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Mediatization of Religion: Three Dimensions from a Latin American/Brazilian Perspective

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Abstract: Research on the mediatization of religion seems to have become a major issue both for Social Sciences and Media Studies, although some core questions concerning its definitions and characteristics are still open to debate. This paper addresses some of these interrogations from a Latin American/Brazilian perspective, taking into the account some of the particular perspectives of the region. It draws on previous studies, combined with contemporary cases, to outline an overview of mediatization, as it has been studied by some Latin American scholars, in three dimensions: (1) Theoretical: Mediatization as an alternative path to ‘media and religion’ studies by focusing on the articulation between the media environment and religious practices, both institutional and individual; (2) cultural: Mediatization has drawn religion closer to media culture and entertainment, which has allowed churches and denominations to reach a wider audience; and (3) political: Mediatization has enabled religion to get a broader visibility in the public space and to have a say in social matters. These elements lead to the suggestion that mediatization of religion is a new way of living the religious experience in everyday life.

Keywords: mediatization; religion; communication theory; media studies

1. Introduction

The singularity of each religious phenomena, spreading in a wide range of beliefs, doctrines, and practices, would make it very difficult to talk about ‘religion’ in general, as if it had some sort of unity. Uniformity, it seems, is a word that does not fit in the study of the religion, as its very borders have not been precisely defined neither by Philosophy or the Social Sciences. In actuality, if common language uses the name ‘religion’ to refer to a more or less defined set of beliefs and practices, the word encompasses a more complex range of activities that does not fit in a single definition. Therefore, the task of writing about ‘mediatization of religion’, as it happens with other issues in Social Sciences, must be focused and narrow, situated in time and place.

When one talks about the mediatization of religion in Latin America, it is important to bear in mind that several forms of religion and religiosities coexist in the continent, and not all of them have the same relationship with the media. Moreover, it also important to notice the differences and inequalities that characterizes the countries, as much as the different regions of each nation.

There are also some common elements that also allow a broad view of the continent. The colonial heritage may be the first common denominator, as all modern nations in the region were originally territories conquered by European countries, mainly Spain and Portugal, and, to a much lesser scale, France, England, and Holland. A troubled political and economic history also seems to be common to the majority of countries, with authoritarian regimes alternating with democratically elected governments. Economically, the region is marked by a widespread social inequality, with a huge gap between the richest and the poorest.

Finally, in cultural terms, where religion may be included, the region is characterized by the articulations, disputes, and appropriations and re-appropriations of media culture, organized Christian doctrines, popular beliefs, non-Christian influences, and so on. That is why, when talking about the mediatization of religion, it is important to bear in mind that tension, not agreement, seems to be the rule. The historical developments of each country's media and communication system have played an important role in the mediatization of religion, just as the 'genesis and structure' of the region's—and each country's—'religious field', as Bourdieu (1971, 1998) names it, has also contributed not only to the plurality of this scenario, but also to the tensions that also characterize it, as stated by Berge (2007), Câmara and Neris (2008), and Martino (2016).

There is another problem: Where does mediatization of religion studies fit in academic research? There is no obvious place, as Hoover and Venturelli (1996) argues, as it constantly crosses the borders between Media Studies and the Social Sciences. It may be argued that disciplinary borders are questionable historical constructions, or outdated views of university departments, but it also has weight in chasing theoretical and methodological choices throughout a research. In Latin American research, the subject seems to be placed in a sort of interval between Social Sciences, particularly Sociology, and Media Studies.

Historically, media studies have no paid special attention to religious matters or phenomena, and one might argue that only from the late 1990s onwards there has been a significant growth in books, articles, and papers on the subject. On the other hand, the Sociology of Religion does not seem to have a special concern with the place of the media in religious practices and experiences. The focus seems to be on the religious beliefs and practices of people and groups, more or less organized in institutions such as churches and denominations. The media, when mentioned, is a component of religious institutions (Martino 2016).

This paper focuses on mediatization of religion as part of a broader process, the mediatization of society (Hjarvard 2008a; Hepp 2014; Gomes 2010; Martino 2016). The scope is on churches and religious denominations that have fully embraced the media communication environment not as a sort of 'tool' to convey their message, but as part of their everyday practices. Mediatization is not an even process, as Martino (2016), grounded on empirical research, suggests. On the contrary, it seems to be related to the particular doctrinaire concerns of each religion, as much as its history and social context. For some religions, especially the Roman Catholic Church and some Protestant denominations, the relationship with media communication is part of their everyday practices: Apart from the religious celebrations in churches, they also employ a media network (which includes from television channels and radio stations to social media). However, there are religions, and some Protestant denominations, which have little or no relationship with media communication—this could be a matter of option, related to doctrinaire concerns, or due to the impossibility of meeting the costs to sustain a media production structure.

In spite of the lack of definition, the study of media and religion seems to be firmly established as a legitimate field of enquiry, as studies by Block (2000), Buddenbaum (2002), or Stout and Buddenbaum (2002, 2008) have shown. In Latin America, these studies have also flourished, firstly on the Social Sciences and, after a while, in Media Studies, with the works by Souza (1969), Martín-Barbero (1995, 1997), Campos (1997), Brito (1998); Fonseca (1998), and Blancarte (1999, 2011) among the first to address the issue.

It would be possible, for the sake of an overview, to identify three main branches or trends in mediatization, and, particularly, in the mediatization of religion studies in Latin America, each of them stressing one aspect of that: (1) The theoretical dimension: Latin American research sees mediatization as an alternative path to 'media and religion' studies by focusing on the articulation between the media environment and religious practices, both institutional and individual; (2) the cultural dimension: The mediatization of religion has drawn religion closer to pop culture and entertainment, which has allowed churches and denominations to reach a wider audience; (3) the

political dimension: Mediatization has enabled religion to get a broader visibility in the public space and to have a say in social matters.

Each of these branches have been constructed in a close dialogue with non-Latin American research: That is why a dialogical approach, rather than exclusive, sets the tone of this paper. In what follows, the paper provides an overview of each of those dimensions.

2. The Theoretical Perspective of Mediatization

What is mediatization? This question has been posed, and attempted to have been answered, by several scholars at least since the 1990s. It is not the goal of this paper to draw an outline of those studies, neither to provide a comprehensive literature review of the several articles and books focused on the subject, but to draw a rough outline from Latin America, in dialogue with other perspectives. Authors like Verón (1986), Sodr  (2004), Braga (2006, 2015), Ferreira (2010), Adolf (2011), Gomes (2015), or Valdettaro (2016) have developed some formulations in dialogue with views from Hjarvard (2008a, 2008b), Str mb ck (2008), Clark (2011), Krotz (2009), Couldry and Andreas (2013), and Hepp (2014), among others. Each of them focus on different aspects of the concept, highlighting its different meanings.

In Latin America, led by Ver n (1986, 2013) and Sodr  (2004), mediatization has been studied as a broader process that started at the eve of the acquisition of symbolic representation and expression by human beings, and includes, as ‘media’, from drawing to writing, from printing to digital media. For Ver n (2013), mediatization is a long-term process, related to the human acquisition of language and symbols—the representation of reality. ‘Mediatization’, thus, is firstly seen as a historical and cultural phenomena that pervades a long historical range of human anthropological development.

Some authors have concentrated their focus on the mediatization of religion instead of a looking at wider changes in society. Studies by Fiegenbaum (2006), Guti rrez (2008), Gomes (2004, 2010), Gasparetto (2011), and Martino (2012a, 2012b, 2016) suggest that religion, perhaps more than other parts of society, seems to have been deeply affected by the process of mediatization. Grounded on these previous studies, it is possible to highlight some common features of those studies that particularly may help to understand some elements of the process of mediatization, and, particularly, the mediatization of religion.

The word itself refers, as Sonia Livingstone (2009) points to the notion of ‘media’, on the one side, and ‘action’, on the other—by ‘mediatization’ one could understand the ‘action of the media’ on something. However, even this first approach raises some questions: How can the media ‘act’ on something? Would it be a new name for the classical ‘effects’ approach in media studies, the claim that the media influence people’s thinking and attitudes? Also, on who or what, exactly, would be this ‘action’? Would it be on individuals, groups, or the society at large? In order to outline some answers, even provisory, it is necessary to step back to the very concept of media.

Livingstone (2009), writing more than a decade ago, detected a particularly important shift in the way media researchers addressed the relationship between the means of communication and other instances of society: Instead of ‘media and politics’ or ‘media and culture’, researchers have started to talk about ‘mediated politics’ or ‘the mediatization of culture’. In fact, some books bearing titles close to that were published around that date, such as Krotz (2009), Hjarvard (2008a, 2008b), and Hepp (2014). Why, then, depart from a well-established tradition of ‘media-and-something’ studies to ‘mediated’ or ‘mediatized’?

Researchers like Sodr  (2004), Braga (2006), Livingstone (2009), Couldry (2008), Couldry and Andreas (2013) and Martino (2019a, 2019b), among others, identify a shift in the place of ‘the media’ in society, and even a transformation in the very concept of ‘media’. Roughly, they seem to claim that prior to the 2000s it was possible to locate ‘the media’ in society: Mainly great broadcast corporations, transmitting to a mass of receivers easily located at their homes, reading printed newspapers, watching their television sets, listening to CDs, and watching and DVD players. There were only some portable devices, such as car radios, Walkmans, or CD players.

The growth of the Internet, social media networks, and portable smartphones have outlined another panorama. ‘The media’ is not anymore located somehow ‘outside’ the society, and only occasionally linked with social activities, such as politics or religion. Instead, it is inside the society, among groups and communities, and connecting individuals—not anymore only ‘receivers’, but potentially authors and even broadcasters. Every single activity, so to say, might be related to the connection with some sort of media. The media has, at least partially, slipped from the great corporations to one’s pocket.

As much as anyone is ‘the media’ and might send messages to one or many people, it makes no sense anymore to consider as ‘media’ only the big broadcasters. [Couldry \(2006\)](#) argues that the media would not occupy the ‘center’ of a society since there is no ‘center’, but a web of social and interpersonal relations that may, or may not, be mediated by the interference of some technological device or informed by a media broadcast group. The media, argues [Braga \(2010\)](#), is not anymore ‘focused’, but it is ‘dispersed’ throughout the society.

Ana Paula [Rosa \(2009, p. 3\)](#) argues that ‘a mediatized society arises when the media are not anymore an intermediate between the living experience and representation, but when they become a communicative agent’. In another text, she goes further ([Rosa 2011, p. 134](#)) to argue that ‘mediatization is not only related to the media, but to the logics employed by institutions to make known and public the elements to which it attaches importance’.

The ‘media’, as technological devices, seems to be spread, potentially allowing any person—who has the social and economic conditions to afford the device and the internet provider account—to be connected. Therefore, no recognizable ‘center’ would be found, even if there are some poles, or nodes, of concentration, such as social groups, governments, and corporations. It is not anymore apart from the whole of society, but around and inside it as an ‘environment’, [Meyrowitz \(1999\)](#) or [Adriana Braga \(2019\)](#) states.

In view of that, and also grounded on empirical research, it would be possible to suggest an understanding of mediatization as the articulation between the media environment and social practices. This work definition has been developed after some previous empirical studies, and it does not claim to be valid outside the scope of a limited set of studies.

The relationship between media and religion would be typically viewed in terms of the media use by religious churches and denominations, on the one side, or the media coverage of religious issues, on the other. The meaning of ‘media’, in these studies, mainly refers to the media enterprises and corporations, or the technological devices. However, there seems to be a third dimension implied: Each medium has its own way of organizing the messages it carries out, setting it in specific ‘codes’ ([Fiske 1997](#)) or languages ([Manovich 2008](#)), in a way one can talk about ‘the language of the movies’ or ‘the language of the television shows’. Religious denominations do not employ the media only as devices (such as a television set or a mobile phone) or broadcast companies (as, for example, a television station, a website or a social media account owned by a church), but also as a language that pervades its everyday religious practices—heavily drawing on the style of entertainment, as [Fishwick \(2004\)](#), [Souza \(2004\)](#), and [Patriota \(2008\)](#) notice.

More to the point, the churches’ and denominations’ dependence on the media seems to be limited. Although the weight of the media greatly varied among them, there was a good deal of actions, from religious ceremonies to member’s social work, grounded in social interaction, both in groups and interpersonally, mediated by social media. The religious discourse, as much as the church member’s interactions, occurred apart from the traditional media apparatus employed by churches. In some cases, there was simply no media apparatus at all, and yet the community of believers is connected to the religious context that provided them the meaning of their actions.

As [Fausto Neto \(2006, p. 2\)](#) argues, ‘mediatization is something bigger’ than any instrumental, or technical, view of the media as technological devices. It cannot be limited to the ‘action’ of the some device: That would give technology alone an oversized agency in society. The author ([Fausto Neto 2006, p. 15](#)) also states that the media should be included in a broader social picture of the interactions between individuals and among groups: It is a ‘social practice’ linked to the

creation of meanings and representations. In a similar way, Natalia Anselmino (2010) highlights that, in mediatization, a message's meaning also depends on the 'activity' of subjects.

Mediatization seems to refer to a broader process that could include, on the one side, that three-fold definition of the media environment (as companies, devices, and language) and, on the other, the social practices, also understood as interactions, language, and its social contexts.

How, then, does the media environment interact with social practices?

One answer may come from the concept of 'articulation', by Stuart Hall (1996), stated as a link of mutual influence between two diverse elements, and every action of one necessarily reflects on the other—which keep, however, their own separated identities. The concept of articulation is central to understand mediatization, as it seems to provide a non-determinist view of the relationship between religion, as a social practice, and the media environment. Each of them runs independently, and keeps their own characteristics.

Focusing on religion, Campbell (2013, p. 3) argues that 'digital religion' describes the contemporary panorama of the intersection between religion and media then previous categories, such as 'cyber' or 'online' religion. The term, she suggests, 'describes the technological and cultural space that is evoked when we talk about how online and offline religious spheres have become blended or integrated'. Actually, in a previous study, Campbell (2004) explain the changes in religion due to its intersection with the Internet in terms of 'online religious networks', and point to a growing relationship between them.

The articulation between them, however, creates a sort of third element, which is different from both—mediatized religious practices, such as cults, ceremonies, and rituals, are articulated with the language of the contemporary media environment, as social media and smartphone apps, without losing its core doctrine and theological aspects: The presence of religion in the media environment does not compel churches and denominations to change their doctrines, beliefs, and practices. That is why one can argue that 'articulation', and not 'adaptation' or, even less, 'effects', may be a key expression to understanding mediatization in a non-mediacentric perspective.

It would be perhaps fruitful to draw a brief comparison between the two concepts of mediatization. Hjarvard's (2008a) and Hepp's (2014) perspectives on mediatization seem to be grounded in a definition of 'media' that refers mostly to technological means of communication and its effects on institutions-religion, for instance. Latin American perspectives do agree with that, but it also explores, drawing on Verón (2013), the receptor's everyday life dimension.

The outline of a Latin American theoretical perspective of mediatization suggests that it rely on a large perspective, that tries to include a broader view of the media and a historical understanding of social practices. That is why the process of mediatization of religion seems to become particularly visible when related to culture and politics.

3. The Cultural Dimension: Religion Meets Popular Culture

Historically, Latin America has been mostly a Roman Catholic continent, largely due to the colonization by Portugal and Spain in the 16th century. For nearly 500 years, the presence of other religions or denominations was minimal, and largely marginalized by the colonial rule. Hegemony, however, was never complete, and other religiosities persisted as a form of resistance and affirmation. The result of that dynamics of hegemony and resistance was the development, sometimes, of an intersection where beliefs and practices of different origins blended in different forms of popular piety—sometimes far away from the 'official' doctrines. This panorama was mostly the same until the 1950s, when a change in the 'religious field' Bourdieu (1971, 1998) started.

In sum, drawing on Ramirez (2009); Murillo (2011) and Gaytán (2018), the situation of religion in Latin America seems to be grounded on three main elements: A deep Roman Catholic heritage, challenged, mainly from the 1950 onwards, by the growth of Protestant denominations. Other religions, such as Spiritism, Rastafari, Umbanda, and pre-colonial or non-hegemonic religions coexist with the main ones.

In what follows, one will focus on the particularities of the Brazilian case as it seems to be exemplary of the issues this paper deals with.

As sociologist Antonio F. Pierucci (2004, p. 19) once claimed, the sociology of religion in Brazil is the sociology of the decline of the Roman Catholic church. As bold as this expression may sound, it reflects what demography has been showing at least since the 1970s: The fast growth of protestant evangelical churches (Pierucci and Reginaldo 1996; Campos 1997; Mariano 1997) and a far more moderate rise of spiritualist religions. In the whole of Latin America, the presence of the Roman Catholic Church still seems to be well established, but its hegemony seems far less complete than it was in the past decades.

Of course, the range of change in the religious field varies greatly from country to country, as much as the weight of popular, affirmative, or pre-colonial beliefs. As much as several sociologists have attempted to explain the changes, the growth of evangelical denominations and the reaction of the Catholic church seems to follow closely, although not completely, the mediatization of religion (Martino 2016). This is not to claim that mediatization is the 'cause' of any change, but there seems to be a parallel between them—it would be perhaps difficult to isolate any cause from the other social, economic, and political components of religious change.

3.1. Mediatization and Denomination's Growth

It is symptomatic that the fastest-growth denomination in Brazil, the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God) has, from its very beginning, heavily relied on the media environment to spread its message. It was the first evangelical church to have its own television network: It bought Record Network in 1989, and 15 years later it reached second place in national audience rates. Other denominations, such as the Igreja da Graça (Grace Church) or the Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus (World Church of God's Power), without owning networks, have rented time for broadcast in radio stations and television channels. From the 1990s, other denominations have altered the religious field backed by large media use, such as the Renascer em Cristo (Reborn in Christ) and the Bola de Neve Church (Snowball Church), the latter targeting a younger public than the others. All of these churches also have webpages, apps, and social media accounts to spread their message.

The Roman Catholic Church seems to have arrived later to the process of mediatization. Although they owned some radio stations by the 1940s, it was only by the 1990s, after the first growth of evangelical mediatized churches, that the Catholic Church paid a closer attention to the media environment. One of the main answers was the success of two priest-singers, Padre Marcelo Rossi and Padre Fabio de Melo. They frequently appeared in television shows (Rossi even starred in a movie), released music CDs, best-seller books, and are now fully engaged in social media. Other Catholic priests, such as Reginaldo Manzotti and Zezinho, have also recently engaged with the public mainly through social media. The efforts may not have reverted the decline in Roman Catholic membership, but they have shown what Oro (1997) calls a 'reaction' against it and an attempt to regain, or enlarge, the church's visibility in the public space.

One of the distinctive features of both Catholic and Evangelical was the way they have adapted some of their practices and rituals to the particularities of each of the media they have employed. It was not a matter of 'transmitting' through the radio, television, or social media, but to fit their preaching, as much as the transmitted ceremonies, to the language of each medium. Content, it seems, is not 'adapted': It is especially designed for the medium, from newspaper and radio to television, social network, and mobile applications. A few examples may illustrate the argument.

A Roman Catholic movie called 'Brothers in Christ', on the life of Apostle Paul, was, first of all, a movie—there are sequences, closes, cuts; in sum, a recognizable cinematographically narrative. From 2015 onwards, Record TV, owned by the Universal Church, has broadcast biblical telenovelas (soap-operas), including 'The Ten Commandments' and 'Jesus', employing all the resources of television drama—the result was the largest audience shares of the network. Renascer em Cristo in 1993 started a Gospel music festival named 'Renascer Praise', an event similar to any non-religious pop concert.

Finally, in GoogleStore and AppleStore, there are several mobile applications that allow one to connect with people of the same faith through prayer and doctrinaire books—and even love in religious relationship apps.

The articulation with the media environment also seems to reflect back on the religious actions, even inside the churches. Mediatization means that everyday religious rituals, ceremonies, and practices also happen in this mediated environment. Following an argument by [Dias \(2001\)](#) and [Carranza \(2011\)](#), it is possible to point out the influence of television entertainment shows on the way masses are celebrated, as [Souza \(2005\)](#) argues—Father Marcello Rossi was, for a time, known by his ‘Showmasses’, a version of the traditional mass enlarged with popular songs, attended by hundreds of people—and evangelical cults, performed in a way close to popular shows: In *Renascere em Cristo* and *Bola de Neve* Church, pop and rock gospel music are largely employed in cults, as much as pop music is also part of some Roman Catholic masses.

[Borelli \(2010\)](#) comments that mediatized religion implies some changes in the very core of religious practices. Following her arguments, one can notice that some religious temples, especially the main ones of Catholic and Evangelical, are provided with screens, computers and projectors, loudspeakers, and cameras for broadcast via television, social media, and websites. There is no need anymore, she argues, to gather in a temple to be part of a religious community or to experience religious practices.

3.2. The Mediated Experience of Religion

Apart from the institutional and denominational aspect, everyday individual religious experiences have also been part of mediatization, as Fausto [Fausto Neto \(2004\)](#) and [Borelli \(2008\)](#) suggest. The mediatization has brought up a new dimension of the religious experience for the faithful, by linking her or his religious beliefs with other cultural practices, such as watching movies or serials, reading comics, or young adult literature. If there was a time in the past when popular culture and religion were worlds apart from each other, today some believers have fully embraced popular culture as an element closer to their religious views. In a highly mediated world, it would be difficult to someone to split up her or his religious beliefs from their media and entertainment consumption: As complex as identity is, its religious aspects (e.g., being a Roman Catholic) cannot be separated from pop culture, such as being a Star Wars fan or a football supporter.

[Helland \(2005\)](#) had already points that participation is a major feature of online religion, as it is not restricted to a concrete place, as a church or a temple, but it is virtually spread and accessible—although the author also argues that an easy access does not mean participation.

It also means that religious elements might mix with different and sometimes new aspects of the believers’ life, by mixing with hers or his cultural taste and everyday activities. It seems to have been long past the day when being a rock music fan or a Star Trek could be a problem for a religious individual. Just as an example, it is possible to find on the Internet several sites that link productions of pop culture, such as the Star Wars or Avengers movies, or Harry Potter books to religious considerations and ideas, or even interpreting those productions from a doctrinaire point of view.

The timing of religious practices, rituals, and ceremonies have also changed as churches and denominations are not necessarily synchronous with their worshippers. During the Covid-19 lockdown, several temples transmitted online masses, cults, and ceremonies: People gathered in front of a digital device for the sake of being part of a broader community of the faithful. The mediatization of religion is not only about the media or the religious field, but the new meanings, built by the faithful, which emerge from this intersection.

These similarities seem to be far from coincidence or mere adaptations, but an articulation between media form and religious content—the result is something other than a transmission of the religious message, but what may be described as a new way of the religious experience.

4. The Political Dimension: Mediatized Religion in the Public Space

As Meyer and Moors (2006) or Herbert (2012) stated, the relationship between media, religion, and the public sphere have many aspects: There are several particularities that enable a complex discussion on it. In this section, the scope is limited to a view of contemporary issues concerning mediatized religion and some of its manifestations in politics.

The controversies in the relationship between religion and public sphere in Brazil have been discussed, among others, by Miranda (1999), Birman and Lehmann (1999), Figueiredo Filho (2005), Montero (2006), Birman (2006), and Martino (2012a, 2012b, 2016). All the authors, in spite of the several differences among them concerning the themes and approaches, identify a fluid relationship between politics and religion as an indicator that the public sphere seems to be permeable to religion.

The mediatization of religion has also reverberated in the public visibility of churches. As Stollow and Boutros (2015) claim, this is not linear, but it is important to notice that, since the 2000s, through the media, denominations' views concerning public issues have gained a wider repercussion since they are able to reach a far wider audience than conventional preaching—religious views on public matters have become a part of the political agenda since denominations have enough members to claim a say on it. As Hoover (1997) and Martelli and Cappello (2005) state, particularly, the importance of the media for the presence of religious issues in the public sphere must be taken into the account.

4.1. Mediatization and Secularization

It would be perhaps difficult to address the discussion on mediatized religion and politics without mentioning the debate on secularization. The issue is one of the classical discussions in the Sociology of Religion, but its mediatized aspects seem to have been mostly left out of the picture. The discussion concerning secularization is an ongoing debate, with positions pro and against it, as shown in works by Keane (2000), Lee (2002), Martin (2005), or Casanova (2012), to mention but a few. It seems that secularization has never reached, in Latin America, the same results it has had in other countries, particularly in Western Europe. In Latin America, the particularities of the question have been addressed, among others, by Martín-Barbero (1995), Pierucci and Reginaldo (1996), and Pierucci (1997). It is worth noting that Martín-Barbero (1997) actually argues that the media (he does not talk about 'mediatization') is at least partially responsible for what he understands as the 'decline' of secularization and the 'resacralization' of culture.

Actually, religion was never really left out of the picture in Latin American politics. It is debatable whether there was really a time when religion was a private matter, 'invisible', as Luckmann (1970) said, to the broader public and apart from the public affairs. Although there is an effective separation between church and state, religion still plays an important part in the political agenda. This is mostly done by the election of members of parliament linked to churches and denominations, grouped in the Frente Parlamentar Evangélica (Evangelical Parliamentary Group) but also with civil society groups and associations, such as the Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (Brazilian Roman Catholic Bishops' National Conference). The country celebrates, as holidays, Roman Catholic saints dates, such as Corpus Christi (in June) or Nossa Senhora Aparecida (in October), and even in public buildings it is possible to find crucifixes and other Christian symbols. Through the media, new ways of participating of denominational life have been developed, such as watching and interacting with YouTube videos or engaging in social media discussions—it is part of what Miklos (2012) termed 'cyber-religion'.

It is worth noting that other religions, such as Espiritism, Umbanda, and Candomblé, do not have the same treatment: There is no national celebration of their commemorative dates, and they are mostly absent from public places. It is important to notice that such religions have not encompassed the mediatization process in the same way of their Catholic and Evangelical counterparts, and their mediated public visibility remains low when compared to the others. This is also due to social and historical reasons that go beyond the scope of this paper, but it is interesting to stress, from a

mediatization point of view, that the lesser adherence to the media environment is related—not in a causal way—to an equally low visibility in the public space.

4.2. Mediatized Religion and Public Affairs

It is debatable how far the influence of religion in Brazilian politics goes, but the political polarization that has wiped out the country since 2014 seems to have shown traces of religious influence, particularly in what concerns moral issues such as LGBTQI+ rights, public health issues, and gender discussions. Statement made by religious leaders in social media have reverberated not only among their followers, but also to a larger audience that otherwise perhaps would not be aware of any controversy.

Religious issues have gained a greater place in the political sphere than would be stated by some secularists and public sphere theorists. If there was a 'classical' view on secularization that argued the exclusion of religious issues from the public sphere, evidence seems to have shown that the process is not only uneven, but far more moderated in some countries—the United States would be an example of that, as Marsden (2008) argues. Something similar could be said about Brazil: At least in the last three decades it was possible to see the rise of a new form of religious engagement in public affairs. If there was a time when religion and politics were completely different realms, mediatization of religion seems to have pulled them closer by increasing some denominations' public visibility and intensifying its participation in political discussions concerning general issues.

Habermas' (2005, 2006) late works on the issue seems to point in a less radical direction concerning the place of religion in the public sphere: He seems to admit that religious views still have an audible voice in the public discussions, as long as it is 'translated' to secular, or at least non-religious, statements. In Brazil, the study of mediatized religion suggests that religious arguments are presented, in the public sphere, per se, without any sort of translation or adaptation: Even the Bible is quoted by politicians in support to their views regarding public matters. In other words, it seems that religious arguments go side by side with non-religious ones, boasted by its mediated public visibility. In Latin America, studies by Blancarte (2011), Martínez (2011), Pérez (2012), Otero and Edison (2015), and Sepulveda (2018), suggest that secularization has been a complex and contradictory and even paradoxical process, as the 'decline' of religion in some aspects (e.g., the decrease of church attendance) has been contradicted by the growth of new ways of experiencing religion. The place of religion in the Latin American public sphere is far from even, and it seems to reflect some of the continent's main social and historical contradictions.

It would be doubtful how far can one go by making the case of a new flourishing of religion in contemporary culture, but its public visibility as an important player in political and social matters seems to have been boosted by mediatization. The many dimensions of secularization would make it difficult to point to mediatization as the sole responsible for what Thompson (2005) calls the 'new visibility' of religion in society, but the growth of the importance of religion in public matters closely follows its relationship with the media environment.

The notion that religion would be excluded from the discussion of public affairs has been well discussed in the secularization literature, with no consensus about the extent of that exclusion. While classical works like Martin (2005) and Connolly (2012) suggest opposite views on the theme, there seems to be a plethora of intermediate positions concerning real situations.

Mediatization seems to have provided religious leaders with a more straightforward way to communicate with their public, without the need for intermediaries. This means not only greater access to their faithful to spread their words, it also creates the possibility that each believer, herself or himself, to share that with other people by social media or instant messenger. Therefore, the scope of any controversy may quickly meet some person's political agenda, especially if concerned with moral issues. As a result, the power of religion to gather and mobilize people to its causes seems to have reached a new level through the mediatization process.

This is not claiming that mediatization has significantly altered or stopped the secularization process, but it seems that it has contributed to engage people in debates concerning issues that could

not be considered, by themselves, ‘religious’, but mostly ‘moral’. This is, perhaps, one of the most striking features of mediatized religion in politics: It seems to have brought a religious-grounded moral agenda back to the public discussion. As a consequence, religious assumptions have found a voice in suggesting political decisions concerning educational or civil rights matters, such as the teaching of creationism in elementary schools or the criminalization of homophobia. Instead of being a matter of personal opinion, or a private concern, moral questions have been brought back to the public debate by mediatized religious denominations. As [Martino \(2014\)](#) and [Aguiar \(2019\)](#) have shown, this has happened in at least two ways: By bringing the issues to debate in the Brazilian Parliament, by MPs directly or indirectly being linked to churches or denominations, and as an argument in presidential campaigns, addressing the voters’ decision-making.

5. Conclusions

An overview of the mediatization of religion from any perspective would be forcibly narrow and focused on some issues, leaving others necessarily behind. It was not the goal of this text to provide but a panorama of three main aspects of it—and, as it happens in any panorama, some details must have been lost. In this paper, the focus has been on three main dimensions, as seen from Latin America—or at least part of it—in a constant dialogue with other references.

The first dimension, theory, proposes a general view on mediatization that articulates the media environment with social process, moving the focus from both to a third element—the ‘mediatized’ is not the media or the social interaction alone, but what emerges from that articulation. Latin American contribution seems to broaden the notion of ‘mediatization’ by going beyond the media itself to include the social.

Secondly, the cultural dimension of the mediatization of religion proposes that the intersection between media and religion has created new ways of experiencing religion by articulating it with a broader media culture, including popular culture products: Mediatized religion has found new ways to speak contemporary media language.

Finally, mediatized religion seems to have found a new place in the discussion of public issues, mostly from a political perspective. This is the third mediatization of the religion dimension: Although the secularization process seems to have never been linear in Latin America, mediatization seems to have allowed a new way for religious views to be presented in the public space.

There, of course, would be several other elements to add to a discussion on the mediation of religion from a Latin American perspective, and to a broader dialogue with other perspectives. Each of the dimensions stated above are but the summary of several researches mentioned in the references—and each of them would be related to several others. This paper, therefore, might be seen as an invitation to further dialogues—perhaps the very stuff of academic knowledge.

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