

Innovation Research Fund Project Report 2013-2014

Research Team:

Christopher Helland (PI)
David Michels (PhD Candidate)
Shannon Ramsey (MA Student)
Ashley Doyle (MA Student)
Haley Farrar (MA Student)
Elizabeth Michels (Sociology Undergraduate Student)

Project Goals, Rationale, Methods:

This research grant supported the development and implementation of a cross-national research project examining religious representation in the media at the regional/local, national, and international/transnational level. The “media capture” was for one day (September 17, 2013).

The project focused upon several research questions:

- How do mainstream print media in Canada, the United Kingdom, Finland, and Australia portray and represent majority and minority religions?
- Are there key areas of controversy in which such portrayals and representations are focussed, and do these differ between countries?
- Can common methodological resources and comparable data sets be developed to allow for trans-national comparisons?

The research group at Dalhousie University examined English and French speaking newspapers from Canada identifying any religious or “secular sacred” content in any form within the print media. This included news stories, editorials, advertisements, pictures, and even horoscopes and cartoons. Researchers from Ottawa also assisted with the identification of material in Canada. All newspapers and print media used within the study in other countries underwent the same analysis and then were shipped to Dalhousie University and scanned, converted to searchable PDF files and stored in a searchable database. Third, and yet to be completed, all researchers involved in the project will enter their coded findings into an online data storage repository (located on-site at Dalhousie University in Canada). The online storage site is structured to include “pull down tab” indexing that allows team members the opportunity to search the database and compare different material from the study.

The main objectives for the research project were:

- 1) The development of an internationally comparable data set on religion and the media and to use these data sets for comparative analysis, e.g., key public controversies involving religion and the secular.

- 2) To develop and implement strategies of knowledge exchange between international researchers examining religion in the public sphere.
- 3) To disseminate the findings arising from comparative research on the portrayal of religion in the media.

Summary of Activities:

All members of the International research team were able to meet at the general meeting for the Religion and Diversity Project in October. At that time we compared news stories, discussed the coding framework at length, and began some preliminary data analysis (which was presented at the meeting). Ongoing discussions continued concerning the coding framework, problems associated with coding images, and the structure of the searchable database at Dalhousie University. The coding frame is currently being developed in collaboration with Kim Knott. There have been several preliminary coding frames developed and it is hoped that a final coding frame will be in place shortly. We also discussed the time for the next media capture—which will most likely be again on September 17. Dalhousie University has provided the searchable data repository (password protected but accessible to team members and international collaborators) and unlimited data storage. This work was developed and implemented by David Michels at no cost. Dalhousie University has also provided free use of the proper scanning equipment needed for the project.

Provisional Findings:

There were several key areas that show promise for further analysis. This included issues of the hijab in Europe and Quebec, religion and political leadership, issues of the “sacred secular” (including war heroes and veterans), and the representation of religious symbols within photographs. With the developing analysis, we are also able to clearly see several cases in each country where the dominant religious tradition (especially Catholicism) is represented in the news in contrast to minority religious groups.

Outputs:

As this research project has been delayed we are currently still discussing publication options. We anticipate at least one co-published article involving researchers from all contributing countries; one extra article co-published from the Canadian research group focusing on method and data analysis, and formal papers presentations at key religion and media conferences.

Request for Extension:

Unfortunately, this research project has been delayed and working transnationally with several research groups has presented unique problems. One of the key delays has been the acceptance of a workable coding framework, developed specifically for the print media we are using. There has been “back and forth” over several key issues and these differences are being resolved now. However, with the varied academic semester systems in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, each country has different times of the year when they have the opportunity to work on the project. As of June 2014, we are receiving all of the finalized articles from each country, a general coding framework for their classification, and they are being scanned and entered into the searchable database. We will be conducting the second data capture on September 17, 2014. This is good for consistency; however, the

original plan was to do the capture one or two more times during the 2013-2014 funding period. As this second round of data capture has not been done, money for the research assistants has not yet been paid out. We would request at this time a 1 year extension on the research project time frame to properly complete the project.

| Breakdown of Expenses | | | | |
|---|--------|---------|-------|-------------|
| | | | | |
| Student Funding* | | | | |
| | Amount | Name | Dates | Project |
| Student Stipends | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Student Assistantship | | | | |
| Ashley Doyle (examining French material) | 1600 | | | |
| Shannon Ramsey (scanning and coding material) | 3200 | | | |
| Elizabeth Michels (scanning and data entry) | 500 | | | |
| Haley Farrar (scanning, coding, data entry) | 1600 | | | |
| Research Funding | | | | |
| | Amount | Project | Dates | Specifics** |
| Funding for Research Costs | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Funding for Research Travel | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Funding for Administrative/Supply Costs Related to Research | 240 | | | |
| Total | 7140 | | | |

