Laicism in France from communication

Laicidade na França a partir da comunicação

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ABSTRACT

La laïcité dans l'arène médiatique. Cartographie d'une controverse, directed by one of the most renowned contemporary specialists in the field of discourse analysis, is part of an effort to observe the way in which the mass media represents laicism in France. The book contains analyzes on the press, television and radio and gives the reader a historical and sociological framework of laicism in France; it also delves into the theoretical apparatus and methodological lines with which these studies were conducted.

Keywords: Laicism, social controversy, discourse analysis, mass media

RESUMO

La laïcité dans l'arène médiatique. Cartographie d'une controverse sociale, obra organizada por um dos especialistas contemporâneos mais reconhecidos no campo da análise do discurso, faz parte de um esforço para observar o modo pelo qual a mídia de massa representa a problemática da laicidade na França. O livro reúne uma série de análises sobre a imprensa, a televisão e o rádio e expõe ao leitor um quadro histórico e sociológico da laicidade na França, assim como apresenta um mergulho nos aparatos teóricos e nas linhas metodológicas com as quais foram conduzidos esses estudos.

Palavras-chave: Laicidade, controvérsia social, análise do discurso, mídia de massa

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THE BOOK WAS developed by Communication Science specialists, improving one of the most sensitive phenomena in the French historical-political-social context Marked by an everyday tension, to the extent of producing acts of evident symbolic violence. The French Church-State relationship has been historically complex, mainly by the inexorable coexistence with the Islamic culture. For this reason, the history of French secularism is of great interest from different dimensions, especially the communicative. To analyze, through mass media, reaction, opposition, rationalization acts or secular argument measures, means to observe the phenomenon that French secularism controversy brigs about. Here is where the importance of *La laïcité dans l'arène médiatique* lies, as a scientific study, which contributes to the understanding of the relationship between the State and the religious freedom of members of any society. This controversy must be studied from different approaches in social and human sciences.

The book's preliminary theoretical-communicational is shown in the first part ("About public debate"). Parting from the concept of *contract of communication*[1], Patrick Charaudeau aims to analyze the secularism phenomenon, in its components of language and speech. In the case of an analysis of media communication, the researcher points out that this type of communication has its own contract of communication (media), and, therefore, differs from others (scientific, political, legal, activist). This dimension is important to follow the work of the document because the speeches that are discussed should not be construed as it was in the scientific communication contract, which "is, primarily, a review and critical analysis. It places the enunciative subject in second place, behind knowledge, as it aims to establish a truth, as a hypothetical truth that cannot be erected as absolute truth, as it always will be discussed "(Charaudeau, 2015: 12). Indeed, what the researchers analyzed in this book is a discourse of social controversy, understood as a statement that "arises spontaneously as polarized confrontation of points of view" (Ibid: 15). Thus, social controversy, developed in the mass media, appears as a triangular act: present or absent speakers (representatives of the two points of view) and the consuming media public. However, Charaudeau pointed out that the individual character of the speakers should not be seen necessarily as such, but as true representatives of groups, parties, institutions, expressing through the controversially social speech (not scientific), beliefs or convictions, with traceable sociological, political or historical arguments.

Before introducing the studies, Charaudeau contextualizes the issue of secularism, in the last twenty years in France. It refers to a remarkable

1. Concept formulated by Patrick Charaudeau, mainly developed in the book *Le Discours de l'information médiatique. La construction du miroir social*, Paris, Nathan-Institute National de l'Audiovisuel, 1997.

event that happened in 1989: female Muslim Students were wearing veil on school grounds, which led them to be expelled following the Secular Law. This, consequently, led to a semantic battle around the usage between members of the French community, of ostentatious religious signs. An extensive social controversy emerges, in which secularism is reported excluded from cultural diversity. Charaudeau also says that a series of questions point to the ambiguity of the *Law of Separation between Church and State* (1905), In which "the Republic ensures freedom of conscience and guarantees the free exercise of worship." Defining what, how and for whom the Secular Law is to be understood and applied, including Christians. In this context, it remains to solve "various questions: moving from a traditional to a modern secularism; from an exclusive to an inclusive one; from liberal to authoritarian; from a Christian secularism to one that is opposed to Islam" (Charaudeau, 1905: 35).

Once the reader sees the semantic complex chart, from which the social controversy of secularism in France has been developed, Charaudeau (Second Part: "Secularism in the media prism") describes the *corpus* of the studied cases: press, television, radio and the speech of the former president of France Nicolas Sarkozy, at Letran's Castle. For Patrick Charaudeau, this is the reason for the studied cases, each mass-media

> appropriates [each important event or incident around the issue of secularism] and built them through the various genres and media devices, witnessing ways of dealing with this issue: written by way of the *tribune* newspaper, television and radio supported by interviews, roundtables and other forms of confrontation. Each of these states the direction of the debate, depending on the choice of social actors (Ibid: 57).[2]

Hence it was decided to observe each of the traditional media (newspapers, radio and television), during 1989 (the case of the students' expulsion) through the bill (known as Stasi Act) prohibiting manifestation of religious symbols in public space (2003-2011), until 2007-2013 (update of the speech delivered by Nicolas Sarkozy (at Letran's Castle), through mass media). Around these critical moments, representative French discursive moments were analyzed in press articles from different newspapers as well as television and radio programs.

Overall, the results of each one of the analyses developed in this book showsthe relationship between language, speech, mass media, social partners and social construction of reality. So, for the study of the press ("The

2. "se apropria de [cada evento ou incidente importante sobre o assunto da laicidade] e os constrói por meio de diversos gêneros e dispositivos mediáticos, assegurando os modos de abordagem da questão: a imprensa pelo caminho da 'tribuna', a televisão e o rádio apoiando-se em entrevistas, mesas redondas e outras formas de debate. Cada um deles orientando o debate, em função da seleção de atores sociais."

written press: the spider's thematic fabric"), conducted by Emmanuel Marty and Pascal Marchand, the researchers, based on a corpus of 3467 newspaper articles, perform a "lexical classification of the newspaper articles, to track operations of contextualization about secularism and, thus, clarify the universes of discourse and the ideological territories that assumed, often, between the lines, the propaganda speech "(Marty and Marchand, 2015: 87). This study shows that behind the political discourse about secularism, the Republican and secular nature of France is present, as a matter of identity and socio-historical value. This allows to establish that the term secularism has a sense of ethnocentric French defense: even paradoxically

> the religious treatment of secularism is, unsurprisingly, in the newspaper *La Croix*, which describes the contents of the law about the use of veil, mobilizing a spiritual lexicon (religion, spiritual, courage, human, live, life, culture, society, faith, space, diversity, belief, common, cultural, respect, universal, tradition, individual, tradition, god, moral, nation, belief, thought...) (Ibid: 92).[3]

This is, undoubtedly, a clear affirmation of the constitutive lexical use of the construction of French secularism by the speech.

The study "How television treats the issue of secularism," by Guy Lochard and Jean-Claude Soulages, analyzed two types of corpus: one consisting of television news (analysis of 1392 reports) and another of debates (from the genre of interview and talk shows, making up 346 objects of study). This study demonstrates, once again and reliably, the limits of this media device[4], when intended to deepen any subject. Hence, the researchers noted a question that highlights the precarious cognitive device of television "how social controversy as complex as secularism can be apprehended and taken over by television?" (Lochard and Soulages, 2015: 99). In the case of television news, it "only allows little room for an argumentative or controversial development, the positioning manifested in it appears, frequently, partial and incomplete" (Ibid: 96). Regarding other studied television genres, the production instances use the discourse of actors deeply involved with the problem of secularism (institutional representatives or experts) and even those who have suffered the consequences of it. This circumstance leads to argumentative polarization, characterized by a *pathématization*[5] of the television dramatization. Even in the midst of these limits, typical in the argument on television, Lochard and Soulages found that they do make *success* in recruitment and identification of strategies with the viewer, which dis-

3. "o tratamento religioso da laicidade se encontra, sem surpresa, no periódico *La Croix*, o qual chega a descrever o conteúdo da lei sobre o uso do véu, mobilizando um léxico espiritual (religião, espiritual, valor, humano, viver, vida, cultura, sociedade, fé, espaço, diversidade, crença, comum, cultural, respeito, universal, tradição, indivíduo, tradição, deus, moral, nação, convicção, pensamento…)."

4. A wide range of analyzes that account for these cognitive limits of television by these two authors can be found in two studies: *La Communication télévisuelle*, Armand Colin, 1998. And "Les imaginaires de la parole télévisuelle. Permanences, glissements et conflits", en journal *Réseaux*, Paris, CENT, numéro 63, 1994.

5. Term used by Charaudeau: "La pathémisation à la télévision comme strategie d'authenticité", en *Les émotions dans les interactions*, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, Lyon, 2000.

plays scenic devices showing speeches of the protagonists in the programs. Thus, these authors establish five argumentative repertoires: 1. Ideological (from institutional representatives). 2. Religious (usuallygiven by the actors involved). 3. Traditional Feminist (experts or actors with complainant trait). 4. Paradoxical Feminism (experts or actors who support the respect for religious habits applied to women) and 5. Socio-historical (experts who try to base their speeches on a conceptual level).

In the chapter entitled "How the radio approaches secularism", Nicolas Becqueret, analyzing 161 programs, also recorded media device constraints that favor the argument. On the radio, says the researcher, depending on the identity based on each broadcaster, it is logical to identify the editorial lines, from the positions that are assumed, in this case, regarding secularism. If we recognize that radio is a device of accompaniment, this means that while we are listening, we usually do something else, which "is not, in fact, a system of opinion, since the arguments are rather regarding *pathos*, sometimes *ethos*, but not *logos* "(Becqueret, 2015: 136). When comparing public and private broadcasting programs, Becquerel realizes the discursive contrast that each of them establishes with their listeners. Stating that any broadcaster aims to propose a position that meets the expectations of their listeners (and in reciprocity with the identity of the broadcaster), some programs organize debates with expert guests, while others are interested in inviting especially popular voices. In other words, this type of conditioning of the radio has resulted in a polarization of positions, a recurrence of the very anecdotally narration of events and assessments of secularism, little frankly argued.

The last paper presented at *La laïcité dans l'arène médiatique* is "A particular study. Letran´s consecutive and controversial speech." Powered by Manuel Fernandez, the researcher tracked reactions or the positions of various actors and personalities in the press (from December 2007 to 2013), regarding Nicolas Sarkozy's pronunciation, known as "Letran's Speech". As this is a speech that caused, generally among the French population, intense conversation and comments on the political scene, to Fernandez, the press is an excellent observatory of the social controversy. The analysis in question dealt with the articles published in opinion columns by personalities challenged by Sarkozy's speech. The aim was then to identify how these discourses of *discussion* are built, not from a personal position, but as a result of the inexorable discursive polyphony, in which ways of perceiving reality that results in the development of concepts are shared and of them in statements. Fernandez formulation is eloquent:

If language is always an 'ownership-modification' if 'every utterance always contains the indication to agree or disagree with something (Bakhtin)', which is confirmed by recent studies in neuroscience, It is the demonstration that in the course of brain activity, understanding in the listener who anticipates the speaker's speech, which we can consider that the places of social controversy are based on pre-existing schemas (representations, *Topo*ï...) that constitute the references of social groups, based on shared points of view which fight other opinions (p. 139-140).[6]

This subsequent speech enabled Fernandez to recognize certain discursive continuities of the positions in the press that offer credit, legitimacy or full opposition (in this case about Sarkozy's speech in Letran), confronting the contradictions that this speech contains: the myth of progress and modernity, the Republican values , the concept of secularism, the alleged Christian roots as historical heritage, the place of religion in public space, understood as all these cliches (*topo*ï) that are shared between discursive identities just to position themselves politically. So says Fernandez,

This activity of justification is exercised through reasoning modes and types of knowledge (supposedly shared), summoned as evidence (Charaudeau). Taken as common places or *Topo*ï places, defined by Anscombre as the 'general principles that support the reasoning (...) presented as true objects of consensus within a fairly large community (p. 163 -164).[7]

We consider the book not only a useful study for the scholar of public opinion, but also for the sociologist, historian and political scientist because the analyses presented here do not neglect the various dimensions of social complexity that is the phenomenon of secularism. While the book focuses on the work of language and speech, it also approaches, clearly, the historical place of secularism in France, which is far from being a minor issue.

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