

## DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION AND ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS FREELANCING: STRATEGIES AND SPEECHES OF THE ARMENIAN LEADERS IN ARGENTINA

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The speeches of several Armenian institutional leaders in Buenos Aires, Argentina are analyzed to identify the processes of quantitative and qualitative transformations. These changes come along with modifications in the practices and representations of Armenian believers. The processes of individualization and deinstitutionalization of religious figures and tendencies to ethnic and religious freelancing are studied in some detail.

### Introduction

Considered as a *diaspora religion* in the Armenian Argentine community, the universe of senses on which the meanings of the actors are played propel one to the notion of *axiomatic identity* where religious confession and ethnic adscription are automatically tied.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, the coexistence of religious and ethnic belongings are related, from the institutional point of view, to the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) and, respectively, to various community organizations.

The twist between these two dimensions—the religious and the ethnic—highlights a complexity that leads one to a prospect where religious belief envelops a universe of senses. This occurs in a series of institutional references that go beyond the merely religious to place itself in a constellation of meanings that, or so it seems, may well exceed it. At the same time, in a social context that, as we will see, combines diversification with deinstitutionalization, the participation of the ethnic factor in the religious experience is crossed by *religious freelancing*.<sup>2</sup>

The particular relation between religion and ethnicity, as well as the peculiarities and changes that come with the macrosocial processes of deinstitutionalization and the dynamics related to freelancing, are perceived by community

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Vertovec, "Religion and Diaspora," in *New Approaches to the Study of Religion*, vol. 2: *Textual, Comparative, Sociological, and Cognitive Approaches*, ed. Peter Antes, Armin W. Geertz, and Randi R. Warne (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 275-303. See also Gananath Obeyesekere, "Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity: A Question of Fundamentals," in *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Fortunato Mallimaci, "Los católicos: entre el 'cuentapropismo' y la protesta social y simbólica," in *¿Es posible "otro mundo"? Reflexiones desde la fe cristiana* (Bogotá: Indo American Press, 2004).

leaders and understood by them in specific ways looking forward to the production and reproduction of certain positions, practices, and speeches.

In groups where there exists a community bond in which the religious and the ethnic overlap, it is fair to inquire *How institutional leaders process the re-configurations of the religious? Which are the representations and definitions that circulate among these leaders? How are they constituted? In what social phenomena are they based?*

These questions are examined based on the results of a qualitative fieldwork<sup>3</sup> consisting of an observation that took place in a religious ceremony.<sup>4</sup> The files of the weekly community publication *Sardarabad* were also examined.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, an archbishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church;<sup>6</sup> along with a lay community member, "Marta,"<sup>7</sup> who was the coordinator of *Sardarabad*, as well as the director of the same publication, "Luis";<sup>8</sup> and the president of a community institution, "Marcelo," were interviewed for this research effort.<sup>9</sup>

### Pluralism in Religious Modernity

Together with social transformations that occurred throughout South America and in the rest of the world during the last decades of the 20th century, serious modifications were introduced to religious claims from a social sciences

<sup>3</sup> This fieldwork was made as a junior scholar of the University of Buenos Aires under the direction of Professor Fortunato Mallimaci.

<sup>4</sup> The observation took place during the celebration of the Christmas Mass in the cathedral of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the city of Buenos Aires on January 5, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> *Sardarabad* is a weekly publication of the Tekeyan Cultural Association linked to the Armenian National Assembly. Published since 1976, it consists of 12 pages in newspaper format with a circulation of 3,000 copies distributed in the city of Buenos Aires, in seven Argentine provinces, in Uruguay, in Chile, and in Brazil. It has correspondents in Córdoba, Montevideo, and São Paulo and is edited by a Deputy of the province of Buenos Aires. It publishes its own contents, materials produced by the Armenian General Benevolent Union, and articles of the Administrative Institution of the Armenian Church, as well as a great quantity of advertising from Armenian business and professional worlds.

<sup>6</sup> The archbishop is a monsignor and is one of the maximum authorities of the Diocese of Argentina of the AAC. Born in the Syrian Arab Republic in the decade of 1940, he arrived in Argentina as a priest in the middle of the 1970s and later was promoted in the hierarchic structure of the institution.

<sup>7</sup> "Marta" is a Literature Professor of the University of Buenos Aires and coordinator of *Sardarabad*. Born in Argentina in the 1950s, she is a sister-in-law of the editor, and she is related to the manager of cultural issues and press of the Armenian Embassy through ties of friendship and paths of common socialization.

<sup>8</sup> "Luis" is a Deputy of the province of Buenos Aires (Recrear—PRO, center-right). He was born in Argentina in the 1950s and studied Veterinary Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires. He was a member of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Organization and president of the League of Young Men of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. In the frame of his political trajectory he was politically active in the UCeDé (1983–1991), the Justicialist Party (1993–1996), and Recrear Party (2001–present). He is also the editor of *Sardarabad* and a prosperous textile businessman.

<sup>9</sup> "Marcelo" is a senior staff member of the Armenian General Benevolent Union and a wholesaler. He was born in Argentina in the 1940s and was also president of the League of Young Men of the institution. His political trajectory in the institution continued in the Commission of Major and the Managerial Council. He is also a member of the World Council of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. He is joined by relations of friendship and paths of common militancy with Luis and Marta.

perspective that have enhanced our comprehension of the complexity between religion and other spheres of social life. Thus, the reconfigurations of religious prospects set out an outlook of pluralism, which, from a quantitative point of view, can be thought of as a multiplication of religious options. Simultaneously, an increase in the diffusion of certain kinds of pluralism, understood in a normative dimension as an opening to political and social coexistence, also occurred. That is to say,

... the plurality refers to the increasing number of groups, activists, spokesmen, churches, chapels, among others [whereas] the concept of pluralism is different, since it points to the construction of new game rules, which incorporate multiple actors and voices as legitimate elements of the process.<sup>10</sup>

Several authors tackled these topics especially the way in which the religious came to occupy increasingly irrelevant roles in classical theories of secularization.<sup>11</sup> A serious attempt to think about the effects of modernity on religion in our contemporary world invites us to question the utilization of explanatory models as that of modernization. In fact, to understand secularization as a part of the project of modernity that weakened religious norms would reinforce the analytical suppositions based in terms of “lag” or “detour” from a “normal” standard.

Danièle Hervieu-Léger proposes a definition of secularization that moves away from the evolutionary environment. It sets out a reconfiguration of the religious, which enables the conceptualization of different processes of diversification. In this way,

... the secularization does not consist on the disappearance of the religion confronted to the modernity: it is the process of constant reorganization of the religious work in a society structurally impotent to satisfy the expectations that it must provoke to exist as such.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, we can think that, instead of eliminating religion, considering the constant generation of uncertainty and the effects that this produces, modernity strengthens religion and diversifies it by contributing to religious pluralism.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel H. Levine, “Pluralidad, pluralismo y la creación de un vocabulario de derechos,” in *América Latina hoy: Revista de ciencias sociales*, no. 41 (2005), p. 20, translated by the author.

<sup>11</sup> Ari Pedro Oro, “Considerações sobre a modernidade religiosa,” *Sociedad y Religión*, no. 14/15 (1996). See also José Casanova, “Religiones públicas y privadas,” in *Caja de heramientas: El lugar de la cultura en la sociología norteamericana*, comp. Javier Auyero (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Vers un nouveau christianisme? Introduction à la sociologie du christianisme occidental*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987), p. 227, translated by the author.

<sup>13</sup> Oro, “Considerações sobre.”

In this way, Ari Pedro Oro says that there is a "privatization of the sacred thing" that does not refer to the traditional distinction between the public and private spheres, but to a kind of religious pluralism that we can find in the subjectivity of social actors. Modernity allows one to think in terms of the social actors as *bricoleurs* who, in turn, take elements from different religious traditions to create their own *bricolages*, or mosaics, which offer many variables. In fact, the tangles between religion and diverse scientific or artistic disciplines or any number of other fields of knowledge, illustrate the *nebulousness of heterodoxies* where attempts to reconcile disparate or contrary beliefs become united.<sup>14</sup> These eclectic constructions of the religious sense are on the margin of institutional controls in a context of strong deinstitutionalization where formal instances of organized worship lose their role of intermediaries and whatever authority leaders enjoyed over subjects.

The notion of *religious freelancing*<sup>15</sup> turns out to be suitable to analyze this matter, emphasizing why religiousness is experienced as a combination of beliefs that originate in diverse sources and the cultural contexts of various social spaces.<sup>16</sup> For one analyst, freelancers

... believe without belonging, are there without being what the clergymen suppose they are, pray without worrying for words, orthodoxies, worships and system. . . . They live their own Christian experience on "one's-own-ism," "in their way" and re-do their beliefs taking that things which satisfies their individual or familiar needs. Somehow we might say that they "hybridize their believing" with those things they find "in their way" without many worry for procedure or institutional dispositions.<sup>17</sup>

This kind of autonomy in a context of pluralism would be possible in large part because of a decrease in the relative cost of religious dissidence that facilitate eclecticism and nomadism.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding the case studies made over specific groups, one can differentiate two categories of works, those focused on identity processes of groups concerned with their national, religion and ethnic features, such as Brazilian Muslims or Syrian Kurds, and works concentrated on Armenian communities like

<sup>14</sup> Jaques Maître, "Régulations idéologiques officielles et nébuleuses d'hétérodoxies: A propos des rapports entre religion et santé," *Social Compass* 34, no. 4 (1987), pp. 353-364.

<sup>15</sup> The original concept in Spanish is *cuentapropismo religioso*. It is related to the idea of *believing without belonging*, but in some way it goes beyond. It implies the weakening of the *belonging* (to a church or institution), but in a world where subjects become creative and relatively autonomous agents who keep some institutional practices but change meanings and make mixtures. See Grace Davie, "Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?," *Social Compass* 37, no. 4 (1990), pp. 455-469; and Mallimaci, "Los católicos."

<sup>16</sup> Mallimaci, "Los católicos."

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12, translated by the author.

<sup>18</sup> Floreal Forni, "Nuevos movimientos religiosos en Argentina," in *Nuevos movimientos religiosos y ciencias sociales*, vol. II, comp., Alejandro Frigerio (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1993).

the Argentine Armenian institutions or British Armenians.<sup>19</sup> It is within this context that this paper attempts to make a contribution to the field of Armenian studies, from the perspectives of a sociology of religion.

### **Institutional Leadership and Ethnic and Religious Freelancing**

The freelancing tendencies framed in the processes of deinstitutionalization identified above are perceived by institutional leaders and practiced in specific ways looking forward to the creation and duplication of certain positions, practices, and speeches.

More difficult are the experiences of non-leader believers—where it might seem more suitable to use the category of *religious freelancing*—that is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, a series of representations and habits allow us to work with these concerns, not necessarily from the perspective of the believer, but from the very important and often overlooked point of view of institutional leaders.

First, the overlapping between what we can analytically differentiate as the religious and the ethnic also supposes an extension of the universe of available senses, where identity references of both interlace, multiplying the offer of meanings. Therefore, if the notion of religious freelancing allows one to put in relation the practices of the believer with institutional speeches of organized worship, the existence of institutionalized ethnic allocutions encourage one to think beyond the wider outlook where religion and ethnic group are axiomatically linked. To experience the “Armenian” in a freelance way would suppose an autonomization that exceeds the merely religious: what is lived in a freelance way and is combined with other knowledge and heterodoxies is not simply a selection of certain aspects of religion, but a mixture between religious and ethnic elements. Consequently, to speak about an ethnic-religious freelancing seems to be more appropriate in this case, as the analysis of the way in which the leadership—whose control seems to escape these practices—gains momentum.

In the words of one of interviewee:

We understand that we are Armenian in a *light* way. Because our tradition is Christian, it does not exist a very big difference of religion. We are Christian. Inside the Christian world it is obviously much more easier to be diluted. And this is happening right now. Here we speak about significant numbers. According to some people there should be 80,000 Armenians in Argentina, although the community is probably

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<sup>19</sup> Silvia Montenegro, “El problema del Islam como ‘identidad axiomática’: destejando vínculos entre religión y etnicidad,” *Claroscuro: Revista del Centro de Estudios sobre Diversidad Cultural (UNR)* 4 (2005), pp. 31-50; see also Paulo Gabriel Hilu da Rocha Pinto, “Etnicidade e nacionalismo religioso entre os curdos da Síria,” *Antropolítica*, no 19 (2005), pp. 31-61; Nélida Boulgourdjian-Toufeksian, “Los armenios en Buenos Aires”: *La reconstrucción de la identidad (1900-1950)* (Buenos Aires: Edición del Centro Armenio, 1997); Vered Amit Talai, “Social Boundaries within and between Ethnic Groups: Armenians in London,” *Man* 21, no 2 (1986), pp. 251-270; and Vered Amit Talai, *Armenians in London: The Management of Social Boundaries* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989).



not integrated for more than 20,000. Presumably, the other 60,000 integrated within their neighborhoods, and while many preserved some of their traditions, most did not. Those are the prettiest traditions to conserve. The food and such things. Everything else is getting lost.<sup>20</sup>

For this observer, *light* meant that there was no fanaticism. In his own words:

It is not closed. It is not exclusive. We have a school that goes from the age of 2 to the age of 18. And the truth is that the cultural subjects are given in Spanish language. A little bit because there are some that are not of Armenian origin. They study. And also because they understand more the Spanish than the Armenian language. That is difficult enough to learn. Is good to speak it. I speak it. But, at the moment of giving a speech, for me it is much easier to give it in Spanish than in Armenian language. When I speak of *light* I do not say it in pejorative sense. But it is not a *sine qua non* condition for Armenians who live here to be closed to the rest of the things. No. On the contrary. In the integration it is also possible to spread.<sup>21</sup>

The quoted fragments show how this leader rationalizes what is perceived as a "dissolution" of the Armenian community. If there is a light way to being an Armenian it is because there is a stronger model involving many more elements in the representations of an individual like Marcelo.

In fact, this interviewee regards even those speeches that one might perceive within a highly positive connotation, and adopts an apparently pragmatic attitude on the population in the country. Besides, he suggests a path of dissolution ("to be diluted") where the last preserved things are clearly ethnic elements—such as gastronomy—over the religious norms. An equally critical aspect deeply tied to ethnicity, language, is likewise in retreat.

Nevertheless, the most interesting thing is the appropriation of the believer's speech, along with the positive meaning given to the weakening of such practices. Marriages between Armenians and non-Armenians, for example, as well as the minor use of the Armenian language are seen as inevitable trends in the bosom of a "Christian society." While they may have a positive aspect, in which integration is highlighted as something desirable towards the non-Armenian world, concerns abound. In the words of one interviewee:

When I go on holidays to some place where there are no Armenian churches, I go to a Catholic church. Furthermore, for young persons, it is much easier to go to a Catholic church and to understand what is

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Marcelo.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

recited in the mass that to go to an Armenian church and to listen the same thing in Armenian language.<sup>22</sup>

Generally, the faith of today's young is lighter. Inside this outlook, many people go [to a Catholic service]. There are many marriages outside the Armenian Church. Mixed couples. And . . . the Catholic Church does not contradict our spirit at all. At all.<sup>23</sup>

This community leader perceives himself in the abstract and indefinite group of "young persons." On the one hand, the rite that takes place in a Catholic church is compared as a religious experience with the one followed by the Armenian Apostolic Church and, consequently, is convenient ("it is much easier"), though it acknowledges the believer's freedom of choice. In addition, placing the Apostolic Armenian rite and its Catholic counterpart on the same level presupposes an identity that joins them under the aegis of the "Christian thing," allocating to this category a level of supra-institutional abstraction that suggests a link of the sacred that crosses different organized worships.

On the other hand, having postulated an identity between his personal experience and the practices of "young persons," the leader looks for inclusiveness on having tied what he declares as his own habits with the customs of a group ("Armenian young persons") with strong connotations of projection towards future developments that refer to a dynamic age group. The leader looks for similarity between his actions and the ones identified with the group.

In contrast, the Archbishop seems to raise the question under a certainly more extreme way. The "dissolution" discussed above changes in the metaphor of the disease and of a certain near death. Here, it is a dilemma between the "maintenance of traditions" or "death." In his inimitable words:

The diaspora is an intensive care. We, the Church, the clubs, the schools, we are the means to prolong the life of the patient. But, the more the traditions are kept and the more some customs, forms and formalities that identify us are kept, the more the life of those who live in the diaspora extends. If necessary things to support the identity are not done, the patient dies. It is the intensive care that goes step by step. And doctors . . . Doctors do not exist. They are the institutions that we have. The Church, the Club, the school. I put four fundamental factors: Church, school, social Club and the family. Last, the house. Indeed, we have to put the family first. Because everything is kept in the house. But we do not have to lose the hope and we have to continue working.<sup>24</sup>

Continuing his soliloquy, the interviewee opined:

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Archbishop.

In general Armenian families still keep some traditions at home. Maybe they do not speak the language, but they keep the customs. Where to go, for example. The clubs. To go to the social clubs, the relation with the community, the schools. The food in the house. And there is another point that in Argentina is not so common but it is also important: the names. Here they do not allow to put any name. There is a list. But if we put totally or directly Armenians, children would know what it is all about. Who is the owner of the name. Or what does it mean. It is also a way of keeping something. To support. Thanks to the name you can study the history of the name, of the character.<sup>25</sup>

Faced with what he understands as a withdrawal of religious norms (even before the ethnic spaces of socialization as clubs and schools) and the possibility of their weakening, perhaps even their disappearance, the Archbishop identifies a set of strategies that form the cornerstones of a safeguard mechanism. In this context, symbolic elements pursue pragmatic means to eliminate existential threats, which for the Church is indicated as a device whose importance is placed over the educational establishments and the social clubs. Again, in the words of the cleric:

Previously we did not have many people in Christmas. We start doing some things, the living crib, moving the boys. Apart from the religious ceremony, to do something more theatrical, bringing animals. And people started moving a bit more. Because people celebrated the 25th as the Argentineans and they went away on vacations. Because they did not stay until January 6. And now more people come. Or in Easter, especially on Holy Thursday, Holy Friday, we do something more apart from the religious ceremony. We do, for example, the crucifixion. For Christ's ascension, which is 40 days after Easter, we have a holiday that is traditionally ours. With dance. We are in the court, but sometimes we do it in a lounge. With these things, sometimes more people come and it is a way of supporting what is a part of our identity.<sup>26</sup>

In a context of deinstitutionalization where the religious (and the ethnic) seem to escape the norms and controls established by institutions, freelancing trends are perceived by leaders in specific ways, and transformed into mechanisms of identity management and preservation. Theatrical activities and events that summon the faithful together, with a fully conscious overlap between religion and art, show the same purposes.

On the contrary, the representations and strategies of *Sardarabad's* staff have a strong affinity with those of Marcelo. In the quoted paragraphs below one can highlight the interaction between the religious and the ethnic and, on

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



a parallel level, the crossing points between the non-religious and non-ethnic. One is also able to identify the idea of free choice for every believer—both constitutive of the already presented processes of privatization of the sacred thing. According to one of the interviewees:

I believe that the preservation of Armenian-ness is one of the big worries of the community. Also mine, especially. It is to preserve the language. The use of the language in the new generations. To preserve the traditions. The customs. To come to church. For example, to preserve the customs of the celebration of Christmas, of Easter and of the big religious and national festivities. To preserve the culture. In fact, I have here this space which I fitted out, let's say, for the Armenian plastic artists. In order to have a space to be able to show what they do. I believe that it has to be with it. The family unit. The harmony. I do not believe that one has to be a very strong practicing of all the things. Because the community offers to you every day loads of acts in which one can take part if one wants. But we have to support what each of the institutions does to preserve the faith, the culture, the language. Any institution you want.<sup>27</sup>

Another interview offered this perspective:

The Armenian identity of the Diaspora is this that we are doing. What we do in the collectivity. To preserve the Church. To preserve the schools. To preserve the newspaper. To preserve the institutions. To be an Armenian passes thereabouts. To preserve the Armenian identity is to preserve that.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, the very idea of "harmony" as well as the multiplication and specialization of the institutional offer that now turns out to be linked to other spheres, inform us of the strategic reaction towards the increasing privatization of the sacred. Even being conscious of strong limitations that are implied in the use of any metaphor as a conceptual element, one can postulate that in the face of diversification to preferences and demands by believers under the logic of de-institutionalization and *bricolage*, institutional leaderships answer by diversifying the offer of concrete activities and of those senses and meanings. Nevertheless, it must be underlined that the processes of individual discovery are linked with the main categories discussed above, both the logic of believers and the practices of leaders.

### **Ethnic Affinity and Religion in a Context of Deinstitutionalization**

The impressions gathered in the ethnographic observation developed during the Christmas Mass illustrate the way in which all those strategies and speeches occur in everyday community life. They take place as an institutional activity

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Marta.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Luis.

that, in principle, cannot be defined otherwise except under the form of the religious. They contribute to essential elements of our analysis and enrich it by emphasizing the overlapping—that looks as a random mixture, but has internal coherence—in the empirical field between both conceptual dimensions. Likewise, religion and ethnic group are crossed by the national concern, with representations and identities linked to Armenia and Argentina.

Therefore, both flagpoles located in the entrance of the cathedral of the Armenian Apostolic Church, one with the Armenian flag, the other one with the Argentinean, remind us of double affinities in the national references towards Armenia and Argentina.

Simultaneously, national references that actors give to the religious, as well as the naturally weak borders between religion and ethnic groups, appear in a mass ceremony that is celebrated entirely in the Armenian language. Consequently, the reproduction of the identity or, in other words, of the identity which is postulated by the clergy, is indissoluble from what the clergy envisages as its space for power. Toward that end, the assistance to the ceremony of individuals who did not demonstrate an intention to follow prayers and were, perhaps, relegated to the last rows of the church where they met to chat, explain the autonomization of practices and believers' freelance participation in religious experiences. Remarkably, the religious does not possess a place of exclusive organization, allowing other forms of socialization to emerge.

In this respect, several other summoning factors can be identified, beyond the religious ceremony in a strict sense. For example, the "living crib" is a dramatization of the traditional Christmas ceremony when children, teenagers, and some adults participate immediately after a formal Mass. Most of those who attend services join others who seem to only go for this specific activity. Surrounded by oriental music, and presented in Spanish by an announcer, "actors perform." The ceremony closes with the arrival of Santa Claus, who distributes gifts to children.

The development of an event that alludes to a religious story, which takes place in the court that the church shares with the community school and whose entrance is flanked by both flags, speaks volumes. Moreover, such ceremonies include traditional music, are narrated in Spanish, and have leading religious figures co-mingle with ethnic leaders. Even more revealing is the mixture of attendees who participate in the religious ceremony for more than one hour with individuals who only reach the premises at the end of the ceremony. All of these key features highlight the reality of a situation in which Armenianness overlaps.

### **Conclusions: Religious and Ethnic Specialists**

The interviews analyzed above were extremely useful to comprehend the way in which Armenian leaders understand ethnic-religious linkages and the way in which they process the freelancing trends of believers. Moreover, they reveal a differentiation in the representations and definitions that these actors postulate, which allow one to divide them in the following two groups.

First, the *religious specialist*—a concept elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu—who talks about a body of agents vested in a certain social power and special-

ized in *religious work*, which focuses on practices catering to a particular type of religious needs within the community.<sup>29</sup> This seems to be an appropriate concept to analyze the way in which certain actors tied to a clergy generate definitions of and for the community. Second, and analogously, diverse individuals and social groups from different areas—out of an ecclesial institution, for instance—acquire dynamics of behavior, at least in principle, comparable to the religious specialists but without the formal religious imprimatur. These would be other kinds of specialists. Such diverse *specialists* allow us to make an approximation of their practices and discourses focusing one's analysis in the form in which their interests differ and, often, are opposed to one another. In this respect, a distinction must be made between *religious specialists* and *ethnic specialists*. Within the first group, one may locate the Archbishop and other ecclesiastics, whereas in the second one must place the remaining leaders.

Together with Hervieu-Léger, it is indeed possible to affirm that the reconfiguration of the religious and the processes of secularization are part of a constant reorganization, which means that the macrosocial transformations tied to deinstitutionalization trends change the religious outlook of the 21st century. They produce certain answers on the part of community leaders of an ethnic-religious group. From the perspective of the "Armenian world," both discursive formations analyzed above are formulated by clearly differentiated groups of actors that, in an effort for understanding and explaining the development of these dynamics, were included under the categories of religious specialists and ethnic specialists.

The first ones outline an *us*, clearly defined in the comparison between religious, ethnicity, and nation that opposes an *otherness* constituted by the non-Armenian, understood to be a non-Christian. A detailed analysis will notice an emphasis in those elements that favor the religious factor and the mechanisms of community reproduction in relation with an interest to preserve or improve the ecclesial position in the field of power relations. Equally important, a sociological reading would suggest the influence of the educational socialization of these actors within a religious institution and the fact that they were foreigners that reached Argentina. In this respect, they look at the deinstitutionalization of the religious and the autonomization of believers as superlative dangers which were rejected.

In contrast, ethnic specialists address a multiplicity of interactions that dilute the inflexibility associated with strict religious norms. The *other* is thus mingled, while the possibility of legitimizing spaces of power is extended to accommodate the new environment. Sociologically speaking, Armenians born in the country and socialized under the strong influence of the *immigrant Argentina* imaginary construct,<sup>30</sup> delineated the bases on which they constructed

<sup>29</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Genèse et structure du champ religieux," *Revue Française de sociologie* XII, no. 3 (1971), pp. 295-334.

<sup>30</sup> The *immigrant Argentina* was at the same time a myth and a reality. It was built from the large numbers of immigrants who came from southern Europe and—in a lower proportion—the Middle East and reached Argentina during the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th to "make it big in the Americas." As an imaginary construct, it is based

their perceptions. Deinstitutionalization and autonomization were therefore experienced as a natural transformation that indicated in a positive way relations with universalist values.

These two groups may not be homogeneous in their selves. Still, as the initial questions that shaped this work, one can agree with Hervieu-Léger's reflections on religions as mobilizers of a specific collective memory. In this case, it would be a question of a field in which two memories claim themselves as "true." Religious memory and ethnic memory possess both a fundamentally normative character and are managed by "organized producers of the collective memory," which is to say the way "specialists" behave.<sup>31</sup> However, the normativity of each memory, as well as the historical and cultural elements in which they are based and, consequently, the practices and answers that they generate, are inscribed in particular dynamics that affect the structures of each group. This is akin to the dynamic nature of the religious phenomenon and the new questions that its recent transformations raise for the future.

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on a rhetoric that represented the country as a European cultural enclave and as an open society with intra-generational upward social mobility. This notion is related with what the Argentine historian José Luis Romero called *alluvial era* (José Luis Romero, *Las ideas políticas en Argentina* [Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984]).

<sup>31</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "Catholicisme: l'enjeu de la mémoire," in *Religions sans frontières? Present and Future Trends of Migration, Culture and Communication*, ed. Roberto Cipriani (Roma: Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 1994).