religion. And this last group would be the most important for understanding the intersection between journalism and religion.

Searches of journal databases, especially those focused on South American and Brazilian productions (e.g., Periodical Portal Capes, Scielo), attest for the rarity of works specifically on religion and journalism. We agree with Stewart Hoover (2014, 64) who identifies the tendency for media scholars to underestimate religion “as much for theoretical as methodological reasons.” Hoover (2014, 64) continues, “media theorists tend to adhere to a fairly strict definition of secularization.”

Religion and secularization

Based on Hoover’s proposition (2014), we briefly focus on secularization studies. One way of approaching the term is through the modern process of compartmentalization of experience and, prominently, the separation of public and private aspects of life. The Brazilian sociologist Cecília Mariz (2006) talks about encompassing social life to describe the centrality of religion in pre-modern societies. Secularization can be considered as the movement to remove religion from political-social centrality, creating the public sphere. Religion thus comes to occupy the private aspects of life. That helps understand the tensions between journalism and religion: the latter is understood as a part of private life while the former emerges as the voice of the public sphere (Wolton 2004, Vieira-Souza 2014).

This remark does not explain the fact that there are works on the intersection between journalism and religion in other parts of the world, while in Latin America, the absence is notable. We suggest that in societies where the notions of public and private are more well established probably the interchanges between them are more visible. Consequently, it would be easier to describe, analyze and criticize them. In Latin America, the process of secularization is characterized by negotiations between religion and politics – the private and public spheres – and the intersection is more problematic. Perhaps the absence of studies on the intersection comes alongside an ideal of what journalism *should be*, based on the North-Atlantic experience.

The secularization debate is long, large, full of nuances and even disagreements among scholars. Mariz (2006) and Zepeda (2010) affirm that it was necessary to deal with religion in the modernization process of societies. The approach to it however was to propose an atheistic/humanistic devotion; to simply think about overcoming it and moving forward; or, to replace its function of social aggregation with other institutions and social bodies; or even to maintain the sacred, without religion (Mariz 2006, Zepeda 2010).

In the beginning of the 20th century, the secularization debate was based upon these diverse approaches. In addition to theoretical perspective, scholars observed the decline of religion both in institutional/political influence and in number of believers (Zepeda 2010, 130). In this period, research studies were mostly European and considered realities from the North Atlantic (Mariz 2001, Fonseca 2011).

From the middle of the 20th century onward, Latin America played an important role for the creation of secularization theories. Its religious effervescence challenges propositions that are more radical and contradicts the hypotheses that bet on the end of religion.¹ The Latin-American context (together with other peripheral regions) forced studies to become more refined and complex² (Mariz 2001, Fonseca 2011).

The debate around secularization continues to this day. The complex compartmentalization of the aspects of life brought by modernity forced religions to reorganize their foundations and traditions. This generates, on the one hand, a fundamentalist response. On the other hand, space is made for new associations to break barriers. Thus, contact points emerge that permit the challenging of forces and diffusion, to rupture or simply to create new configurations (Vieira-Souza 2014). Hence, intersections are possible in modern-secularized contexts with negotiations among different areas of life/experiences.

Latin America, BECs and liberation

The Liberation Theology and Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) are an example of re-creating European inheritance and negotiating between religious and social realities. The religious experiences of Latin America reflect its history of colonial domination and resistance against it. The strength of Roman Catholicism throughout the region speaks clearly of the violence of colonization and its impositions. The forms of syncretism found within Catholicism and the contemporary religious plurality tell of resistance.

Typically, in Latin-American experiences, LT and BECs respond to everyday oppressions with a mix of faith and social analysis. This experience also suggests a model of secularization that occurs in negotiation with religion, even in its institutional aspect: The BECs were promoted by the clergy and participated in the activities of the parishes. The BECs functioned as small mutual support groups that gathered to pray and discuss everyday life. With the influence of LT, which supposed that Christ's incarnation pointed to the intervention of faith in structures, BECs came to form both individuals of faith and of political consciousness – and

politicians. They were intense during the Latin-American dictatorships, as a way of confronting authoritarianism, oppressions and human rights violations, especially among the poorest (Hewitt 1990). BECs and LT have become weaker in recent years. However, the marks of this intense phase continue: These experiences have marked Shukura's trajectory.

The multiplicity of conceptualizations of journalism

In his work *Being a journalist in Brazil – professional identity and academic training*, Lopes (2013, 33) suggests that “a less narrow path to reaching an understanding of journalism is to avoid the slippery trail of stating what it is and affirm what it **is not**.” In this sense, the author maintains that her trade and definition is not “literature, advertising, science, art or history, although the journalist or the journalistic product may have characteristics that resemble or are shared with those” (Lopes 2013, 33). This means journalism involves knowledge, policy (through rhetoric) and rhythm of functioning marked simultaneously by the present time and periodicity (always current). Far from limiting the definitions of journalism, we find in these dimensions a crucial theoretical input to the presentation of the scope of the subjective and practical context of the profession (Lopes 2013).

The dual character we capture from journalism is intimately linked to its modern origin. The history of news media can be traced back to the Enlightenment, to the advent of modern cities that produced daily news, information and politics. Mitchell Stephens (2007, 133) claims the press's origin has a direct relationship with commerce routes and political power, which organize the first news system. The Industrial Revolution turned this first system into the rational and technological means for production and diffusion of information.

The Brazilian researcher Nelson Traquina (2005, 34) also identifies the origins of journalism in the 19th-century press. The new media professionals were designated a new task: to provide information, instead of producing propaganda. Journalism gained legitimacy as a profession as media companies expanded. Traquina (2005, 34) claims that this commercial activity acquired the status of public service, as the profession focused on “news, searching for the truth, independence and objectivity.”

This moment of journalism's birth coincides with the consolidation of the separation of public and private, that is, with the effect of the processes of secularization in Europe. This is not mere coincidence: the modern notions of sovereignty, democracy and *public* are the conditions of possibility for the birth of the media, as we know it. (Wolton 2004). It is also probably no coincidence that the word public refers both to the sphere of politics and reason and to the group of people who consumes media: the audience.

Religion and journalism then have an intimate relationship with secularization. However, the relationship goes in opposite directions. For religion, secularization came to be thought of as its end. For journalism, it permitted its start. We are of course constructing caricatures, but it is a fact that secularization is, for religion and religiosities, a turning point and in the institutional sense entails a loss of relevance (at least in most contexts and strongly in the West). For journalism, secularization brings about the demand for communication capable of putting itself in place or constructing what is *public*.

The concept of race: an analytical and discursive category

Stuart Hall (2015) presents the concept of race as a category that is not conceptually scientific. It is a political and social construct within which discourses organized in a system of (socio-economic) power, exploitation and exclusion are framed – racism. He considers race a

floating signifier, which gives *meaning* to the issues. According to Hall (2015, 1) race “is one of those major concepts which organize the great classificatory systems of difference which operate in human societies.” The term manages to give dimension to the discrimination that has affected the black population since enslavement. Even so, as we are discussing a kind of language, the meaning is not fixed and is instead subject to “slippage” of meaning and “floats in a sea of relational differences” (2015 [1995], 1). When we define it as a discursive category, we recognize that “all attempts to ground this concept scientifically, to locate differences between the races, on what one might call scientific, biological, or genetic grounds, have been largely shown to be untenable” (Hall 2015, 1).

That said, one path to understanding the concept’s broad and specific dimension is identification of a sociological sense: when a person’s skin color is associated with a marginalized, denigrated and excluded ancestry.

We must then remember that racializing the debate without bringing the whiteness agenda is problematic. Araújo (2006, 77) maintains, “(n)aturally, for all of us, by virtue of our cultural upbringing, the superior aesthetic standard can only be represented by those who continue to hold the privilege.” For Sueli Carneiro (2003) the answer lies in understanding the construction and reconstruction of representative systems that contribute to a denaturalization of the central position of whiteness in spaces of public visibility. Again, the modern *universal* is unmasked as private, because it is masculine and white.

Therefore, race is reflected in a social representation, affecting black men and women in individual terms. It stipulates how people are seen – *being white* or *being black*, for example, is loaded with a symbology of privileges and exclusion, respectively. We therefore see a social and political dimension, because “the racial divide between blacks and whites genuinely exists” (Gomes 2005, 47).

Black Woman: why is intersectionality the key to many questions?

Having presented a brief critical and constructive overview of the conceptualization of race, we would like to reinforce the impossibility of considering the categories of race and gender from different viewpoints. Intersectionality is a tool that allows us to analyze the complexities of experiences, scenarios and contexts – in which different people and groups are contemplated – without isolating any of the factors acting on those individual’s lives.

The African-American author Kimberlé Crenshaw dedicated herself to studies on intersectionality after a personal experience that proved the multiple axes of oppression could not be analyzed separately. Thus, the concept of intersectionality presents itself to identify how racial discrimination and gender discrimination operate together, limiting black women’s chances of success. In an interview, Kimberlé contextualizes and justifies the continued use of the term:

In every generation and in every intellectual sphere and in every political moment, there have been African-American women who have articulated the need to think and talk about race through a lens that looks at gender, or think and talk about feminism through a lens that looks at race.

(Adewunmi 2014)

In the definition of two Latin-American authors, Fernanda Lopes and Jurema Werneck (2007), intersectionality is defined more broadly, addressing factors of extreme social marginalization such as color, race, ethnicity, gender, social class, living with HIV and AIDS,

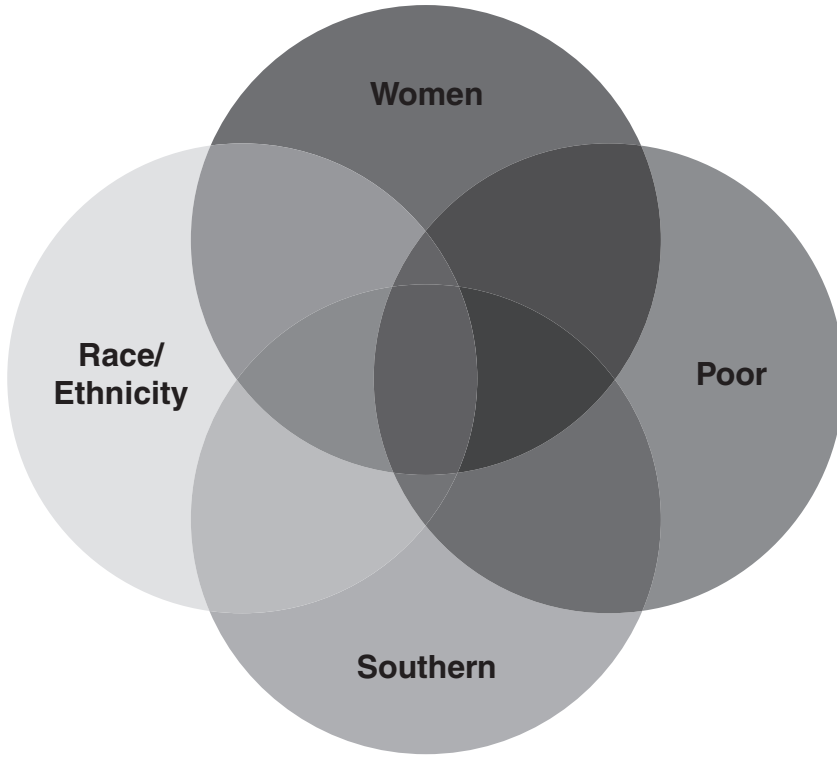


Figure 15.1 Illustration of intersectionality (Crenshaw 2002).

disability or any other factors of social complexity. As a category of relational analysis, it allows us to identify social relations in their many dimensions.

To understand, therefore, the functioning of intersectionality, it is necessary to reflect on the “coexistence of different factors (vulnerabilities, abuses and discriminations), also called axes of subordination, which happen simultaneously in people’s lives” (Werneck 2007, 3). A diagram helps us to visualize the functioning of intersectionality. Jurema Werneck explains that it corresponds to the meeting, that is, the intersection of the multiple factors that influence the lives of black women individually and collectively:

We agree with Werneck (2007, 4) that “the central point where, as shown in the Figure 15.1, the color becomes more intense, signifies the intersectionality that produces the concrete way these different factors act on people in general and black women in particular.”

Gender symbology from the perspective of blackness

The expression that chains feminism to a Eurocentric and universal perspective warns us of the barriers raised when it is not understood that we are talking about women with different vulnerabilities. As such, it is necessary to always question what gender realities we are talking about. We cannot unify them and approach them unilaterally. This is one of the first steps to the basis of understanding black feminism and tensioning all the limits of the *traditional* logic.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1980) was unprecedented in the history of feminism in presenting grounds for redefining what it is *to be a man or a woman*. In the same way, the understanding of gender relations was also structured as "a first way of giving meaning to power" (Scot 1989, 21). As studies deepened, women as a category of analysis was questioned on several occasions in relation to defining a single and indivisible biological identity. The spread of post-structuralist perspectives guided by the Foucauldian notion presented the idea of sexuality as a socio-historical construct forged by discourses and institutions (Foucault 2005).

In this dialogue, the concept of gender has been expressed through notions of deconstruction and difference in the post-modern era. The gender construct can then be aligned with recognition of the role of racism and other forms of discrimination that cross this category. One can also address the dimension from the perspective that there is a specific group of women who present distinct experiences of oppression – defined as "any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society" (Collins 2000, 4).

Based on these theories, it should be emphasized that black feminism emerges by questioning racial inequalities and challenging the universalization of experiences. We also need to remember that the vector of race directly and primarily influences the experience of black women as a limiting element to the possibilities of success, recognition and positive representation of this specific group. Consequently, black feminism seeks to question historically imposed systems of domination, which resulted in racist and sexist practices.

We therefore highlight the pertinence of addressing the axes of inequalities of race and gender among black women – specifically black woman journalists. The concepts apply to our proposed dynamic, as we understand the racial dimension's impact – inserted in sexist perspectives – and discuss an exemplary case, Shukura, which demonstrates the trajectory that confronts the logic of workplace oppression.

Journalism in Brazil and South/Latin America

The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP 2015a) study, developed by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), presents the global view of female media representation. The data is grouped by region and separates South America into Latin America and the Caribbean. Not all countries in these regions are included in the data, and Brazil did not participate in any of the 20 editions of the project (Figures 15.2a and b).

From the graphs, we highlight that Caribbean countries have greater equity than the Latin-American region, though the study shows significant differences in the region: "in Trinidad & Tobago, Puerto Rico and Barbados three quarters of the newspaper reporters were female, while in Suriname only one in ten was a woman" (GMMP 2015c, 16). In Latin America, there is significant difference in the presenters' age. Among women in this role, 43% are between 19 and 34 years old, 33% between 35 and 49 and only 21% between 50 and 64. Among men, the relationship with age is inverted: 53% of presenters are between 34 and 49 years old, 26% between 50 and 64 and only 14% between 19 and 34. The percentages suggest the image of youth is prized in women over professional experience.

In Brazil, production of data on the profile of media professionals was non-existent prior to the 2012 study *Who are the Brazilian Journalists – Brazilian Journalist Profile* (Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) joint with National Federation of Journalists (FENAJ), 2012). Comparison of data from the Brazilian study with that of the study across Latin America

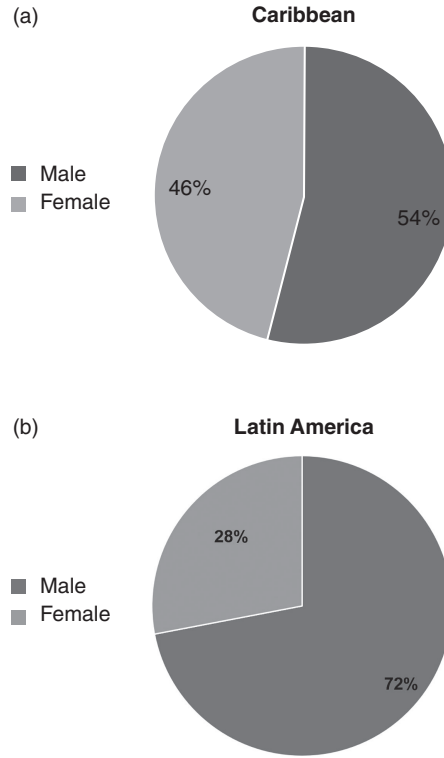


Figure 15.2 (a) and (b) Caribbean and Latin America journalists by sex (GMMP 2015b, 2015c).

and the Caribbean is compromised by methodological differences. There is no specific data, for example, on newsreaders, as opposed to reporters in the Brazilian report. Another methodological issue is that the Brazilian study considered training in the area, not only active media professionals (this includes journalism graduates who are academics or work in other areas) (Figures 15.3a and b).

Methodological differences aside, Brazil, Shukura’s country, reproduces the inequalities of Latin America. The study indicates that in Brazil, although women represent the majority, men occupy the highest positions, implying promotion and career evolution.

The report also notes that the percentage of black men and women was less than half that of Brazil’s general population: only 5% classified themselves as black (Figure 15.4).

After this first survey, other initiatives updated the data. A recent study by *Comunique-se* and *Apex Conteúdo Estratégico* (2018) demonstrates that transformations have affected the profile of the country’s journalists. The survey covered 26,000 professionals and included in-depth research with 266 Brazilian journalists. This study included only media professionals. According to the study, men represent 58.2% while women represent 41.8% of all professionals.

This means if we consider the media type in which each group operates, we arrive at the following indicators in the Brazilian scenario: male predominance in newspaper staff; in radio stations and studios, the number of male professionals is three times greater; in television, the number of women (49.9%) is almost equal that of men (50.1%).

To better understand the field’s complexity, another study (2017) undertaken by the organization *Gênero e Número* (Gender and Number) in partnership with the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Abraji) revealed 86.4% of women have experienced

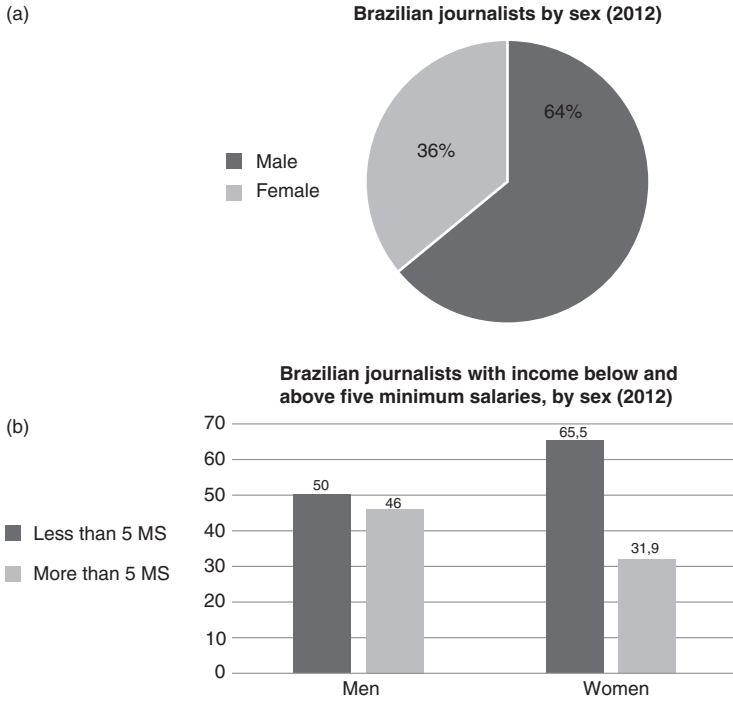


Figure 15.3 (a) and (b) Brazilian journalists (UFSC and FENAJ 2012).

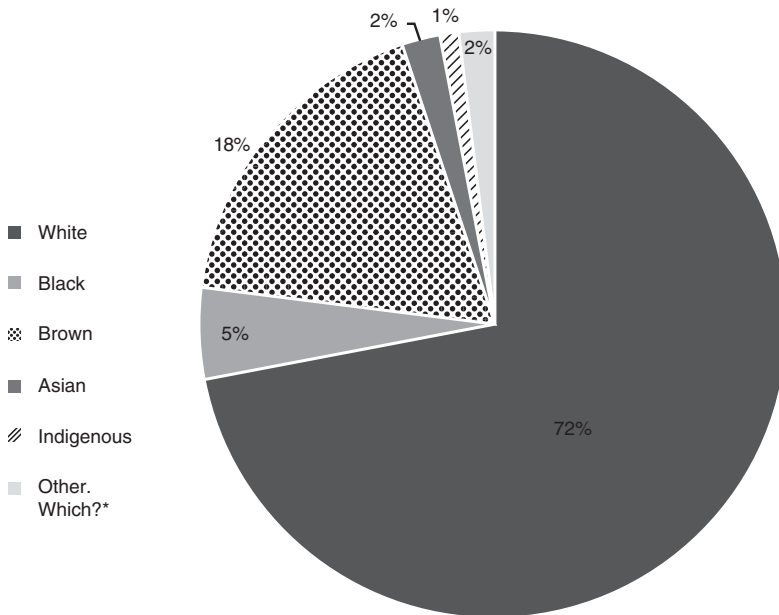


Figure 15.4 Brazilian journalists by race (UFSC and FENAJ 2012).

episodes of gender discrimination and 70.2% have witnessed or heard of cases of harassment in the professional environment. The survey was conducted with more than 500 professionals, demonstrating sexist attitudes in Brazil’s different regions and vehicles, especially in print newsrooms.

Discussing female voices in journalism has been more contentious. Besides having been a male dominated profession, women could not find space or credibility to feature live or in coverage that is more complex. However, when we analyze the female and *black* voices, we still significantly lack representation in the contemporary panorama. The character presented is considered an exception to the profile of journalists of Brazil. Visibility and greater protagonism is not a reality for black women in the media.

Regarding religion, studies on the profile of journalists in Brazil simply do not collect information. Finally, The Thrust Project conducted a survey during the years 2016–2017 with professionals in the country and included religion (Figures 15.5a and b). The result is surprising in its contrast with the national average:

In the 2010 Demographic Census (the last conducted in the country) of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), agnosticism falls within the option *without religion*. The majority of journalists fall in this group. This contributes to understanding why research about journalists did not include data on religion and corroborates Hoover’s statement (2014, 64). Roman Catholicism, which covers 85% of the Brazilian population, appears as the religion of only 33.8% of journalists.

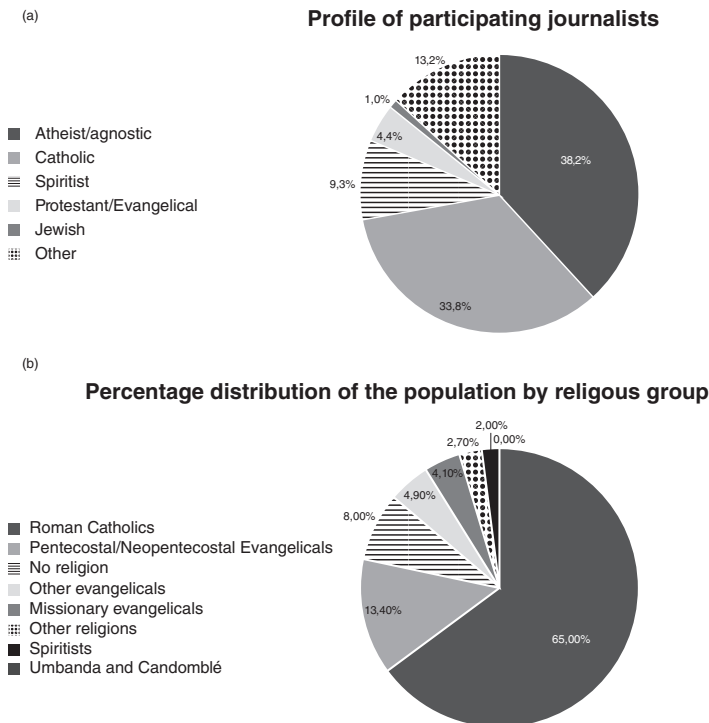


Figure 15.5 (a) and (b) Journalists X population by religious groups (The Trust Project 2017; IBGE, 2010).

Shukura, the life story of a Christian black woman journalist in Brazil: a case study

In Brazilian journalism, female professionals are mostly white, single and aged 30 years old or less. The majority are agnostic (there is no data that cross-references sex with belief/religion).

Shukura, 39 years old, a black woman, Brazilian raised in Rio de Janeiro's deprived urban periphery. We could list many personal and professional characteristics; she is after all a public figure. However, we limit ourselves to the key peculiarities that relate to our main theme. The character is a Catholic woman, journalist and known for acting in human rights and racism issues. What few know, however, is the path that led her to television screens to report to Brazilian citizens the latest news of the country – especially in Rio de Janeiro.

I'm from a very poor community and, in my neighbourhood, we didn't even have university students at the time. I was the first university student there, and I was the first university student of all generations of my family. And journalism appeared to me as a social issue, which is what I do to this day, activism. I had already participated in Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) linked to the Liberation Theology of the Catholic Church, which was very politicised. Yesterday I happened to visit the church where I said "this is where my social *status* for journalism was born" — I remember that I was there and I had already decided to do journalism, because I thought it was a tool for structural change in society, to call out injustices. This I already realised in adolescence, I said as a child that I wanted to be a journalist, in adolescence I had conviction that about it and I was seventeen or eighteen years old, when the Massacre of Eldorado dos Carajás³ happened, I remember that I was in the middle of a mass and the news of the slaughter came in the morning and I had that click: "This is what I want. To fight against this injustice in Brazil." And we need to have a voice. The issue of the voice. The people need to have a voice in this country, the people. It's not possible. And then I got engaged in journalism. I didn't have racial awareness yet at that time.

(Shukura, 39 years old)

Shukura also presents an initial narrative regarding the encounter with journalism in childhood. The core of what she reports has a differential load with a social ideal of a "tool for structural change in society" (Shukura 2016). It all started in the BECs. As we presented earlier, this is an experience peculiar to Latin-American Catholic religiosity, with a strong social emphasis. It is in this environment of faith that Shukura develops as a (black) Brazilian woman and, after the tragic slaughter of the Massacre of Eldorado dos Carajás in 1996, she receives confirmation of her professional vocation. It is worth remembering that the *insight* she described in the interview occurs during a Catholic liturgy. The unrest she feels that morning is grounded in a social *status*. That is, being a black, poor, suburban woman draws her into a fight for her voice. The journalist begins on a path of creating strategies to address inequalities.

Shukura's trajectory is marked by surprises and opportunities as a black woman. Considering that, television media holds white men and women as an aesthetic standard, the effective presence of a black woman journalist in presentation positions is a significant achievement in the anti-racist fight in audiovisual media. This only confirms there is still a series of structural changes required to make equality a reality and not simply an egalitarian simulacrum represented by a minority.

I arrive at PUC [Pontifical Catholic University] and it's that thing, right? An initial shock. I was the only black journalism student that year. I was the only black student there for a long time, I had been the first of the project [of scholarships for black and poor students] too, the project was very recent. And there, I begin to perceive myself as black, as a black woman. At PUC I already did this differentiation — "I'm not that, that's not me." This starts to develop. And very early on I needed to work, because I was very poor. I'd get a lift, I did cleaning to go to university, all to pay the bus ticket. My dad was a bus driver and I used to hitch rides with his friends. Until they put me off the bus many times and I had to find a different way.

(Shukura, 39 years old)

In this sense, the university space is presented as a dividing scenario, accompanied by significant transformations to the trajectory, of the process of perception of ethnic and racial belonging – added to the challenges of living together and surviving in a white, elite environment.⁴

The social meaning of *being* a black woman journalist, that outlines the concepts of identification and identity, was one of the emblematic questions of the interview with Shukura. As we asked *what does it mean to be a black woman journalist to you?* we found the question could have multiple manners of response. After all, understanding your own subjectivity immersed in so many choices, notions of belonging, ruptures, experiences and processes of construction of thoughts and knowledge is already a path of conflicts.

Although faced with a difficult trajectory, from the social and psychological perspective, with all the gender and race issues that Shukura shared, gratitude is a characteristic peculiar to her personality and narrative. Soon, once again, we see how religion also permeates this perception. Spirituality as a lifestyle and faith as a reconciling bond in her life – personal and professional – is recurrently mentioned, as in:

I give thanks every day for what I have. My spirituality, my way of living makes me thankful all the time, for example, I give thanks for the plate of food, I give thanks because I will soon leave, I give thanks because I will see my godson, because I will pass by the church. I give thanks when the broadcast starts, I give thanks when the broadcast finishes. I always do this. And I found that this gives me pleasure all the time, in everything.

(Shukura, 39 years old)

Next, Shukura recalls her university career and her arrival to television, even if she "believed" that was not her place and writing away from cameras and visibilities would be a more real and predictable alternative for a black woman journalist.

Going to PUC, I discover myself and start looking for an internship in print news – which is what I wanted to do. But I never got print internships I only got television. I went to Canal Futura, to GNT, and I was building a career in television. I stayed because I needed to pay my travel. I sat exams and "some mechanism" boycotted me on the print news exams and I passed the television exams. I passed all the television selection processes, even for Rede Globo. I went to the final phase, which was the interview, and at interview another person was chosen – who happened to have connections there. I always passed for television and never for newspaper. I kept staying because I thought it was a way to pay for my ticket, only not, right? It was fate acting. Until at the GNT

internship, I really enjoyed writing. So I satisfied my desire to write reports on the street without appearing. I was super happy until my boss said no, I had to appear in the video. I'm saying this to explain how my racial awareness came about. I refused, I won't do it. I won't do it. Until my boss, one day, called my cameraman, I was leaving and my cameraman came back to talk to me, "So, Shukura, here's the thing. They told me if I come back without a stand-up⁵ from you, I'm gonna get fired. So, sorry." So I was forced to. And that was my reflection.

(Shukura, 39 years old)

Were you ashamed?

It wasn't a question of shame. It was a matter of not thinking that was my place. So it was a matter of not seeing, not perceiving the black woman in the video. It was a much bigger issue. It was that Brazilian television had formed me as a "non-presenter", you see? That was very clear to me. I started thinking about it, and when I appear in the video, it is clear I'm celebrated as a black presenter, I was chosen. Soon after I had a story in which I was chosen as the presenter, as the "face of GNT at the time." Shame I only stayed there a few months. When I appeared in the GNT video, Band called me. So, in this way, it started growing in me really strongly. I began to ask "who is this Shukura who doesn't want it?" Actually, I wanted an easier path in terms of the race issue. The path of not appearing.

(Shukura, 39 years old)

The journalist presents the "path of not appearing" as an issue of self-rejection. We can view this as the first *climax* of her narrative, because simultaneously a racial awareness begins to be forged – when Shukura reflects on her self-representation, her place as a black woman and her role as an intern in that environment.

When Shukura says that "Brazilian television did not form her as a presenter," she corroborates Araújo's theorization (2006, 77) that "naturally, for all of us, by virtue of our cultural upbringing, the superior aesthetic standard can only be represented by those who continue to hold the privilege." The persistence of the profiles of white men and women represented in the audiovisual is historical and cultural, leading us to naturalize this imaginary. When there is a disruption of this scenario by the channel of the Brazilian pay-TV channel GNT, the journalist describes the episode as a phenomenon celebrated by Brazilian viewers.

What does it mean, after all, a black woman journalist in front of the network's cameras? If we are part of a society that under-represents the image of black women, what happens in the collective imaginary when we place one, two or three active reporters with the power of decision and opinion in a medium of communication? For Sueli Carneiro (2003) the answer lies in understanding the construction and reconstruction of representative systems that contribute to a denaturalization of the central position of whiteness in spaces of public visibility.

This is the same imaginary in fact that triggered in Shukura, as a black woman journalist, a sense of not belonging to that position of visibility, but to a category of lower aesthetic – exposure – like printed news, for example, where she would only have to sign the texts. "The path of not appearing," described as easier and more obvious to her subjectivity, shows us how racism acts on the psyche, imprinting negative marks on self-esteem and self-projection. This reveals a kind of unconscious process of acceptance/rejection when she herself says "it was a matter of not thinking that was her place." That is, there is a conflict between the projection of her identity and her body.

Additionally, in January 2019, Brazil was shocked by a news report: Shukura was fired from the station where she had worked for almost 15 years. The news generated revolt and endless questions on social media, as the reason was not stated in the media. The first information came from the journalist herself on her Instagram profiles, where it said, “Yes. I’M SAYING GOODBYE. I ended up in public journalism consistent with my own beliefs... My feeling today is of much gratitude.” The mark of gratitude continues, even in the face of an event seen by many as adverse.

At least three major Brazilian newspapers republished the news, but gave no opinion or hypotheses regarding what happened.⁶ What is worth noting is that, in all headlines, journalists reported the impact on representation of black professionals on television. Shukura with her history, representation and trajectory was one of our few references – a Catholic black woman journalist – with an active presence in the media. Now, it remains for us to continue to follow our character’s future professional trajectory, certain that religion, gender and race are significant factors to the exercise of analyzing oral narratives.

Conclusion

This chapter contributes to the area of study primarily by proposing intersections. Considering the scarcity of work on journalism and religion the publication of this study, from a Latin-American perspective, breaks with this absence and has the potential to foster research on these two pillars. The same can be said in relation to the other intersections present in the text. Data, information and the history of a black woman journalist challenge the fields of communication and religion by displacing the gaze and thought. Gender and racial inequality must be considered in theories, categories of analysis and interventions proposed.

Our initial approach was to follow a methodological perspective that contemplates the life story to visualize the intersections between journalism, race and religion. In this sense, we discussed a case study narrative that repeatedly showed how the character’s spirituality directly impacted on her lifestyle, career choice and awareness of the challenges of race and gender in the Brazilian – and Latin American – context. Another important point of our discussion was the impossibility of disconnecting the factors of race and gender. Being a black woman in practice carries a succession of episodes of exclusion and institutional barriers that operate in the professional, personal and structural contexts in Brazil. Religion occupies a central space in Shukura’s subjectivity, which constantly finds coping strategies in spirituality expressed in gratitude and recognition of what she has achieved so far. Even in the sensitive moment of her dismissal, which brings frustration and questions regarding the economic and power system, the character equips herself with this feeling as a weapon of resistance.

For the intersection between religion and journalism, the data analyzed and life trajectory presented pose great challenges. The disregard of religion in the first surveys on the profile of journalists dissonates with Shukura’s narratives. Although journalists in the country tend toward a rather different religious configuration from national statistics, religion is present – either in the profession or in society. It needs to be approached and considered by these professionals. In fact, we suggest this disparity as an area for future studies. Considering the absence of data on religion in the first studies and its inclusion in the most recent research, we can suggest the topic tends to be a growing area of research in Latin America. It is important that journalists and communication scholars avoid taking the reality of their professional class as the basis for social analysis. In this point, we also see the proposition that the theory of secularization is sometimes taken in its most radical aspects (Hoover 2014).

The trend toward growing interest in religion and its social intersections in Brazil is also rooted in the specific country context. For instance, the 2018 presidential elections in Brazil revealed a political-religious reconfiguration, with the rise of evangelicals to important posts in the government and an increase in the number of parliamentarians in congress. Alongside this, there is a conservative turn that attacks progressive policies on gender and race issues – such as issues related to reproductive rights and minorities access to higher education. In the secularization debate, it is important to be cautious and understand the nuances and history of these processes. The new political-religious configuration reveals religious adaptation to forms of secularization through negotiations with the political-economic field. It is certainly a fertile field for researchers in the area and to which we wish to continue contributing.

Notes

- 1 Mariz (2006, 105) affirms, “the Enlightenment believed in the end of religion” and sought “to replace all knowledge revealed, or based on faith, with rational knowledge.”
- 2 Peter Berger (1999) writes about the de-secularization of the world. David Martin, known for the General Theory of Secularization presented in 1978, proposes revisions 13 years later. He states, about Brazil: “the whole atmosphere is completely alive, and this opinion is not restricted to less sophisticated classes” (Martin 1991, 471).
- 3 The Massacre of *Eldorado dos Carajás* occurred on 17 April 1996 in the Brazilian state of Pará. More than 19 landless agricultural workers were murdered. The workers from the Landless Movement were walking to the state capital Belém and were prevented from continuing by the police. Twenty years later, only two commanders have been jailed. More information available at: <https://anistia.org.br/noticias/massacre-de-eldorado-dos-carajas-20-anos-de-impunidade-e-violencia-campo/>.
- 4 Data from IBGE reveal that in 2000, only 2.2% of Brazilians with degrees were black. In 2004, Brazil began a higher education access program known as quotas aimed at the black population. Shukura attended university in the 1990s before the access programs.
- 5 External reporting in which the journalist communicates with the studio to report on some event and at the same time with the viewer.
- 6 We have omitted the webpages to preserve the identity of the journalist.

Further readings

- bell hooks, 2015. *Feminism Is for Everybody – Passionate Politics*. New York: Routledge.
The book is a guide to learn about the specific issues which black people, especially women, face in society.
- Fonseca, B., 2011. *Relações e privilégios: estado, secularização e diversidade religiosa no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Novos Diálogos.
Fonseca describes the relations between religion and governments in the Republican age of Brazil (1888–1988) and presents a brief good account of the theory of secularization in a Latin-American perspective (for Portuguese readers).
- Hewitt, W. E., 1990. Religion and the Consolidation of Democracy in Brazil: The Role of the Comunidades Eclesiais de Base (CEBs). *Sociological Analysis*, 51(2), 139–152.
The article is a classic text on the Theology of Liberation and REBs in Brazil. It gives the reader (academic or not) good information and critical analysis about the issue.
- Hill, P., and Bilge, S., 2016. *Intersectionality*. Malden: Polity Press.
The book shows us that the concept of intersectionality has become a hot topic in academic and activist circles alike and what it really means in the reality of our society.
- Hoover, S., 2014. Mídia e religião: premissas e implicações para os campos acadêmico e midiático. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, [e-journal] 35(2). Available at Universidade Metodista de São Paulo website <https://www.metodista.br/revistas/revistas-ims/index.php/CSO/article/view/4906>, accessed 8 October 2014.

- Hoover addresses some of the main issues in the media and religion field, such as the ways in which religion and media interact; how both dimensions have changed in recent years; and the implications and consequences of these changes for media professionals and for researchers in the field. For these reasons, the paper is an ideal first reading on the intersection of media and religion.
- Nascimento, Abdias, 2016. *O genocídio do negro brasileiro: processo de um racismo mascarado*. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva.
- This book shows why the widely accepted concept of “racial democracy” in Brazil was, and still is, a myth. Questioning the idea of harmonic racial relations in Brazil, the book was censored from the 1977 World Festival of Black Arts, in Nigeria.

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