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Racismo Religioso no Brasil: Comunicação além do Secularismo

Religious Racism in Brazil: Communication beyond Secularism

Racismo Religioso en Brasil: Comunicación más allá del Secularismo

RESUMO

Este estudo é uma revisão teórica para desconstruir certas suposições em publicações sobre raça e religião. A primeira seção explica o contexto sócio-político em que a violência contra religiões de matriz africana ocorre no Brasil, especialmente durante a presidência de Michel Temer. A segunda seção usa um quadro interdisciplinar para conduzir uma revisão de literatura sobre raça e religião no Brasil. As últimas seções oferecem sugestões para melhorar a pesquisa sobre racismo religioso em Comunicação. Tendo em vista a onda conservadora atual ao redor do mundo, comunicadores deveriam refletir sobre o nosso papel na luta por justiça social, e imaginar formas melhores de fazê-lo.

Palavras-chave: racismo religioso, secularismo, justiça social

ABSTRACT

This study is a theoretical revision aiming at deconstructing certain assumptions in scholarship about race and religion. The first section explains the socio-political context in which violence against African-rooted religions occurs in Brazil, especially during Michel Temer's presidency. The second section uses an interdisciplinary framework to conduct a literature review on race and religion in Brazil. The last sections offer suggestions to improve research on religious racism in Communication. Given the current conservative wave around the world, communicators should reflect on our role in the fight for social justice, and imagine better ways to do it.

Keywords: religious racism, secularism, social justice

RESUMEN

Este estudio es una revisión teórica para desconstruir algunas suposiciones en publicaciones sobre raza y religión. La primera sección explica el contexto socio-político en que la violencia contra religiones de matriz africana ocurre en Brasil, especialmente durante la presidencia de Michel Temer. La segunda sección usa un cuadro interdisciplinar para conducir una revisión de literatura sobre raza y religión en Brasil. Las últimas secciones ofrecen sugerencias para mejorar la investigación sobre racismo religioso en Comunicación. Porque actualmente hay una ola conservadora en el mundo, comunicadores deberían pensar sobre nuestro papel en la lucha por justicia social, e imaginar mejores formas de hacerlo.

Palabras-clave: racismo religioso, secularismo, justicia social

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Introduction

The present article intends to challenge taken-for-granted concepts such as race, religion, law, and secularism; explain the socio-political context in which religious racism occurs in Brazil; challenge the idea that communication (information and visibility) equals power; suggest more radical ways of fighting religious racism.

To reach these objectives, the article asks the following questions: What are the contributions and limitations of the academic literature on the relation between race and religion in Brazil? What is the context in which religious racism occurs? How can Communication better intervene in this debate?

The article performs a literature review of academic publications on the relation between race and religion, particularly violence against members of African-rooted religions in Brazil.

The theoretical framework is interdisciplinary (MARTINO, 2017), applying epistemological lenses developed by Talal Asad (anthropology), J. Kameron Carter (religious studies), and Tomoko Masuzawa (history) to reflect on the co-construction of race and religion, as well as Denise Ferreira da Silva (ethics) and Cedric Robinson (political science) to trace how the race was invented in Western Europe and then re-signified in Brazil and the United States, respectively.

Masuzawa (2005) explains that the modern idea of “religion” and its derivative expression “world religions” was invented in Western Europe in “the long nineteenth century” (1789-1914) by a white male intelligentsia. The field of philology was a great contributor to this project because it divided most of humanity into:

- Aryans (Indians, Persians, Europeans who practiced true religions (Christianity, Buddhism) and spoke inflective Proto-Indian-European languages (Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, German, etc.);

- Semitics (Jews, Muslims) who practiced quasi-religions (Judaism, Islam) and spoke agglutinative languages (Hebrew, Arabic);

- Other races (natives in the Americas, Africa, and Asia) who were “heathens” and spoke “primitive” dialects.

This classification basically divides the West (Aryans) from the rest (Semitics and “savages”). Nowadays, despite the discourse of pluralism and equality between world religions, in practice, the West-and-the-rest binary remains. Moreover, Masuzawa's historical investigation makes clear that the concepts of “race”, “religion”, and “nation-state” were created about the same time and for the same purpose: to justify European colonization, slavery, and hegemony. By denying or diminishing the Middle-Eastern, Jewish origin of Christianity, and using *Reconquista* logic in the colonies through Jesuit missionaries, colonizers inaugurated modern Christonormativity.

Carter (2008) comes to the same conclusion as Masuzawa's: “modernity's racial imagination has its genesis in the theological problem of Christianity's quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots.” (4) Carter

draws parallels between, on the one hand, Irenaeus of Lyons' (early 2nd century - c. 202 A.D.) fight against Gnosticism's proto-racial outlook, Gregory of Nyssa's (c. 335 - c. 395) abolitionism, and Maximus the Confessor's (c. 580 - 662) anti-colonialism, and on the other hand, New World Afro-Christian faith in antebellum North America.

Carter argues that theology has been used for oppression to the point in which the subaltern is having doubts as to whether faith can be effective for social justice, so he wants to show how religion has been and still can be an important tool for liberation.

Asad (2003; 2010; 2012) questions the assumption of secularism as the epitome of epistemological evolution, i.e., the idea that rationalism supersedes religion. In contrast to that, critical research shows that there is a lot of religiosity in secularism: European philosophers were religious (MASUZAWA, 2005; 2011) from Plato (WILLIAMS, 2016) to Kant (CARTER, 2008), and many attitudes believed to belong to rationality are actually "irrational" (ASAD, 2003).

Part of the inability to grasp religion for social justice comes from scholars, activists, and even religious leaders who arrogantly believe themselves to be rational, and the populace to be irrational (MOTTA, 2014). Notwithstanding, what we now define as African, Middle Eastern, Asian, and Latin American societies have developed science (technology, math, medicine, architecture, navigation, etc.) much before Europe (ROBINSON, 2000), without the need to conflict it with spirituality. Therefore, religion is congruent with complex thinking, logic, and ethics.

Henceforth, we can practice critiques of systemic oppressions and imagine alternatives that are not

necessarily secular. We, scholars who want to be called critical, must recognize the limits of the Marxist origin of Critical Theory to the study of the race (ROBINSON, 2000) and question the presumption that critique is secular (ASAD et al., 2013).

Some of the common arguments among Masuzawa, Asad, and Carter are: they crush the dichotomy of the secular versus the religious, deconstructing the very words "secular" and "religion"; they show how race and religion have been invented concerning each other to justify European imperialism; they demonstrate how science and religion have been used for both oppression and violence, thus demystifying the notion that secularism equals objectivity and justice, whereas religion means partiality and violence; they detail the relations between religion and fields assumed to be secular, such as science and law; they trace how Eastern Christianity came to stand for the West, being hierarchically followed by other Abrahamic religions: Judaism, and at last Islam.

Cedric Robinson's book *Black Marxism* traces the history of how, first, European elites (especially Athenians such as Aristotle) created *racialism* based on the idea that people from certain spaces were "barbarians." Then, Western European intellectuals from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century created *racism* through the invention of a White Self in opposition to a Non-White Other. These Non-White Others were called "primitives" because they were supposedly stuck in the past. Descartes (1596-1650), Kant (1724-1804), and Hegel (1770-1831) are the main contributors to this racist philosophy.

Racialism

Ancient Athens, Crusades, *Reconquista*, early colonization of Africa, etc.

→

Racism

Colonization and slavery in the Americas, a new wave of colonization of Africa and Asia, the French Revolution, the English Industrial Revolution, German nationalism, etc.

Denise da Silva (2007) investigates how Western European natural and human sciences from the 17th to the 19th century invented “race” based on “science”. She traces the trajectory of the construction of race in written texts from the fields of history and science:

- History: human or social sciences such as philosophy and anthropology that privileged time over space (e.g., Hegel)

- Science: natural sciences such as biology and physics that privilege space over time (e.g., Darwin)

Racial difference is not a substantive, empirically observable bodily trait because human diversity cannot be proven in biology or genes, neither can it be associated with any specific characteristics such as intelligence, skills, talent, morality, culture, etc. Presuming that racial difference precedes race is presuming that the race exists before its politicization and theorization.

The “transparent I” – the Western European modern male self-determined subject endorsed with individual free will and rationality – and the “others of Europe” – the outer-determined affectable object who can be deemed a subject but never *the* subject – did not simply exist, but rather were created with significant conscious efforts by the European intelligentsia to justify colonization, slavery, and other capitalist tools through white supremacy (SILVA, 1998; 2001; 2005; 2007; 2008; 2014; 2017).

Because the modern concept of race is based on modern science, racism did not exist before the nineteenth century. At the same time, because "blacks" did not exist before colonization and slavery – they called themselves Yoruba, Hausa, Pitjantjatjara, etc. – then blackness did not exist either.

The modern concepts of race and religion were brought to Brazil mostly through European colonization and U.S. neo-colonization and adapted to our reality (SILVA, 2007). The next section will explain the background in which religious racism occurs in the present with Michel Temer's administration.

1. Context

Lula's and Dilma's administrations promoted policies against religious racism¹ such as the 2003 law 10.639 for the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture in schools, and the 2007 law 11.635 establishing the *Dia Nacional de Combate à Intolerância Religiosa* (National Day for the Struggle against Religious Intolerance) on January 21st – the day Mãe Gilda died. At that time, the government also opened the *Ministério das Mulheres, da Igualdade Racial e dos Direitos Humanos* (Ministry of Women, Racial Equality, and Human Rights), but Temer's administration strategically re-named it *Secretaria dos Direitos Humanos* (Office of Human Rights) to omit explicit mentions to gender and race and subordinated the office to the Ministry of Justice. Dilma also founded *Disque Denúncia 100*, an emergency telephone number for denouncing human rights violations, which has been one of the main sources of information about the number of cases of religious intolerance. Before the

¹ Cipó, Roger. "É sobre Racismo Religioso que Precisamos Falar." *Brasil de Fato*. Fórum Social Mundial, 21 Jan. 2017. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

impeachment, government officials would participate in events against religious racism and homophobia.²

On April 17th, 2016, politicians voted for Dilma's impeachment live on television, each one saying they were doing so in the name of God and their families, and citing decontextualized passages of the Bible that justified their decision. Because Brazil is officially a secular state, various religious organizations and social movements protested the politicians' religious justification for the impeachment.³ But, does the separation between state and religion guarantee social justice? Is this separation possible, necessarily desirable, or in the best interest of the people? Or are there other ways to fight Christonormativity? These questions will be answered in the next section.

Left-wing politicians have been pushing against Christonormativity in the government such as the reading of the Bible during voting sessions since Brazil is officially a secular state.⁴ However, most resistive acts come from religious groups and social movements that march on the National Day for the Struggle against Religious Intolerance⁵, on *Dia da Consciência Negra* (Day of Black Conscience)⁶, and other occasions.

² "Brasília Faz Ato de Desagravo à Intolerância Religiosa." *Portal Vermelho*. Associação Vermelho, 21 Mar. 2016. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

³ "Religiosos Criticam Citações a Deus na Sessão que Votou Impeachment." *Portal Vermelho*. Associação Vermelho, 20 Apr. 2016. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

⁴ Oliveira, Tory. "Vereadora Crítica Leitura da Bíblia na Câmara de Araraquara." *CartaCapital*. Editora Confiança, 30 Jan. 2017. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

⁵ Cipó, Roger and Douglas Belchior. "Religiões Africanas Promovem Ato contra Intolerância e Racismo em SP." *CartaCapital*. Editora Confiança, 20 Jan. 2017. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

⁶ Gouveia, Laís. "Enquanto Reina a Intolerância, Religiões Afro Resistem ao Preconceito." *Portal Vermelho*. Associação Vermelho, 6 Jan. 2017. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

Educators have also been fighting religious racism by pushing for curricular changes, critical education for teachers, and campaigns about bullying against children of non-Christian religions (COUTINHO; RUPPENTHAL, 2016; SILVA; CAMPOS, 2011; GIVIGI et al., 2016; MÜLLER; COSTA, 2016; RODRIGUES JR., 2013). In 2015, the *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* (National Exam of High School, or Enem), which largely determines the entrance of students in college, chose "religious intolerance" as that year's overall theme. The test had one of the worst grade results in history, thus indicating the youth's prejudice and lack of awareness about religious racism.⁷

In Rio 2016, the International Olympic Committee decided to leave Afro-Brazilian religions out of the ecumenical center of the Athletes Village, and included only the five religions most practiced by athletes: Christianity, Islamism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Hinduism.⁸ After outcries from social movements and religious groups, and a recommendation from the federal government, the committee created a "neutral space" to be used by practitioners of all religions that did not fall into those five.⁹ However, Masuzawa warns us that "major" or "world religions" are social constructions that leave out great diversity of human spiritualities.

⁷ Nascimento, Nadine. "Denúncias de Discriminação Religiosa no Disque 100 Crescem 19% em 2016." *Brasil de Fato*. Ed. Camila Rodrigues da Silva. Fórum Social Mundial, 21 Jan. 2017. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

⁸ "Excluir Religiões Africanas de Festa Olímpica É Manifestação Mundial de Racismo." *Revista Brasileiros*. Brasileiros Editora, 30 Jul. 2016. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

⁹ "Centro Ecumênico da Vila Olímpica tem espaço neutro após recomendação do MPF." *Ministério Público Federal*. Governo Federal, 9 Aug. 2016. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

Besides the Catholic bias in the Brazilian government, there is also a growing neo-Pentecostal bias. Temer's government is openly favorable to the growing number of conservative neo-Pentecostal pastors in politics. Even before pastors are elected, they openly defame Afro-Brazilian religions in election campaigns on the media¹⁰ and inside churches, where they pressure followers to vote for them (CUNHA, 2015, p. 3).

Cunha (2015) investigates how neo-Pentecostal leaders have been accumulating positions in the government, acquiring ownership of media corporations, and getting positive representation by the news and pop culture. She analyzes how Marco Feliciano, Eduardo Cunha, Marcelo Crivella, Silas Malafaia, and other pastors/entrepreneurs/politicians have been spreading laws and hate speech against Afro-Brazilian religions, feminism, blackness, queerness, and social movements. Despite constant protests by social movements and left-wing politicians such as Jean Wyllys, the neo-Pentecostal empire – especially *Assembléia de Deus* and *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* – continues to grow and build alliances with political parties, media corporations, and the Catholic Church. As this empire adopts entrepreneurial strategies and gathers more power, the prospect of having a neo-Pentecostal pastor as the new president in the 2018 elections becomes more likely (MACHADO; NACIF, 2017).

Cunha points out that this new wave of conservatism is simply a continuation of Brazilian society's conservatism.

¹⁰ "Bahia: MP Recomenda a Candidatos Respeito à Crença Religiosa." *Portal Vermelho*. Associação Vermelho, 29 Jul. 2016. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

She mentions a 2013 *Datafolha* national survey¹¹ revealing that out of the 2,517 interviewees in 154 cities, 11% are right-wing, 38% are center-right, 22% center, 26% center-left, and 4% left-wing (8). This means that 71% of the population is conservative.

In tandem with the increase in religious bias, racial and gender disparity have also been growing. When comparing Dilma's to Temer's office,¹² the latter's lack of female¹³ and black¹⁴ ministers is obvious. Not only is Temer personally sexist,¹⁵ but his administration's policies are particularly harmful to impoverished women of color¹⁶ and other vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples.¹⁷

Pastor and politician of *Partido Social Cristão* (Christian Social Party) Antônio Fernandes Toninho Costa became the president of *Fundação Nacional do Índio* (National Foundation of the Native, or Funai), which is the indigenous organ of the federal government. Pastor Antônio's proselytizing mission is

¹¹ Mendonça, Ricardo. "Ideologia Interfere Pouco na Decisão de Voto, Diz Datafolha." *Folha de São Paulo*. Folha de São Paulo, 14 Dec. 2013. Web. 3 Mar. 2017.

¹² Infográficos Estadão: <http://infograficos.estadao.com.br/politica/o-ministerio-de-temer/>

¹³ "Ausência de Mulheres no Ministério de Temer Gera Polêmica." *Marie Claire*. Groupe Marie Claire, 12 May 2016. Web. 7 Mar. 2017.

¹⁴ "Especialistas Sublinham Ausência de Ministros Negros no Governo Temer." *Radio France Internationale*. Government of France, 13 May 2016. Web. 7 Mar. 2017.

¹⁵ "Temer Enfatiza 'Importância' da Mulher: Casa, Filhos, Orçamento Doméstico." *Rede Brasil Atual*. Fundação Sociedade, Comunicação, Cultura e Trabalho, 8 Mar. 2017. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

¹⁶ Teixeira, Marilane Oliveira. "O Desmonte da Previdência e as Mulheres." *CartaCapital*. Editora Confiança, 7 Mar. 2017. Web. 07 Mar. 2017.

¹⁷ Pacheco, Tania. "Nota da Apib de Repúdio contra o Ministro da Justiça Anti-indígena Osmar Serraglio." *Combate Racismo Ambiental*. Latin America Bureau, 8 Mar. 2017. Web. 8 Mar. 2017.

no secret to indigenous communities. After Temer's administration considered other names for this position among military candidates, it ended up choosing Pastor Antônio despite indigenous movements' official support for either native candidate Sebastião Manchineri or indigenous ally Noel Villas-Bôas. Native movements have been protesting Temer and suffering police brutality.¹⁸

Besides the proselytizing of natives sponsored by the government, a pressing problem is racism against participants of Afro-Brazilian religions, as well as police officers' condoning of hate speech and hate crimes. LGBTQIA practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions are especially targeted (FERNANDES, 2013) since *candomblé* is not so rigid in terms of gender and sexuality in comparison to Christianity (PRANDI, 2011).¹⁹

The Law and the police are almost always on the side of perpetrators: laws against animal sacrifice (COELHO et al., 2016); lack of policies against environmental racism connected to religious intolerance (LIMA; OLIVEIRA, 2016); fining or arrest of religious practitioners for accusations of animal sacrifice, littering when offering food to the gods on a public space, and noise pollution (OLIVEIRA, 2015); police officers' refusal to file complaints under the name of religious intolerance or racist crime²⁰; lack of punishment to perpetrators etc. are some of the ways in which powerful institutions engender violence against this population.

¹⁸ Farias, Elaíze. "Governo Temer Nomeia Pastor a Presidente da Funai e Inclui um General do Exército na Equipe, Ambos do PSC." *Instituto Humanitas Unisinos*. Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos, 13 Jan. 2017. Web. 7 Mar. 2017.

¹⁹ Matuoka, Ingrid. "Eu Sou Trans e Religiosa." *CartaCapital*. Editora Confiança, 20 Feb. 2017. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

²⁰ Prado, Bruna. "A Intolerância Religiosa no Brasil em 2016." *Portal Vermelho*. Associação Vermelho, 15 Dec. 2016. Web. 01 Mar. 2017.

According to the Office of Human Rights, there were 300 complaints of religious intolerance from January to September 2016, corresponding to 105% growth in comparison to the same period in 2015.²¹ Extremists from civil society who are anti-Afro-Brazilian religions, most of whom are from neo-Pentecostal churches, commit several forms of violence: invasion, depredation, and arson in *terreiros* (Afro-Brazilian temples); hate speech on the streets and by the mass media; complaints to the police of noise pollution during religious rituals; stalking; physical violence against practitioners, including children and the elderly; homicide attempts and murder; vandalism on public statues in homage to Afro-Brazilian deities; destruction of offerings to the gods in public spaces; intentional disturbance of religious events; passive-aggressive comments and microaggressions, etc. (SILVA, V. G., 2015)

Section 2 will further elucidate the context in which religious racism occurs by analyzing academic discourses about violence against members of Afro-Brazilian religions.

2. Literature review

Most Brazilian scholarship on race and religion is written under the rubric of *religious intolerance*, but sometimes it also appears as *religious racism* or other combinations of these words.

Religious intolerance occurs when members of a religion are considered socially and politically dominant in society to use stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against members of a different faith. Religious racism builds upon the previous concept

²¹ *Idem*

but directly links religious intolerance to racism. The concept recognizes that bigotry against Afro-Brazilian religions, *pajelança*, Muslims, etc. is not solely about religion, but rather about the intersection of religion and race.

Besides the foundational books *Encantaria Brasileira* and *Intolerância Religiosa*, from the last years, I have found three articles in Communication (BEZERRA; RODRIGUES, 2016; CUNHA, 2015; CARMO, 2016); two in Arts (GOMES, 2013; STEEL, 2014), one in Geography (MACHADO; NACIF, 2017); one in Psychology (SANTOS, 2015); three in Law (COELHO et al., 2016; LIMA; OLIVEIRA, 2016; OLIVEIRA, 2015); five in Education (COUTINHO; RUPPENTHAL, 2016; SILVA; CAMPOS, 2011; GIVIGI et al., 2016; MÜLLER; COSTA, 2016; RODRIGUES JR., 2013); and nine in Anthropology, Sociology, and Religious Studies (CAMPOS; NASCIMENTO, 2013; CORDOVIL, 2015; FERNANDES, 2013; GÓIS, 2013; MAIA, 2015; MOTTA, 2014; OLIVEIRA JR., 2014; SILVA, C., 2015; SILVA, V. S., 2011).

Encantaria Brasileira and anthropological articles are mostly descriptive, i.e., they detail the beliefs and practices in *candomblé*, *umbanda*, *jurema*, and other Afro-Brazilian religions. Some of them also traces the history of these religions, which is especially important when it takes into consideration the racial, socioeconomic class, and geographical differences between the practitioners of those religions over time. For instance, *umbanda* is a white-washed version of *candomblé* in combination with *espiritismo*. While *candomblé* emerged in Bahia in lower-class black communities, *umbanda* emerged in Rio de Janeiro and is mostly practiced by the urban middle class in the South and Southeast (PRANDI, 2011).

Intolerância Religiosa and most of the articles focus on instances of violence against practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions, but they call for reform rather than revolution. *Reform* is a social change within a given structure, for example, suing a person for saying racist things is a reform because it abides by capitalism (money for punishment and reward), the law, the prison industry, and other systems that primarily benefit the elite. *Revolution* is a holistic social change that dismantles a given structure through large and long-term efforts, for example, attempts to end capitalism, the law, the prison industry, etc., to then build a new egalitarian society (FANON, 2004; LORDE, 2015).

For the most part, the reviewed literature essentializes socially constructed terms such as "race" and "religion", use solely secularism to combat religious intolerance, and speak *for* rather than *with* the subaltern (ABU-LUGHOD, 2002; ALCOFF, 1992; SPIVAK, 1988).

Most articles lack an open critique of the system that allows for religious racism to happen. Ironically, the analyzed publications ignore the possibility and desirability of revolution while using a Marxist framework. At the same time, several try to apply extremely conservative European thinkers such as Hegel to social justice work in Brazil, without any critiques or relativization of their theories.

Many of the analyzed publications either neglect racism in religious intolerance or mention it very briefly. Moreover, they fail to recognize a continuity from Catholic missionaries during colonization to the demonization of African-rooted faith during slavery to the current anti-black and anti-indigenous Christonormativity.

To combat religious intolerance, the literature recommends tolerance, inclusion, democratization, law changes, the *de facto* separation between state and religion (*estado laico*), celebration of diversity, government-sponsored media campaigns to raise awareness, and other reformist measures. The authors unconditionally and uncritically believe that human rights, access to information, visibility, etc. can end oppression.

The call for tolerance is aptly criticized in some of the analyzed articles: “differences in modes of acting, thinking, and feeling are also endured, i.e., tolerated, because they were never truly considered legitimate alternatives” (CARMO, 2016, p. 211); tolerance presumes “a false condition to pacify and tame conflicts (*idem* 213). In other words, the defense of tolerance blames the oppressed for oppression by implying that difference or diversity is the cause of discrimination. The defense of tolerance places the tolerant, privileged person as the active subject and the tolerated subaltern as the passive object presents tolerance as the “white man’s burden” and the tolerant as “white savior”, and reinforces the myths that tolerance means harmony, and that a total lack of conflict is the ideal. Challenging this view, *Intolerância Religiosa* stresses who the perpetrators are.

Defenders of the term “religious racism” criticize the call for “tolerance” mainly because members of a hegemonic religion (Christianity) should not just try to tolerate (endure, suffer, bear) other religions. Instead, religious communities should form alliances with each other to fight racism together. To this argument, I would add that the word “tolerance” assumes an essential opposition between Christianity and other

religions, when in fact the borders between religions are blurry and invented (MASUZAWA, 2005).

Belief in the Law is also easily contestable in Brazil, where indigenous tribes had their own oral constitutions, social norms, and alliances, but have been betrayed through written treaties for over five hundred years. Furthermore, natives do not enjoy full citizenship because their reservations are owned by the government.

As we saw above in the theories by Asad, Carter, Denise da Silva, Masuzawa, and Robinson, state and religion have never been separated. Moreover, both secularism and religion can be used both for oppression and resistance. Furthermore, trying to solve all social problems through the law is ignoring that the law was created by and for white wealthy men (CRENSHAW, 1989; SILVA, 2007; SULLIVAN et al., 2011).

Laicity is an illusion. Most analyzed publications argue that although Brazil is officially a secular state, the government just needs to actualize this premise. Notwithstanding, Brazilian law and all its institutions are structured on Christianity, from the mentioning of God in our 1988 Constitution to Catholic crosses and paintings in public buildings, national holidays based on Catholic festivals, "Praise to God" printed on our money bills, politicians voting for president Dilma Rousseff's impeachment (a.k.a. *coup d'état*) in the name of God, etc.

The belief in democratization as the only path towards justice is naïve. I agree that "democracy is a regime of minorities" (CARMO, 2016, p. 204), but not because democracy protects oppressed minorities. Quite the contrary, democracy was created for an elite: "Athenian democracy as a form of political

practice depends directly materially upon the slave economy that supported it by making time available for political activity to a non-productive class." (GARNHAM, 2006, p. 224)

Nowadays, democracy still serves a minority formed by the white higher-class, who profit from the labor and resources belonging to a majority formed by low-wage laborers, peasants, women, children, etc. This fact could not be clearer in Brazilian areas where the white higher class is minute but in charge. Moreover, because contemporary democracy relies on the legal system and financial profit, it necessarily excludes the homeless, the unemployed, people in illegal jobs such as prostitution, etc.

In other words, slavery and neo-slavery (WILDERSON, 2003) is neither solely an ethical issue, nor an exception to a socially just system. Instead, the use of human chattel is an economic and political issue on which the inherently unjust system of Whiteness depends. As Robinson (2000) and Galeano (2010) warn us, Europe and U.S. white men could only develop capitalism and accumulate wealth to the point of surpassing the pre-colonial and more powerful empires of Africa, the Middle East, East Asia, the Americas, etc. *because of* colonization and slavery. Land appropriation, stolen resources, and free labor guaranteed profit for Europeans and their descendants.

Nowadays, money continues to be appropriated and inherited by a white male minority. According to Credit Suisse Wealth Report 2016, Forbes, and Oxfam, *eight men* have the same wealth as the 3.6 billion poorest people in the world. "This wealth is, in most cases, hereditary. In the next two decades, 500

individuals will pass on more than 2.1 trillion dollars to their heirs, which is more than the PIB [Produto Interno Bruto, or national wealth] of a country like India, with 1.2 billion inhabitants."²²

This means that trying to include the marginalized into democracy is not enough, because democracy itself is flawed. The call for inclusion assumes that the system is good, and everybody wants to be part of it. Inclusion ignores that many people yearn for alternative lives outside the system (CLASTRES, 1989). Let us think about Communication Studies as an example. On the one hand, it is important for universities to center the voices of marginalized peoples in their research, offer opportunities for students from public schools, hire more female faculty of color from impoverished regions, etc. On the other hand, we must also consider those who should be given the chance to succeed without a college diploma, those who want to rely more on informal education than European theories, those who wish to use African and indigenous epistemologies as theory, etc. Better than inclusion in Communication as it is, we should build a completely new field (CHÁVEZ, 2015).

Civil rights are limited as well, not only because rights require the Law, but also because being considered part of civil society requires citizenship. This means that stateless and undocumented people do not have civil rights (ARENDT, 2013). By the same token, those who uncritically utilize human rights for social justice ignore that *most people are not considered fully human*. Because people of color are

²² "Oito Homens Têm a Mesma Riqueza que os 3,6 Bilhões Mais Pobres do Mundo." *CartaCapital*. Editora Confiança, 16 Jan. 2017. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

dehumanized, violence against them is normalized and not universally considered a direct attack on humanity. Racist structures depend on the exploitation, violence, and murder perpetrated on bodies of color, and therefore attacks on human rights are neither an aberration nor an exception, but the rule (SILVA, 2007).

Particularly in Communication, the assumption that information is power needs to be addressed. For instance, most Northern residents do not have access to the Internet: only 41% accessed the Internet in 2015, only 50% used a computer, 61% who have never accessed the Internet cannot afford it, 58% have never accessed it because they have no place or gadget to do so, 52% can only access the Internet on cell phones, and 23% do not own cell phones (*TIC Domicílios*). Even those who have access to the Internet, television, newspapers, and other media sources do not necessarily search for information framed around social justice (RODRIGUES; MALCHER, 2012). Most media rhetoric is conservative because media owners are conservative.

Visibility in the media does not end religious racism either (BEZERRA; RODRIGUES, 2016). Foucault (2013) has famously explained that visibility can mean not only recognition but also surveillance. Therefore, when a marginalized group begins to appear more in the mass media, they do not necessarily become less oppressed as a result. In fact, their representation is almost always filled with stereotypes, and opportunities to discipline them to become more frequent (SPIVAK, 1988).

For instance, when television introduces a paradisiacal beach free of tourists, the beach becomes famous, so a flood of tourists go there and pollute it. Similarly, when a *candomblé* girl appeared

on the news because a neo-Pentecostal fanatic threw a rock to her head,²³ her image not only raised awareness but also defensiveness and hate. She became an easier target for a larger audience nationally. The readers' comments below news articles and videos about the case show hate speech against *candomblé*, leftist journalists, politicians who support immorality, etc. Concomitantly, several commentators are Catholics who post classist and racist texts against neo-Pentecostal believers, most of whom are of a lower class.

Additionally, like tourists appropriate a beach that used to be primarily enjoyed by its native inhabitants, a marginalized community's image can be co-opted, tamed, and used against the oppressed by conservative groups (CARBADO et al., 2013). For instance, when social movements protest on the streets, the news usually avoids reporting them, except in a negative light to convey a violent image to the protestors. Henceforth, the media incites public fear and justifies police brutality, imprisonment, and submission to authority.

Most scholars, journalists, activists, lawyers, and other people committed to social justice have very good intentions, but we end up contributing to the continuation of injustice because we rely too much on hegemonic tools. In other words, our final goal is usually to ameliorate the situation just a little, instead of imagining ways to dismantle violent systems at the root of injustice.

²³ Rodrigues, Matheus. "Criança Vítima de Intolerância Religiosa no Rio se Encontra com Dom Orani." *G1. O Globo*, 19 June 2015. Web. 3 Mar. 2017.

The next sections offer suggestions for us to improve our critical endeavors.

3. Epistemological sources

Is it possible to use religion for social justice? Yes. Is it possible to use more *transgression* and less *hegemonic resistance* (FOUST, 2010)? Yes. Is it possible to strengthen Afro-Brazilian religious groups without essentializing “race” and “religion”? Yes. Let us think about how.

Brazilian Communication draws theory primarily from France, Germany, and to a lesser extent, the United States: semiotics, Frankfurt School, media studies, etc. Stuart Hall, Néstor García Canclini, Jesús Martín-Barbero, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak are some exceptions to this tendency, but still, the number of female scholars of color is very small.

Authors from the reviewed literature tend to assume the position of a Western, white scholar, thus identifying more with Europe than with their fellow Latin Americans, Africans, Middle Easterners, and other peoples who were colonized by Europe. For instance, Valdélío Silva says, “our Occidental societies” when agreeing with Foucault (p. 204).

By the same token, almost all the reviewed publications seem to envision an academic, presumably white readership. For instance, Coelho et al. (2016) suggest that *nobody* is free from the fear of witchcraft engendered by *candomblé* (p. 62), thus encouraging the nurture of a Christian white fear and dismissing how members of Afro-Brazilian religions feel about it. To challenge the inclination to imagine a white audience, Calafell and Moreman (2009) suggest authors project a diverse readership: women of color, queers, non-academics, etc.

The practice of adopting a white “we” impedes solidarity and coalition with most Brazilians and the liberation cause, because people with educational and class privilege identify as “we, white intellectuals studying the subaltern” rather than “we, the subaltern and allies studying ourselves and the institutions that oppress us.” This is what Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra (2007) call *internalized racism* (p. 289-290).

For instance, the problems suffered and mobilizations carried out by Native Brazilians²⁴²⁵ are conducive to grasping our surroundings – or even more so – as what Marx said in the nineteenth century, or what French university students did on the streets in the 1960s. Therefore, Fig. 1 charts the status quo in Brazilian Communication, whereas Fig. 2 suggests a more egalitarian approach to learn from, and create a theory based on non-Western references.

As we can see in the figure above, the majority of the Brazilian population is composed of the wretched (FANON, 2004): people who are poor, black, indigenous, female, etc. Nevertheless, the voices that are most heard and respected come from a minority of white middle-class men. In this context, high voice power generates a high publication rate in academic journals, so a larger amount of literature is framed around Western European theory written by white middle-class men.

24 Tenonderã Ayvu. “Ato com mais de três mil indígenas termina com repressão em frente ao Congresso!” Facebook. 26 Apr. 2017. [1 May 2017. <<https://www.facebook.com/tenonderaayvu/videos/1214776685318736/>>]

25 “O Maior Acampamento Terra Livre da História!” *Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil*. Mobilização Nacional Indígena, 28 Apr. 2017. Web. 1 May 2017.

Fig. 1. Epistemological sources in Social Communication in Brazil.

Fig. 2 demonstrates that scholars must consciously and purposely center marginalized voices. Furthermore, everybody regardless of our identity should try to learn from each other and work together towards our common goal: a society fair to all. This means that we, the formally educated, should give up our arrogant desire to teach the supposedly ignorant masses and lead them to social change. Rather, learning should be mutual, and we the privileged must contribute to strengthening the leadership that already exists among black, indigenous, poor, female, queer communities.

Fig. 2. Suggested epistemological sources for academic theory aimed at social justice.

When we begin to take life experiences of the wretched seriously, we will realize that many get inspiration for understanding social injustice and fighting against it from religion and spirituality. There is scholarship about critical Christianity, especially when practiced by racialized groups such as blacks (CARTER, 2008; MAIA, 2015; POLLOCK, 1998; SMIET, 2015) and Latin Americans (CAMPOS; NASCIMENTO, 2013; de la GARZA, 2004; ROESE, 2015; WANZER-SERRANO, 2015). There is also research on social justice and Islam (ALVI, 2015; MOGHADAM, 2002) and indigenous spirituality (BROWN; STREGA, 2005; KELLER, 2014; SMITH, L., 2013; WILSON, 2008). Finally, there are publications about social justice efforts in various religions (HODGE, 2012; PALMER; BURGESS, 2012), but they usually include just a small number of

major religions. Scholarship on East Asian religion and race outside the United States (GONÇALVES, 2017), on non-Abrahamic religions and social justice in the Third World (FERREIRA, 2016), and on alliances or coalitions across religions (LEE, 2012) are very hard to find.

Unfortunately, amazing research (e.g., indigenous theory²⁶ from New Zealand) often has no translation to Portuguese. Therefore, we will have to rely more on Portuguese-speaking epistemologies, including those from countries like Angola, Mozambique, and East Timor, as well as Brazilian communities like *candomblé* associations, non-governmental organizations led by local residents, hip hop feminists (SAUNDERS, 2016) etc.

Moreover, professors should push for the translation and publication of seminal texts from various Third World communities around the globe. If globalization works primarily in favor of capitalism, we should turn it into a tool for social justice by connecting colonized peoples' epistemologies, thus engendering horizontal dialogue.

From now on, the Brazilian intelligentsia will hopefully learn more from, acknowledge, and work alongside non-academics. Most organized and non-organized resistance is led by peasants (*Movimento dos Sem-Terra*), artists (*Tropicália*), religious communities (*Guerra de Canudos*), slaves (*quilombos*), and other subaltern groups outside academia. Additionally, hopefully, we will draw even more from Latin American activism (e.g., Rigoberta Menchú) and research (e.g., Orlando Fals Borda), rather than using primarily continental sources.

²⁶ Indigenous Theory is written by and for native communities, using traditional knowledge such as aboriginal philosophy, spirituality, ethics, aesthetics, etc.

Final remarks

In this time of intense racial bigotry around the world, all scholars must be committed to challenging and dismantling racial supremacy, because being silent or pretending neutrality while communities of color are decimated is akin to compliance with oppression. Let us remember Desmond Tutu's words: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

I know thinking outside the box is hard and often interpreted as naïve, i.e., impossible to achieve. However, if we fail to use our imagination to conceive a radically different future, soon we will be unable to even begin to imagine a truly liberated world. Can we still consider a society without capitalism, neo-liberalism, national borders, race, cis-hetero-patriarchy? Can we still think of ways to end institutions' control of our bodies, our time, and our space? Can we still imagine ways to destroy this whole structure, i.e., to bring about revolution instead of only reform?

For thousands of years, human beings did not have to report their "race" in official forms, prove patriotism by showing faithfulness to a "religion", carry a passport to cross borders, issue a wedding certificate to receive certain governmental benefits, etc. In fact, many oppressions assumed the present form only in the last 200 years. An example from modernity: British factory workers during the Industrial Revolution were fighting against the boss' right to control their time, rather than just fighting for the improvement of existing labor laws (THOMPSON, 1967).

So, we do not really *need* to be controlled in these particular ways by institutions to function or be happy. We can look for millions of other possibilities from the past, and create numerous other possibilities for a happier future. And what is happiness anyway? Who gets to define it? (LEWIS, 2013)

How can Communication contribute to this debate? First, we pay close attention to language. If the main focus of our field is to study discourse and intercultural relations, then we have skills to question concepts that common sense takes for granted, such as "race" and "religion". Second, the discipline or non-discipline of Communication has strived for interdisciplinarity since its inception in Brazil (MARTINO, 2017), thus allowing for more holistic research. Third, its interest in the media requires up-to-date information and insights, hence making academic knowledge relevant and generally accessible to a larger audience. Fourth, communicators are well versed in critical theory and tend to be committed to social justice, in other words, we work for a fairer future for all.

Michel Temer is in power not because he is an evil individual, but rather because there are a lot of powerful people who support his views. Even worse, he is the president because we who are against his rule are failing to take him out. We, educators and communicators, are failing at educating the conservative middle class about systemic oppressions such as racism, cis-hetero-patriarchy, Christonormativity, etc. We are failing at coming up with tactics for transgression and revolution, as well as strategies for hegemonic resistance and reform. We are failing at learning from marginalized groups who have been using radical tools to survive these five hundred years.

Critical intellectuals have been trying to lead the masses, but now it is time to follow them too.

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