The consumption of alcohol in the Lubavitch Movement in Buenos Aires. Diversity of meanings.

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ABSTRACT:
The practice of drinking vodka belongs to the core of identity reproduction processes inside the HabadLubavitch movement. Thisarticle accounts of the various meanings of this practice. The analysis is based on the concepts of globalization and territorialization, analyzing their potentialities when articulated with the concept of imaginary. Taking these concepts into account, we aim at analyzing the heterogeneity of religious groups.

Introduction:

Amongst the practices of sociality of those involved in the Hasidic[1] movement of *Chabad Lubavitch,* is the celebration of *farbrengen*, for which the consumption of vodka serves as a central component. In this article we aim to analyze the various meanings produced by this central practice in terms of the distinctions between imaginaries of globalization (IG) and imaginaries of territorialization (IT)[2], by addressing a host of theoretical challenges geared towards the cultural dimension of globalization processes.

The *farbrengen* and the consumption of vodka are practices subject to varied interpretations by the social actors whose identity identifications[3] are tied to their self-positioning in respect to said practices. Our case is framed along the lines of globalization studies and religious transnationality[4]. The transnationalization of *Chabad* carries with it a circulation of cultural markers, such as vodka, whose production of meaning entails a tension between IG and IT. If we take vodka to be a traditional Russian drink, and assume that its consumption by Argentine Jews reflects the "Russification" of Jewish identity, then this would be a simplification based on the ontology of the marker. Going beyond "Russification", what we observe is that the understandings of the practices and meanings are debated within the movement. For some, these practices harken back to Russia, and this perception resonates with how they position themselves and their identification with the Chabad. For others, the signifier lies in a global space that nullifies territorial differences, thus "de-Russifiying" the meaning. Hence, rather than analyzing processes of globalization, territorialization, and de-territorialization that center upon the "objective" properties of the signifier, we base our analysis on the construction of the

1. Jewish movement emerging from Eastern Europe and dating back to the 19th Century.
2. We consider the term *territorialization* to be the most accurate, with the understanding that one of the characteristics of the territory is defining its borders (Haesbaert, 1995), and preferring the use of "territorialization" over "territory" in order to deconstruct the natural progression of social phenomena.
3. The concept of identity has been the object of many appropriations and debate. The position of Brubaker and Cooper (2000), appears to be the most radical given their argument to abandon the term, replacing it with the concept of identification. Other authors have considered the possibility of maintaining it, freeing it from its essentialist connotations (Kauffman, 2004). It is a serious debate that entails its positioning with respect to other concepts including ethnicity and culture (Brubaker, 2002, Calhoun, 2003).
4. The concepts of transnationality and globalization do not necessarily refer to the same processes. One distinction can be found in Canclini, 1998. Framing of a conceptual taxonomy proves difficult especially when there are disputes over the extents and meanings of the concepts. At the same time, the social dynamics express combined forms of mundialization, transnationalization and globalization.

imaginaries.

This article is the product of a research period spanning between 2003 and 2009 in the *Chabad Lubavitch* community of Buenos Aires, conducted through participant observation and in-depth interviews framed within a constructivist paradigm.

Chabad Lubavitch is a Hasidic movement emerging in Russia in the nineteenth century. A series of processes led to the migration of its principal leaders to the United States (Gutwirth, 2004). From there, Manachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh leader of the dynasty, would organize a body of emissaries charged with the task of transnationally expanding the corpus of *Chabad* beliefs. For Schneerson, the world was taking the final steps of the Messianic era, which should be accelerated upon the fulfillment of religious precepts. The emissaries served as the front line responsible for leading the "Jewish people" along the Messianic road. Amongst these activists, Dov Ber Baumgartem arrived in Argentina in the fifties, and brought together a group of youths that would become the core of the *Chabad* movement in the country. Unlike the processes that gave origin to the Jewish population in Argentina (Mirelman, 1998), the growth of *Chabad* was not dependent on migratory processes, rather to the actions of an emissary that was capable of transnationalizing a set of beliefs and practices. After Baumgartem's death, one of his disciples, Tzvi Grunblatt, would assume the role of principal emissary. Under his command, the institutionalization, visualization and growth of the community took place. In this sense, *Chabad* has served as a global process of revitalization of orthodox and ultra-orthodox Judaism which has expressed itself on various national settings such as in France (Podselver, 2010), Canada (Shaffir, 1974), Brazil (Topel, 2005), The United States (Danzger, 1989) and Israel (Aviad, 1983; Lehmann and Siebzehner, 2006).

The *Chabad* community has been reproduced in Argentina as well as other national platforms, due to a set of global and transnational practices. Shandler (2009) highlights the significance behind the circulation of Schneerson's image as a means of creating a sense of community. These communication technologies allow for ties to be maintained amongst emissaries separated from the core of religious life (Berman, 2009). The translation of books from English into Spanish and their commercialization in Argentina correlates with the production of a transnational field of circulation of discourse (Baredes and Tribisi, 2013). And likewise, a great number of students of the religious formation of *Chabad* complete their studies in Israel and the United States. The transnational circulation of those followers of the movement is also exhibited in the coming together of marriages of people from different countries (Harari, 2002).

However, even if we can see here transnational dimensions, the institutional organization tends to project a national dimension. For example, the majority of the Rabbis that conduct *Chabad* Houses in Argentina, are Argentinians.

This begs the question: How can the concepts of globalization, territorialization, and de-territorialization help us to understand the consumption of alcohol in *Chabad* practices?

Religion and Globalization.

In their critique of the "social modernist theory", Vásquez and Marquardt highlight the tendency to perceive cultural territories as entities with stable borders and internal homogeneity, which inhibits seeing the permeability of the borders between groups (2003:27). This manner of conceiving of the relationship between culture and territory can also be applied on a grander scale, as Hannerz avails us of the organic association between peoples, territories, and forms, alongside political organizations and cultures (Hannerz, 1996: 37-38). The critique of this analytical perspective has driven Hannerz to propose the concept of a global acumen to account for the fluid meanings that circulate transnationally. Subsequently, the understanding of contemporary cultural processes distances us from understanding cultural territories, defined according to their defined frontiers (Ortiz, 1997). Deterritorialization, understood as the separation between practice and its regional context or national origin, becomes all the more pronounced with processes of globalization deepening at the end of the twentieth century. The increase of cultural flows brings about the production of dynamics between globalization, territorialization, and deterritorialization that, according to Motta's (2001) analysis regarding Afro-Brazilian religions, produce a process of deterritorialization and de-ethnicization of the signifiers while inserting them in the market of magical and religious goods. Other studies place an emphasis on how cultural signifiers are reappropriated inside flexible cultural territories with diffuse borders. These kinds of processes can be seen at work in the different ways that North American films are viewed relative to nationality or in the McDonalds permutations in different national contexts (Abélès, 2012: 68-70). These studies reveal how cultural territories persist inside which certain ways of appropriating global signifiers are possible, where others are not. And yet these territories do not harbor stable nor impermeable cultures, rather, they are continuously redefining themselves according to the dynamic between deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

The political, socioeconomic, and cultural transformations from the last decades of the twentieth century redefined the ways of researching religious phenomena amongst the social scientists of Argentina. The growth of anthropological and sociological research in religion in this country is marked by a break which in the eighties signified a shift from a religious sociology focused on Catholicism with an intent to better pastoral affairs, to an anthropology and sociology with an academic approach to religion, sustained by the use of qualitative analysis (Frigerio, 1993). This was the beginning of research concerning Pentecostal and Afro-Brazilian religions, alongside an interest in New Religious Movements and the processes of conversion (Carozzi and Frigerio, 1994, Soneira, 1995).

With the study of New Religious Movements, social scientists delved into thinking over processes of transnationalization and globalization. Frigerio (2002) has analyzed this phenomenon from the difference between transnationalism from above and from below (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999), simultaneously researching the tensions between the Argentinization and Africanization that permeated throughout immersion strategies of Afro-religions in the public space. Semán and Moreira (1998) have produced an interesting approach at analyzing the relocation of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Argentina in terms of interpretive frames. Popular Catholic cults have, in part, been an investigative focus in a series of work centered on regional migrations, where they have been analyzed in terms of how, according to religion, populations have recreated their ethnic identifications (Grimson, 1999).

There remains a lack of understanding for how the above mentioned questions relate to Jews in particular. Senkman (2007) who analyzes the dynamics between nationalization and transnationalization in Argentinian Jews, still fails to include the Orthodox. Moreover, Brauner's (2009) seminal study regarding Orthodox Jews and the understanding of religious Judaism in Argentina, is framed only within the auspices of history with a significant absence of ethnography, in addition to focusing on the ways in which the migrant population inserts itself in the national framework. The growth of sectors that identify themselves as Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox led some scholars and students to question about this process (Jacobson, 2006; Harari, 2002; Libertela, 2004). Research work has been produced about orthodoxy and about Chabad itself, but farbrengen had not been sufficiently analyzed, perhaps because it was not feasible for female scholars to do participant observation in such a male centered activity. Harari's theoretical framework, centered on Durkheimian sociology, does not take into account that the Hasidic perspective between the sacred and the profane is not necessarily about

difference. Rather, it concerns a kind of inter-relationality that may be better analyzed from other anthropological perspectives, as has been the case with definitions of popular religions such as the holistic, cosmological, and relational (Semán, 2001). This is an anthropology that seeks to depart from certain "modernist" frameworks when understanding the religious and has resulted in serious criticisms of the Durkheimian model (Parker, 1995). Another perspective could be to focus less on popular religions (when all is said and done, *Chabad* followers do not place themselves on this socioeconomic sphere) and more on the propagation of *New Age* religions, which, as Huss (2007) affirms, reserve a space for the articulation of joint meanings which draws from the relationship between postmodernity and *Kabbalah*.

The religious scene in Argentina saw many changes at the end of the twentieth century. In part, political and economic transformations such as the return to democracy in 1983 and then the resulting newfound visibility of religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities as well as the welfare system's destructuring and the ensuing effects on identity registration (Feijoo, 2001), respectively, have influenced the creation of spaces of sociability and the reformulation of identities as religious. Globalization has served as a component of these transformations, especially when it concerns migrant populations. In these cases, cultural and religious meanings have been transported from their place of origin to their destination, which produce, as opposed to what is pronounced from the assimilationist theories: "the formation of multiple and hybrid identities at 'borderlands', sites where two or more lifeworlds meet" (Vásquez and Marquadt, 2003: 43). Another manifestation of the process consists of the formation of religious communities as a consequence of the actions of cultural activists that circulate transnationally, which combines the circulation of meanings and symbols that detach from their place of origin and are relocalized. They form spaces of sociability brought together by local actors, but reproduced thanks to a series of transnational practices (Frigerio, 2002). We will see how these function in our case study and what kinds of theoretical questions and challenges our subject will pose.

In the classic study over the rise of nationalism, Anderson maintains that what differentiates communities is not their legitimacy or lack thereof, but rather, the way in which they are imagined (Anderson, 1991: 24). Drawing from that, he states that the religious and national communities differentiate each other in the way they are imagined. The religious communities preceding nationalism were imagined as global, in part due to the existence of sacred languages. With the end of the Middle Ages, these communities began to fragment and territorialize (1991: 35-

39). The nation could then distinguish itself from universal religions by imagining itself as a territorially circumscribed community. When Ortiz maintains that the process of making Nation States assumes the circumscription of the religious to a defined territory in accordance with the imagined nation, he cannot avoid the question of how globalization modifies the place of religion as it simultaneously modifies the place of the Nation State (2005: 106). The universal vocation of the religious can be projected onto the global context, giving social actors access to resources that allow imagining themselves as part of a global community. One way in which this process of identity identification manifests itself is through the formation of communitarianism. Inside these really existing communities (Bauman, 2011) distinguishing marks are recreated. In our case study, religious practices, nutrition, the physical, all tend to produce borders between *Chabad* and other communities. At the same time, these practices which are shared by actors in different national contexts, allow them to imagine themselves as part of a global community. This recreation of the IG can manifest itself according to cultural meanings which, in the same way that they promote the possibility of recreating the IG, also enable the recreation of the IT. In this way, the global circulation of meanings produces a tension between IG and IT, which expresses the heterogeneity of the group.

The immersion of the actor within a universe of meaning gives him access to a set of resources which reproduces an imagined geography which in turn creates a space of significance which allows both him and others to place themselves in regions that are likewise imagined. Our research allowed us to observe the recreation of IG and IT. With the use of IG and IT, actors can assign meaning to specific practices of their respective religious universe. From the point of IT, the actor interprets that a specific practice corresponds with a territoriality. This experience of a territoriality becomes suppressed from the point of IG. This shows that the religious constructs imagined geographies, but these geographies do not necessarily void those IT. Rather, we are dealing with the production of tensions between IG and IT. The case of the tension between unity and fragmentation which are expressed in the tensions between Islamism and Arabism in Muslim communities (Montenegro, 2002) is an example of the kind of tensions that are produced in this kind of religious universe.

As we will show, the production of IG and IT can be explained by Judaic cultural baggage. On the other hand, other ways of defining the practice of alcohol consumption can be explained by the correlation between the perspective of the actors and the set of social imagery related with said practice. This shows us that the borders of the group

are permeable to external meanings being produced both in the Jewish space and the wider social space. The borders of the meanings of the group are diffuse, and this permeability enables the production of diverging meanings with respect to the practices. This interpenetration of the imaginary explains the way in which the actors experiment the religious practices, and are able to pass from one imaginary to another. This passage is possible, on the other hand, by the fact that the actor is never completely enveloped in one imaginary. Even during *farbrengen*, for example, the actor could be checking to see if his cell phone rings.

The IG does not depend on an imaginary of decommunitarization. On the contrary, the consumption of vodka is perceived as a diacritic that differentiates the *Chabad* community from other communities within the Jewish social space. Yet, the community ceases to be perceived as one that is anchored to a specific territory of origin. The *Lubavitchers* do not feel they are a part of the Russian diaspora. *Chabad* is understood as a global community. The meanings that make it up are "de-Russified" through the production of an IG.

The context: The consumption of alcohol in Buenos Aires.

The social actors whose practices we analyze here correspond to urban middle class sectors in the city of Buenos Aires which, going beyond communitarian belonging, maintain economic and social relations with diverse actors outside of the communitarian sphere. This data is increasingly relevant as we conclude that, within these social sectors, there exist shared meanings behind the consumption of alcohol. This does not mean that there is a kind of "Argentinian way" of consuming alcohol. But rather, that there are social imaginaries that permeate the production of meaning within the religious group, alluding to shared spaces of meaning.

Statistical research shows that the consumption of alcohol is an established practice that tends to grow amongst adolescents and middle class youths in Argentina, where boys consume more than girls, and beer is the most consumed drink (SEDRONAR, 2011). This preference for beer is supported by market research (Lazarte, 2012). Compared to beer consumption, vodka is much less preferred, limiting its consumption to its incorporation in mixed drinks. In this sense, the *Chabadian* practice of consuming pure vodka does not extend into the social sphere nor into the kind of socioeconomic sectors that tend to associate with the *Chabadian* community. This manner of consuming alcohol creates a border (diffuse, porous) with the social space, a territory within which a practice that differentiates the religious community from the outside world is recreated.

Yet, certain patterns of *Chabadian* consumption of alcohol tend to resonate with social patterns, such as the matter of drinking in a group, as part of the construction of sociability, inside (it is frowned upon to drink on the street), and where men consume more than women. The *farbrengen* is for all intents a masculine activity that many women interpret as somewhere between the religious and a night out with friends. Therefore, the *Chabadian* practice of alcohol consumption assumes breaks and continuities with the social practices and social imagery.

In terms of the insertion of *Chabad* into the religious social sphere, there is room for a brief reflection concerning the religious constructions of alcohol consumption. Of the religions that prohibit the consumption of alcohol. Pentecostalism is the one that carries a significant presence in the country, constituting 9% of the population in Argentina and 9.1% of the population in the Metropolitan area of Buenos Aires (Mallimaci, 2013: 33). The consumption of alcohol is a central component in Pentecostal discourse. On the one hand, a central topic of the Pentecostal narrative is the solution to social problems like alcoholism. On the other hand, abstinence creates a corporality that resonates with the logic of leadership.

Even though Catholicism does not carry a prohibition on alcohol, the process of constructing Catholic identities does touch upon the problems of its consumption. National festivals for migrant populations in the public sphere tend to be scenes for discussions regarding the consumption of alcohol (Grimson, 1999), due to the fact that these stigmatized populations are concerned about projecting a certain kind of image that legitimates them to the general public. As such, the presence of drunks could produce a less than desired effect. Here we can point to the differences with *Chabad*, where the consumption of alcohol is practiced indoors. The *Chabadian* celebrations in the public space omit the circulation of alcohol. On the other hand, the *Lubavitchers* do not see themselves as a group charged with promoting their legitimacy to Argentinian society.

Farbrengen and the consumption of alcohol.

The practice of consuming alcohol is part of what makes up *farbrengen*, as it is one of the central rituals in the socialization of the *Chabad* male subject[5]. The ritual consists of a gathering where people sit around a table and put forth three central components: *nigunim* (melodies), *mashke* (alcohol), and the words of the *Torah*. The *nigunim* are religious melo-

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5. The consumption of alcohol, in terms of cultural practice, has historically been related with a set of processes having to do with identity production of class, gender, and religion. For further reading look to Dietler (2006).

dies that may be vocalized on different occasions. The singing of *nigun* involves a performance where specific parts of the body are utilized. The actors balance back and forth, elevating their voices and beating the table with their fists or open hands, manifesting the passionate dimension of religiosity. The *nigunim* that are sung in the *farbrengens* are purely melodic without any lyrics[6].

The *nigunim* are essential elements in the formulation of *Chassidism*, as a movement that salvages the passionate and expressive in contraposition to the academic style of Orthodox Judaism. Since its origins, *Chassidic* leaders considered their chants as elements that connected man with his creator, his community, and his leaders and with his own inner being (Chaskalovic, 2003). In this sense, *farbrengen* is the occasion to project a central component of the *Chassidic* experience as well as a corporality that manifests the passionate dimension tied to the development of sensibilities. However, as we shall see, this experience comes about from a particular formulation of a group memory.

Here we take the emotional as that dimension of religious experience that relates to what should be tried and felt before being understood, in the same way as the controlled disinhibition of the body. The emotional, not as an expression of that which is buried within the believer and subverts the rules, but rather as part of a discourse that enlists the duty itself of an emotional experience and which regulates those moments of legitimately manifesting those emotions. *Farbrengen* assumes a performance whose emotional currency runs on a different kind of technology than that of Pentecostal mega-churches. There is no lighting or microphones here, nor music blasting from speakers, only the "austerity" of the men singing around a single table.

We have observed two types of *farbrengen*. On the one hand, the communitarian *farbrengen*, which we must differentiate from the institutional kind. The latter is geared, from an institutional point of view, towards a general public that does not necessarily define itself as *Lubavitcher*. It tends to unite a greater number of assistants and reverts to technological aids, such as video projections, music, and microphones. Here, the expression of an emotional dimension is more contained, given that institutional *farbrengen*, as opposed to communitarian, is seen as a social interaction between the actors and the audience, to use Goffman's terms (Goffman, 1997:90-116), where the community, acting through the institution, projects an image to the outside. The communitarian *far-*

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6. In the same way that Anderson analyzes the creation of global communities through sacred tongues, we can analyze how the absence of language in the *nigunim* contributes to the production of global imaginaries.

brengen is characterized by an absence of audience, seeking instead to showcase proof of a community existence.

The consumption of alcohol, generally vodka or whiskey, is one of the main components of *farbrengen*. Throughout my fieldwork I have seen vodka take center stage. For example, in the institutional *farbrengens*, the assistants partake in vodka before they would whiskey, which again associates the movement with this drink. In other special situations vodka is also the drink of choice amongst other alcoholic beverages. The consumption of alcohol is defined according to the Hebrew term *l'chaim* (to life!). The actors did not speak of drinking alcohol, but rather referenced toasting *l'chaim*, thus placing the act on a sacred sphere.

Finally, the third component is the words of the *Torah*. In the *farbrengens*, there tends to be a person that takes charge. Between *nigunim* and *mashke* they take the floor, explain concepts, doctrine, constructing and projecting the mood and the meaning. This is usually someone in a position of authority and institutionally consecrated above others.

Experimenting upon Judaism from imaginaries of territorialization.

The dispersion of Jews across all corners of the world created relative patterns of identification processes. Rather than live isolated from the place around them, Jewish populations began adopting many of the local practices. Eastern European Jews could be differentiated from those of the Arab world by their language, their food, their dress and musical tones that they incorporated in their prayers. As these populations began losing their territorial anchors, either due to economic migrations or political persecution, their relocalization meant the recreation of identifications with Judaism based on an imaginary relative to their origin territory. Jewish migrants in Argentina conformed to spaces of sociability based on those origin territories, defining themselves under an IT. In this way, synagogues gathered migrants from the same territorial origin (Poland, Russia, central Europe, Aleppo, Damascus, and Morocco).

The Jewish population organized itself under a set of institutions that functioned as plausibility structures of the identification of Jews with their cities of origin, fomenting the experience of differentiation based on what city one came from. Historical development has meant that some identifications have ceased to remain relevant in the processes of identification while other territorializing diacritics persist in the imaginary of the Jewish population.

This process brings with it the need to distinguish between culture and identity (Grimson, 2011). For example, A Jew with Arab origins can play Judeo-European music and study Yiddish. The case of dress proves significant. The Orthodox-ization of Sephardic institutions signified the growing use of *Ashkenazi* Orthodox vestments. The cultural meanings that travel to specified geographic territories now found themselves available for appropriation, without those appropriations necessarily implying a correlation between the consumed meaning and the actor's identification with an origin territory.

It is observed the persistence of a Jewish geographical imaginary that distinguishes territories and enables identifications based on said territorializations. This occurs even if the actors themselves do not come from these territories. In the imaginary of the actors, the Jewish geography is constituted by cultural territories that hark back to past experiences, given that in many of those territories the Jewish presence has either diminished or disappeared. We are dealing with identification resources with a Judaism that can be appropriated or not, and that "compete" with other available resources. At the same time, the actor that organizes his perceptions from the IT could have created his identification with Judaism through transborder circulations. As we will see, the case of Aaron shows how the IT can be recreated within an actor who has migrated from Uruguay to Argentina and that, without ever having been in Poland, identifies as Polish.

Religion, as is defined from certain institutional situations, projects a discourse that recreates the IG. We do not pretend here to propose an academic definition of religion, rather to analyze how certain actors construct a definition of Judaism that, by referencing the idea of divinity, projects an imaginary through which they recreate the experience of identification with the Jewishness.

The meanings behind alcohol consumption.

The analysis of the ways in which meanings circulate across borders, and then reconfigured in new contexts, tends to put forth a previous definition that relates to the ties between the aforementioned meanings and the territory from where it came from. In our case, we could have taken the definition of vodka as a meaning that harks back to Russia, which would mean partaking in a previous definition grounded in historical analysis. However, if we have probed into the production of meaning of vodka, it was because its ties to Russia, more than an objective datum, forms part of the imaginary of some actors. These imaginaries come into tension

with other productions of meaning, a process which express the heterogeneity of the group. In this sense, concepts of globalization, territorialization, and deterritorialization lead us to analyze not the circulation of meanings and signifiers, but rather the production of imaginaries through which meanings are produced that associate those signifiers with territories or with something that goes beyond territoriality. We do not presume to analyze the objective or historical process of the reterritorialization of the signifier, but rather the geographic imaginaries that enable a certain kind of identification with the religious.

Rabbis tend to explain, to those who are beginning to embark on a process of socialization inside *Chabad*, the functions that alcohol performs. It must be consumed, basically in the *farbrengens*, which are conducted on special occasions having to do with Jewish festivities or specifically those of *Chabad*, but also on the birthdays of the believers. They are also organized spontaneously. The vodka is served in glasses and drunken neat, although some would dilute it with juice to make it more digestible.

The *farbrengen* was a moment during which intellectual capacities were set aside for the benefits of sensibility and perceptivity, all the more heightened by the consumption of alcohol. One would attempt to leave behind anything that would inhibit connecting with the divine. The production of the religious subject involved time dedicated to the study of sacred texts complemented with time for *farbrengen*, where intellectual concepts are internalized. *Farbrengen* expresses one's attempt at going outside of oneself to reach a connection with the divine, but as one Rabbi explained, "if you want something to happen, you have to make it happen. Nothing is going to happen if you stay seated. You have to do *l'chaim* and sing as if you were a child, letting yourself go" (Field notes December 17, 2008).

Farbrengen is also an opportunity to teach and reprimand the colleague whom, one figures, is not doing things properly. *Lubavitchers* say that with a glass of vodka in hand it is easier to reprimand and be reprimanded. Hence, *farbrengen* is similarly considered to be a moment where the kind of energy is produced that can enact real changes. In one such *farbrengen*, the head Rabbi reminded those present of the difficult moment they were experiencing due to the kidnapping of two *Chabad* emissaries in Bombay. Notwithstanding, he explained that the *farbrengen* was generating an energy that could change the course of events, leading to the liberation of the emissaries (Field notes November 27, 2008). In this way, a *farbrengen* taking place in Buenos Aires could influence events in India. The community could surpass their geographic limitations to

transcend space, where distances were no longer a barrier, and where everything that happened, happened in the same place. This spatial suppression realized the IG.

The meanings behind the consumption of alcohol do not revert back to any predetermined territoriality. *Lubavitchers* do not see themselves tied to Russia by vodka. On the contrary, drinking vodka is a means of tying themselves to God, whom is the image of the omnipresent sacred and whom does not abide in any particular territory. In this sense, the "de-Russification" of vodka assumes the potential for vodka to be replaced with whiskey. I observed many times how the *Lubavitchers* drank whiskey in the *farbrengens*, without a care, showing their preference for it over vodka. The preference for whiskey reveals a classificatory hierarchy for alcoholic beverages which is not anchored on Chassidism but express the immersion of Lubavitchers in a social context where whiskey ranks higher than vodka. The inclusion of whiskey, in one way or another, results in the superiority of IG over IT.

The IT is present in the way in which some actors tend to inhabit the *Chabad* social space. They perceive that some community practices respond to cultural and territorial particularities. In the way in which they do not identify with the territories to where those practices are rerouted, the realization of such is perceived as a strange act in the way their identification is constructed as religious.

Aaron is tied to *Chabad*, having been ordained as Rabbi in the *yeshiva* (center of religious studies) of said movement. Yet, he defines himself as a member of another *Chassidic* community, the one he feels attached to due to his (imaginary) Polish origins:

> "As much as I like it, as much as *Chabad* has given me a religious framework,
> I have Rabbinic ordination in *Chabad*, etc....but my origins are Polish, and
> *Chabad* is Russian. [...] We never had anything to do with the Russians.
> Nothing to do with the Russians" (Interview 2008).

From an institutional point of view (Rabbinic ordination in *Chabad* institutions, he also sent his sons to *Chabad* school) as well as a framework of socialization, Aaron constitutes part of *Chabad Lubavitch*, but from the experience of an identity identification detached from institutional and communitarian anchors, he defines himself as a part of the Polish Chassidism. His manner of seeing himself as a follower of a Polish *Chassidic* teacher is not dependent on his incorporation into a concrete community, since there is no actually existing community to speak of. Notwithstanding, it is a matter of a perception of self where the subject controls his relationship with the meanings and practices of *Chabad*. For

Aaron, positioning *farbrengen* in an IT is a way of projecting his position in relation to *Chabad*.

> "*Farbrengen* with vodka is a typical thing that a *Chassid* [a Chassidic follower] of *Lubavitch* cannot help but do. [...] I have nothing to do either with *farbrengen* nor with vodka. Even though I follow the same *Shulchan Aruch* (the Code of Jewish Law) and follow the same code of laws, etc., I have nothing to do either with *farbrengen* nor with vodka. I don't drink vodka and I'm not interested in *farbrengen*. (Interview 2008).

For Aaron, vodka is defined from the IT. This creates a distance with *Chabad* based on the relationship between the perception of *Chabad* as a community with Russian origins and its identification with origins that are similarly territorially defined. The case of Ruben, whom after many of years of participating in *Chabad* now is estranged from the movement, expresses the same imaginary.

> The function of vodka was to suppress the *yetzer hara* (evil instinct), giving it something tangible. Following this logic, I proposed doing *farbrengen* with marijuana. First they responded by telling me that marijuana was bad for your health. Ah, because vodka is so good for it. Then they said that it was addictive, as if vodka wasn't. They said it would be a bad example, as if the act of drinking vodka isn't. Finally, I came to the conclusion that they drink vodka because *Chabad* comes from Russia, where that is typical. There they drink vodka like we drink coffee here. If *Chabad* would have come from the Middle East, we would be smoking marijuana. (Interview 2006).

The relationship between vodka consumption and tricking the evil instinct emerges from the IG expressed in a religious tone. And yet, Ruben, in his process of distancing himself from the movement, realizes that what is at stake is territorialized meaning. This territorialization of meaning allows for the construction of a personal discourse of distancing, in the same way that in Aaron's case it allows for the construction of a personal discourse of attachment from the periphery.

The imaginary of danger.

The consumption of alcohol has been a topic that has drawn a certain amount of controversy amongst actors tied to *Chabad*. Iehuda, a man who is part of the community since the time of its formation in Argentina, criticizes the youth of *yeshiva* citing their drunkenness at the *farbrengens* and claiming that there needs to be greater measures of control. Sara regrets that her son has joined *Chabad* and tells me that she has

witnessed him returning home drunk on many occasions. Throughout my fieldwork, I was able to listen to many comments about the youths whom get riled up due to the effects of alcohol and then proceed to act in a way that, according to the movement itself, is defined as counter to what the movement proclaims it should be. The stories vary in degree and intensity, telling of instances where certain people get disrespected to other circumstances of structural damage, and even to cases resulting in alcoholic comas. I should say that during the time that I was in *Chabad* I never witnessed an episode of alcoholic coma or structural damage, but rather they were told to me by informants. Notwithstanding, my objective is not to decipher whether these situations really happened, but rather to come at how the consumption of alcohol, as a motif, circulates within *Chabad* while inciting different accounts and how it is perceived from different imaginaries.

A third imaginary which we have been able to access through accounts and fieldwork observations, is what we call the imaginary of danger (ID), from which the consumption of alcohol is conceived as the cause of drunkenness that leads people to act in ways that can be classified as antisocial, disruptive, or dangerous for them and their fellows. This imaginary comes about not due to the dynamics of the Jewish social space, but rather in correlation with the meanings that consumption of alcohol acquires in the social environment of those related with *Chabad*. We are dealing with an imaginary that is realized through government briefs that speak to the "excesses" of consumption, of television news concerning drunk drivers that run over transients and of politics destined to prevent such accidents, such as controls over alcoholism on the highways. We are dealing with the production of a sense of alcohol best understood by the phrase: "alcohol is dangerous".

Iehuda as well as Sara define the situation of alcohol consumption from an ID, but from different perspectives relative to the *Chabad* space. Iehuda belongs to Chabad, while Sara defines the situation from the point of view of someone outside of *Chabad*.

The actors can go from one imaginary to another in defining the situation. In a case that I was able to witness, at the end of a *farbrengen*, a *Lubavitcher* had slumped over on a couch, affected by the alcohol from a series of *l'chaim*. If, during the *farbrengen*, the consumption of alcohol could be interpreted as an action destined to nullify the Ego and break with the limitations that prevent one from connecting with the divine, the picture of his body over the couch is interpreted in a different way. While we attempted to convince him not to drive back to his house, we were realizing the ID. Before us, we saw a drunk man that could

potentially cause a dangerous action. He was not a man succumbed to the divine. After the *farbrengen*, a man that has had too much to drink is drunk and one whom should not be driving. The only 'steering' he should do is towards the point of spiritual rising that he reached during the *farbrengen*. In this sense, the *farbrengen* is not a ritual that produces altered states of consciousness from which it takes a while to come back from. Rather, the hangover functions in the same way as it would in a non-religious context.

In order to comprehend how the situation can go from one definition to the other, we have to consider the fact that *Lubavitchers* do not consist of an isolated community but rather share in a series of imaginaries that are reproduced from a shared social space. Indeed, we have to recall how they position themselves at a very specific point in history, in the same way that religious identification is manifested in the act of memory through which they insert themselves into a predetermined lineage of believers (cfr. Hervieu-Léger, 2005). In analyzing this dimension of the *Lubavitcher* experience, we observe that the actors pinpoint a golden age that corresponds with the existence of the first *Chassidic* communities in Eastern Europe. These communities would come to condense the sacred attributes that, the actors maintain, are found lacking in *Chassidic* communities of our time. In comparison to these communities of an imagined past, the really existing community inhabited by our actors is defined, according to them, as a pale copy of the past. When a Rabbi tells a *Lubavitcher* that, in the original community of *Chassidim*, "they would not have allowed you to enter, even to look", he is pointing to the spiritual distance between that imagined community and the really existing community inside which the actor reproduces his identification with the *Lubavitchness*.

A *Chassidic* account states that a *Lubavitcher* was returning home from a *farbrengen* singing and completely "drunk". A policeman heard his singing and asked "who goes there?", to which the Lubavitcher responded "bitul is walking!" (Fieldwork notes, September 16, 2008). The term *Bitul* signifies self-nullification. The *Lubavitcher* had managed to reach a state of selflessness to which the *farbrengen*, ideally, should lead one. He had come to know - in a social context where such a response towards authority could mean death- that in reality there was no world, no police, no death, only a sacred totality where the IT has no place in the mind of the Chassid.

The purpose of narrating these accounts of the golden age points to a selective strategy, in order to create examples, to illustrate what things *should be like* in order to measure oneself against. In this case, what the

relationship between a *Chassidic* follower and alcohol *should be like*. In other words, alcohol should be the medium for which the sacred is projected beyond one's time in the *farbrengen*, extending to the space of interactions with the world. Sacralization is impossible for the *Lubavitcher* of the twenty-first century, but its projection through the account is central to the formation of his experience of the self.

The Goffmanesque[7] reference to the transformation of frames could prove useful when analyzing these processes. The contemporary *farbrengens* would be experimented upon as transformative situations by the actors (Goffman, 1991) with respect to the *farbrengens* of the golden age. In this way, the psychotropic properties of alcohol would not, it is believed, reach the same effects produced among the 19th century Chassidic Jews. The knowledge that enacting practices which are an imperfect copy of a now gone original makes it so that the superimposition of frames is not experienced as a refusal of core beliefs of the group[8]. A chain of transformations is created, where the communitarian *farbrengen* is a transformation of an imaginary *farbrengen* that is perceived through the act of memory, and where the institutional *farbrengen* is, at the same time, a transformation of the communitarian.

Conclusion.

Globalization makes the construction of "symbolic global products, without specific national anchors" possible (Canclini, 2008: 47). Could we think of the consumption of vodka as a symbolic global practice, capable of being imagined as such as it is inserted in a corpus of religious practices and beliefs? Religion projects an IG through which signifiers gain meaning. However, because Judaism consists of a dynamic of deterritorialization and territorialization, in part due to the historic processes of diasporization, it promotes the production of IT, in such a way that the signifier is susceptible to the imagination of its ties with a limited territory. Religion contributes to the creation of an IG, even though in this process it appeals to signifiers that are susceptible at being imagined by an IT. From here processes of identity identification are not analyzed from the ontology of the signifier but rather through the imaginaries brought

7. We take allowances at appropriating Goffman's concepts, in which the main frame functions in the imaginary, while for Goffman, the main frames are identified with the real (Nizet and Rigaux, 2005: 74).

8. The place of memory in the construction of frames leads us to formulate questions about how this interrelation functions in the case of Pentecostalism. In Pentecostalism does there exist the possibility of a transformation of frames from memory? Or, in comparison with Judaism, does Pentecostalism offer a short memory?

about by strategies, by the actors, tied to specific spaces of identification construction. In this way, the notions of globalization, territorialization and deterritorialization can prove fruitful not only when the goal is to reveal cultural flows, but also in the analysis of the imaginaries which actors put into play at the time of identifying with specific identity projects.

At the same time, the analysis surrounding the meanings of alcohol consumption allowed us to observe how the reproduction of the religious group does not imply a homogenizing of the meaning of their practices, but rather processes of disputed which implicate the project of imaginaries that resonate with the external imaginaries surrounding the consumption of alcohol. In effect, the consumption of alcohol in social groups tends to be interpreted from various functions, without it necessarily imparting one single definition (Cortés, 1988). Therefore, within *Chabad*, the consumption of alcohol is, at the same time, a territorialized practice, globalized and dangerous. The dynamic of the group consists in the projection and administration of these meanings.

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