Tearing Down the Secular
Religion and violence in the reporting of the Ayodhya dispute by the Swedish daily press 1986-2002

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Abstract


Using a discourse analytical method with the discourse theoretical framework of Laclau and Mouffe, this thesis aims to study the changing discourse of religion and violence in the Swedish media, and how this is presented in the Swedish daily press’s reporting of the Ayodhya dispute in India during the period 1986-2002; the dispute is often cited as a typical example of the religious violence between Hindus and Muslims in India, which has plagued the country for centuries. This study would argue, in relation to the trends observed in the studied material, that the discourse of religious violence seems to become an established part of the Swedish daily press’s discourse sometime during the latter part of the 1990’s, and that the discourse itself is characterized by a tendency to portray religion and religiosity in a dichotomy with the secular, where the secular state is depicted as being in an antagonistic relationship with fanatical and violent religiosity, which is constantly threatening to tear it apart.

Keywords: religion, religious violence, media, discourse analysis, Swedish daily press, Ayodhya.
Preface

Due to the fact that the majority of the material discussed is written in Swedish it should be noted that the author has taken the liberty to translate the quoted articles into English simply for pragmatic purposes, and rhetoric reasons.
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**Introduction**

“Hindus march against mosque”. It is the 30th of December, the year is 1990, and squeezed to the side of the foreign affairs page of the morning’s *Svenska Dagbladet* is a short notice, barely a few sentences describing a minor disturbance in the Indian city of Ayodhya located in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The article is describing a demonstration against a mosque in the city; it takes note that there were among the protesters “temple priests” and “holy men” dressed in “saffron yellow clothing”.¹ Even if this news snippet is as mentioned very short, it is fascinating to see what was prioritized in the article. The religious aspect of the demonstration becomes emphasized, both with the article’s title “Hindus march against mosque”, as well as the focus on religious actors. Here the reader can see a conflict brewing, and even if they don’t know much surrounding it, it would seem that religion plays a great part in it, that this is a religious conflict is more implied than stated outright. That religion can be a cause of conflict and that there are some acts of violence that can be classified as religious, is not something that is often questioned or discussed; which is interesting considering how often acts of violence, or conflicts, classified as religious make headlines.

The discourse of religious violence in the media, tend to be highly politicized, and is of a normative character. Modern forms of media, such as the television, and the press, are significant communicators of meanings and ideas in society, and are of outmost importance concerning how general ideas of religion are presented, mediated, and constructed. Media creates religion, when it reports and comments on it. Religious violence, religious conflicts, and the intricate relationship between religion and violent acts, are no exceptions. These concepts are contextually bound and thus subject to change, they are constructed and shaped socially. This may become problematic if these terms are used unreflected to delegitimize and simplify conflicts that in reality may be rather complex. Discussions like these on the subject of religious violence are undeniably of great importance for anyone interested in the relationship between religion, society, and culture.

I would argue in relation to this debate that the concept of “religious violence” is a mostly modern social construction, and that the discourse of it becomes generally established in the Swedish daily press sometime during the latter part of the 1990’s. This development is most

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¹ SvD 1990/12/30 Hinduer marscherar mot moské [Hindus marsch against mosque] TT-AFP, p.4.
visible when one takes into account the Swedish daily press’s reporting of the so called “Ayodhya dispute” in India.

The Ayodhya dispute is a fairly known, although a rarely discussed incident in the recent history of India. The city has at times taken to being called the Jerusalem of India, in reference to the disputes surrounding it. The dispute is seen as one example among many others of religious violence between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority in India, and it is credited being the source of numerous other cases of violence. The dispute itself is centered on the controversial Babri Mosque in the Indian city of Ayodhya, both Hindu and Muslim groups claim ownership of the site, and it is still a subject of political debate and strong opinions to this day. The dispute itself, and other connected conflicts, have been widely and extensively reported by the global news media, the Swedish daily press being no exception. It will be interesting to see how this conflict, which is generally viewed as one of many tragic examples of how religion can lead to violence, is discouresd in the Swedish daily press; and what it can tell us about the media discourse of religion and violence in Sweden during this period.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to study the ever-changing discourses surrounding religion and its relationship to violence; more specifically how the discourse is presented in the Swedish national daily press in the media reporting of the Ayodhya dispute. The questions that I will aim to answer to aid in my inquiry will be the following:

- What characterizes the discourse of religion and violence in the Swedish daily press that can be observed in its reporting of the Ayodhya dispute?

- And what can this tell us of the media discourse of religious violence in the Swedish daily press during the period 1986-2002?

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**Theory and method**

Discourse analysis becomes the natural choice of method considering this particular study’s area of interest. Discourse itself is a concept that has been defined and used in a variety of ways, simply put “discourse” can be defined as a certain way to talk about and understand the world (or a part of it), a discourse analysis is thus a research method that aims to analyze these discourses.³ Discourse analysis in itself is a method grounded in several epistemological and ontological premises, which one should get acquainted with if one is to fully understand it, as the method and theory are intertwined. The theory surrounding discourse analysis is closely related to the social constructivist school of thought.⁴ Discourse analysis overall tends to focus on language and is a useful methodological tool for a researcher interested in subjects such as communication, culture, and society. As Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Phillips argue in *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, discourse analysis is especially suited for studying communication processes in different social contexts.⁵ Such happens to be the case regarding my own area of interest.

There exists a myriad of different types of discourse analytical methods and uses of the word discourse; even if they are generally quite alike there can be some significant differences between them. It is often necessary to describe what exact discourse analytical method one will be using. This study is admittedly greatly influenced by the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. This theory in particular is very poststructuralist in nature, Laclau and Mouffe believe that the discourse “constructs the social world in meaning”, the meaning itself is in a state of constant flux caused by the fundamental instability of language. The different discourses themselves are in a state of perpetual conflict where they battle for hegemony over the meaning of language, where the winner gets to lock it in accordance to their own point of view.⁶

In the discourse theory presented by Laclau and Mouffe they argue that the social is a discursive construction, and that all social phenomena can be studied discourse analytically.

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⁴ Social constructivism is a theory of knowledge which generally believes that knowledge is socially constructed. Some of the most common premises of discourse analysis being, a critical nature towards “obvious knowledge” (everything is believed to be a product of a historical and cultural context and is thus subject to change), that there is a connection between knowledge and social processes, and that there is a link between knowledge and social action.
Analyzing discourse becomes a way to study the definitional debate over language and meaning. It is not the purpose of the analysis to make any statements about some objective reality, but rather to study how we create reality. Language has certain “significants” (or signs) which can be likened to knots in a string net where their meaning is decided by their position in the net. The goal of discourse analysis is then to “chart the processes where there is a conflict over the meaning of these signs”. All the aforementioned signs in a discourse can be called “moments” and as mentioned their meanings are always decided by the differences between them, their so called “differential positions”. Discourse is established by being built up around “nodal points”, privileged signs which other smaller signs are gathered around, where the significances of the lesser signs are decided by the “nodal points”. Discourse can be viewed as an entity which strives to keep its’ signs in their fixed positions, which it does by reducing other possible interpretations of the signs. Interpretations that are excluded from the discourse are part of the so called “discursive field”. But even if this field is outside the discourse it constantly finds itself in relation to it. “Elements” are signs that have different meanings, and the discourse tries to turn them into moments, signs with a set unambiguous meaning. A discourse may strive to reach a form of closure, but it is never so complete that it can not be undermined and changed. Elements are given meaning by being set in relation to other signs, this is called “articulation”, which may also serve to change the existing meaning of an element. Some elements are more prone to being ascribed different meanings, and they are often called “floating significances”. Sometimes the contingent nature of established discourses is forgotten and they are taken for granted, in discourse theory these discourses are labeled as “objective”, and they are a historical result, a product of “antagonism”, a term to describe the aforementioned battle of rivaling discourses over meaning. Nodal points, among others, are “key signifiers”; and they are given meaning by the “concept chains of equivalence”, the language signs that are connected to them.

It has already been established that discourse analysis is a suitable choice considering this study’s material and area of interest, and Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory would seem

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8 It can be argued that a fundamental premise of this discourse theory is that these social phenomena are fluid in nature and lack fixed points and since their meanings are not set in stone there is a constant battle over the aforementioned hegemony of meaning. A discourse acts as if it, and the signs organized within it, are set in stone; but its true nature is always fluid and contingent. A discourse is the notion of a set (or fixed) meaning in a certain domain.
11 Other key signifiers are “master significants”, signs which organize identities (“man” or “Hindu” for example), and “myths”, that organize space (for instance “the West”).
an especially well suited theoretical frame. With their model a sign such as “religion” can be seen as a nodal point in a media discourse, while simultaneously being an element, for example, other lesser signs circling “religion” could for example be “temple”, “church”, “fundamentalism”, and so on. What will be interesting to study then are how exactly the net of media discourse is tied around the concept of religion, how it is articulated, what the discursive field around it is encompassed of, and more specifically where “religion” finds itself in relation to “violence”.

According to the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, objectivity is deposited power where the traces of power have been erased, which in relation to the news media (in this case the secular press) brings ones thoughts to journalistic objectivity, discourse analytical models as mentioned often put an emphasis on the relationship between power and knowledge, and even if it is not the central concern of this study, it will nevertheless be interesting to observe if such tendencies appear in the material.  

Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory, and discourse analysis as a whole, has earned its’ share of critique and it is unarguably far for from prefect, even if the method has its’ share of weaknesses its’ strengths more than make up for them. I have chosen this model for two fundamental reasons, the first being that it contributes a helpful framework for one to explain and present one’s findings, and secondly that it emphasizes the contingent, conflict-ridden, and ever-changing nature of discourse, which is helpful when trying to study an eventual change in a discourse over time and mapping possible opposing discourses within the same medium.

**Earlier research**

On the subjects of religion, media, and religious violence, there has been quite a fair bit research done. With many established experts in these fields, accounting for every single study made on these subjects is both an impossible and unnecessary task considering the limited nature of this thesis. Instead I will give a short introduction of the studies that are relevant in relation to my own.

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13 I have also considered alternative discourse analytical models such as Norman Fairclough’s, but considering my focus on the discourse in the news medium, I find that Laclau and Mouffe’s model suits the best.
Studies that focus on the relationship between religion and violence tend to fall into two different categories, one arguing that religion can be a source of violence and conflict, while the other side of the fence tends to argue the opposite and tend to emphasize the significance of other social or cultural factors as being causes of violence. There are a few researchers who find themselves falling outside these two categories for a variety of different reasons, one of them being William T. Cavanaugh, who in his work *The Myth of religious violence* takes a different approach to this discussion. He argues among other things that the concept of “religion” is a socially constructed and historical term that is shaped by its’ surrounding context, and that there is a tendency in the west to portray religion as an “other” in relation to secularism and democracy, which in turn leads to “religion” being classified as violent and dangerous. This in turn, according to Cavanaugh, helps legitimize the secular nation state. He states that he does not deny that religion can be a possible source of violence, just that religious violence is largely a western “myth” that is dependent on how “religion” is being defined. In his book he draws largely upon political and academic material to support his argumentation, and although it is possible to be critical of his standpoint, his theories raise some thought provoking questions. That will be explored further in this study.\(^{14}\) Although if I were to compare my own opinions to Cavanaugh’s, I would sooner argue that “religious violence” is more of a modern social construction than a myth. When Cavanaugh argues that religious violence is a myth he upholds that there is no difference between religious and political violence. According to him both are ideologies that can be the cause of conflict, and the myth is that religious ideologies are more prone to violence than secular ones. To recapitulate one can argue that Cavanaugh studies a discourse on religious violence, as opposed to my own study which seeks to observe the discourse of religious violence, how it is created, shaped, and mediated.

Cavanaugh’s arguments bring to mind the discussion that Timothy Fitzgerald has in his book *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*, where Fitzgerald analyses the different meanings the term “religion” has had in different historical contexts, in relation to other equally shifting concepts such as “politics”, “economics”, and “the secular”. He argues that “religion” as a category always finds itself in discursive relationships to other concepts, which is something that this thesis finds itself agreeing with.\(^{15}\) Religion is defined by its relationship to other


categories, it is defined as what it is by what it is not; “religion” is a historically bound concept, the meaning of the term is dependent on its context, and is thus subject to change.

The article “Religious violence and the myth of fundamentalism” written by Michael Barkun has arguments similar to Cavanaugh, the difference being that the latter takes a wider look on the phenomena, while Barkun solely focuses on the term “fundamentalism”. He states that fundamentalism as an academic term needs to be retired, since the term itself is of a dubious nature and oversimplifies the nature of religion and violence, “the political behavior of religious believers needs to be handled with great care”.16

Cavanaugh, Fitzgerald, and Barkun are all examples of critical approaches to the general views and discourses on both religion and the relationship between religion and violence. Even if this study agrees with many of these scholars and their points, I differentiate myself slightly from these authors. I would argue that what is of interest is not if religion is a cause of violence or not, if the categories used to describe it are adequate; what is of interest on the other hand is to study how we create, shape, and discourse “religious violence”.

On the topic of religion and media there exists a large amount of literature, where some studies give extra attention to the way media creates and shapes our ideas of religion. One worth mentioning is Claire Badaracco’s Quoting God: How Media Shape Ideas about Religion and Culture.17 There have been a few studies that focus on the theme religious violence and the media, such as the book Media, Religion, and Conflict.18 Research on the subject of religion and violence in the media, sadly tend to focus on the West, particularly the US, as well as the events of September 11, where Islamic fundamentalism, Islam, or Muslims, tends to merit extra attention.19 This is not particularly surprising, although it does on the

9780195300093. See especially the chapters: “Introduction” and “On Civility and Barbarity”.
other hand point to some noteworthy holes in current research. Even if there are some gaps, this does in no way demerit the research, for example in Justin Lewis, Matthew Wren, Paul Mason, and Kerry Moore’s “Islamic Terrorism and the Repression of the Political”. They make many interesting points regarding the process of de-politicization that Islamic fundamentalism has undergone in the British press, from being regarded as a political phenomenon to a religious one. They argue that this is an attempt to de-legitimize the movements and the conflicts that they are part of.\(^\text{20}\) There are also notably few studies that focus specifically on the representation of religion in the media that focus on the 1990’s, an example being Fred Vultee, Stephanie Craft, and Matthew Velker’s article on the coverage of religion in the American press during this period.\(^\text{21}\)

It is worth noting that while there has been a fair bit of research done on religious violence in India and the Ayodhya dispute itself. There is however very little on how it was portrayed in the media and how this relates to the global discussion regarding religion and violence.\(^\text{22}\) These studies mostly focus on either the consequences of the dispute, or try to explain why, or how, it happened. Most of the previous research on the subject is of little relevance to my own, since they are built on differing epistemological and ontological premises than my own.

In Sweden some research has been done on the subject of religion and media, for instance by Marta Axner, and Mia Lövheim.\(^\text{23}\) In a bachelor’s thesis by the journalist students Madeleine Engstrand and Jenny Nordlander also discuss the the representation of religion in the media, by studying articles from the daily press.\(^\text{24}\) Worth mentioning is Stig Hjarvard and Mia

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\(^\text{24}\) Engstrand A., Madelene, and Jenny Nordlander. “Misstro: Om Mediebilden Av Religion I Svensk Dagspress.”
 Lövheim’s collaborative work *Mediatization and religion: Nordic perspectives* where they have collected a few articles that discuss the matter of religion and media in the Nordic countries, one of which being Sweden. On the topic of religious violence in Sweden, or for that matter in Swedish media, there is far less. My own earlier research on the discourse of terrorism in the Swedish Security Service’s annual reports touched lightly upon this theme. The research of Göran Larsson is another example, where he discusses the representation of Muslims in Swedish media after the events of September 11. Larson argues that the overall portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the Swedish media is generally negative. He takes a post-colonial interpretation on these media representations, referring to Edward Said’s theory’s regarding orientalism. To illustrate his point he shows that the media has a strong tendency to portray Muslims as being an other in relation to the “us” of the Swedish society, a classic orientalist dichotomy where Muslims are depicted as primitive, dangerous, and backwards.

Mattias Gardell is another well-known Swedish scholar on the subject of “Islamofobia”, and the portrayal of Islam in media. Although there is a small amount of literature on the subject of Islam and Muslims in the Swedish media, very little focuses on religions besides Islam, or on the general theme of religious violence. Considering how often, and unthinkingly, violence is attributed to religion in today’s media, the fact remains that there is at the moment far too little research done on this important, and most relevant, area of study.

**Material and Demarcation**

A ruling premise of this study is that the daily press, as well as all other forms of media, play a central part in the framing and communicating of ideas and values to the public. It is therefore a significant factor in the construction of meaning. “Media” can be defined in a variety of ways, and in this thesis it will simply be defined as a means of communication. In this essay the focus is as mentioned earlier the news media, more specifically the printed media.

<sup>28</sup> Larsson, G., 2003, p.45-47. Considering the general themes of this thesis, post-colonial theory could arguably also be applied to a study of this kind, but due to the focus of this study being the rather wide category of religion and violence, a more broad discourse analytical model has been chosen; so discussions regarding post-colonial theory will not be covered to much extent.
press. The news especially serves as an informant of general concepts, and deeper realities of life. The lines between media culture, the ones reporting, and the matters that are being reported, are constantly blurred. In relation to events covered by the press, the audiences are handed a chimera of the media’s discourse, and the events themselves. The news tell stories, have narratives, and create realities which its audience inadvertently relate to; they play a significant part in the reader’s meaning-making process. Ideas are created, communicated, and debated in the news, the nonverbal is made concrete. All news articles are cultural products in constant flux, and can therefore be products of analysis, especially in a discourse analysis inspired by the discourse theory by Laclau and Mouffe. Newspapers are not an uncommon choice of material in studies regarding media and discourse. It is arguably one of the most potent sources for studying a public or general discourse surrounding a subject matter; the discourse surrounding the connection between religion and violence, and how it is presented in the public sphere by the secular press.

In Sweden the daily newspaper is still an important media outlet, daily newspapers are often divided into different categories, one category being the so called “morning papers” that tend to be distributed in the mornings. The “Large City” morning papers being one of the most popular and widely read of the newspaper types. These papers have the biggest joint circulation in Sweden, roughly one million on weekdays out of a total population of nine million, with Dagens Nyheter (DN) and Svenska Dagbladet (SvD) being the two most popular secular newspapers. They are the only morning papers distributed throughout all of Sweden.30 Dagens Nyheter is the greater of the two, and its’ political leanings are labeled as independent liberal. Svenska Dagbladet is on the other hand labeled as an independent conservative paper. Because of the natural limits set by a thesis of this sort, the material for this study will be limited to the Swedish daily newspapers Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet. These two newspapers become a natural choice for any researcher aiming to get a glimpse of a general Swedish news media discourse in regard to the secular press. The papers themselves are by far the two most widely read in Sweden, and although they have slightly different political sympathies they are quiet alike in character. There are admittedly other possible choices in regard to Swedish media, for example public television or radio, but considering this study’s particular area of interest these two become the most suitable. A possible critique of the chosen material is that many of the articles analyzed are rather short, and some might argue

that it is questionable if any proper analysis could be drawn from them. I argue that while it is a proper and understandable concern, but on the other hand that the shortness is what makes it interesting, for then you are given a picture of what is prioritized.

Another possible critique of this study is that it neglects the importance of the journalist in framing and creating the news articles themselves, the individual that shapes the discourse. I would state in response to this that yes, how the journalist chooses to frame an article has an effect on the message that is presented, but if one considers the theoretical premises of my study I would rather argue that the journalist is also inadvertently part of the discourse. Studying the discourse of the media entails looking beyond the thought behind the acts of an individual.

The designated period of study for this thesis is set between the years 1986 to 2002, the timeframe itself is chosen because it is from the year the mosque became open to Hindus, and when most of the modern disputes surrounding it started, up until the ten year anniversary of its’ demolition. When there was once again a move to try and build a Hindu temple at the site. This choice of timeframe is partially due to the dates of interest and importance in the dispute, but mostly due to the fact that one will with this division see examples of how the same conflict is described before, during, and after the 1990’s.

It is not the intended purpose of this study to give any explanation on the subject of religion and its relation to violence. To debate the “how’s” and “why’s” of the relationship between religion and the media, or for that matter to critique the Swedish daily press on whether their representations are right or wrong; the aims is to study how the categories religion and violence are discoursed in these papers, and to discuss the implications this may have.

As the reader might imagine there is no shortage of material which encompass this study’s chosen theme of religion and violence in the press during the late 1980’s till the beginning of the 21st century. For simply pragmatic reasons the articles that will foremost be subject to analysis will be demarcated to articles during the period 1986 to 2002 that discuss the Ayodhya dispute, and the violence accredited to it. As stated in the introduction of this thesis, I would argue that this dispute in particular is a clear example of the ever-changing discourse of religion and violence. It is possible that I could draw from other examples and other conflicts to further my point, but because of the limits imposed on this study, it would be almost impossible to form a coherent and fair account of the media discourse. By focusing on the Ayodhya dispute this will hopefully lead to a more concentrated and straightforward
argumentation, which will be more accessible to the reader. Even if the focus of this study is the media portrayal of the Ayodhya conflict I will for arguments sake make comparisons with other “religious conflicts”, or similar themes, to strengthen my discussion.

**Defining religion, violence, and the secular**

As in all studies a researcher should explicitly explain what it is exactly that they shall be studying. The term “religion” is a concept that can be defined in a variety of ways depending on who is doing the defining and the intended purpose of the definition. In this study I shall refrain from trying to define the term myself. The interest of this study is not how the studied material, the newspapers, relate to my own definition of what constitutes “religion”, but rather to observe how the medium itself defines, demarcates, and constructs “religion”. In this thesis I will admit that terms such as “religion” and “religious” should often be put in quotation marks, but I will try to limit these to avoid cluttering the text.

Violence is another concept that the reader might have noted is central to this study, there are many different forms of violence and violence as a concept can be difficult define. The violence that will be of interest to this study can roughly be defined as; the intentional use of physical force, threatened or actual, against another individual, group, or community; which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, and psychological harm.\(^{31}\)

The word “secular” is the adjective form of secularity, which generally means a state of being separate from religion. Secularism can be defined as an ideology which upholds that the government or other ruling political institutions should remain separate from religious ones. These two concepts are admittedly quite different from one another, even if they are similar; but in this thesis it should be noted that the use of these two will be used essentially synonymously.\(^{32}\) Note that all these definitions are essentially my own, defined here for the purpose of clarity.

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\(^{31}\) Discussions on for example individual self harm will not be addressed.

\(^{32}\) To take the title of this thesis as an example (“Tearing down the secular”), it is referring mostly to the secular state rather than secularity itself.
Disposition

Considering my chosen criteria for the study, the study itself will have a chronological division, which considering the demarcated theme of study is the most logical choice, considering the fact that this study aims to follow the media reporting and observe the change in the discourse over time. First we will focus on the newspaper’s presentation of the Ayodhya dispute before the year 1991, following this there will be an analysis on the reporting of the violence that resulted when the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya was destroyed the year 1992. Last we will analyze the disputes significance in the press up until the 10 year anniversary of the incident; when it once again became a topic of serious debate due to attempts to build a Hindu temple over the remains of the destroyed mosque. After these discussions there will be a final summary of the thesis findings and conclusions.

Analysis

1986-1991 “The tensions rise in India”

The Ayodhya dispute itself is generally argued to be the product of the historical antagonism between Hindus and Muslims in India. The roots of which are seen as stretching back hundreds of years, starting with the reign of the first Mogul emperor Babor during the 16th century; who had the Babri Mosque constructed. It is said that the mosque itself stands upon the demolished ruins of an older Hindu temple for the god Rama which the Mogul emperor destroyed to make way for the mosque. The start of the modern Ayodhya dispute is said to be traced back to a court ruling the year 1986 when the site was opened to both Hindu and Muslim worshipers.³³

While the court ruling itself, or the debate leading up to it, seems not to have been covered to any great extent by the Swedish daily press, the following violence accredited to the court ruling, and the political ramifications of it was. "The tensions rise in India" is the rough translation of an article heading from the paper Svenska Dagbladet that comments on the Hindu-Muslim riots that took place in many cities across India during the year 1987, a year

after the court ruling. They were said to have started in the city of Meerut in the Uttar Pradesh state of India. In the article it is stated that “one of the causes of the unrest […] is a dispute between Hindus and Muslims over a temple which both groups state a claim to” (Ayodhya), on the other hand the article also comments that “the spark” of the conflict is “often trivial”, “a bar fight, a procession which is viewed as provocative, a rumor of an assault, or a traffic accident where those involved happen to be members of different sects”. In the “arguments that ensue those involved divide the contracting parties after their religious affiliation”. The true cause of the violence is explicitly stated to not be religion, but due to “sectarianism” and “communalism”. The article explains that while these concepts often are translated as “battles between sects, it is not an adequate description”. “Economic, cultural, and linguistic factors” are stated as being more fitting explanations, it is added that “suspicions over the fact that Muslims may be less trustworthy citizens” can be another possible cause for the conflict. The riots, and “the divides between different sects, languages, tribes, and casts” are said to threaten the budding national Indian identity, and “fundamentalism” on both sides is said to be a considerable factor according to the Indian politicians quoted in the article. Note that the author in this case uses the term “sect” rather than religion to describe the Hindu and Muslim groups, although the situation in India is admittedly partially described as a “religiouly colored disorder”.

In a related and contemporary article titled “Gandhi is criticized by his own: ‘Is negotiating with terrorists’”, similar topics are discussed and brought to light. The Indian Prime Minister Gandhi is argued as having lost his credibility due to his dealings with “terrorists, fanatical Sikhs,” and “Muslim extremists”, among others. The article describes that a “period of growing political violence has begun” in India, and that the reporter in an interview with Gandhi wanted to discuss “the political situation, ‘communalism’, the increased tensions between casts, religions, ethnic, and language groups”. The prime minister however was noted as being very tight lipped. The growing conflict between Hindus and Muslims is described as being one of many problems facing the Indian government, and the dispute surrounding the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya is mentioned.

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34 SvD 1987/05/24 Motsättningarna skärps i Indien [The tensions rise in India ] Bo Kage Carlson, p.4.
35 SvD 1987/05/24 Motsättningarna skärps i Indien [The tensions rise in India ] Bo Kage Carlson, p.4.
36 DN 1987/05/15 Gandhi kritiseras av sina egna ”förhandlar med terrorister” [Gandhi is criticized by his own: ‘Is negotiating with terrorists’”] Eva Lindgren, p.11.
A current subject of conflict is the Babri Majsid Mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. It is an old mosque from the era of the Mogul rulers, which happens to stand on the same spot that the Hindus believe the god Rama was born. The area has been a matter of dispute for 150 years, but it has been a mosque up until the year 1949. Although when an idol of the god Rama was found on the spot both Hindus and Muslims were forbidden from entering the site. Last year a local court allowed the ban to be lifted, which then led to Hindus to take over the area, which they now call Ramjanmabhoomi. 37

“Neither Hindu nor Muslim political leaders have had the courage to take a reasonable stance on this explosive issue, due to fear of upsetting extremist groups from both camps”. The same extremist groups that the Prime Minister Gandhi stated as “wanting battle, confrontation […] they cheer if their group is met with an injustice, because then they can goad respectable people to violence”. 38

Ten days later another article comments on the political situation of India, titled “The wave of violence was planned”. Something worth noting in this article is that the aforementioned “extremist” groups in the earlier text have now turned into “religious armies”.

The police in New Delhi state that both Hindu and Muslim extremist groups, are at the moment arming themselves and preparing for confrontation. In the last two years private armies with religious overtones, have sprung up among extremists in the northern and western parts of India. These violent groups are being blamed for the rioting in Meerut and Delhi, as well as the city of Broach in the western part of India. 39

Here it would seem that we have a pretty clear cut discourse of the violent nature of religion, but if one reads into the article the violence is described as being between “folk groups”, not religions. A fear of being “overridden and discriminated against” is described as a concern for both groups. 40 The acts of violence are primarily described as being caused by “extremist groups”, against “rival folk groups”. The violent acts seem to arguably be caused more by ethnical tensions rather than religious ones, even if the groups are being categorized by their

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37 DN 1987/05/15 Gandhi kritiseras av sina egna ”förhandlar med terrorister” [Gandhi is criticized by his own: “Is negotiating with terrorists”] Eva Lindgren, p.11.
38 DN 1987/05/15 Gandhi kritiseras av sina egna ”förhandlar med terrorister” [Gandhi is criticized by his own: “Is negotiating with terrorists”] Eva Lindgren, p.11.
39 DN 1987/05/25 Våldsvägen planerad [The wave of violence was planned] TT-AFP, p.10.
40 DN 1987/05/25 Våldsvägen planerad [The wave of violence was planned] TT-AFP, p.10.
religious affiliation. The term used to describe the situation is “religiously colored disorder”, as opposed to “religiously colored violence”, or just “religious violence”.41

Now, when putting these findings in to the discourse theoretical framework of Laclau and Mouffe, one can debatably see the beginnings of a discourse seeking to establish itself. As mentioned in the introduction a “discourse” according to Laclau and Mouffe is always looking for hegemony, to control the signs of language encompassed within. The nodal points, and other language significantants within the discourse always find themselves in relation to the discursive field that surrounds them. In these articles it can be argued that the signs within the discourse have yet to become fixed in the appropriate positions in relation to the acts of violence, for this to be considered an established discourse of religious violence. What religion is or isn’t (or what exact role it plays in the conflict), seems to be rather ambiguous and undefined in relation to the violence that is being reported; it has yet to be articulated. Religion, or the religious groups described here, seem to intersect with many other discursive concepts, such as culture and ethnicity. The violence is discussed as being between different groups in society. While it would seem that there exists no clear cut and established discourse of religious violence in these articles, it can not be denied that there exist some budding tendencies in the material. The sign of religion in the discourse has yet to have reached the status of nodal point, it is arguably more of an element in the media’s discursive web. “Communalism” and “sectarianism” in the Indian society seem to be the most emphasized factors of the reported conflict, while religion is a small aspect encompassed within what can be considered an element of communalistic violence (as opposed to religious violence) tied to the nodal point of Hindu-Muslim violence. It would seem that we find in these articles a discourse of religion and violence, rather than a discourse of religious violence. Religion is being used in the conflict as a tool to further violence between different groups in society, as opposed to being the prime instigator or the reason for violence. That the violence could be motivated by transcendental rewards is also not touched upon, nor that the acts themselves could have a symbolic religious meaning for the ones participating in it. The violence is articulated as being between two different groups, that happen to have different religions, rather than being the prime cause of it; even when one of the causes of the violence is said to originate over a dispute over a temple. Religion as a concept is used to describe rather than explain the violence. I would argue that although religion itself does not seem to be viewed as the core concern in these cases, it is still undeniably a part of the greater picture.

41 DN 1987/05/25 Väldsvägen planerad [The wave of violence was planned] TT-AFP, p.10.
Between the years 1987 to 1990 there seems to have been very little written on the conflicts surrounding Ayodhya. With one notable exception. In the introduction of this thesis there was the mention of an article from the year 1990, “Hindus march against mosque” describing the protest surrounding the Babri Mosque during the beginning of the 1990’s. These protests took place few years before the actual destruction of the building itself, and although the articles describing them are rather short, they have some interesting tendencies. These were also mentioned in the beginning, but it was not thoroughly explained why they are of interest. The interesting aspect of these is that the earlier emphasis on the sectarian or communalistic tendencies of the violence between Hindus and Muslims seems to here have been set aside. Here there seems to be a highlighting of, to again refer to Laclau and Mouffe, moment significantants in the article that are strongly associated to the discursive element of religion. To summarize and repeat some of the methodological concepts of the study, a moment is a relatively fixed sign, not open to a lot of interpretation. For example a mosque can be considered a moment sign, there is not an awful amount of discussion on what exactly constitutes a mosque, most would agree that it is a type of sacred building. An element on the other hand is a sign where its significance and meaning can be the subject of some discussion and debate. Privileged signs that encompass and organize other smaller signs around them are called nodal points. Religion, “religious violence” or “religious extremism” for example, are not nodal points in these articles, but seem rather to be a part of the existing discourse of the earlier mentioned sectarian violence. Moment significances that have associations to the element of religion in the discourse, are becoming more popular. While the main nodal point seems to be Hindu-Muslim violence, “holy men” and “temple priests”, for example, are master signifiers (identities) that have apparently started to become more prioritized in the media reporting of the 1990 demonstrations against the Babri Mosque. Tendencies like these become even more apparent in the future reporting of the incident. The “violence” described during this pre-1990 period, can be viewed as a floating significance. Depending on how the violence is reported, what meaning it is imbedded with, and how it is set in relation to other language significantants within a discourse. The very nature of the violence is changed. Violence becomes constructed depending on how it is discoursed and articulated, religious violence is no exception. In these cases the violence is mostly

categorized as sectarian, while the key significants connected to it become more religious in the sense that religion as an element sign moves up the chain of equivalence.


Debates and demonstrations continued to surround the controversial mosque throughout the first years of the 1990’s, and these were often mentioned in articles commenting the political climate of India. “Temple building wakes anger before elections”, is one article that exemplifies this. The dispute surrounding the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya is discussed as having great political consequences in India, more specifically on the country’s future elections. The “nationalistic” BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) party is stated as being one of the most popular, although it is commented that it has its share of critics, who claim that the party “is exploiting and egging on the disagreements between religious groups”, and that they may be behind the upspring of “religious riots”, that have plagued the country.43 Building a temple for the god Ram in Ayodhya, is noted as being a central point in the BJP’s electoral manifesto.

In the leader “India needs new ideas” a few days after this article, the violence in the wake of the elections is described as being “political violence”, although the author states that Indian politics have started “concentrating more on ethnical and religious problems”.

The reasons behind the political violence, and the general increased amounts of conflicts in the country, are of course many and very complex. India is not the only multicultural country that has these problems. It is clear that these problems become larger in an economy that does not supply any hope, comparing the Indian economy with other Asian countries it seems India is standing still. […] Indian polls have also shown that the voters worry more over the economy, than they do over religion or ethnicity. Sadly the Indian politicians seem to focus on the latter rather than the former.44

Although religion is there as a notable aspect that needs to be addressed in Indian politics, it is seen alongside ethnicity as a rather small problem. Religion and ethnicity are viewed as being lesser concerns as possible sources of “political violence” when compared to the country’s

44 SvD 1991/05/21 Indien behöver nya ideer [India needs new ideas] p.1.
economic problems. The description of the political situation in India in the press seems to be rather nuanced.

In the wake of the murder of prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, many articles continue to discuss these issues, “religious fanaticism”, “Hindu fundamentalism” and “religious antagonism”, are discussed as problems next to other causes of friction in Indian society. The murder of the prime minister seems to have generated a special interest in both India’s elections and its politics in the Swedish media. Roughly two weeks after the murder, there is an article (“Ideological battles are toned down: the BJP’s leader Advani would rather talk about bread than reincarnation”) that specifically focuses on the leader of the BJP party, Krishnan Advani. He is described as looking like a sympathetic and good-natured old man, but “everyone in India knows that there is another side of Advani” and that “two years ago he was seen looking like a demigod at the head of a marching procession demanding a temple built to the god Ram in the city of Ayodhya in a spot where there already is a Muslim mosque”. Advani states that his party considers itself more nationalistic than religious, “the questions are more about nationalism than religion when his party stresses questions regarding Hindu values”, “why should you be punished and mocked for asserting your country’s traditional values? India is a Hindu country in the same way France is a Christian one”.

Language significants associated with religion, violence, and conflict, (for instance religious fanaticism, religious antagonism, and religious riots) start being commonly used to describe the situation in India, and thus become part of the larger discursive net of significants surrounding the violence; albeit next to other language signs that are not associated with religion. Religion and ethnicity still seem to go hand in hand, even if the specific concept of communalistic, or sectarian, violence is not used here. One could argue that there is a small shift, where the emphasis on religion within the discourse starts gaining momentum; before religion was a small part within the discourse, and it has now evolved into becoming a possible cause, even if it seems to be viewed as a lesser one.

46 SvD 1991/05/31 Ideologisk kamp tonas ned: BJP:s ledare Advani talar hellre om bröd än om pânyttfödelse [Ideological battles are toned down: the BJP’s leader Advani would rather talk about bread than reincarnation] Bo Kage Carlson, p.4.

The already precarious peace in India during this time finds itself starting to shatter on the 7th of December 1992, when “Thousands of Hindus attack mosque”:

Thousands of Hindu extremists destroyed on Sunday the controversial Ayodhya Mosque in northern India. The medieval shrine was reduced to rubble after an angry mob attacked it with their bare hands. [...] Angry mobs of people ran amok through Ayodhya after the destruction of the mosque. [...] The attempts of Hindu extremists to demolish the mosque have been a source of discrepancy and has claimed the lives of 2500 people over the past three years. The Hindus claim that the Hindu warrior king Rama was born on the same spot where the mosque stood, and want therefore to build a Hindu temple there. [...] The 3000 police on the scene could only look on helplessly as tens of thousands of Hindus broke through the barricades and stormed the shrine.47

And “Hindus tore down the mosque in Ayodhya”:

Fanatical Hindus –as many as 100 000-sieged the north Indian town Ayodhya, and on Monday they attacked the Muslim shrine that was said to have been built on the birthplace of the ancient Hindu warrior god Rama. The police were forced to give in to the enraged mob which with pickaxes, hammers and their bare hands demolished the medieval mosque till only rubble was left. The demolition caused wild protests among the Muslims of India and its neighbors Pakistan and Bangladesh, and hundreds of lives were lost in acts of retribution after the attack in Ayodhya. India is to its name a secular state, but its leading politicians are being accused of not dealing with the Hindu’s fanatical religiosity in time.48

In a leader following these incidents the author comments that “religion is a flammable subject in the formally considered secular country of India” and that “a serious political crisis has been the product of the tensions between Hindus and Muslims”; the conflict “bears witness to the deep religious animosity that has always been more or less prevalent”.49 In an article the day after the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya (“Hindus take advantage of civil unrest”) it is stated that “when fanatical Hindus tore down an old mosque in the city of Ayodhya they tore down a part of the secular fundament which the modern Indian state rests

49 SvD 1992/12/8 Indiskt raseri [Indian rage], p.1.
on as well.[…] Frictions between these groups have always been strong in India, but the country has managed to keep the peace astonishingly well through decennia, partially due to a constitution which keeps religion out of the state’s affairs”. The reader might have noted the rhetoric emphasis on presenting an antagonistic relationship between the concepts of the religious and the secular in these articles, this is something that starts playing a greater part of the discourse as time goes on, which will be discussed in greater lengths later.

The headings of the articles that report on the aftermath of the Babri Mosque’s demolition follow an interesting theme, words like “religious conflict” and “religious riots” become commonly used to describe the violence across India that followed. Reports on the violence in India continued on a regular basis weeks after the incident in Ayodhya. “Religious riots tear India apart”, is a classic example of one such article. In the article the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque is seen as the cause of these religious riots, and “fanatical Hindus”, and “Hindu fundamentalists” are discussed as trying to provoke and instigate violence. Their dream is apparently being a “Hindu Bharat (India) which stretches out farther than their own country’s boarders”, wishing to recreate the old Hindu society.

According to Laclau and Mouffe there are always different discourses fighting for hegemony in a medium, and the Swedish daily press is no exception. It should be mentioned in the spirit of academic transparency that although my analysis might give you a different impression, there is no clear break in the discourse surrounding religion and violence during this period. There are arguably two strong tendencies in the discourse on religion and violence in these articles. One where religion is seen as one aspect of a multidimensional conflict, and the other where religion is the central and primary aspect. While there is no clear break, one tendency does not simply evaporate without a trace, it is clear that the latter one is starting to gather steam while the former is falling behind. As we have observed, the element of religion in the media reporting of the Ayodhya dispute starts becoming all the more accentuated within the

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50 SvD 1992/12/8 Blodiga kravaller i Indien [Bloody riots in India] TT-Reuter, p.4.
52 SvD 1993/ 01/11Religiösa kravaller splittrar Indien [Religious riots tear India apart], Bo Kage Carlson, p.6.
53 Compare with SvD 1995/08/18 Hinduer kräver ökat inflytande: Kampanj i Indien skall samlas motstånd mot islamiskt inflytande [Hindus demand increased influence: Campaign in India gathers support against Islamic influence] Bo Kage Carlson, p.8. “Every year there are hundreds of cases of violence caused by different religious, cast, or tribal, affiliations”.

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media discourse of Hindu-Muslim violence. Interestingly enough the specific concept of “religious violence” is not used to describe or categorize these incidents, it is not yet a significance in the media discourse. Words like “religious conflict” and “religious riots” and “religiously colored disorder” are the more common elements surrounding the nodal point of Hindu-Muslim violence in India. “Religious disagreements” is also explicitly used to describe the situation in India between the Hindus and Muslims.54

Articles that discuss the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya retrospectively, and the violence that followed, can generally be characterized by two trends. The first being that the religious aspect of the violence becomes more emphasized and the second being that there is a tendency of a rhetoric dichotomy in the narrative where the secular state is being portrayed as waging a war against fanatical religious mobs.55 Hindu nationalist groups are seen as being to blame for the religious disagreements. They are accused of planning and instigating an organized persecution on Muslims in India, in an attempt to destabilize the country and seize power from the secular government.56 The secular modern nation state is discussed as the country’s only hope for peace and order, after the religious fanatics have thrown it into chaos. Here one becomes reminded of Cavanaugh’s arguments in The Myth of Religious Violence, where he states that the myth of religious violence is often used to legitimize the authority of the secular nation state. While this study does not offer much contribution to the objective debate on the nature of religious violence, it is nevertheless interesting to see this strong tendency in the material, which also helps demonstrate a slight shift in the discourse. The language signs of “state” and “democracy” are more clearly articulated as being part of the discursive field surrounding the nodal point of Hindu-Muslim violence, where simultaneously the language sign element of religion has gotten a more central part. Religion has moved up the equivalence chain, so to speak. This dichotomy between the secular and the religious, is


arguably one of the most central and noticeable characteristics of the 1990’s media discourse on religion and violence. This dichotomy between religion and the secular also mirror a similar dichotomy in the material, the one between chaos and order, barbarity and civility. The previously mentioned Fitzgerald’s arguments on the dichotomy between civility and barbarity in relation to the concepts of religion and the secular, seem to fit well with Cavanaugh’s research in the case of this material, and the trends that have been observed.\(^{57}\) It would seem that, considering the trends in the material, religious violence becomes religious violence when it is set in comparison to the secular and secular violence. Religious violence is never discoursed as being enacted by a legitimate democratic state, the nation state instead asserts its authority over the fanatical religious masses. Cavanaugh would probably argue that the nation state uses the myth of religious violence to justify itself, and considering the material I would generally agree that on the media discursive level there seems to be some connection. Even though this study would rather argue that religious violence as a concept or a category in the media, discursively becomes constructed in relation to the secular. The discourse of religious violence becomes constructed in relation to the discourse of the secular.

In the earlier articles there one could point out that there also seems to be a discursive tendency to portray the state as being set against the extremist groups, but the secular aspect of it is not nearly as emphasized. The term “secular” is hardly used at all, it is not a language sign element, or for that matter a nodal point, within the media discourse on the Hindu-Muslim violence stemming from Ayodhya as observed in the articles.\(^{58}\) It is after the destruction of the Babri Mosque that the term secular becomes an element sign which is part of the discursive field surrounding the discourse of religious violence.

Another significant trend emerges in the material during this period. To take the article “Fanatics use God as a tool: Hundreds of thousands victims when attackers abuse religion in different countries”, as an example. What is of interest here is the fact that the author is equating a variety of different conflict with each other, and uses them all as examples of when “religious fanatics” use religion to further violence. The previously mentioned articles, as the reader might have noticed, also refer to the fact that “Hindu fanatics” used religion to justify acts of violence in the Ayodhya dispute. But here we can see the violence surrounding Ayodhya being put into a greater narrative.

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Murder, war and terror in the name of God, but hardly in his spirit, has cost hundreds of thousands of people their lives both in modern and historic times. Egypt’s Anwar Sadat, India’s Indira Ghandi, and now Israel’s Yitzhak Rabin are all high ranking politicians […] who have been murdered by their own countrymen who have ties to religious extremist movements. Against these fanatics who believe that they serve a higher power there is no protection. [...] Those who abuse their gods are not only Muslims or Jews, but also people from almost all other religions: Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus. [...] Often the misuse of God’s name to justify acts of violence against other religious groups. It is especially viable in territorial disputes like in Palestine where groups on both sides motivate territorial ownership by claiming that it is sacred ground –unfortunately the same ground which is considered holy by both sides. Similar arguments were used by Hindu fanatics when they in 1992 demolished the Muslims Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in northern India. The mosque was, said to have been, built on sacred Hindu ground, the spot where the god Rama was born.59

The article itself is commenting on an incident in the Middle East, but here we can find the concept of “religious extremist movements” being applied to a greater scale of things, it has become a category, a nodal point that language signs such as “Hindu fanatics” for instance become set in relation to.

In another similar article from 1998, The “Hindu fundamentalist movement” is compared to other fundamentalist movements like the Christian extreme right, and Islamic fundamentalism to name a few. In “Have Hindu extremists become more reasonable?” the article asks “How are we to interpret the tide of religious and ethnical fundamentalism that has washed over the world in the latest quarter of the 1900 hundreds?” 60 Another thing that is noteworthy in this article is that we are once again met with the term “communualism” being used to describe the political situation in India, but not quite the same way that it was in 1987. Here the term communalism is used to describe the ideological characteristics of the Hindu nationalistic (Hindutva) movement, while in 1987 it was used to describe a cause for the unrest between Hindus and Muslims. The term “religious fundamentalism” is in this article used as an objective category in the media discourse. The research of Barkun, mentioned earlier comes to mind. He argues that fundamentalism is a dubious term, and that the label of fundamentalism is used more often to condemn a group rather than describe their ideological

60 SvD 1998/02/05 Har hinduiska extremister blivit mer moderata? [Have Hindu extremists become more reasonable?] Carl Johan Gardell, p.12.
views.\textsuperscript{61} He states that fundamentalism is generally a very ambiguous and ill-defined concept which’s unreflective use in academia can be inappropriate; the same could debatably be said for all forms of media. There is very little written on the use of the word “fundamentalism” in Swedish media. If I am to compare my own findings, it would seem to have been present at the very start of the reporting of the Ayodhya dispute, and used fairly sporadically over the years. Fundamentalism is an example of one of many language sign elements that surround the nodal point of religion and violence.

This also seems to become the case for other discursive categories that are used to link religion to violent acts, for example the concept “religious violence”, which as a seems to start being used regularly to describe different conflicts and incidents across the globe, sometime after the year 1995. The Ayodhya dispute is mentioned regularly in the press all throughout the 1990’s, and sometime during the first five years there is a remarkable trend observed, where one can argue that the discourse of religion and violence and “religious violence” becomes established. “Religious violence” starts being generally used as a term to describe conflicts during the later years of the 1990’s, admittedly not first in articles specifically related to the Ayodhya dispute.\textsuperscript{62} “Religious violence” as a term being used in conjunction with the Ayodhya dispute is starts a few years later.\textsuperscript{63}

It would seem like the reporting of the Ayodhya dispute runs parallel and intersects at times with a similar but altogether different debate in the Swedish press, as observed in the newspapers; one of religious violence. Simply put, the discursive construction of an objective category of violence that can and is be labeled religious. Something that is mirrored in other articles from this period that discuss “religious violence”, one example being the religious conflict that is described as developing in Indonesia. For instance in the articles “INDONESIA Thousands flee religious violence in the Maluku Islands”, “The violence may tear Indonesia apart”, “Religious wave of violence intensifies”, and “INDONESIA Soil for religious extremism worries”.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{61} Barkun, M., 2003.
\textsuperscript{63} Compare: DN 2002/03/5 Utrikes/Per Ahlin: Utmaningar för Indien [Abroad/Per Ahlin: Challenges for India] Per Ahlin, p.2.
Another interesting trend in the daily press on the subject of religion and violence is the emergence of religious terrorism as a discursive concept. In “The blind terror – The poison attack in Tokyo is yet another example that no one is safe against fanatics that use fear as a weapon”, although the author mostly comments on the Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo Subway the year 1995, he briefly mentions and compares different terrorist groups, fanatics that use terror, oftentimes in the name of God. Violence between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in India is shortly mentioned as an example of this. The “goal is to achieve a religious cleansing” and using “terror as a weapon minorities where scared away from their homes and the ones that did not flee fast enough where murdered”.65

There is also a criminal element that is very apparent in the discourse. The religious fanatics are violent, murderous, and they are often portrayed in opposition to the police, as well as general law and order, which also ties back to the aforementioned tendency to portray religion in an antagonistic relationship to the secular state. Religious violence can not be justified in these articles, violence that is attributed to religion is delegitimized.66 Fanatics have no understandable, or acceptable, reason for their actions; the fanatical religious mindset can not be understood. Other possible factors, or reasons, for the conflicts described are set aside when an emphasis is put on religion.

To summarize the discussion thus far, the main nodal point in the earlier media discourse of the Ayodhya dispute could arguably have been “Hindu-Muslim violence”, where the main element signs connected to it seem to have been “sectarian violence” or “communalistic violence”, and “religion” is a lesser element encompassed within these two. Then with the start of the 1990’s, there is a slight but significant shift, where the element of “religion”, becomes a more noteworthy part of the media discussion on the dispute, Hindu-Muslim violence, as well as religious and ethnical conflicts in India. Before the discursive field surrounding Hindu-Muslim violence was relatively vague, what the conflict exactly was or was not, was relatively unarticulated; but when the religious aspect becomes more

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65 SvD 1995/03/26 Den blinda terrorn - Giffattentatet i Tokyo är ännu ett exempel på att ingen är skyddad mot fanatiker som använder skräcken som vapen [The blind terror – The poison attack in Tokyo is yet another example that no one is safe against fanatics that use fear as a weapon] Bo Kage Carlson, Sipa, Pica pressfoto, p.52.
66 The de-legitimization of certain conflicts or movements with a religious character in the media has previously been noted, see for example: Lewis, J., P. Mason, and K. Moore, 2009, p.17-38.
emphasized, the discursive field surrounding the conflict becomes more pronounced. In this case the modern secular democratic nation state, becomes set in dichotomy to violent religion.

2001-2002 “Fanatics stopped by the police”

In the beginning of this essay it was stated that the discourse of religious violence becomes established in the Swedish daily press sometime during the later years of the 1990’s. As we can observe there have been some changes in the discourse surrounding religion and its connection to violence. To further argue my claim I will in this chapter show some examples of the discourse after the 1990’s. To once again return our Focus to Ayodhya, let’s see how the discourse of religion and violence looks in the beginning of the 21st century.

During the year 2002 there were once again a movement to build a Hindu temple in Ayodhya on the spot where the now demolished Babri Mosque stood, Ayodhya was once again credited with another bout of “Hindu-Muslim” violence. In general there does not seem to be an overabundance of change within the media discourse of religion and violence, as opposed to the earlier articles. The ethnic aspect of the violence has admittedly still not completely disappeared from the discourse, but the general trend of the emphasis on the religious aspect can not be denied.67 For example terms like “religious riots”, “religious violence”, “fanatics”, and “extremists” are used regularly in articles when describing the dispute. The narrative tendency to portray religion in an antagonistic relationship with the secular state is also still observable. The nodal points, elements, moments, and the discursive field surrounding the concept of religious violence within the daily press’s discourse are largely unchanged.

In articles from both newspapers that describe the “religious riots” that took place after the VHP (World Hindu Council) made plans to build a Hindu temple in Ayodhya. They have a clear emphasis on the religious cause and nature of the conflict. “Religious wave of violence” and “religiously motivated violence”, are some examples of how these incidents are described in the newspapers.68

67 DN 2002/03/5 Utrikes/Per Ahlin: Utmaningar för Indien [Abroad/Per Ahlin: Challenges for India] Per Ahlin, p.2. “An India plagued by ethnic and religious violence is a nightmare”.
Despite the fact that India lacks a state religion and calls itself secular religion and politics have during these past few years gotten woven closer together.\[---\] What started as a new, dramatized and romantic view of Hinduism and all its gods, led to the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya. It also helped the Hindu nationalistic party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) get into government, although not as a single party but as a leader of a coalition. As the leader of this coalition the BJP has had to tone down the Hindu nationalistic rhetoric. Anything less would threaten the whole unity of India, a large country where all the religions of the world are represented […]\(^69\)

In another article commenting on the violence, the conflict is set in relation to the dreams and ambitions that the late Mahatma Gandhi had for his country after its independence. In the article it is stated that Gandhi was murdered by a “fanatical Hindu” because of his tolerant attitude towards the Muslims. “What has happened to India?”, the article wonders and afterwards stating that “many fear that what has happened in Gujarat this past week is just the beginning of more violence, and yet another step away from Gandhi’s message of religious tolerance”.\(^70\)

Later the tensions in Ayodhya were at their peak when the VHP prepared to have a Hindu ceremony to bless the building of the new Rama temple on the contested spot. The Indian Supreme Court ruled to forbid such a ceremony, but preparations were still being made.\(^71\) The Indian government accepted and opted to enforce the ruling, which in turn led to the “Hindu activists” being stopped by the police and forced to perform their ceremony a fair distance away from the site.

The dispute in Ayodhya, where fanatical Hindus tore down a mosque in 1992 to make way for a Rama-temple, has become one of India’s most sensitive issues and shows the serious religious disagreements.\[---\] “Live Rama!” Yelled the thousands of followers that were marching through the city. They had two stones for the temple and they were eagerly encouraged by the residents who stood along the streets and singing hymns.\[---\] The hundreds of people who tried to force through the police’s barriers were stopped by police with batons. Thus the secular India won a victory over the fanatical forces in the country, but the risk of backlash is great. On the losing side is the in government BJP party, which partially came to power by promising to build the temple in

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\(^69\) SvD 2002/03/1 PROVOCERANDE TEMPELBYGGE HOTAR LANDETS KÄNSLIGA ENIGHET Upplopp i Indien [BUILDING OF TEMPEL THREATENS THE COUNTRY’S SENSITIVE UNITY Riots in India] Bertil Lintner, p.15.

\(^70\) SvD 2002/03/7 INGEN LYSSNAR LÄNGRE PÅ FREDSAPOSTELN GANDHIS BUDSKAP OM TOLERANS Fanatiker chockar Indien [NOBODY LISTENS ANYMORE TO THE PEACE APOSTLE GANDHI’S MESSAGE OF TOLERANCE Fanatics shock India] Bertil Lintner, p.13.

\(^71\) DN 2002/03/14 HD förbjuder hinduisk ceremoni [Supreme Court forbids Hindu ceremony] TT, p.15.
Ayodhya. [---] The secular India sent clear signals: close to 10 000 soldiers have been sent to the area and the activists have been prevented from getting to Ayodhya.\(^22\)

As previously stated the discourse does not seem to have changed significantly in 2002 in relation to the later years of the 1990’s. Which is in itself an interesting find considering the events of September 11 and the attack on the World Trade Center. One would think that this would have led to a significant impact on the media discourse on religion and violence, considering the emphasis the media had on the religious nature of the attack. Instead it would seem that the biggest change in the media discourse came before the year 2001. Something which debatably strengthens the case for this thesis central argument, that the modern discourse of religious violence in the Swedish daily press becomes established sometime during the 1990’s. By following the reporting of the Ayodhya dispute, the conflict itself has not changed significantly, but the way it is discoursed has, from a sectarian dispute to becoming a prime example of religious violence.

An interesting similarity can be found in the earlier mentioned research of Göran Larson, regarding the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the Swedish media. He argues that the media portrayal of Muslims in Sweden is generally negative, often portraying them as fanatical and violent barbarians.\(^{73}\) Taking this into account there seems to be precious little difference between the media portrayal of the Muslims specifically, as opposed to other religious groups, such as the “fanatical Hindus” in the conflict surrounding the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya.

Of course one could argue that the reason for the changes in the discourse of religious violence changes naturally because our knowledge of it increases, that there are more incidents of violence with a religious character now than then. In response I would point to the Ayodhya dispute as a prime example, the incident itself has remained largely unchanged, but the meanings we have applied to it have shifted. When labeling a group as fanatics, fundamentalists, terrorists, or extremists, there are consequences and implications. The labels may be disguised as objective categories, but in reality they are normative social constructs, that create and shape ideas about religion, and the violence that it is said to be the cause of.

\(^{72}\) SvD 2002/03/16 Polisen stoppade fanatiker [Fanatics stopped by the police] Naila Saleem, TT, p.24.
\(^{73}\) Larsson, G., 2004.
Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to study the discourse of religious violence, and the connection between religion and violence as it is discoursed in the Swedish daily press, by following its reporting of the Ayodhya dispute, and using a discourse analytical method with the theoretical framework of Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory. To serve this purpose the study aimed to answer two central questions. What characterizes the discourse of religion and violence in the Swedish daily press that can be observed in its reporting of the Ayodhya dispute? And what can this tell us about the discourse of religious violence in the Swedish daily press during the period 1986-2002?

Religious violence is a discursive construction, and within the Swedish daily press it would seem, when following the media reporting of the Ayodhya dispute, that the discourse of religious violence becomes established sometime during the latter part of the 1990’s; even if there are admittedly earlier tendencies of it before then. The daily press’s reporting of the conflicts surrounding the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya shows a shift in the discourse. The dispute goes from being viewed as an example of group, sectarian, or communalistic violence with a religious dimension, to a prime illustration of the global phenomenon of “religious violence”. There is an observable trend were the religious aspects become all the more emphasized as time goes on. One of the central characteristics of this discourse seems to be that religious violence is consistently set in relation to the secular, and democratic, nation state; where religious violence becomes constructed in relation to the secular. When the discourse of religious violence becomes more established the violent nature of religion becomes more emphasized, and other aspects of conflicts, such as political or ethnical ones become marginalized or plain ignored. There is a rhetorical meta-narrative in the discourse, where the dichotomy of religion and the secular is set in an antagonistic relationship to one another. As mentioned earlier the establishing of the discourse of religious is increasingly set in an antagonistic relationship to the secular nation state, where there is narrative tendency to portray religion as chaotic, intolerant, fanatical, and violent; in relation to the secular which is democratic, just, orderly, modern, and rational; the religious is often portrayed as needing to be controlled by the state. Religion becomes a source of violence, disorder, and divisions within a state, which in turn needs to be controlled by the secular. The secular state is always under threat, and it needs to be protected from fanatical and violent religiosity, so violence
from the state becomes justified when dealing with religious fanatics. This is very similar to the line of argumentation presented in the research of William Cavanaugh, but a key difference here is that instead of the secular state using the myth of religious violence to legitimize itself, here the discourse of religious violence seems arguably to be is constructed in relation to the discourse of the secular.

When considering how media, especially the news, shape and create our ideas of religion, there are precious few studies that take this into account on the matter of religious violence; the idea of an objective category of violence that can be considered religious as opposed to political or the like. The very concept of religious violence is ill-defined, ambiguous, and its usage has normative implications. This can be problematic considering its unreflective usage in media, as a conventional form of wisdom. As we primarily have observed through the Swedish daily press’s reporting of the conflicts surrounding the mosque in Ayodhya, the same conflict, over the course of time, can be discoursed rather differently. Even if discourses, or terms like religious violence, may be viewed as unchanging, they are in fact fluid, they shift.

The discursive debate of religion and violence is more than just Islam and the World Trade Center attacks. Something of interest for future studies could for example be to study the discourse of religion and violence in the Swedish media over a broader time span, comparing different forms of media, or studying specific religious groups or incidents. Much of the current research on religious violence in media sadly tends to focus on Islamic extremist movements and the events of September 11, but as this study hopefully has shown there are still areas in these discussions that have yet to be fully explored.
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