

Article

“I Have Apostatized”: Self-Narratives of Catholic Apostasy as Resources for Collective Mobilization in Argentina

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Abstract: Since 2009, the Collective Apostasy Campaign in Argentina has mobilized some people who are opposed to the political interference of the Catholic Church through the formal act of apostatizing. The politicization of sexual and reproductive rights, and, especially, the fight for the legalization of abortion, led to the campaign that acquired great public repercussions between 2018 and 2020. This paper analyzes 13 self-narratives of apostasy publicly available since 2009, digging into its plot, motives to apostatize, and motivation for its publicizing. Through a thematic analysis, the diverse self-narratives show similar motivations (to promote social debate on political secularization in the country), although they differ in the centrality of their personal, sociopolitical, and procedural motives to apostatize. The stories that apostates tell are resources for social mobilization as they seek an increasingly broad audience and serve the pedagogical function of sharing arguments against the political role of the Catholic Church and in favor of personal ideological coherence.

Keywords: apostasy; collective action; atheist movement; feminist movement; sexual rights politics; self-narratives; Argentina



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1. Introduction

In 2018, days before the Argentine Senate rejected a bill to legalize abortion, a wave of outrage swept through the streets and on social media. Driven by the rejection of several expressions and tactics against the bill encouraged by religious leaders, particularly the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy, many people began to mobilize for an effective separation between the State and the Church. Numerous demonstrations, some of them spontaneously gestated on social networks, resorted to a practice that was little visible until then, although it was already present in the vernacular repertoire of protest: collective apostasies. A collective apostasy is a performative action that has been promoted by the Collective Apostasy Campaign in Argentina since 2009, inspired by similar campaigns in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom, and entails atheists, freethinkers, feminists and LGTBIQ+ groups articulated in the Argentine Coalition for a Secular State (CAEL, in its Spanish initials).

Between August and December 2018, thousands of people protested in front of arch-bishopric buildings or city squares and formed long queues to comply with the formal requirements of their apostasy procedures. The actions acquired great media coverage both nationally (Acosta Rainis 2018) and internationally (DW.com 2018; Goñi 2018) and even encouraged actions of collective apostasy called in solidarity by feminist groups in other Latin American countries and Spain. Renowned actresses, artists, social networks influencers, political officials, and historical human rights’ activists, such as Nora Cortiñas the co-founder of Madres de Plaza de Mayo, expressed their support for the campaign and publicized their reasons to apostate in interviews or in press releases (Carballo 2018; Santoro 2018). In social networks, the debates went from the comments of those who dis-qualified or minimized the act, to a significant number of messages from people expressing that they wanted to apostatize or that they had already apostatized, and how and why they had done so.

The Collective Apostasy campaign, which has the slogan '*No en mi nombre*' (Not in my name), has continued to resonate since then, especially when public debates reinforce a social questioning of the political interference of the Catholic Church and other religious groups, such as the legislative debate for a new bill to legalize abortion, which was finally approved in December 2020. In that context, the collective apostasies motivated by feminist struggles have begun to be understood as acts with strong political connotations (Martínez-Ariño 2021).

Social scientists have usually studied apostasy as the disaffection or estrangement from one's religious tradition and the adoption of new worldviews, including non-religious ones (Beit-Hallahmi 2006; Hunsberger 1983; Streib and Klein 2013; Zuckerman 2012). However, as Bromley (1998) pointed out, it must be considered a differential and disruptive personal act that is strongly contested, which occurs when the religious movement is visibly in tension with its social environment and is not just a mere religious disidentification. Apostasy has aroused increasing interest in those who study both exit processes and theological criticism among Muslims (Enstedt and Larsson 2013; Vliek 2019), because in many Islamic countries, apostasy is a crime that carries severe penalties. Some scholars have analyzed the self-narratives of apostates who have abandoned Bahá'í Faith, LDS Church, Soka Gakkai Buddhism, Jehovah's Witness, or other evangelical movements (Mannon 2019; Momen 2007; Pannofino and Cardano 2017), noting that they tend to adopt a strongly adversarial public position towards the abandoned religion, as was previously identified by Bromley (1998). Other works suggest that the term 'apostate' should only be considered when there are explicit efforts by "religious exiters" to positively re-signify it, because it is often a markedly pejorative label (Cragun and Hammer 2011).

Catholic apostasy is a formal act that depends on the fulfillment of certain established regulations and procedures, in some cases, by the Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church and, in most cases, by the civil norms of each country (Gas-Aixendri 2015). The procedures may vary from one country to another, or from one diocese to another even though they are in the same country. Catholic apostasy is per se a strictly individual act, considered a sin and a very serious crime against the Church, comparable only to schism and heresy (Corral Salvador and Embil 2000). Hence, in some conservative social contexts, the practice can imply social rejection towards those who apostatized. Therefore, while there are some previous records of individuals who have apostatized, except when these corresponded to people who had converted to another religious affiliation, the apostasies used to be kept in secret, almost as an infamous mark that should not be made public.

That is why it is striking how, little more than a decade later, Argentine society has incorporated into the lay vocabulary the notion of 'apostasy', unknown to many Catholics until then, and how this action has significantly changed in terms of its social significance. Although, without ceasing to be a strictly individual procedure, apostasy has begun to be configured as a collective protest action; away from being a private, almost secret practice, in many cases it has become a heavily publicized decision and action. From being valued as a sin and a crime against the Church that could even be the object of social repudiation, apostasy has begun to be redefined in positive terms, at least in some social groups, partly mobilized by the Collective Apostasy Campaign and its demands. The identification as an 'apostate' appears as an emerging political subjectivity that, despite being minoritarian in its population scope, expresses to occasional interlocutors the political and social positions adopted by those who identify themselves as a heuristic.

How did these changes come to be? How has the Catholic apostasy become a plausible option for people who were questioning their religious affiliation to the Church? What were the trajectories that guided certain people to opt for a formal apostasy, acquiring for them such a strong personal and social significance? The present paper postulates that the ways in which the Catholic apostasy has been narrated by those who have apostatized are important in the process of configuring an individual's formal practice as a collective identification. The act of narrating one's own apostasy has been encouraged by the Collective Apostasy Campaign itself, as well as calling the media's attention to performative actions of collective

apostasy organized all throughout the country. Several narratives of “*Yo apostaté*” (I have apostatized) have circulated through multiple channels and with different registers and genres over the years, exercising a pedagogical and mobilizing function that has paved the way to an emerging “we” as a constructed collective identification. These stories, usually narrated from a register of the self, tell us who, how and why some people have apostatized, and why they decided to publicize it. In some cases, they specifically resonate with a user’s filter bubbles in their social networks; in other cases, the most challenging, these stories are disseminated broadly as articles in newspapers and digital magazines, blog posts, and printed books or documentaries freely accessible online, in search of those who may feel interpellated.

Specifically, this paper analyzes self-narratives of apostasy publicly available since 2008, digging into its plot, motives, and motivation as way to explore the reserves of personal, sociopolitical, and moral repertoires in which an adversarial position is configured with respect to the political interference of the Catholic Church in the country.

As scholars of social movements have analyzed, narratives and stories are a strategic resource for all activists, because they help to mobilize, enlist supporters, socialize alternative interpretative frames, or impact public decision makers (Davis 2002; Polletta 1998, 2006; Polletta and Gardner 2015). However, these stories need to have repercussions on a social background that helps them to be signified as morally compelling, plausible, important, and coherent (Polletta and Gardner 2015).

In terms of its social background, the self-narratives analyzed here resort mostly to the increasing social processes of liberalization and pluralization of lifestyles of the Argentine society. The next section briefly describes those social processes, especially the changes associated with religious beliefs and belongings, and the impact of the incorporation of the sexual and reproductive rights agenda in the public arena. Then, we present some methodological considerations concerning the recollection of self-narratives of apostasy and the analysis of its themes and components. Finally, we exhibit insights into these self-narratives in chronological order as a way of unraveling the skein of plots, characters, context and, above all, motives and motivations told by the people who apostatized. Taking the precautions indicated by Polletta and Gardner (2015), with this exercise we do not intend to affirm that through these very personal stories it is possible to see through a “transparent window” the emergence and development of collective apostasies in the country (p. 543). However, when considering this context, it is possible to affirm that the stories that apostates tell tend to increasingly converge in larger social narratives in which the rejection of the political role of the Catholic Church (in the past, present, and future) is emphasized, as much as the search for personal ideological coherence.

Religious Changes and Politization of Sexual Rights in Argentina as Social Backgrounds

Since the return of democracy, and particularly during the last two decades, the politization of sexual rights mobilized by feminists and LGBTQ+ movements in Argentina have faced the challenge of eroding the power of the Catholic hierarchy, a power which even included the decision on which issues should be part of public debates. For this reason, the struggles for sexual rights are conceived as significant political opportunities where several updated demands of political secularization and new institutional arrangements of the relations between religion and the State are reenacted (Di Stefano 2011; Sáez and Faúndes 2018).

The Roman Catholic Church has had a historical, social, and political predominance in the country, which has increased since the 1930s, when it sought to configure Catholicism as a substitute for national identity (Mallimaci 2008). It enjoys a privileged legal status compared to other religions, partly based on the interpretation of article 2 of the National Constitution that affirms that the national state “supports” the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church, although the same constitutional text also guarantees the “freedom of worship”.

In line with Vatican documents, the Argentinean Catholic hierarchy has promoted a biological conception of sexuality associated with reproduction inside of heterosexual marriage, and the defense of life from ‘natural’ conception to ‘natural’ death. Therefore, they have opposed and mobilized against the approval or implementation of laws that consider to be based on a notion of ‘gender as a social construct’, such as the sex education law (2006), same-sex marriage (2010), self-perceived gender identity (2012), or the legalization of abortion (rejected in 2018, but approved in 2020), among others. In this sense, as in other Latin American societies, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church has been configured as an antagonist in the sexual rights politics promoted by feminism and LGTBQI + movements (Pecheny and Dehesa 2011). Over the last two decades, in addition to lobbying with legislators and political decision makers, the Catholic hierarchy has developed several advocacy strategies, including an alliance with neo-Pentecostal evangelical groups, pro-life NGO and other neo-conservative agendas, some of them non-denominational (Morán Faúndes 2015; Vaggione and Machado 2020), which has amplified its power of social mobilization throughout the country.

However, Catholicism is in decline in terms of its social support and number of affiliations. The number of self-identified Catholics in the country decreased during recent decades, and today represents around 63% of the population (Mallimaci et al. 2019). This decrease could be explained by the lower proportion of parents who baptize their children, as suggested by a local study (Morello and Rabbia 2019), but mostly by the increasing proportion of evangelicals (generally Pentecostals or neo-Pentecostals), those who are unaffiliated or people without a religious self-identification (Mallimaci et al. 2019). The category of unaffiliated, which represents 18.9% of the population (Mallimaci et al. 2019), includes a very heterogeneous group of people (atheists, agnostics, disaffiliated believers, spiritual seekers, indifferent to religion) who, nevertheless, tend to adopt more favorable attitudes toward sexual and reproductive rights than people with a religious identification (Esquivel 2021; Esquivel et al. 2020; Rabbia 2017). The segment of the ‘unaffiliated’ arouses the interest of the sociology of non-religion (Lee 2015) but has been scarcely considered in Argentine academia until recent years.

At the same time, as with other believers, many Catholics reclaim and exercise an “interpretive autonomy” (Dillon 2018) because they do not agree with official positions on topics such as those of sexual morality. Those Catholics, as well as several expressions of religious dissent in part associated with feminist and queer theologies (Azcuy 2012; Córdova Quero 2015), have at least indirectly challenged the pretensions of the Catholic hierarchy to represent an alleged univocal social majority in its opposition to sexual rights recognitions. The internal diversity of Catholicism is not necessarily a novelty, but the positions of progressive Catholics came to be more evident when contrasting with the hardcore Catholics believers that defend the official position of the Church regarding sexual morality and other social issues (Donatello 2010; Giménez Béliveau and Irrazábal 2010).

Religious and non-religious diversity is considered a novel resource available not only for sexual rights politics, but also to mobilize political secularism. The study of the historical and sociological dimensions of political secularization has stirred a greater attention regarding the prominent and privileged status of the Catholic Church. Several studies indicated that Argentine secularism, framed under the reference of French’s *laïcité*, has been largely anti-clerical since the 19th century, although not necessarily anti-religious (Di Stefano and Zanca 2013). In the heterogenous tradition of Argentine anticlericalism, it is possible to find some moments in which the voices that claim for political secularization gained more visibility and achieved secular laws and public policies, and others where they suffered a setback. As a consequence, the narrative shared by current secularist advocates tends to reinforce the idea that Argentina is facing an incomplete process of political secularization, that it is incompatible with an increasingly plural society (Di Stefano 2011; Rabbia and Vaggione 2021). However, for much of the second half of the 20th century, secularist activism has been largely reactive, scarcely institutionalized, and with a low public visibility. Until recent decades, their agendas were almost exclusively associated

with minority left-wing parties, freemasonry, or certain advocacy groups of human rights (Mancini 2011).

However, the politicization of sexual rights has assured a greater public resonance to the demands of secularist organizations that promote a laic state. Those organizations, unlike feminisms and LGBTBIQ + movements, have not enjoyed the same visibility or power of mobilization until recently. Over the last decade, the demands toward an effective political secularization have been strongly articulated by feminist and LGBTBIQ + rights' movements, as the self-narratives of apostates and the Collective Apostasy Campaign itself might illustrate. As such, the Collective Apostasy Campaign has been a dynamic force to promote an effective political secularization, by seeking to challenge the supposed social majority represented by the official position of the Catholic Church through the formal disaffiliation of those who are already estranged from the religious institution.

2. Stories Apostates Tell: Methodological Considerations

The 'narrative turn' has had a great impact on the sociology of religion (Ammerman 2014; Yamane 2000), non-religious (Lee 2015; Stacey 2020; Trzebiatowska 2018) and social movements studies (Benford and Snow 2000; Davis 2002; Polletta 1998, 2006). Partly because of a culture of self and authenticity and the decline of grand narratives, the voices of regular people took on an unusual centrality and were presented as current dispositions of subjectivity (Arfuch 2019). In this process, narratological approaches (Abbot 2007), hermeneutic perspectives (Brockmeier and Meretoja 2014; Ricoeur 1991) or proposals of discursive psychology (Potter 2003), among others, have delved into different aspects of what people say about themselves.

No matter how we define them, the narratives share some elements: they have a plot, which often structures consequential and meaningful actions, and they include human or human-like characters as protagonists, co-protagonists or even antagonists (Polletta 2006; Polletta and Gardner 2015). Narratives are also allusive, in the sense that stories' moral reference points are not necessarily explicit (Polletta 2006). At the same time, storytelling is always a social activity (Georgakopoulou 2006); therefore, good narratives tend to offer a 'larger' social point regarding some issues, even if they are not directly highlighted by the account of events. As a social activity, narratives seek to generate something in their audience: they pursue to reinforce the narrator's social status, to build trust and social identification, or persuade a certain desirable behavior or attitude. In social movements, narratives might be central for challenging larger traditional narratives, making specific claims and enlightening society on the social injustice the group is perceiving. However, not all narratives are equally persuasive. Plots charged by arguments, analyses or descriptions that may close an open appropriation of the text, or plots that alters the causal effects of actions, are usually more resisted by a potential audience (Polletta and Redman 2020). People's pre-existing assumptions and beliefs affect their willingness to endorse the message communicated by the story and, for that reason, it is relevant to clarify in advance what kind of audiences the story itself will have, while linking elements of the narrative with intelligible aspects of its social background (Polletta and Gardner 2015).

Self-narratives are a product of motivated memory (Bruner and Weisser 1998), stories told by a narrating self that is usually distinguished from the *self* or *selves* of the past, by evoking shifting and enduring experiences from the point of view of the storyteller (Ochs and Capps 1996). Disruptive or exceptional events are usually central to these narratives, as a way of configuring a before and after in the experiences told.

Self-narratives are often collected through in-depth autobiographical interviews or from traditional published autobiographies. In this case, though, we are interested in the self-narratives of apostasy, that is, the stories of people who fulfilled a formal Catholic apostasy procedure, which can dispense with any specific type of record. Although the self-narratives of apostasy have all of the elements already mentioned, it is a contested and contentious practice, and so the narrators usually feel the need to delve deeper into their reasons for apostatizing (defined here as motives) and their motivations for telling or publicizing the practice.

During the first half of 2021, we recollected records of self-narratives of apostasy by a systematic exploration using internet search engines. In constructing the corpus, we left aside interviews in the media, even though many were carried out with well-known activists of the Campaign of Collective Apostasy, because we preferred in this instance to analyze what the apostate explicitly wanted to say of their formal defection from the Catholic Church without direct intermediaries. We required at least one mention of the Campaign of Collective Apostasy at some point in the self-narrative for it to be considered in the analysis. We also did not consider the multiple self-narratives posted on personal Facebook, Twitter, or other social media accounts, except in one case below where we had the express permission of its author. In summary, we opted to analyze only those open and publicly available written and/or audiovisual self-narratives of apostasy because they intended to persuade a larger audience that may not have previously been convinced or interested in the proposal. In total, we identified 13 self-narratives, 5 of them posted in public access blogs, 5 published as articles in digital magazines or the traditional press, 1 posted on a personal Facebook account, 1 that is a film documentary, and 1 that is a printed book.

More concretely, in terms of the analytic procedures, we began our narrative analysis by paying close attention to the ways in which storytellers constructed plots and characters, in particular, how apostates represented their past and present selves. Then, we codified motives to apostatize and motivations for publicizing the practice. For this second part, we followed a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), also considering that the differences between each media and record of the self-narratives could partly condition the ways in which people presented themselves and the extension of motives and/or motivations displayed.

The next section presents some insights into several of those self-narratives in chronological order of publication, so that it may also be possible to track how a larger narrative and a collective identification are being configured over more than a decade, and how recently publicized self-narratives innovate but also recover a repertoire of motives and rhetorical functions from the personal accounts of those who have previously apostatized in Argentina.

3. Results

3.1. Self-Narratives of Apostasy in Argentina's Blogosphere

The first group of self-narratives of apostasy analyzed were published in personal blogs, simultaneous to the expansion and decline of the blogosphere in Argentina (approx. 2008–2012) (Samela 2018). Blogs fostered previously present cultural features that are significant for our account: they promoted self-narratives and virtual communities as classically conceptualized by Rheingold (1993). With their thematic focuses, followers, and computer-mediated interactions, blogs could dispense face-to-face relations to bring people together, but also propelled personal ideas and practices to persuade others on topics of the blogger's interest. As noticed in other contexts, virtual environments are safe spaces for skeptics, atheists, and seculars advocates, and the internet facilitates their search to build communities and a larger visibility (Lundmark and LeDrew 2019; Noman 2015; Smith and Cimino 2012).

Between 2008 and 2010, Pablo, also known as *Alerta Religión*, posted 24 entries labelled under the category 'apostasy' in his blog. Through these posts, the author builds a plot where his criticisms toward the Catholic Church and religions in general (he defined himself as a 'militant atheist') are increasingly channeled through a stimulating cause of political commitment that transcends the virtual space; the significance assigned to these new face-to-face demonstrations is suggested in the numerous photographs that the author shares about several actions of collective apostasy portrayed both in his city and in other cities.

His first post referred to an article published by a newspaper, which introduced to its readers the local affiliate of the atheist's organization, ArgAtea, of which Pablo was a

member. The post affirmed that the organization was promoting two issues at the time: first, a national *massive* apostasy (as it was called during the first narratives analyzed), inspired by those that were accomplished in Spain; second, a request to modify the Constitution of the province of Santa Fe, removing discrimination in favor of the Roman Catholic Church ([Alerta Religión 2008](#)). From this very first publication it is already possible to display some significant aspects upon which the Collective Apostasy Campaign will later be cemented: firstly, apostasies and demands for political secularization have both been linked since their first manifestations; and secondly, militant atheists were the first to publicly resort to this type of protest action. Indeed, a few years before, some founding members of ArgAtea, such as Cristina Ferreyra and Andrés Miñones, carried out their apostasies, which received some media coverage ([Carbajal 2007](#)).

In March 2009, *Alerta Religion* echoed the call to the first collective apostasy by feminist activists through the mailing list of Argentina Women's Information Network (RIMA, by its acronym in Spanish). It was a transnationally articulated reaction against the veto of President Tabaré Vázquez to the law that decriminalized abortion in Uruguay; this call is considered as the starting point of the Collective Apostasy Campaign ([Rabbia and Vaggione 2021](#)). Since then, the blog posted several calls and press repercussions of different collective apostasy actions, personal apostasies (such as the one by trans rights advocate, Alejandra Palladino), and some replies to commentaries of followers against the initiative.

On 4 July 2010, Pablo published a self-narrative of his own apostasy, which was also printed in a summary form as a reader's letter in a local newspaper: the title is '*Yo, apóstata*' (I, apostate). The narration focuses on the day that he and his girlfriend were summoned to an interview with an archbishop officer. With witty humor and self-reflexive punctuations, Pablo reveals that the procedure was shorter than expected ("I have taken longer paying with a credit card in the supermarket than condemning myself [. . .] to hell"), acetic ("The fluid formality, that limpid bureaucracy, the administrative nature of the process was funny, unsatisfying. It was a great anticlimax") and left him with ambiguous feelings ("On the one hand, one wants everything to go quickly and smoothly; on the other, we do not want it to go unnoticed"). In that sense, Pablo insists that he did not want the apostasy to be labelled as a "pathetic act of rebellion" and emphasized that he had a genuine interest that other people asked him about the motives of his decision. This assertion suggests the underrecognized and negative status of Catholic apostasy in Argentine society at the time.

In that post, Pablo does not explain much of the casual motives related with his formal resignation from the Catholic Church (which are described in many other posts under the same label), but he expands more on his motivations. The driving desire to fulfilling his apostasy is expressed in the next fragment:

The value of formal apostasy, in addition to the activism exemplified by the Collective Apostasy campaign, is to provide an opportunity to chat with family, friends and acquaintances about a subject that is both serious and trivial. It is trivial to realize that most of our social contacts are only nominal Catholic, and that even the practicing ones ignore the most conflicting ecclesiastical doctrines. It is serious to realize that almost none of them consider themselves responsible, in the slightest part, for keeping the Church in the privileged position it is as a pressure group. It is trivial to disagree with friends at a lunch; it is serious not to express that disagreement when it matters. ([Alerta Religión 2010](#))

Thus, like other bloggers who also began to publish their testimonies of apostasy at that time, Pablo sets a tone for both individual and collective apostasies: the act seeks to ignite the social debate and, therefore, apostasies need to be publicized. Other skeptic and atheist bloggers that often interacted with *Alerta Religion* (for example, [DrGen.com.ar](#), by [Carnielli 2009](#)) helped to amplify the discussion by posting several calls to collective apostasy as well.

Two other cases are of interest to illustrate this moment: the self-narratives by *Oveja descarriada* (Stray sheep), who briefly published a series of blog posts titled *Crónicas de una*

apostasía (Chronicles of an apostasy) during 2010, and the post by Ezequiel, published in 2011 on a popular scientific skepticism blog at the time: *Proyecto Sandia*.

In 2010, through several posts called ‘Why to apostatize’, ‘How to apostatize’, and ‘Apostasy: How I got it’, *Oveja descarriada* wrote about the procedure and motives of their apostasy. They affirm that they began to research information and guidelines on how to apostatize in atheist blogs and websites, following former Pope Benedict XVI’s statements in Africa about the forbidden use of condoms. They even discovered and recommended a Facebook group of *Apostasia Colectiva* (it is the first reference to that group in our corpus, witnessing a slow move of online activism from the blogosphere to other social networks). Their apostasy was simpler than the ones described by those blogs; as they lived in Spain at that moment, but were baptized in Argentina, they just had to fulfill a form at the diocese of their residence, and several weeks later they received a formal acceptance to their request ([Oveja Descarriada 2010](#)).

Later, the user identified as Ezequiel del Bianco signed a large post called ‘*Cómo y por qué me desbauticé*’ (How and why I got unbaptized), organized with subtitles such as ‘Why I have apostatized’, ‘What for apostatize’, and ‘How to apostatize’ ([Del Bianco 2011](#)). With this similar argumentative structure; both *Oveja descarriada* and Ezequiel’s self-narratives seem more clearly focused on their pedagogical function and the socialization of an idea. In fact, Ezequiel points out that many atheists have not apostatized “because they do not know that it is possible to do”.

The author begins by stating that “Today I finished a procedure that would be equivalent to buying a one-way trip to hell”, since his act also implies an automatic ex-communication. To reinforce the irony, the blog post is interspersed with AC/DC song recommendations, such as ‘*Highway to hell*’ and ‘*Hell Bells*’. As he noticed, the process was simple, but it took many months, which is why he characterizes the times imposed by the religious institution as “stretched”. At the time of signing a note in the archbishopric confirming his defection, he noticed that he was required to guarantee a “personally, consciously and freely” made decision. This statement served him to make a rhetorical counterpoint with baptism itself, which in the Catholic Church is usually taken at a very early stage of life (no more than two years of age), and it mostly depends on the decision of the parents of the child.

Both self-narratives display their motives to apostatize as an explicit enumeration. This rhetorical figure fulfills the function of accumulation, and thus can be perceived by its readers; in turn, as all enumeration is always incomplete, each person can continue adding reasons to prove that they agree with the main proposal. However, there are some differences between the two enumerations. *Oveja descarriada*, who was self-defined as ‘atheist feminist’, starts by mentioning ‘being an atheist’ as their first reason, and continues to emphasize quite broad personal differences with official positions of the Catholic Church regarding women, homosexuals, abortion, HIV/AIDS, and ecclesiastical abuses. The enumeration also calls the attention toward the Church’s interference in politics, such as its silence or mere complicity during military dictatorships in several Latin American countries.

In contrast, Ezequiel mostly declares motives regarding personal autonomy of conscious and the incompatibility of holding rationalist and skeptical beliefs, and being an atheist and agnostic himself with the obligation to uncritically admit Church dogma. His first argument revolves around the fact that he should never have been baptized: “Baptizing a person, enrolling him in a religion or belief (in the same way as with a political party), as long as he cannot consent to it, is a clear violation of his individual freedoms, and in my opinion, it should be totally illegal”. ([Del Bianco 2011](#)). After an explicit enumeration, he also includes reference to ecclesial sexual abuses, discrimination toward women, and ‘backward conceptions’ regarding the family and homosexuals. Nonetheless, he considers that these are not enough reasons to leave the Church, because if it were ever adopting different postures, even in that case, “I would still disagree with the underlying philosophy” ([Del Bianco 2011](#)).

3.2. Self-Narrative of Apostasy in Books

Since 2005, based on the best-selling success of authors such as Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris and, particularly in Argentina, Michel Onfray, several local thinkers published books on atheism, such as *'Hijos sin dios: ¿cómo criar chicos ateos?'* (Children without god: how to raise atheist kids?) (Rozitchner and Ianantuoni 2007) by the philosopher Alejandro Rozitchner and his wife Ximena Ianantuoni; *'El ateísmo a partir de las sagradas escrituras de las religiones reveladas'* (Atheism from the sacred scriptures of revealed religions) (Triviño 2008) by the anthropologist Luis Triviño; and *'¿Por qué dios? La necesidad del ateísmo'* (Why god? The need for atheism) (2013), by the psychologist Ángel Rodríguez Kauth.

Although this last book had less circulation than the others, we are interested in highlighting it because it is the only book that combines a personal narrative of the author's own apostasy with other chapters that have a more typical essay's approach. Rodríguez Kauth was a professor at the National University of San Luis, a pioneer in the disciplinary field of Political Psychology in Argentina and, during the last decades of his life, a committed essayist who published several books on different topics.

The introduction of *'¿Por qué dios? ...'* is an autobiographical account of his life, oriented to satisfy the "intellectual and social responsibility" of giving a testimony about his disillusionment with religion, which led him to adopt a "recalcitrant atheism" (Rodríguez Kauth 2013, p. 7). His self-narrative is mostly a journey through various pivotal events that were piercing his initial religious socialization: from the political militancy of his youth in the Communist Party to, decades later, his illegal arrest motivated by political reasons during the last Argentine military dictatorship, which was accompanied by the temporary expulsion of his position from the university (p. 13); from his guilt and fears in his sexual awakening in a Catholic school, to the formation of a family with two children and a very devoted wife, who stayed by his side when he had a risky brain surgery (p. 15). The time he was arrested and tortured in a clandestine detention center, the weeks he spent in a hospital recovering from his surgery, and—as it is introduced later in the book—when the couple lost their 26-year-old son (p. 63), are presented as life and death episodes in which he faced the temptation to believe in something; instead, they serve to reinforce his atheism. Religious elements were used to justify human rights violations during his clandestine detention, while other political prisoners with whom he shared his painful fate turned to prayer for consolation. Several priests and pastors passed by his hospital room and were ordered to leave, when all he wanted was to have a favorable medical diagnosis that would allow him to return home (Rodríguez Kauth 2013).

Rodríguez Kauth's self-narrative is also an attempt to trace an intellectual autobiography, as it highlights how the discovery of atheist, anticlerical or secular readings (from José Ingenieros to Giovanni Papini, and from Blas Pascal to Stephen Hawkins), as well as his training in dialectical materialism and Freudian psychoanalysis, quickly led him to discard any transcendent belief and assume a critique not only toward organized religions, but also to religious beliefs per se. In consequence, the central chapters of the book take on a more essayistic style, although the author still incorporates some personal anecdotes. Marx, Rose of Luxembourg, and Freud are the authors most referred to in chapters that emphasize several anticlerical and antireligious arguments. For example, belief in God is presented as a phenomenon of consciousness, an illusion or a problematic expression of neurosis, as classical psychoanalysis suggested; he associates it with fatalism, social inequalities, and irrationality (Rodríguez Kauth 2013).

However, what is most relevant to the book's central argument is the criticism of the Catholic Church through a historical and sociopolitical lens. Throughout the following pages, different critiques emerge and are configured as important motives for the author's apostasy, although he does not present them in those explicit terms. He describes the Church as the 'ecclesiastical party', a powerful force that has been sustained over the centuries largely by its pendulum political game: "it supported dictators and then withdrew its support, and even many times these situations did not occur with temporary alternation, but it was done simultaneously" (Rodríguez Kauth 2013, pp. 99–98). According to him,

the “ecclesiastical party” is essentially antidemocratic as it is vertically organized and depends on the ultimate decision of its current ruler, who is credited with divine inspiration (p. 105). He also argues that the Roman Catholic Church sees the secular state as a “dangerous institution” (p. 137), against which all its artillery is in service, including its related mass media. Then, he questions the silence or complicity of the Church during the conquest of America, and the crimes of Nazism and Latin American dictatorships, a matter very close to his personal experience. He also criticizes how the discourse of the Church allows the justification of both the death penalty, poverty and the submission of millions of people. According to the author, compulsive socialization has allowed the ecclesiastical party to have a great number of ‘affiliates’, but he wonders “how many continue due to inertia, comfort, or opportunism within the party?” (p. 109). In this sense, based on the analogy with any other political party, the author largely justifies his call to one’s own disaffiliation, to apostate. As he clarifies, apostasy “has only symbolic value”, but that at least allows him to “remain at peace with his own conscience” (Rodríguez Kauth 2013, p. 29).

During the last chapters, the author reinforces his anticlerical arguments, promoting an alliance between liberalism and socialism against any power concession toward the Catholic Church. To his great disappointment, he witnessed how *kirchnerism*, a political movement with which he has felt sympathy for, realigned itself behind the figure of Cardinal Bergoglio when he became Pope Francis, something very recent at the time of publication of the book.

The book ends with a template of a letter of apostasy, which can be copied, completed with personal information, and sent to the corresponding diocese (Rodríguez Kauth 2013, pp. 149–50). In some way, the entire book seeks to answer the question of why one should apostatize, and this final resort shows the confidence the author himself had in the persuasive power of his arguments. Unlike the enumeration of the posts previously analyzed, Rodríguez Kauth (2013) uses an entire book to accumulate arguments that motivated him to apostatize. In some ways, the book serves as a panoramic view on the numerous anticlerical arguments that have circulated in Argentine society during recent decades (Mancini 2011), interpreted from a personal point of view and based on both the author’s intellectual background and his harsh life experiences. As such, the author highlights the sociopolitical motives of his criticism against the Catholic Church and the questioning of religious beliefs. Although the personal experiences narrated by the author promote the potential empathy of a broad group of readers, his strong statements against the Catholic Church, and religions in general, guide the invitation to apostatize for likely a small audience (mostly rationalists, left thinkers and atheists).

3.3. Social Networks and News Media: A Greater Spread of Self-Narratives of Apostasy

After few years of relatively low visibility, disputes over political secularization exploded in 2018. Earlier, in December 2017, the Supreme Court of Justice declared the illegality of religious education (mainly Catholic) in public schools in the province of Salta. Months later, in a context of increasing economic austerity measures, there was a great social controversy when, for the first time in many years, the national Chief of Staff publicly reported in Parliament the public budget that the Federal Government allocated annually to support the Catholic Church. From May to August, society was strongly mobilized by the legislative debate around the first bill to legalize abortion that was under discussion. Its rejection mobilized those who did not feel represented by the official positions of the Catholic Church, especially young people: several requests to remove religious images in public universities were reported, as well as demonstrations in favor of legalization of abortion in religious schools (Felitti 2018).

In August 2018, Romina posted a message on her Facebook feed narrating her own apostasy. In her post, she mostly pointed out a series of motives that had led her to make the decision. In the first place, she stated: “I am an ATHEIST, after many years of building my own’s “spirituality” of which I am proud of, because being an atheist means not believing in a supreme being, but it is not synonymous with a lack of spiritual life”. Secondly, she criticized the state funding of the Catholic Church and its “interference in debates in which it should not engage”, such as the legal abortion bill, same-sex marriage law, civil divorce law (from 1987), or the abolition of slavery (at the beginning of the 19th century). She also questioned the presumed complicity of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the civic–military dictatorship, and, as a scientist, she felt mostly alienated by the historical persecution of those who promoted scientific knowledge which was not endorsed by the religious institution (Rabbia 2018).

Romina’s story, like that of others, also recovered the rhetorical figure of the enumeration of motives, and the explicit motivation of ‘sharing, promoting, informing and advising on apostasy to those who want to do it’. Nevertheless, it is possible to notice two subtle changes at that time: on the one hand, the greater relevance of issues of gender and sexuality when it comes to weighing up the political power of the Catholic Church; on the other hand, the interest in amplifying the call not only to atheists—although Romina identified as such—but to those who developed a self-determined spirituality. The messages on Facebook by Taty Barranco are similar, although they do not directly narrate their apostasy. Messages that were repeatedly reposted or retweeted generated a snowball of comments from followers who proposed collective apostasies throughout the country. They were also the germ of gestation for the Federal Campaign for the Separation of State/Church, which adopted an orange bandana to identify itself.

These demonstrations had two contextual advantages compared to previous moments: on the one hand, the massification of social networks (especially Facebook and Twitter) promoted an intense self-referential culture and online activism, and in consequence, the self-narratives of apostasy, as well as the demands for State–Church separation, spread with great intensity in the virtual space and publicly resonated in the broader media ecosystem. On the other hand, based on the experiences of previous years and the resources available to the Collective Apostasy Campaign, there was already a shared practical memory regarding how to proceed with an apostasy, and a more articulated corpus of arguments circulating that would facilitate personal discontent, narrated in terms of collective discontent.

As accounted by Julieta Arosteguy, one of the most vocal advocates of the Collective Apostasy Campaign, “the debate for the legalization of abortion has broken the cultural inertia of Catholicism”; she noticed that people started to question why they are still part of an institution with which they do not agree. In particular, she called the attention towards the “misogynistic” and “discriminatory positions” of the Catholic hierarchy and considered that the surprise collective apostasy resurgence was mostly motivated by “feminist” reasons (Arosteguy 2018).

As already noted, the collective apostasies of the second half of 2018 had a great turnout in numerous cities of the country. The intense public resonance of this moment could be well appreciated by two self-narratives of apostasy that appeared in the press: on 17 August 2018, *Infobae* republished a note from *Vice* (in Spanish) by Cristian Calavia called ‘*Nos dimos de baja de la iglesia católica argentina*’ (We unsubscribed from the Argentine Catholic Church), and on 19 August 2018, the Sunday supplement of *La Voz del Interior* published an article signed by journalist Waldo Cebrero, entitled ‘*Cuestión de fe: crónica de una apostasía*’ (Question of faith: chronicle of an apostasy). These articles in traditional media are a clear indicator of the social echo generated by the agitation of collective apostasy at that moment. Cebrero’s article also allows us to observe a path of self-reflexiveness where cultural Catholic upbringing is positioned as its main target.

Calavia’s article reflects on how to carry out the procedure to request apostasy, which is simple and fast (“It had been easier to unsubscribe from the Catholic Church than to

fulfill an IRS declaration form without dying in the attempt”) (Calavia 2018). According to the author, it is not necessary to delve deep into his apostasy motives, except that he did not choose the Catholic religion and that today “I understood that the religion they chose [his parents] for me did not represent me at all and that I did not want to belong to it anymore.” (Calavia 2018). He mentions, however, that the Catholic Church has great social and political influence due to its privileged situation: it receives federal funds for its operation and does not pay taxes. To introduce his main argument, he resorts to the analogy of soccer fandom (“In Argentina there are two things that are imposed from the cradle: soccer and religion”), for which, according to the author, the small effort required for the apostasy procedure is central to endowing oneself with ideological coherence:

(. . .) any baptized person who agrees with same-sex marriage, legal, safe and free abortion—or simply considers that the bible has more in common with Tolkien’s novels than with the account of true facts—the dilemma is imminent: he/she/they is being a member of a club of which he is not a fan. (Calavia 2018)

In his words, apostasy becomes, above all, an actionable item and a mean of protest for “anyone who considers that Church and State should be separate issues” (Calavia 2018). The author also draws attention to the fact that the procedure does not completely end with the acceptance of the personal resignation to the faith: the baptismal records are not deleted, only a notification is added in the margin that the person has apostatized. In turn, he considers that if everyone is not allowed to freely choose their religion, “apostasy will be nothing more than the ironic act of seeking legitimacy from an institution that the apostate precisely wants to delegitimize” (Calavia 2018).

In its own way, Cebrero’s self-narrative is a chronicle with a much more personal and nostalgic tone: it begins with a scene that takes place several years ago in the kitchen of his very devoted grandmother’s home. She felt embarrassed and angry at him because the neighbors saw him stealing peaches from a Church tree. An altar boy as a child in his small town in the province of Córdoba, Cebrero affirms that “My emotional education is full of those values: fear, repentance, guilt” (Cebrero 2018). However, something changes over time. He decided that, for reasons of internal ideological coherence, he needs to express his will to “no longer belong to this club” (the analogy to soccer appears again).

The second scene places us in the parish of his childhood town. He has gone there to retrieve the baptismal certificate he needs to apostatize, and the priest—who is also a police official preaches against the proposed bill for legal abortion. “I feel an energy that expels me,” he affirms, and yet he repeats the amens from memory, because he has embodied them. He then exchanges a few words with the priest, who kindly tries to hold him back, although he is not persuasive at all. Even his mother sounded a little convincing about the reasons why he was baptized: she told him that she did not know the reasons, except that people from the town used to say that baptism differentiated some human beings from other animal species (Cebrero 2018).

Next scene: the author comments on the decision he has made to a group of his childhood friends, who do not agree with him. For certain people who have been baptized, giving up belief in God and not attending religious services is enough to resolve their estrangement from the Catholic institution. The chronicle seeks to account for the fact that there are people who need something more: “an act of dissent, of rebellion, of not wanting to belong to an obsolete institution”, as the author characterizes his own apostasy (Cebrero 2018).

Then, there is a phone call to the General Secretary of the diocese. The author says that he wants to try to solve his process by phone to avoid the personal interviews that some dioceses impose to discourage applicants. The first thing he receives from the diocesan official is a lie: he tells him that his baptismal certificate has been lost because of a serious flood that his town suffered decades ago; Cebrero knows that this statement is false, he has a copy of the registry in his possession. Finally, with disdain, the official points out that the procedure he is going to do is “insignificant”, for which the author suggests the possibility that, in that case, it can be resolved by email or WhatsApp. Days later he received an official

notification from the archbishopric that he had apostatized from the Catholic faith. As he writes in the chronicle, his “certificate of apostasy” (in his own words) had thousands of likes on Facebook.

The self-narration closes with some personal remembrances: he affirms that he needed to tell his experience and motives to make amends with his late grandmother, who always opted for faith, for *his* faith. At the same time, he describes an exchange of messages with his psychologist, who read the narrative of his apostasy and concluded that, over time, his Catholic upbringing has left him with “very good quality guilt” (Cebrero 2018).

Cebrero’s self-narrative approach proposes a backward account, which appeals to each person’s Catholic baptism and their religious socialization, to note the subtle ways in which cultural Catholicism impacts people’s lives. He seems to suggest that, through the recounting of personal sufferings, there are very personal reasons to apostatize, in addition to the political and social position of a person who initiates the process of apostasy. Such personal reasons may respond to a search for internal coherence, to resolve a cognitive and emotional dissonance, but they may also aim to explain a certain distance, an estrangement and, although it may seem contradictory, a certain indifference regarding the beliefs and practices promoted by Catholic Church. As in the scene with his old friends, it is evident that Cebrero intends to promote apostasy as a possibility; he does not assume that all baptized people who feel alienated from Catholicism necessarily have similar personal motivates that lead them down a path identical to his. In this sense, he seeks to amplify through this discursive strategy his potential audience even from a more subtle approach. This may also be a consequence of the fact that this self-narrative has been published in a large-circulation newspaper from the central region of the country.

3.4. Narrating One’s Own Apostasy in a Documentary Film

As in Cebrero’s chronicle, other self-narratives have shed light on the remoteness with which some baptized people live their experience as alleged Catholics. This is also the path chosen by Nazareno Guerra, a psychologist and graduate in audiovisual production. Guerra opted for the audiovisual form to narrate, in part, his process of apostasy. He is the director, writer, editor, and narrator of *Primario* (2019), a 64-min-long non-profit documentary film that can be freely accessed on *CineAr* platform and *Vimeo*.

Primario mixes several narratives, interviews, archive material, photographs, and visual collages, as evidenced in its prologue with cross-cut images of religious symbols and school supplies, proposing a puzzle of personal memories. From the beginning, Guerra emphasizes that people are born without gods: by showing a photograph of his first year of life, the author points out that it was taken 4 years B.C., which means 4 years before he began his primary education in a Catholic school. Then, the film is organized in chapters and an epilogue. At the end of each chapter, Guerra includes the narration of his own apostasy process motivated by the “deep rejection of everything I lived” during his primary Catholic school education. It is possible to watch him enter a Collective Apostasy Campaign gazebo for assistance with his procedures (min. 19:11).

As explicitly mentioned, the film is about the Catholic education that the author and others received between 1989 and 1995. This was a time of hegemony of neoliberal economic policies in the country, including privatization and labor deregulation that generated high rates of unemployment and poverty. It was also a time when then-President Carlos S. Menem, in search of social legitimacy, forged an alliance with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. The Argentine episcopate was headed by Monsignor Quarracino, famous for his discriminatory statements towards LGTBIQ+ people (once he suggested that gays and lesbians should be exiled to an island, as showed in the film). This fact is not irrelevant, as Guerra will later tell, because a breaking point with the Catholic Church is notably related to the discovery of his sexuality, which rivals the gender and sexual segregation promoted in practice by the institution, as he pointed out. At that time, the collusion of the government in power with the Catholic Church was such that an excerpt from a press conference by the Minister Of Education is very revealing: when launching a

booklet on HIV/AIDS that was distributed in all schools across the country, minister Salonia highlighted that it contained a message from Pope John Paul II, from the Argentine episcopate, as well as from the International Lutheran Foundation and other evangelical pastors (see [Ministerio de Educación de la Nación 1992](#)). To the invisible syllabus of sexual education based on the clear differentiation between men and women (the Catholic school he attended was only for men), the recommendation of sexual abstinence was added to the curricula as the only method promoted by the Church to prevent the HIV.

The second chapter of the film, 'Communion', revolves around this sacrament. First, there was a communitarian penitential celebration for students at the school's church, which also served as a rehearsal for their communion mass. Under the supervision of an affable priest, Guerra and his friends rehearse an orderly entrance through the main corridor, that forms a cross seen from above as each child sits down in their assigned place. However, on communion day, everything gets messy: every boy wants to sit down next to his mother, so the orderly entrance loaded with the symbolism previously rehearsed turns into a chaotic parade of children. Guerra analyzed the situation:

Already in that issue of entering the church there was one thing that was very clear to me: between what they ordered us to do and common sense there was a very large distance that was plagued by reasons that were foreign to us. (Guerra 2019, min. 25:21)

Old school friends interviewed in the film recall the day with a common adjective: boring. Someone also mentions that all these actions are more for the parents: "it is a thing of the institution with the parents, and the kids are always the hostages". Boredom and estrangement from the cult practices become a regular mention throughout the film.

At the end of *Primario*, Guerra interrogates his parents about their motives for choosing that Catholic school for his education. One said it was nearby their home at the time, so it was a short commute; the other parent said it was recommended by a new neighbor. In this way, like the reasons why many parents baptize their children, the documentary wants to show the little meditated decision by some parents regarding the religious socialization of their children. However, as the author tries to emphasize, this kind of socialization has great consequences for the subjectivity of a person. He is mostly concerned about social segregation directly or indirectly endorsed by the religious institutions. However, above all, what endures the most from their transit through a Catholic religious socialization are feelings of boredom, distance from social life, discordance with reality, and what the author characterizes as "meaningless" symbols and rituals: a "pedagogy of obligatory abulia", he called it.

At the epilogue, Guerra receives a letter from the archbishopric with the acceptance of his request for apostasy. The entire film is a way of constructing and communicating the reasons for his apostasy, while constituting the motivation itself. Through his self-narrative, which is also a collective narrative (as he interviews old classmates, some specialists, and his parents, while showing archival footage), Guerra tries to transform the comfortable lightness with which some people in Argentina live their adscription as mere cultural Catholics, into a greater discomfort. This discomfort might range from the analysis of the irreflexive decisions of parents who baptize their children or send them to a Catholic school, to the questioning of a social context in which the Catholic hierarchy enjoyed great social and political power permeating daily life and public policy. The personal and the political, even in slight ways, are strongly intertwined; in Guerra's account, it is just a matter of self-reflection to realize that there are things in the "family memory box" that do not make sense to him anymore. In this sense, its potential audience seems even broader than that of other analyzed self-narratives, and although the reasons for his apostasy seem like the other reasons already reported, he analyzes them from the profound banality of everyday life.

3.5. A 'Foretold' Collective Apostasy in a Digital Magazine

The last self-narrative analyzed was published by Lin Pao Raffetta, one of the main referents at the national level of *Apostasía Colectiva*. Although Lin Pao had already given an account of their militancy as an apostate in some posts on their now inactive personal blog, in September 2020, they published the article '*Argentina. Crónica de una Apostasía Anunciada*' (Argentina. Chronicle of an Apostasy Foretold), a publication at *Revista de Prensa Alternativas*. The selection of the medium in which Lin Pao published their self-narrative appears to be a continuation of their previous personal register, both in linguistic aspects and cultural environment. During the last decade, digital magazines or webzines have continued to be a space for personal expression that was previously provided by personal blogs, taking up some elements of their specific languages and stimulating cultural and social debates aimed at a more segmented audience (Vigna 2020).

Lin Pao's narrative is, above all, a personal memory, and a reconstruction of more than a decade of advocacy in the Collective Apostasy Campaign: the first actions mobilized by RIMA, the meetings and help provided by atheists who had previously apostatized, and the first collective apostasy in March 2009, among other episodes. The publication states that from more than one thousand apostasies that were delivered to the Archbishopric of Buenos Aires in that first demonstration, the Church did not prosecute a single one. The chronicle also gives an account of moments of less public visibility, although the campaign continued "supporting the website with its sample letters ready to download, giving information through social networks, accompanying collective apostasies of other groups". In turn, integrated into CAEL, *Apostasía Colectiva* was "lobbying to promote secular municipal laws, insisting on the removal of religious symbols in public space, opposing the transfer of land and real estate of the City [of Buenos Aires] to the Catholic Church" (Raffetta 2020).

The story becomes more personal when, after participating in the first apostasy and being interviewed by the media, Lin Pao was fired from their position as a professor at the University of El Salvador, a Jesuit university. The reason? Their public expressions on apostasy and their adverse judgments of the Catholic Church, were both considered misconducts by the university statute. Teachers are prohibited from disseminating or adhering to conceptions that oppose the Catholic doctrine, as pointed out by a reproduced letter fragment. Although legal action for labor discrimination was initiated by the author, in 2013, Cardinal Bergoglio, who was the highest authority of that institution, was elected pope, and lawyers advised that Lin Pao should accept a small financial compensation at the risk of losing everything (Raffetta 2020). The situation of dismissal that was considered arbitrary and discriminatory by the activist appears as one of the main reasons in their account of apostasy; being an apostate in 2009 could have serious personal consequences.

Six months later, after much insistence, Lin Pao received a notification from the archbishopric: the 'apostate' status has been registered in their baptismal record. However, that is not the end of the process: the National Personal Data Protection Law 25,326 establishes that religious affiliation data are sensitive personal information and therefore it is prohibited to store them. For this reason, like other people who have apostatized, a long litigation began in administrative and judicial instances, so that the Catholic Church could abide by the provisions of national civil law and eliminate its archived apostate's baptismal records. After the chronicle was published, the National Agency of Personal Data ordered some dioceses of the Catholic Church to erase Lin Pao's baptismal records (Alcaraz 2020).

The story jumps to the winter of 2018, where, faced with the conservative opinions of the Catholic Church and neo-Pentecostal allies against the project to legalize abortion, Raffetta warns of a "wave of repudiation that was quickly reflected in an immediate demand for separation from the Church and the State and an exponential increase in consultations and downloads of the model letter to apostatize". Raffetta suggests here, as the title of their self-narrative, that it was a "foretold apostasy", because, they insisted, the Church continues to try to impose its doctrine, its ideology and its convictions on a society that has already changed. At the same time, they ask about the legitimacy of a "Church governed by the only State in the world that does not have female citizens [and]

prohibits its priests from sexual life and family formation” to even issue an opinion about sexual morality. The narrative ends with a reference of Raffetta’s main audience and now protagonist of the collective fight that was accounted: those “women, cis and trans, queers and lesbians, transvestites, whores, divorced, crazy, liberated and empowered who shout “NOT IN MY NAME” through the act of apostasy” (Raffetta 2020).

Unlike the other narratives presented, Lin Pao’s text exhibits somewhat more bitter-sweet insights: it is both a way to celebrate a collective memory of militancy, and a way to highlight that political secularization underlined by the claims of the Campaign is a long and incomplete process (for example, the elimination of their baptismal record took more than a decade), which may carry negative personal consequences (such as their firing).

4. Discussion

Stories matter, as proposed by social movements scholars (Davis 2002; Polletta 1998, 2006; Polletta and Gardner 2015) and as might be identified through this account of self-narratives of apostasy. Since 2008, some people have wanted to tell others about their apostasy, a practice that until recently was unknown or very negatively received by Argentine society. In some groups, formal Catholic apostasies are no longer considered something reprehensible that should be hidden; in contrast, as they are increasingly associated with struggles for sexual rights, apostasy began to be framed as a political act of protest (Martínez-Ariño 2021; Rabbia and Vaggione 2021), that should be publicized. Although, today, the number of people who have formally apostatized from Catholicism is a minority in relation to the total population, they are in their thousands.

In turn, the public impact caused by their own stories and its media amplification has strongly updated the social debate on political secularization in the country. As other authors have pointed out, this is due to the political opportunities traced by the struggles for sexual and reproductive rights (Di Stefano 2011; Sáez and Faúndes 2018). However, these stories do not circulate in a vacuum: they have repercussions, become plausible, coherent, and significant, as society undergoes significant religious and non-religious changes, and even believers demand greater self-determination in their beliefs and in their daily lives.

Through various resources of self-expression, apostate self-narratives moved from the personal sphere from the margins of public communication; from the virtual spaces of the blogosphere to social media, and from there to traditional media, books, and documentaries, in just over ten years. Thus, storytellers tried to take advantage of the available resources for social mobilization and the questioning of their potential audiences, which, as we have seen, have also been designed to expand their intended reach towards even wider borders and more diverse audiences.

Apostates’ narratives analyzed here coincide in their main motivation: the need to generate social debate around the public role of the Catholic Church in the country and its impact in the daily life. The apostasy and its public narration are understood as a relevant way of pushing people to ask the apostates why they apostatized. They are considered the starting point of a social debate. In addition, whoever recognizes himself as an ‘apostate’ seeks to express with that category a subjective political position that is intelligible in the social context. As Fonti (2019) states, the “gesture” of formal apostasy seems to stage a crisis of representativeness and beliefs, that is, a cognitive and affective crisis of the political role assumed by a former affiliation.

Furthermore, self-narratives of apostasy display at least three main plots. On the one hand, there is a plot that refers to the development of the procedure itself (how to apostatize), which tends to account for a relatively simple procedure that seeks to mobilize especially those who have already decided but are indolent. This plot was more present in the first narratives presented but is also explicit in Calavia’s article (2018). A second plot, on the other hand, emphasizes the reasons for apostatizing (why to apostatize) from a retrospective account of the transit through a personal experience of religious socialization, then a growing distance from the dogmas of faith and Catholic doctrines, the self-recognition

of a new worldview incompatible with them, and the decision to explicitly manifest this distance through apostasy. The narratives of Rodríguez [Rodríguez Kauth \(2013\)](#), but also of [Cebrero \(2018\)](#), for example, comply with this more episodic development, although the first case, due to the nature of the essayist writing, focuses much more on the political arguments of the decision. To some extent, these narratives resonate more with those of the apostates identified by [Bromley \(1998\)](#). The last two self-narratives presented, even with their differences, are somehow narratives that seek to configure a collective memory of apostasy. Guerra's *Primario* emphasizes through cinematographic language the ways in which religious socialization at an early age is inscribed in the bodies of his school friends and himself; Raffetta gives an account of a militant narrative, crossed by the consequences that it generates in their own life, while at the same time making an account of an incomplete process at the time of its writing (the physical destruction of their baptismal records).

The motives for apostasy are accumulated throughout the enumerations. They can be characterized in three types: personal, sociopolitical, and procedural motives. The procedural ones are the clearest, since most of the self-narratives reported here account for procedures that, although they may take time and effort, are relatively simple. It is, of course, a small insight directed by an intentionally selected corpus, since in social networks it is possible to identify many narratives of apostasies that were more difficult or that could never be completed.

Personal motives, on the other hand, account for the adoption of new worldviews by apostates, such as atheism and agnosticism, philosophies associated with critical rationalism, dialectical materialism, and feminism, while they are perceived as highly incompatible with the doctrines of the Catholic Church. In these cases, apostasy comes to provide personal coherence to their ways of thinking about the world, which rival the uncritical positions of Catholic dogma. The reasons that emphasize the autonomy of each person when deciding what to believe and what religion to belong to (if there is one) are also personal. These motives serve to promote the non-baptism of young children or a critical rereading of the compulsory baptism to which they were subjected. Finally, although in more subtle ways, there is also a certain apathy towards religion; it is not framed as a question of a marked indifferentism, because otherwise the apostasy itself would not be significant, but in some narratives, especially in Guerra's and Cebrero's, the lack of interest and the perceived distance regarding Catholic symbols, rituals and beliefs adds a special dimension to the act of apostasy. In their own way, these latest narratives have increasingly promoted a pedagogy of discomfort, a desire that people who have been baptized by the Catholic Church reflect on why they continue to be part of an institution that sometimes generates apathy or explicit distancing.

However, personal motives are never presented alone; they are always linked with diverse sociopolitical arguments. Above all, the rejection of the Church's doctrine on issues of sexual morality is mentioned, which is considered a source of segregation and discrimination, and which is expressed in its clear opposition to sexual and reproductive rights. In some cases, especially in the first narratives analyzed, it is also associated with sexual abuse by priests. Other sociopolitical motives are updated statements in line of the tradition of anticlericalism in Argentina ([Di Stefano and Zanca 2013](#); [Mancini 2011](#)). For example, the conception of the official positions of the Catholic Church as endorsing the death penalty or the supposed justification of poverty and the submission of people. In turn, the past and present political interference of the Catholic Church is also mentioned. Its support for either democratic or totalitarian regimes, and even its role during the last military dictatorship in Argentina, are exposed. Another sociopolitical reason has to do with the Church's government itself, which is conceived as a foreign non-democratic and exclusivist State, which seeks to detent power in other countries, such as Argentina. Finally, several narratives called the attention toward what they conceive as the privileged status of the Catholic Church (federal government fundings, several tax privileges, etc.) The accumulation of sociopolitical motives that lead some people to apostatize, as the self-

narratives reviewed here show, vary significantly, although it is possible to notice that issues of sexual rights acquire an increasing weight in the stories of recent years.

Although it is not the purpose of this work, it is important to highlight how the self-narratives of apostasy have resorted to several media and platforms, as a way of scaling up their impacts: blogs, social networks and webzines have prompted political biographies that are challenged by the need to reproduce online the same contradictory and open-ended work that characterizes political identity constructions. The attention of traditional news media stimulated an amplification of social discussion, while presenting greater challenges to apostasy advocates in terms of generating more inclusive ways of narrating their personal experiences. In future research, it would be relevant to explore how the logistics of collective action and connective action—which make the highly personalized, socially mediated communication processes fundamental for structuring social claims (Bennett and Segerberg 2012)—are affected by the different media and platforms in which these narratives circulate.

In general, self-narratives of apostasy fulfill several functions (pedagogical, socialization of an idea, collective identification, denouncement, mobilization), although the scope of their power of persuasion can only be estimated indirectly by their visibility and public resonance during the resurgence of the Collective Apostasy Campaign in 2018, and the interactions in comments of this initiative. The social repercussion was such that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church issued a series of public positions, although in different directions, with a moderate tone that would not inflame the debate. Even if the Catholic Church in Argentina did not receive federal public funding associated with the number of baptized citizens (a frequent mistaken argument in some narratives of apostates in the first years of the campaign), in 2018, the Episcopal Conference announced that it was studying ways to gradually waive the financial support it received from the state (Perfil.com 2018). In November of the same year, in its annual document, the Episcopal Conference pointed out that the debate on legal abortion, the consequent campaigns of apostasy and denunciations of sexual abuse committed by priests, had generated social rejection, unrest and attacks on the Church and the figure of the pope (Conferencia Episcopal Argentina 2018). In practical terms, the formal procedures for apostasy began to differ according to each diocese: while in some bishoprics they became simpler, and could even be fulfilled by email or WhatsApp, in others, especially in the most conservative regions of the country, the procedures became more cumbersome, demanding personal interviews with priests to discourage the practice.

In summary, as a reservoir of moral and sociopolitical repertoires, with notable efforts to expand the potential audience of the stories, and through very distinctive registers, styles, and the available arguments, the self-narratives of apostasy have become an important resource for mobilizing—sometimes from the margins—the Campaign of Collective Apostasy. Although they do not specifically respond to coordinated actions from the campaign, they constitute an experiential knowledge that circulates through many spaces and audiences, which has helped to configure a resignification of apostasy as a sociopolitical practice of protest. By promoting an identification in their audiences and from their media resonance, a collective identification arises (the ‘apostates’), an identification that is even worth spreading and celebrating. From personal stories to collective narratives, people who tell of how and why they apostatize have kept a campaign running that, otherwise, would only be based on the personal efforts of a handful of activists.

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