

**Religion, Violence, and Addiction in the Northern Border of Mexico: Resemantization of Violence in the Evangelical Rehabilitation Centers at Tijuana, Baja California****Religión, violencia y drogas en la frontera norte de México: la resemantización del mal en los centros de rehabilitación evangélicos de Tijuana, Baja California**Olga Odgers Ortiz<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Classical sociology tends to present religion and addictive processes as factors of alienation, opposed to agency. Violence, for its part, has been analyzed along a broad spectrum that ranges from an instrument of domination—for those who suffer it—to an instrument of action—on the part of those who exercise it. However, there are few analyses that observe how religion, addictions and violence are empirically interrelated in the subjective experience of victims and perpetrators of violent acts. Using a qualitative study based on narrative interviews and participant observation, we analyze the way in which violence is re-signified through religion in three rehabilitation centers for drug addicts located in the northern border region of Mexico. We conclude that spiritual warfare is a central resource for the resemantization of suffering and violence, and constitutes a central aspect of the evangelical model of rehabilitation.

*Keywords:* 1. violence, 2. drug abuse, 3. evangelicals, 4. Tijuana, 5. Mexico-U.S. border.

## RESUMEN

La sociología clásica suele presentar a la religión y a los procesos adictivos como factores de alienación, contrarios a la capacidad de agencia. Por su parte, la violencia ha sido analizada en un amplio espectro, desde un instrumento de dominación –para quien la sufre– o uno de acción –por parte de quien la ejerce–. Sin embargo, existen pocos análisis que observen cómo religión, adicciones y violencia se interrelacionan empíricamente, en la experiencia subjetiva de víctimas y perpetradores de actos violentos. A partir de un estudio cualitativo basado en entrevistas narrativas y observación participante, analizamos la forma en que la violencia es resignificada a través de la religión en tres centros de rehabilitación para farmacodependientes, ubicados en la región fronteriza del norte de México. Concluimos que la guerra espiritual es un recurso central para resemantizar el sufrimiento y la violencia, y constituye un aspecto medular del modelo evangélico de rehabilitación.

*Palabras clave:* 1. violencia, 2. abuso de drogas, 3. evangélicos, 4. Tijuana, 5. frontera México-Estados Unidos.

Received: January 27, 2021

Accepted: May 20, 2021

Available online: March 30, 2022

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## INTRODUCTION

Religions are systems of belief that create meaning and provide believers with practical orientations. That is to say, they establish explanatory systems of the world from which behavioral patterns are produced. Among these systems of meaning, a central place is held by theodicies, which offer explanations about the presence of evil, suffering and death in the world. What causes these events? How can they be alleviated or transcended? Why do the righteous suffer? (Kurtz, 1995). Theodicies incorporate, in varying proportions, the designations of superior beings and the actions carried out by humans, in this or in a previous life.

In Christianity —particularly among Pentecostal movements— the origin of suffering is associated with the spiritual war between good and evil. In the popular interpretations of the Bible, the spiritual war starts with Lucifer’s rebellion, though the central passage is the original sin, in which temptation —symbolized by means of a serpent— leads to disobedience, and consequently, to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The eviction from paradise and suffering as punishment —“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” and “in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children” (Valera, 1960)— ends only for the righteous, on the Day of Reckoning.

This origin myth, which indissolubly associates suffering and sin, will have various implications in the lives of believers. However, the forms in which the relationships among evil, suffering and sin produce particular explanations and practical orientations for everyday life differ in the various versions of Christianity. Thus, to understand the strategies employed to face or avoid evil and to offer solace and resignation for the sufferers, it is necessary to address the historical and sociological supports activated in each case. For that reason, it makes sense to ask, specifically, how do believers mobilize beliefs and rituals to face violence and suffering?

For Vázquez Pasos (2018, pp. 217-218), the spiritual war may be identified in The Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians, where it is pointed out that the struggle “is against the spirits of wickedness in the high places”, though this traditional evangelic meaning has to be distinguished from the prominence acquired by its reinterpretation in the twentieth century among Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches and some facets of Charismatic Renewal (Vázquez Pasos, 2018). As regards the rise of this contemporary reinterpretation, Wynarczyk (1995) states that it appears in the US toward the end of the 1980’s, but it will have a number of expressions in Latin America, where it will be promoted by ministers inspired by the fight against demons carried out by neo-Pentecostal preachers.

Lozano points out that spiritual war becomes more significant in violent contexts such as that of the former paramilitaries in Córdoba, Colombia, where violence is reinterpreted as “material results of the devil’s spiritual actions”. Consequently, “only by means of praying do the victims (...) become capable of making war on the source of war itself” (Lozano Garzón, 2009, pp. 77-78).

From a study of groups that demonstrate against insecurity and violence in Morelos, Mexico, Delgado-Molina (2020) distinguishes groups linked to emotional Catholicism that hold that evil may “take the physical, geographic or a personal-interior space” from those that come from

conservative Catholicism, in which evil “is a structural force, expressed as an ideology” (Delgado-Molina, 2020, p. 18).

Valenzuela and Odgers (2014) report that in the municipality of Tijuana, Mexico, Catholics incorporate a larger number of social elements in their interpretation of violence, Evangelicals articulate it with political-order argumentations, while for Jehovah’s Witnesses the eschatological dimension prevails.

The reflection on evil and suffering is linked to the construction of the meaning of disease and interpretations of the actions of people and/or important institutions as they affect individual health (Augé & Herzlich, 1984). Although the systems of meaning that give rise to diagnoses and therapeutic processes may be religious or scientific, in the individuals’ empirical experience, health care attention strategies usually combine, in variable proportions, various available therapies, either scientific or religious. In the everyday reality, the boundary between these and those is more permeable than is usually supposed (Frigerio, 2019). Particularly, in Latin America, the combination of medical attention with ritual practice, religious or spiritual, from a matrix of meaning that intends to explain the origin of evil, giving the disease a meaning and offering solace to the sufferer. In this way, in socio-culturally constructed etiologic and nosologic thinking, there is a linking of biomedical and religious logics that guide the subjects’ concrete actions in the face of their ailments. This linkage is semantically associated with the reflection on good and evil, in its broadest sense.

Consequently, the various interpretations of evil would also match various prescriptions, intended to keep it at a distance or to restrict its effects. These prescriptions may be seen at various scales. In Mexico, they appear in the public space as cenotaphs and *humilladeros*,<sup>2</sup> which try to prevent misfortune from entering the neighborhoods where the faithful abide (Gaytán Alcalá, 2020). Domestic spaces are marked by protective objects such as crucifixes, shrines and candles (De la Torre & Salas, 2020; Fierro Hernández, 2018). In the intimate sphere, acts of protection may make use of objects —such as scapulars—, writing on the body —religious tattoos— (López-Escobosa, 2018), or even be stripped of material supports, as making the sign of the cross in the presence of evil (Idoyaga Molina, 2001). Considering the above, in the present article we intend to answer the following question: how are violence and suffering reinterpreted in the evangelical rehabilitation centers (ERCs)?

In order to incorporate the analysis of violence, we make use of Wieviorka’s proposal (2003, 2005, 2012), and enquire about the way three ERCs in the municipality of Tijuana resemanticize violence and suffering by means of the theodicies they produce, recreate and transmit via their therapeutic attention model. In like manner, we analyze the way in which the abstract idea of evil turns into suffering produced by violence and disease, linking these with the addiction processes of drug consumption.

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<sup>2</sup> A sort of wayside shrine; the Royal Spanish Academy defines it as “a place of worship at the gates of towns with a cross or an image” (translator’s note).

To do so, in the first section we discuss the categories of evil and violence in relation to subjectivation and de-subjectivation processes. In the second, we describe the rehabilitation centers under study and the research methodology. The third section presents the voices of in-patients and directors of ERCs, who narrate the suffering and violence in their lives. The fourth section approaches the resemantization of suffering and violence in the context of a spiritual war. We conclude with a reflection on the implications of the resemantization strategies in the subjectivation and de-subjectivation processes in these mutual-help therapeutic communities.

#### SUBJECTIVATION AND DE-SUBJECTIVATION IN THE ANALYSIS OF VIOLENCE

Unlike philosophy, where the discussion of evil is central —e.g., Schopenhauer, Sartre—; in sociology it holds a marginal place, making room for the analysis of its social manifestations such as war, criminality and violence. For Giner (2015), the sociology of evil approaches violence considering it inherent to human society and particularly focusing on the intentional damage that is exercised by actors that consider it necessary. Such characterization as *necessary evil* is the one that serves as legitimation argument for those who exercise or legitimize violence (2015, p.10). In this way, it is pertinent to analyze the production of sociodicies, in their function of ideological justifications of evil in our behavior. One can distinguish between the construction of the purposefully inflicted evil —malice— as distinct from that deemed unavoidable or justified in the search for a greater good (Giner, 2015).

As an expression of evil, conversely, violence has been a privileged object of reflection in social sciences. Wieviorka (2005) identifies three main orientations in classic sociology. From the functionalist standpoint, violence is a dysfunction, a response to a crisis; from the theory of resource mobilization, it is another resource the actors instrumentally resort to; while from a culturalist standpoint, the causes and forms taken by violence should be explained in relation to cultural specificities (Wieviorka, 2005).

The relationship between violence and emotion is approached from microsociology, in conjunction with psychology, incorporating topics such as cruelty, rage (Collins, 1974), frustration or fear (Collins, 2009).

Briceño-León (2016) considers that sociology of violence was an emergent field in the nineties, when new crimes that could not be explained from the sociology of deviation or traditional criminology appeared. In this way, together with epidemiology and public health care, the sociology of violence refocuses on the characterization of victims, instead of analyzing the aggressors.

Conversely, for Wieviorka, the main contribution of sociology would come from focusing on the protagonist of the violent action, struggling to find the meaning the actors themselves give to their actions (Wieviorka, 2003, 2005). Then, this author proposes the analysis of violence from subjectivation and de-subjectivation processes, starting with a critical review of the romanticized vision of the subject, disclosing a dark side: the *anti-subject* (Wieviorka, 2012).

Taking Joas (1991) and Touraine (2007) as starting points, Wieviorka states that subject is not tantamount to actor: the former is the capability that individuals have to become actors, to build their own existence, control their experience, take responsibility. The individual does not transform into subject once and for all; subjectivation processes are fragile and ephemeral.

For Touraine (2007), by assuming themselves as subjects, the individuals recognize the others' subjectivation capability, such recognition will be central to understand their logic of action (Wieviorka, 2012). Conversely, Wieviorka underscores that history displays subjects who employ non-recognition, destructive capability, violence. This reality demands the construction of differentiated analytical categories to understand the subjects' obscure expressions. To do so, the author proposes to distinguish two processes: subjectivation and de-subjectivation. The former would lead to the construction of the subject, in the sense of Touraine; while the latter, to the creation of the *non-subject* who is characterized on the basis of being considered stripped of any action capacity, thereby, not being considered responsible of the actions carried out (or not). This idea concurs with Arendt's (2006) statement on the banality of evil.

However, according to a third variant, the construction of the actor is accompanied by the denial of the other as a subject, producing what Wieviorka calls the *anti-subject*. As opposed to the non-subject, the anti-subject recognizes his or her capability of action / transformation of the world, but by disregarding the other as a subject, his or her deeds may be oriented toward violence or destruction (Wieviorka, 2012).

From this analytical standpoint, five different expressions of violence may be identified. First, violence as a *reaction to the loss of meaning*, as a reaction in the presence of a change the actor considers as leading toward a loss of traditional meaning (for example, loss of values); this can create room for conservative violence. Here, *fundamentalist violence* may be identified as an extreme reaction toward what is considered a weakening of meaning (Wieviorka, 2003).

The second expression of violence, associated with *lack of meaning*, would be represented by the banality of evil, stated by Arendt (2006). This would be the case of violence exercised by a non-subject (from de-subjectivation processes), and would include violence as obedience.

Conversely, the third one would group forms of *intentional violence*, gratuitous (associated with cruelty and sadism). That is to say, forms of violence exercised by the anti-subject, who starts from the non-recognition of the other. We would be in the face of the dark side of subjectivation process (Wieviorka, 2003).

In the fourth place, *fundamental violence*; characterized as a reaction against a threat, as a survival instinct. This form of violence may eventually become a phase previous to the construction of the subject.

Finally, for Wieviorka (2005), the fifth expression of violence would be *founding violence*, which may unleash subjectivation processes. This is the violence in which the subject seeks the transformation of the world based on a critique of the existing reality, and oriented by an —

individual or collective— project of action, without this implying the denial of the other as a subject.

Now, to what extent do the analytical proposals above allow understanding the way in which, within specific sociohistorical contexts, violence and the cessation of violence are produced? And again, how is violence resemanticized once it is left behind?

In the ERCs located at the border region in the north of Mexico, the reinterpretation of violence, realized through a religious prism, acquires a dual nature. On the one hand, it corresponds to the resemanticization of suffering itself, associated with the violence received and with the consequences of the problematic use of substances—suffering as a disease. Here, the corporeal dimension is central. For the purposes of this article, we analyze the corporeal dimension from the standpoint of Embodiment Theory (Csordas, 1993), considering corporalities as center of the experience from which beings become in the world. Consequently, we pay special attention to somatic means of attention, understood as the dispositions, culturally constructed, to pay attention to and with the body (Odgers-Ortiz, Csordas, Bojorquez-Chapela, & Olivas-Hernández, 2020).

On the other hand, we find the resemanticization of violence perpetrated by former addicts. Here, the search for meaning is related to guilt, regret and forgiveness as foundations for the reconstruction of the subject. Following this, we present some of the characteristics of the studied ERCs in order to show the way violence resemanticization processes are carried out.

#### EVANGELIC REHABILITATION CENTERS ON THE MEXICAN NORTHERN BORDER

The border city of Tijuana is, owing to its geographic location, a key region for drug trafficking toward the United States, preserving thus the hardly honorable title of Vice City (Félix Berumen, 2003). However, by the end of the twentieth century, the main problem of the region was drug trafficking, not consumption. It was the development of new synthetic drugs that aggravated the problematic consumption in the region (Jiménez Silvestre & Castillo Franco, 2011). In spite of this, federal resources remained concentrated on combatting drug trafficking, while attention for addictions was marginal. In this way, in response to insufficient attention to this public health problem, mutual aid therapeutic communities emerged, known as rehabilitation centers (RC) (Odgers Ortiz & Olivas-Hernández, 2019).

RC were created in the region in the 1980's, replicating the Alcoholics Anonymous' model, based on the Twelve-Step model, but means of prioritizing inpatient over outpatient attention. RC experienced an accelerated growth in the first decade of this century, going from 93 centers in 2001 (González, 2001), to more than 230 by 2013 (Galaviz & Odgers Ortiz, 2014). Most of the RC are self-declared as Christian, or as spiritual (with no specific religious ascription) (Galaviz & Odgers Ortiz, 2014).

To carry out the qualitative research that supports this article, we selected three ERCs —two for men, one for women— because of longevity, stability in their operation, and disposition of the

directors to participate in the study.<sup>3</sup> In them we carried out 69 in-depth semi-structured interviews and gathered testimonies<sup>4</sup> from 14 former patients (García Hernández, 2018). Likewise, we carried out participant observation for 18 months, with recurrent visits, including working days, Sundays, and holidays. Participant observations, registered in field diaries, described the daily and religious activities carried out, collectively or individually.

The interviews and testimonies were gathered and analyzed from the standpoint of narrative identities (Andrews, 2002). In this way, we assume that we built ourselves from our stories by selecting the episodes we narrate, building a pattern and providing logical coherence to our actions to explain the present on the basis of our past, and to project ourselves toward the future, as a part of this sequence. Consequently, in the narrations presented here, the accuracy of facts is not as important as the meaning the narrator gives them.

The observed ERCs are self-managed units that operate in precarious conditions, charging minimal admission fees.<sup>5</sup> Those who apply for admission but with no resources to pay are excused from payment.

Two of the centers under study accept enforced admissions at the request of the relatives of those affected.<sup>6</sup> Such ERCs are confinement structures, from which the internees will be released after a period from three to six months, previously defined. In a third ERC, there are admission and dismissal rules, though complying with them depends on the disposition, willingness and discipline of the in-patients themselves.

One of the centers (ERC #1) was founded by a former drug user, who started his problematic consumption when he was a migrant in the US, where he was enrolled in the armed forces and was deployed. After his rehab and religious conversion, he decided to return to Tijuana and engage in the rehab of other individuals. The ERC he manages has been in operation for some decades now.

The female center (ERC #2) was created by the wife of the director of ERC #1, in the face of the need to have one for women: following evangelical regulatory orientations, mixed centers are

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<sup>3</sup> This article comes from the collective project “La oferta terapéutica religiosa de los centros evangélicos de rehabilitación en la región fronteriza de Tijuana” [Religious therapeutic offerings of evangelical rehabilitation centers in the border region of Tijuana] with funding from Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CB-2011-166635). The project was approved by the Ethical Committee for Health and Population of El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. The interviews presented were conducted by Olga Odgers Ortiz, Gloria Galaviz, Olga Olivas Hernández, Ebhermi García, Lizbeth López, and Ramiro Jaimez. Further information about the methodology available at <https://proyecto166635.wixsite.com/166635/proyecto>

<sup>4</sup> The testimonies are first-person narrations of life stories, in which the positive effects of finding God are underscored by describing supernatural events associated to liminal situations.

<sup>5</sup> In 2015, fees for a 3-month period were about 260 USD, at the exchange rate of that year.

<sup>6</sup> The current legislation allows enforced admissions “in case of users who require urgent attention or pose a grave imminent danger to themselves or others”. The observed ERCs follow the protocol as per Norma Oficial Mexicana [Mexican Official Norm] NOM-028-SSA2-2009 (Conadic, 2009, p. 30).

not admissible. In the region, ERCs for women are scarce, so the demand for attention demand usually surpasses the available supply (Galaviz & Odgers Ortiz, 2014).

The third center (ERC #3) came from an evangelical mission that visited a penitentiary center to offer spiritual and rehab support. At this stage, the present-day director noticed that frequently in-patients were released at nightfall. Since they had nowhere to go—because they were migrants, largely—they returned to life on the streets, doing drugs, and being exposed to delinquency networks. In order to face this situation, they created a halfway house for recently released individuals, which progressively turned into a 24-hour open-door ERC.

The everyday life inside ERCs is defined by religious activities, with a rigorous religious routine accompanied by specific rituals—prayers, praise, and preaching, among others. These include a short prayer at the moment of waking up, morning religious service, productive activities and maintenance of the space, prayers before meals, sports, leisure, and bible school, religious service and another short prayer before sleeping. On Sundays, religious activities take even longer, incorporating people external to the rehab center, mainly relatives, converted former addicts who attend to attest, as well as guest preachers who officiate in other churches in the region.

In line with the tendencies of regional religious change (Galaviz, Odgers, & Hernández, 2009; Jaimes Martínez & Montalvo González, 2019), the observed ERCs may be classified as Evangelical-Pentecostals and have similar characteristics to those observed in other Latin American contexts (Algranti and Mosqueira, 2018; Castrillon Valderrutén, 2008; Güelman, 2018). Pentecostalism is characterized by the centrality of the belief in the Holy Spirit's gifts and by an emotive ritual practice, induced by music, dance, narration of liminal experiences, et cetera; such states might end up in trance, perceived as the Baptism of Fire, or the reception of the Holy Spirit. These characteristics prevail in the three centers, but they prefer to refer to themselves only as Christian; they even reject the name Pentecostal, since they do not have -nor do they seek-institutional links with the Pentecostal churches in the region.

Owing to the laxity of the links they keep with local churches, in the ERCs there is a relative liberty to interpret the Bible. The ritual practice is reproduced by means of Bible schools set up in the facilities, where the future founders of new ERCs are trained. This logic confers fluidity on the reproduction of their interpretative and ritual model, shaped around healing processes. Hence, their attention model is the result of empirical knowledge transmitted from graduates to new residents, where the symbolic reinterpretation of the personal rehabilitation experience is at once a heuristic resource and a source of legitimation. The conception of the body is central in this model to resemanticize violence and addiction (Odgers-Ortiz et al., 2020).

In spite of the differences, the three rehab centers share the evangelical orientation, Pentecostal sensibility, and lengthy histories that have enabled them to gather experience, hone it and transmit it to numerous generations of graduates. Even if we do not consider them to account for the totality of ERCs in the region, we do think they offer a significant standpoint on the resignification of violence inside ERCs.

## SUFFERING, ADDICTION, AND VIOLENCE IN LIFE STORIES

The collected life stories exhibit different structural characteristics. Some cases are structured as testimonies, others try to follow a chronologic sequence to explain why they took drugs and then their rehabilitation. In all the cases, past, present and future are closely interconnected. In the stories of managers, personal histories intermingle with those of the centers and the explanation of their model of care. In all the cases, with no exception, the narration of the suffering experienced holds an important place in the narration of the process by means of which they started doing drugs and became involved in criminal activities, and in the description of violence they exerted upon third parties.

In this section, we will present some of the elements that appear along these three axes. Due to space constraints, we only present some textual fragments of the stories of six discharged women and six discharged men, and three priests who are or were managers in these centers. However, the analysis considers the whole of the ethnographic material in the interviews and field observation.

### *Suffering in the life stories*

In the life stories we gathered, we verified a stage previous to religious conversion, where suffering and violence —experienced and exercised— are constant. In the case of women, narrations of mistreatment in childhood, sexual abuse during adolescence, and unwanted pregnancies are recurrent. For example, Nadia<sup>7</sup> recounts experiences of physical and psychological mistreatment in childhood:

I got beaten by my stepmother... I didn't have a caress from anyone in my family (...) when I wanted to get close to dad, he told me not to, just because my other sister got angry (...) and my stepmother threatened me and told me that if I let my dad hug me, she would hit me the next day... [One time] my stepmother hit me real hard and I said 'I'd like to have my mother so that she protects me; if you want you can do it' and she said she didn't want to be my mother, that I'd be better off dead, and I said, 'don't tell me that'... you see that hurt a lot... it hurt so much that I went to the back of a bathroom and I started 'mommy, why did you have to leave? Why did you leave me? I'm all alone!' (Nadia, personal communication, June 5, 2013).

In the story of Julia, direct and structural violence are constantly interrelated: in her adolescence, when her father —with whom she started to occasionally consume substances— decided to leave the family, her mother had to work exhausting hours, so she took Julia out of school to help in the house and with caring for her siblings. Julia became depressed and after a rebellious period, she decided to leave home. In order to survive, still underage, she worked in a billiard parlor and bar, where she started drinking too much alcohol and taking methamphetamines, and where she suffered the first sexual abuse:

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<sup>7</sup> All the names were replaced with pseudonymous.

Because I was working in the bar, I became a heavy drinker and they took advantage of me once... [I wanted to quit], but my boss in the pool hall didn't let me and he said that in order for that not to happen again he would give me something [to remain alert in spite of the alcohol] that would sober me up quickly (Julia, personal communication, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014).

Later, still underage, she started to prostitute herself in the pool hall and bar and intensified her consumption of methamphetamines:

as he wanted to continue making money from the tricks I was turning, he told me: 'I'm giving you something and we're making more money you and I. It'd be good for you' (...) and then he bought me a balloon and made a line, and I snorted and he told me "don't get hooked on this, only snort on weekends", and then I started on weekends, but then it was every day, every day, I spent all my money just on that (Julia, personal communication, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014).

Unlike Nadia, the violence experienced by Julia is mixed with guilt from the decisions she made (running away from home, using drugs, prostituting herself), as she does not identify the structural violence that prevents her from following a different path. In retrospect, she judges herself for not taking control of her life, for not becoming a subject, while disregarding that the conditions of life she faced entailed a de-subjectivation process. However, undoubtedly, Adela's story is the most dramatic:

My parents were in drug trafficking. When they arrived in Mazatlán, a cargo was confiscated (...) Well, I found out about this later, when I was older. Then, I was born in Mazatlán because they were imprisoned there. She was pregnant with me and I was born inside the penitentiary. I was already sold, even before being born.

My dad took me away from her because he knew I had been sold. (...) There were two days for them to pick me up, the people who had bought me. But my dad wanted to meet me, and asked for me. That day some people from a foster house arrived to take food to the prison, and my dad asked them if they were able to take me in and [the priest] told him yes (Adela, personal communication, n. d.).

She states that in the foster home she was well taken care of, and the priests in charge treated her as a daughter, but she regretted not meeting her biological parents, nor receiving visits from them:

as a child I wondered 'well, why do all children get visits and I don't? Do I also have a mom?' And he [the priest] told me 'don't worry, I love you' and I told him 'yes, I know you love me, but I'm not your daughter'. I saw all the children happy with their mom, (...) they even laughed at me because they said 'you're an orphan, don't have a mom, don't have a dad' (Adela, personal communication, n. d.).

When Adela was 13 years, her mother was released from prison and went to pick her up:

[When I was 13 years] four times my mom came to visit me [in the foster home]. On the fifth, they let me go with her because I was 14 and had to leave the place, but that experience was very sad. I didn't want to leave... and the longest I was with her, close to her, was about

one hour and a half, but I don't know what happened, when I woke up I was in a bed, in a hut, with a shackle, a chain and I turned my head and looked everywhere and wondered: 'what am I doing here?'... it turned out I had been sold (Adela, personal communication, n. d.).

Adela gave birth to her first child in captivity, and managed to escape during her second pregnancy:

[when I was sold] I was 14 and he was 36. He kept me tied up for one year and seven months. When I managed to escape from him, I was four months pregnant with the girl, because I already had had the boy, then I escaped because he arrived, I don't know how he arrived, maybe drugged, but he unlocked the padlock I had, went to bed and fell asleep right away, not even the dogs were there (...) then I ran down to reach the road (Adela, personal communication, n. d.).

Owing to her extreme vulnerability at the time she experienced these two forms of extreme violence, Adela is fully aware of not being responsible for the occurrences. In this way, as we will see later in the text, she will try to find in religion an explanation, meaning and solace for the violence she lived during this stage.

In the case of men, mistreatment in childhood also appears repeatedly. Jorge explains that his mother, who legally resided in California, decided to return to Tijuana with her children to escape from domestic violence:

We grew here on our own, without a dad... it was a little difficult that my dad was not with us... but he was an alcoholic. Ever since I can remember ... I remember him drinking... when I was 6 or 7, I have images of my father hitting my mother... in fact, the memories of him in my childhood are just those memories... it was a bit difficult to live in that environment (...); [then we ran away with my mom to Tijuana because] my dad couldn't cross from the US to here, until later, when he sorted out his documents, he started to come around. He came on weekends. He would be drunk and he came for all that... (Jorge, personal communication, n. d.).

In the case of men, the difficulty of keeping away from urban violence, involvement in gangs and drug trafficking, and also from various criminal activities and from jail, have an important space in their stories. In the stories, they frequently appear as no-subjects who had to act violently in the face of lack of options, or as obedience, similar to that stated by Arendt (2006). However, it is interesting to notice that in some stories the religious interpretation makes them consider that their no-subject condition is the result of the dominance the devil has over them. It would be, from their standpoint, an extreme form of the no-subject, whose actions are commanded by evil.

Carlos was born in Mexico City, and at 17 he already had problematic consumption of substances. He migrated to the Tijuana-San Diego region, where he was arrested and served time in a prison in California. When he was released, he returned to Mexico City, was arrested and imprisoned in *Reclusorio Oriente* [a prison in eastern Mexico City]. When he was 23, he had served three prison sentences in Mexico and one in California. When he was discharged from

*Santa Martha Acatitla* Prison (at 23), once again he migrated and lived for three years between San Diego and Los Angeles. Once again, he was detained and after serving time in Phoenix, Arizona, he was deported via Nogales. He traveled to Tijuana, where he was arrested and imprisoned in “*El Pueblito*”.<sup>8</sup> When he was released, he remained in Tijuana, and was imprisoned again, this time in *El Hongo* prison center. In all the cases, Carlos was found guilty of robbery in varying modalities. Between 23 and 41 years, he spent longer time in prison than in liberty: “for the first time, I’ve been free for two years, I have never lasted this long! One year at most... usually after two or three months (...), the fastest I left and reentered was 15 days: I was released, and 15 days later, boom... I was serving time” (Carlos, personal communication, n. d.).

It was during his last tenure in prison in *El Hongo* that he experienced a religious conversion, when he came into contact with Christian missionaries who visited the prison for volunteer work. Upon his release, of his own volition he directly went to the rehab center where he was living at the time of the interview.

For those who were detained in the U.S., deportation is added to their experiences. Samuel migrated with his family toward California, when he was three years old. At 13, he started taking psychoactive drugs and participating in criminal activities with friends from the neighborhood, so he was sent to a reformatory:

sometimes we had no money left because our moms didn’t want to give us money because they knew we were misbehaving... that we smoked marihuana and arrived home heavily stoned... didn’t want to give us money because they knew we would use it to buy drugs. But then, we started stealing (...) they found us because of the cameras in the stores (...) they went to our houses and arrested us...and took us to an underage reformatory in San Diego, the Juvenile Hall ... and there I was sentenced to a year on probation (Samuel, personal communication, n. d.).

During his probation year, he smoked marihuana, so he was sent to the reformatory once again. On a number of occasions, Samuel returned to the juvenile hall for short periods, always related to drug consumption or robberies.

Later on, after the passing of Immigration Reform and Control Act, IRCA, his parents managed to regularize their migratory status; however, Samuel—who by then had just turned 18— was denied the permits because of his criminal record and was deported. In the state of Mexico, while he was living with his grandparents, he started doing drugs and participating in criminal activities again.

Here, deportation and the consequential severance of social ties operate as a vector for de-subjectivation, which adds to that produced by the violence inflicted and received. People in charge

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<sup>8</sup> *El Pueblito* is the name by which Tijuana’s prison was known, infamous because of its overpopulation and lack of internal control by the authorities (Betanzos, 2017).

of the direction of rehab centers reiterate the severity of violence in-patients have suffered when they arrive to the center. Alejandro, director in an ERC, comments:

they all come really hurt, badly mistreated by society, family, themselves (...) an individual who has been on drugs, grown up on the street, the only thing he has is mistrust in everyone because of the life he's led, everyone has failed him, everyone has beaten him, everyone has humiliated him, whether he is a man or a woman (Alejandro, personal communication, n. d.).

For his part, Priest Francisco points out: “among those who come, they have... well, it may be said, have suffered, been humiliated, have problems in their homes, work, with money, legal... what they want is to get away from it all” (Francisco, personal communication, n. d.).

As regards deportation, Priest Justino comments that being away from their environment and far from their loved ones causes a suffering similar to withdrawal syndrome: “Here, you find deportees, and the deportees suffer badly from the cold turkey [withdrawal] of deportation. I call it so because among those with the deportation cold turkey, there are many that commit suicide, who cannot put up with it” (Justino, personal communication, n. d.).

In like manner, directors remark on the severity of human trafficking for women. Priest Eduardo points out:

women with addictions have a control [upon them], they're controlled by the mafia. (...) many of the women who work in the northern zone are addicts (...) but they are captive because (...) somewhat they are kept dancing [prostituting], they are controlled, and that's a serious issue and getting them out of there is really difficult because they're hooked, they're under the control of the mafia. It is more difficult to rescue a woman than a man (Eduardo, personal communication, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

The story of Adela seems to reinforce what Eduardo states, as she narrates that although she served time on several occasions, she was quickly discharged because the people who prostituted her managed to get her out (Adela, personal communication, n. d.).

### *The beginning of consumption and the violence exercised*

The relation with drug consumption and addiction is depicted in the stories. Even if individual experiences are diverse, the beginning of consumption is associated with two main aspects: the effort of being accepted by a group of youth from the neighborhood or work, and the need to relieve suffering. In the second case we find Nayeli, who starts consumption when her husband decided to live with his lover and he evicts her, so she was in a street situation. This is also the case of Berlin, who, in order to escape from domestic violence, when she is 13, runs away with her “boyfriend” —of 40 years of age—, who offered her methamphetamines so that she forgot her problems. Adela started taking drugs with her coworkers, when they had to prostitute to survive. Delia began taking drugs after the death of her brother in a car accident caused by her. Jorge took up drugs after attempting suicide, at 17. Carlos says he began “... to feel some relief, some consolation, relaxation”; whereas Julia:

Just because they told you that you detached from the world like that and didn't think of anything; because I was really stressed [depressed] because they made me drop out of high school and I started to look after my brothers... and when I smoked marihuana I totally unwound and I thought that just like that my problems would end (Julia, personal communication, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014).

In the stories, the consumption of substances is directly related to the violence exercised. In men, violence is linked to fights or criminal activities, while for women, it is frequently related to the domestic sphere. In some cases, the narrations insist on guilt and remorse—and they might reflect a subjectivation process—, while in other cases they are presented as fatality associated with drug consumption—similar to the banality of evil put forward by Arendt (2006).

Adela narrates that when she had a relationship with a violent man, she shot him when she found him with his lover:

I was just arriving ... I made a lot of noise when I came in, but they didn't even notice. But before that I had told him 'you'd better get these guns out of here because one of these days I'm shooting you with one of those' and he said 'shut up, you are not even able to kill a fly'. The guns were in the children's rooms (...) I opened the door of my bedroom and the first thing I saw... and I pointed the gun at him and he laughed at me (...) and I saw the woman running out. I started shooting. The five bullets hit him, all five of them. Two lodged in his spine, another was in his leg... and the guy ended up in a wheelchair (Adela, personal communication, n. d.).

Berlin narrates: "I was getting fed up with my husband... I hit him... because he didn't dare to hit me. I remember that I was choking him and his dog bit me... and I was got so mad and pulled on the dog, which didn't let go of me... because I wanted to finish him off" (Berlin, personal communication, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

In some cases, memories are confusing and bring to mind exacerbated situations of de-subjectivation linked to substance abuse, which produce extreme cases of non-subjects.

They say that three days went by (...) and over those days [which she does not remember] they said I did what I wanted, which I don't actually remember, I can tell you that I have never stolen, but they said I got into a Seven Eleven (...) and when I woke up we had lots of things... I mean, if they say I killed someone... well, I don't remember... but I'm telling you I didn't kill anybody... but I don't know... (Nadia, personal communication, July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that self-harm is also frequent. Julia explains:

Now I know that I don't need to hit myself... because I used to hit myself when something went wrong for me. I cut or hit myself... it was something really strange... a disease or something, but when I felt sad or someone did something to me, I said, 'it's my fault' and hit myself (Julia, personal communication, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014).

Similarly, Jorge recalls:

I would have taken my own life... some of my older friends used to bring their revolvers... and I took their guns and loaded the bullets to kill myself... and my friends started to grow distant. They said I was cracked and dropped me... because of the suicidal mentality (Jorge, personal communication, n. d.).

So, as previously mentioned, the evangelical model of care attempts to resemanticize the experiences of suffering and violence from a religious interpretation, in which spiritual war is the cornerstone. In the following section we address this process.

### *The resemanticization of violence and suffering through an evangelic perspective*

The attention model of the ERCs tries to make individuals reinterpret the totality of their experience—their past, sentiments and emotions, projects of life—nuanced by a religious view. In the process of violence resemanticization they promote, central is the idea of evil in the context of spiritual war and the conceptualization of addiction and body. Consequently, understanding the process of resemanticization of evil—in their conceptions of evil and disease—is essential to comprehend the therapeutic model (Odgers-Ortiz et al., 2020). Particularly, in the collected stories it is possible to identify the way religious beliefs influence their nosological and etiological conceptions, pinpointing the discomfort caused by addiction and withdrawal, the abstract idea of evil and its expressions on human suffering. In the following sections we will show some aspects of such process.

### *The resemanticization of evil and addiction*

In the ERCs, disease—and suffering—are understood as expressions of the presence of evil in the life of people. The suffering of the body, soul, and spirit are indissoluble, and therefore spiritual restoration is deemed necessary for healing. Hence, drug addiction and the effort of rehabilitation are understood as another expression of the struggle between good and evil which takes the body as battlefield.<sup>9</sup> In the words of the director of a network of ERCs:

when people haven't been spiritually born, they don't understand anything. However, when they get into the spiritual, they realize: 'who brought me here? Who made me steal or kill?!' (...) because the devil came to kill, steal and destroy, but Jesus came to give life in abundance. The struggle is spiritual, and man—his body—is the terrain, the battlefield. And there is free will (...) Then, when people understand: 'Yes, I was blind, I didn't understand, but now I see with spiritual sight', then they start strengthening and so does temptation, and struggle... but they already know they have the power to say no (Eduardo, personal communication, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010).

In order to heal, the individual must seek God—in the figure of Christ—and thus obtain the necessary moral force to fight against the evil inside. It is considered that the *Enemy* is powerful and cunning and he can easily deceive people. The *addict* is not considered a bad person—there

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<sup>9</sup> On the evangelical model of care and embodiment, see Odgers-Ortiz et al. (2020).

is no categorical judgment— but someone who has sinned and needs spiritual support from the community to drive the evil out from their body. Francisco explains:

we try not... well, at least I try not to judge them. Because I also lived through that (...), I try making them see it isn't possible [to quit drugs] on our own, but with the strength God gives us. And that is one of the things I try to teach them because as I get to know them, I can attest to it (Francisco, personal communication, n. d.).

In this way, one of the main objectives in this EC is to guide the in-patients so that religious conversion takes place, to heal and avoid relapses. They assume that those who do not receive Christ in their hearts will leave with a “spiritual void”, which may be occupied by evil, once again. Nadia explains:

Because with God we can, but without him we can't do anything because the enemy has us captive and is very strong. But God is stronger than the enemy. But without God I'm nothing (...) I mean, there's good and evil, and if you let go of the hand of God, think that you give up on everything, that everything comes crashing down on you ... because there are demons, they come and torment you, they make you sick, make you think a lot of things and they take you to the dealer (Nadia, personal communication, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

From the narration regarding addictions, the stories also approach violence exercised on other people. Guilt is not always present, for in some cases, the narrator claimed they had no alternatives for their actions. That is to say, they position as a non-subject. The de-subjectivation process that takes them to the state of non-subject, and consequently, the banality of evil, is explained in the stories, in two possible ways. The first, the social character, states that the context in which they lived —poverty, need to survive in a hostile context, the density of criminal networks around them— left them with no choice. The second, religious in nature, states that it was the devil who made them take that road and they did not have the moral force to resist. In the second interpretation, the individual who does not know Christ is dominated by the enemy, consumes substances and is harmful.

sometimes... I listened to the voice of the enemy, which made us think: 'hey, go and...' then we went to do that (...) And I knew where it was taking me... where that toke would lead, that it would take me to other things... and... I was in great danger... and there [in danger] I was when I praised the Lord and I was able to see his powerful hand manifested because he covered me, he cared for me, so I would not suffer a beating, so I would not be attacked (Samuel, personal communication, n. d.).

In this way, the reinterpretation offered by the evangelical model allows the perpetrators of violent deeds to reinterpret their actions, not to take up responsibility for themselves, but in order to identify a break from the cycle that produces such actions by means of regret and forgiveness. Then, this reinterpretation offers a break from the de-subjectivation process, which turns them into non-subjects to search, by means of the spiritual resource, for a road toward subjectivation.

After religious conversion, the individual recognizes the evil he or she made, repents and asks God for forgiveness. Because of forgiveness, the convert “is born again” and can start the reconstruction of an image of the self and a project of life away from guilt and stigma. In other words, the evangelical rehabilitation model, the religious conversion process, must allow the subject to revert the de-subjectivation process; in this way, from that moment on, the person who “has been born again” is aware of his or her actions, acts responsibly and recognizes the other as the son of God —consequently, potentially as a subject—. So, guilt is magnified by considering the other, the one hurt, as a subject, and in this way, remorse acquires overwhelming dimensions.

When I received Christ, I remember I felt worse... for a week I wasn't able to sleep... it was because of the guilt. Because of my conscience. Something that reminded me [what I had done] and I cried... and I said, 'I'm supposed to feel better, but I feel worse: now I feel a tremendous guilt!' Well... The Bible is clear about sin and then I'm the worst (...) the worst of criminals... I could not live with that... I remember I left the chapel and said: 'there's got to be something else!' (...). I dropped to my knees and I suddenly started to cry, as never before, and I started to feel deeply regretful... there, suddenly I looked at a very bright light... and I remember I started to look at all the bad things I had done... all of them! and I cried harder... suddenly, I remember I saw a cross and Jesus Christ next to it and he told me... he would erase all that, that he would erase all of my past, that he loved me... suddenly I started to feel love as I have never felt before, he hugged me, he consoled me and took that guilt from me and then I would not want to get up... I can't remember how long I was there exactly... but I have never felt SO GOOD (Jorge, personal communication, n. d.).

Forgiveness allows transcending guilt and opens the possibility of becoming a subject by means of recognizing free will.

Nayeli refers to remorse and explains: “I heard a voice telling me ‘you cannot be forgiven’. I went and said ‘I cannot be forgiven by God’ and they said ‘How come you can't be forgiven? God says seven times the just one falls and God forgives him’ and that was when I felt relieved and willing to look for his face and forgiveness, and here I am looking for him” (personal communication, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014). For Julia: “Jesus, the Lord, was torn to pieces for me and for you. He was crucified, that is why his holy blood cleanses us of all evil, is able to save us. God bought us at a high price; then, any sin, he's the only that can forgive us because he did pay a high price for each one of us” (personal communication, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014).

In like manner, Adela explains that courage is needed to recognize guilt, to repent and ask for forgiveness:

they told me ‘forgive yourself so that you can forgive’... and that is still here, in this little head with few neurons [she laughs], I don't get it... I don't know what I have to forgive myself for, but... [seriously] [thing is] neither have I asked what I have to forgive myself for... because maybe I'm scared... (Adela, personal communication, n. d.).

It is worth repeating that the idea according to which demons enter the body with the consumption of substances which have to be thrown out when receiving Christ in their hearts may

be considered in a literal way. In this way, according to the interpretations of Priest Eduardo, in his explanation that evil clings to the body in addiction, when in-patients are forced to undergo detoxication, the devil fights not to be ejected, producing pain and suffering that characterizes withdrawal.

Then, one has to be protected to reject all that and not letting the devil [that is going to be ejected] live in one, how? Letting God enter; if God is inside none can enter (...) Because when he was created, man had the spirit of God, it controlled his life in Paradise. In the fall of man, the spirit of God left him. Only the spirit of life and soul remained. Then, man by giving in to the enemy, offers it the chance to live in him. But, when God comes again, the enemy who lives in men is ejected. In the centers, we have witnessed a lot of things (...). We have seen people possessed by drugs, who during cold turkey are able to jump three meters (...) because they are possessed by legions of demon (Eduardo, personal communication, November 20, 2013).

Unlike the pain inflicted by the violence of the addict, suffering withdrawal is interpreted as an expression of the spiritual war. Suffering acquires a meaning; it is even considered an epiphany, a process in which the in-patient, helped by a community of believers, will invoke Jesus to be released from evil.

For Berenice, who decided to consecrate her life to the attention of ERC female residents, suffering may be even part of the Plan of God: "I believe I was a plan of God, I even believe it was his purpose that I suffered what I had to in order to understand the addicts" (Berenice, personal communication, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013).

In this interpretation, the suffering that accompanies conversion is a key element in the subjectivation process, for as evil leaves the body and after the finding of God, the individual becomes aware of the spiritual war and understands the importance of free will. It is by means of religious conversion and reinsertion in the community of believers that the individual acquires the weapons to face evil.

Adela considers the enemy is the one that causes panic attacks, and she needs the community to endure them, by means of prayers: "I need them to pray for me because I don't like feeling this fear; this is the third time I feel this fear, it is the first here, but other two it happened in prison" (Adela, personal communication, n. d.).

Then, from the moment of conversion, violence would be rigorously sanctioned. However, the rhetoric of violence, which is part of a lifestyle practiced in a previous stage, will not disappear. As we will see next, this is adapted and reincorporated into the new semantic universe structured around evangelical logic.

### *The Bible as an arsenal: The resemanitization of violence*

As demonstrated throughout this article, residents of the observed ERCs have had close contact with violence, firearms and, in a considerable number of cases, life in prison. From the

resignification of violence by means of an evangelical model for rehabilitation, a set of practices and expressions of everyday life are also signified. It is particularly interesting to notice the way the resemantization of the language of violence operates.

Thus, for instance, in a 6 am religious service in ERC #3, we noticed that the session unfolds slowly with music and Bible readings, until a man of about 30 years comes up to preach; he has an athletic aspect, charismatic personality and numerous visible tattoos. The preacher speaks in a loud emotional voice, of the life on the street and the suffering everyone has experienced before arriving at the ERC; he speaks of the suffering they have caused their loved ones, induced by “the devil”. The tone of the preaching, emotional from the start, gains intensity, close to paroxysm. Then he exclaims

We have to be ready to fight against the devil, who is very powerful, and because of that we need to get the weapons to face him and here —raising the Bible— is our arsenal! You choose your weapon, just a little gun? Or do you prefer an AK, or are you going onto the street with a bazooka?! (Field diary, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014).

The preacher goes on stirring up the brethren with a vocabulary and body language that resembles more an invitation to insurgency or to join an armed group. The believers listen to him enraptured and participate in the discourse with enthusiastic answers. The session concludes with the recommendation of reading the Bible carefully to take the weapons needed in battle, of attending the Bible school and being always attentive because the enemy is lurking around the corner. In the face of temptation, he insists on never going out alone and watching the back of partners in order to support one another.

The previous scene is powerful because of the emotional style and the belligerent language that may be heard in the rehab centers. It is an unusual combination which, nevertheless, makes total sense in this context. The preacher speaks to the in-patients in a language that is close to them, which stirs intense emotions. This enables them to become part of a powerful group, with close emotional bonds; but it is the transmutation of the meaning of violence what is central in this situation. The language of weapons makes them feel confident, connects them with their past, although the meaning of the discourse has been deeply transformed: now their rifles will only shoot Bible verses. Recovering the language of violence simultaneously enables them to let go of the victim’s role, gives them the pleasurable sensation of having power, having control over their lives, and having a mission —meaning— for their everyday actions.

#### AS A CONCLUSION: SUBJECTIVATION AND DESUBJECTIVATION IN EVANGELIC KEY

Evangelic Rehabilitation Centers are healing devices where it is possible to identify the transformation of the meaning given to violence and suffering, from a system of religious beliefs that provides the residents with practical guidance.

This process presents, as its main axes of rearticulation, the belief in a spiritual war and the role of the individual in the struggle of good v. evil. More specifically, we may point to the conceptualization of the body as a battlefield and the idea of free will as pillars of this rearticulation.

From analysis of the testimonies and life stories, as well as from participant observation carried out in three ERCs, we are able to conclude that violence appears in the stories mainly at two moments: the violence experienced in childhood and adolescence, and the violence employed during the period with the heaviest drug consumption.

Suffering also appears in narrations about childhood and infancy, and is frequently related to the beginning of problematic consumption of alcohol and psychoactive substances in search of consolation and forgetting. The narratives continue with the description of the suffering caused by addiction and withdrawal.

There are very few references to the meaning of suffering during childhood. Even if in some cases it is stated that suffering may be even in the plans of God—either as a trial or preparation for the actions of adult life—, this interpretation is far from being the most usual.

Conversely, the re-interpretation of the violence the narrators employed as the work of the devil, who tempts and manipulates those who do not have Jesus Christ in their hearts, is recurrent.

Returning to Wieviorka's theoretical proposal (2003), we are able to conclude that in their life stories the interviewees depict themselves, at first, as non-subjects. The de-subjectivation process by means of which they arrive at such an image is explained by two main characteristics:

- 1) Structural violence, which makes them do reprehensible activities—prostitution, theft, joining criminal gangs—as the only way to survive.
- 2) Spiritual war: the evil was able to enter their bodies and possess them because they did not have Christ in their hearts.

In the cases above, the use of drugs appears at once as a consequence of de-subjectivation and as a cause of violence. This puts us in the realm of the second form of expression of violence put forward by Wieviorka (2003), associated with the *absence of meaning*, and also well represented by Arendt's (2006) banality of evil. That is to say, it is the case of the violence exercised by a non-subject—from processes of de-subjectivation—in which violence would be considered obedience—e.g., the need to be part of criminal groups.

In contrast with this form of violence, which recurrently appears in the life stories, the first form of the expression of violence is not identified; it would associate with violence as a *reaction in the face of loss of meaning*, and that might be expressed as a reaction to processes of change in which the actor considers traditional meanings are being lost (for example, loss of values), making room for conservative violence (Wieviorka, 2003). Even if it is true that in the stories, the absence of a father figure or the lack of a traditional family—as the one desired—are mentioned as negative aspects of childhood, which would lead to the distancing from God and the involvement in criminal activities, never is it suggested that the violence they employed would be associated with the

recovery of traditional family values. To put this another way, even though it is true that the evangelical discourse incorporated in the life stories champions conservative values, which include the role of women as mothers and wives, the rejection of homosexuality, or the need for a traditional family, resorting to violence is never suggested as a means to recover such values.

The third form in which violence is employed, following Wieviorka (2003), is more difficult to assess; this comprises *intentional, gratuitous violence*, associated with cruelty or sadism. For Wieviorka, these are forms of violence employed by the anti-subject, in which the non-recognition of the other as a subject is the central characteristic (Wieviorka, 2003). In some of the stories collected, the degree of violence exercised and the coldness with which it is described are surprising. However, in no case do the perpetrators of these forms of extreme violence describe doing these deeds out of pleasure or as a source of pleasure. On the contrary, they stress that their actions were dictated by the devil and do not consider themselves subjects when they carried out such actions. Naturally, due to the methodology of this project, what we have are *a posteriori* interpretations, seen through a religious lens, with no way for us to discover how violence would have been interpreted if the life stories had been gathered in those earlier periods of the interviewees' lives.

In any case, paying attention to the interpretations that appear in the life stories, extreme violence also appears in the fourth form of expression proposed by Wieviorka (2003). This is *fundamental violence*, characterized as a reaction in the face of a threat, as a survival instinct, either from an effort to survive in violent contexts, or in the case of women, as a reaction toward violent partners.

From the evangelical standpoint, it is at the moment of religious conversion that the individual meets Christ, becomes aware of his or her free will and acquires the particular tools —prayer, the community of the brethren— that will help him or her remain away from evil. That is to say, only after religious conversion will the individual be able to turn into a subject. In this way, subjects acquire full responsibility for their previous actions, and, to be forgiven, they must undergo guilt and repentance. If repentance is sincere, they are able to be forgiven and be born again in Christ. They will be aware of temptation, but they will also be able to face it.

If, in spite of their transformation into a subject, the individual decides to disown Christ and return to consumption of drugs, that means willingly choosing evil and turning into an anti-subject. Therefore, in ERCs, the violence exercised by someone who met Christ and disowns him is conceptualized in an utterly different manner than that of someone who had not undergone conversion. Unlike the violence exercised as a non-subject (the banality of evil), the one exercised as an anti-subject after the conversion process embodies destructive violence, which denies the condition of subject for the other.

Finally, we might judge the fifth form of the expression of violence according to Wieviorka (2003) to be present only metaphorically. This is *founding violence*, which might eventually unleash subjectivation processes. That is to say, the violence in which the subject seeks transformation of the world according to a critique of existing reality and oriented by an action

project —individual or collective— without implying the denial of the other as a subject. As previously described, the recovery of the language of violence after conversion follows this logic: armament is sought in the reading of the Bible in order to participate in the spiritual war fought in each neighborhood and in each body that consumes or has consumed drugs; the enemy is not the dealer, nor the user of drugs, who is recognized as a creature of God, therefore, as a subject. The enemy is the devil who produces the de-subjectivation of those who act driven by him; in this way, the spiritual war in the context of ERCs is significant in both of its facets. In one, it is part of the struggle of good and evil, which turns the body of the addict into a battlefield; the spiritual war contributes to interpreting and giving meaning to suffering from addiction and withdrawal. In the other, as a semantic strategy, it relates to interpretation of the violence previously employed, attributing it to the influence of evil, as opposed to the free will exercised by the believer strengthened in Christ (and therefore capable of acting as a subject).

The importance of this interpretation as a part of a therapeutic model is conferred, in the first place, by the possibility of removing stigma: crimes committed before conversion are relativized, though not denied, and it is possible to leave their weight behind due to the figure of God's forgiveness. However, additionally —and this may be the fundamental point— this interpretation makes room for individuals to begin a subjectivation process, to let go of the idea of victim and become responsible for realizing they are able to produce their own life projects. In like manner, this subjectivation process, executed within a context that allows generating new senses of belonging, implicitly carries the need to recognize the other as a subject. Finally, the recovery of a transfigured discourse of violence allows for linking previous experiences to a new regulatory framework that guides actions.

From a sociologic perspective, free from the evangelical lens, it is unavoidable to recognize, in the previous actions of those who attend ERCs, both alienation processes (particularly from the problematic use of substances) and spaces where subjects had the ability of subjectivation. All in all, from a sociological standpoint, it is not possible to classify the totality of violent acts committed with the category of non-subjects and the banality of evil. It would be necessary, on the contrary, to analyze the specific circumstances in which people start taking drugs and become involved in criminal activities. This analysis, however, exceeds the goals of this article.

Furthermore, it may be questioned to what extent the evangelical regulatory framework, strongly restrictive, configures a propitious scenario for subjectivation. Certainly, in classic sociology, religions are considered alienation instruments, not tools for subjectivation. Precisely because of this, it is interesting to empirically observe the way the resemantization of suffering, evil, and violence, in this specific context, seems to be making room for new life projects that are free of stigma, that have emotional links to the past, and that are centered around individual responsibility and respect for others as subjects.

Translation: Luis Cejudo-Espinoza and Richard Cluster.

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