

MEMÓRIA, TRAUMA E IDENTIDADE: TRAJETÓRIAS NA IRMANDADE DE NARCÓTICOS ANÔNIMOS

MEMORIA, TRAUMA E IDENTIDAD: TRAYECTORIAS EN LA ORGANIZACIÓN COMUNITARIA DE NARCÓTICOS ANÓNIMOS

MEMORY, TRAUMA AND IDENTITY: TRAJECTORIES IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

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RESUMO: O presente trabalho tem por objetivo investigar como os membros da irmandade de Narcóticos Anônimos lidam com a questão da memória, do trauma e do tratamento. O trauma é ressignificado, proporcionando a reconstrução das identidades sociais dos membros, através de um processo no qual a chave para a recuperação, segundo essa visão, passa pela narrativa e pelo sentimento de pertencimento e identificação com o grupo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Narcóticos anônimos (NA). Dependência química. Memória. Trauma.

RESUMEN: *El presente trabajo tiene por objetivo investigar cómo los miembros de la organización comunitaria de Narcóticos Anónimos se ocupan de la cuestión de la memoria, del trauma y del tratamiento. El trauma es resignificado, proporcionando la reconstrucción de las identidades sociales de los miembros, a través de un proceso donde la clave para la recuperación, según esa visión, pasa por la narrativa y el sentimiento de pertenencia e identificación con el grupo.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Narcóticos anónimos (NA). Dependencia química. Memoria. Trauma.*

ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this paper is to investigate how members of the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous deal with the issue of memory, trauma and treatment. The trauma is re-signified, providing the reconstruction of the social identities of the members, through a process where the key to recovery, according to this vision, passes through the narrative and the feeling of belonging and identification with the group.*

KEYWORDS: *Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Chemical dependency. Memory. Trauma.*

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Introduction

It's 19 h 30 min. In a room attached to a Catholic Church in the city of Rio de Janeiro, a group of about 30 people gathers. The living room is spacious and comfortable. Plastic chairs are arranged so that they form a circle. At one table we see a series of colorful flyers and books on a blue tablecloth. A bell rings, announcing the beginning of another Narcotics Anonymous meeting. After a moment of silence, the group in unison repeats the 'Prayer of Serenity', followed by the introductions. After the prayer, the secretary, sitting behind the desk, asks if anyone is attending that meeting for the first time. That's when everyone turns to a boy in his twenties with a tired, scruffy face. The boy raises his hand and says his first name, which is promptly answered by the group once again in unison: 'Hi Ronaldo, welcome!' The secretary begins his testimony after reading one of the leaflets - Welcome to Narcotics Anonymous (1993) -, noting that there is a 'newcomer' in the group. All of the following testimonies move, as the secretary warns, himself a member, to 'carry the fifth tradition'.

According to the fifth tradition "each group has only one primary purpose, to carry the message to the addict who still suffers" (NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS WORLD SERVICES, 2015, p. 75). In this sense, all the statements are directed to Ronaldo, who listens carefully to the stories of the older members, who are succeeding in the same direction, revealing the obscure face of their drug abuse (WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, 1993, p. 69-82), the 'rock bottom' and the possibility of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.

After an hour of testimony, the secretary reads an excerpt from the basic text of Narcotics Anonymous and asks if there is anyone in that room who would like to be a part of NA, just need to raise the arm and say his first name to do it. Ronaldo, with trembling hands and choked voice, in a mixture of emotion, fear and hope, raises his arm, says his first name, which is readily answered by much applause. He would have seven minutes like the others to speak up, but the emotion stops him. You then receive a white keychain that symbolizes your 'NA ingress', some leaflets and phone numbers to call if you feel like 'craving to use'.

The above description is part of a Narcotics Anonymous meeting I had the opportunity to attend and which at the time aroused deep interest in what I had just witnessed.

The 'ingress', the entrance to and from the group seems to operate as a watershed, with symbolic load very similar to the rituals of religious conversion (RAMBO, 1993), especially of the Protestant Churches. The stories told there are diverse in content but very similar in form. There is a sense that is built into drug experience that necessarily involves the inability to bring

it to a successful end. In other words, the inability to function socially, understood in the context of a capitalist and hedonistic society.

The traumas narrated there are endowed with strong emotional charge. However, they seem to function as catalysts for a sense of 'belonging' that coalesce and release. The word, in this sense, connects the individual with the group and, by extension, with himself. 'You're not alone anymore'; 'We are together'; 'Keep coming back that works', were spoken to Ronaldo after the meeting and his decision to join. It is also interesting to note the apparent paradox of some speech articulated at the first step. For members of Narcotics Anonymous, admission of 'defeat' is the first step on the road to 'recovery'. That is, treatment, in this view, only becomes possible when the individual decides to admit that he can no longer "manage" his own life, understood here as the ability to work and socially relate, using drugs at the same time. The treatment, therefore, only takes effect as long as he continues to attend meetings in a systematic and disciplined manner and 'avoid the first dose'. Thus, we realize that 'ingress' is not really just a 'moment', but a 'process' that must be followed by the individual as a way of integrating and inserting into what members call recovery. So attending meetings daily for 90 days, talking to more experienced members, asking for help when needed, 'sharing' in meetings 'honestly', are some of these suggestions that are made to 'newcomers'. By doing so, they say, they can then "stop using, lose desire and find a new way of life"².

This paper aims to understand how members of Narcotics Anonymous deal with the issue of memory construction, trauma and treatment in NA. During our research, we conducted interviews with members of Narcotics Anonymous from a group in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro, the locus of our work. The interview reproduced here was organized in a semi-structured manner. Questions were asked about different moments in life, such as childhood, the beginning of drug use, the "rock bottom", the entry into Narcotics Anonymous and treatment. To do so, we were willing to listen without a pre-set time limit. The interview lasted an average of one hour. We are committed to preserving anonymity and so the name has been changed.

It was many hours of intense and revealing exchanges in the interview and fieldwork that enabled us to realize to what extent what Narcotics Anonymous designates as the 'therapeutic character of one addict helping another', practicing what in psychology is called a 'mirror theory', whereby seeing one's own problem in the other would make it easier for the individual to rehabilitate.

² Phrase often heard at Narcotics Anonymous meetings.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that this work does not address or intend to address the nature of chemical dependency and / or treatment efficacy in Narcotics Anonymous. Our interest is based on the members' perception of the program, how they will reinterpret their own trajectory, and especially drug-related trauma, from the Narcotics Anonymous worldview.

Memory and Identity

We can think of memory as the ability to store facts or information lived in the past or as reminiscences of the past. Studies related to memory are part of a wide field of analysis, especially in the human sciences, acting transversally and/or articulated in sociology, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, etc.

Beginning in the 1980s, studies on collective memory grew in interest, with Maurice Halbwachs' analysis gaining prominence. Thus, the debate on the individual-society issue, deepened in the Social Sciences, deepens the notion of memory as an eminently collective phenomenon. Memory would then be a social, collective phenomenon, constituted from the relations between individuals and groups. Individual memory does not cease to exist but is rooted in different contexts in which individuals insert themselves with different participants. This allows transposition from individual memory to collective memory. "But our memories remain collective, and they are remembered by others, even if these are events in which only we were involved, and with objects only we saw. It is because, in reality, we are never alone" (HALBWACHS, 1968, p. 24). Thus, memories of the past can only exist from the 'social frames of memory'. When he says that we are never alone, what he means is that our perception of the world and the formation of our memories are imbued with our previous social experiences. Even though I may seem to be alone somewhere, my memories that will form about this place will be informed by my previous experiences, whether transmitted through others or assimilated by a movie, a book, a song, or any other local information. Language thus represents an important marker, since it is something prior to our existence, informed and apprehended in the process of socialization.

However, in order for this memory to be affirmed and not to be forgotten, given by the detachment of a group of which we were part, it is necessary to insert itself in the pictures of an 'affective community'.

It is not enough to reconstruct piece by piece the image of a past event to obtain a memory. It is necessary for this reconstruction to operate on the basis

of common data or notions that are both in our minds and in the minds of others, because they move incessantly from one to the other and to each other, which is only possible if they have been and continue to be part of a same society. Only in this way we can understand that a memory can be both recognized and reconstructed” (HALBWACHS, 1968, p 34).³

Thus, the collective identity of a group is also built through a process that is both political and social. Such a process defines, for example, groups that will be recognized as well as those that will be marginalized.

Since the Second Industrial Revolution, in the second half of the nineteenth century, drug use has gradually moved from the private sphere into the social sphere. The concern with the consumption of these substances is largely due to the need to expand an increasingly demanded labor force due to the scientific and technological advances (Fordism and Taylorism) of the industrialization process, with also the Protestant asceticism, turning this issue into a moral debate. In this context, the use of psychoactive substances and alcohol becomes a social problem, as it can be perceived as an obstacle to the development of capitalism itself, as well as a moral issue that directly attacked 'a lifestyle', notably western and had its beginning markedly in the USA.

Drug users are then excluded and marginalized, making access to treatment programs even more difficult. In 1953, William Burroughs chronicles his experiences in the drug underworld in the 1940s/50s.

Heavy drug - junk - is a cellular equation that teaches the user (junkie) truths of universal validity. I learned a lot using junk: I saw life being measured in droppers with morphine solution. I felt the agonizing deprivation of the drug — the so-called “cleft” — and the pleasant relief when thirsty junk cells drank from the needle. It is possible that all pleasure is only relief. I learned the cellular stoicism that the drug teaches the user. I saw a cell full of cracked junkies, silent and motionless in their watertight miseries. They knew how pointless it was to complain or move. They knew no one there could help anyone. There is no resource, no secret that anyone has and can offer you (BURROUGHS, 2013, p. 18-19).⁴

³ Não é suficiente reconstruir peça por peça a imagem de um acontecimento passado para se obter uma lembrança. É necessário que esta reconstrução se opere a partir de dados ou noções comuns que se encontram tanto no nosso espírito com no dos outros, porque elas passam incessantemente desses para aquele e reciprocamente, o que só é possível se fizeram e continuam a fazer parte de uma mesma sociedade. Somente assim podemos compreender que uma lembrança possa ser ao mesmo tempo reconhecida e reconstruída” (HALBWACHS, 1968, p 34).

⁴ Droga pesada - junk - é uma equação celular que ensina ao usuário (junkie) verdades de validade universal. Aprendi muito usando junk: vi a vida sendo medida em conta-gotas com solução de morfina. Senti a privação agônica da droga - a chamada “fissura” - e o alívio prazeroso quando as células sedentas de junk bebiam da agulha. É possível que todo prazer seja apenas alívio. Aprendi o estoicismo celular que a droga ensina ao usuário. Vi uma cela repleta de junkies fissurados, silentes e imóveis em suas misérias estanques. Eles sabiam o quanto era inútil reclamar ou se mover. Sabiam que ninguém ali podia ajudar ninguém. Não há nenhum recurso, nenhum segredo que alguém possua e possa te oferecer (BURROUGHS, 2013, p. 18-19).

These were times of criminalization and punishment. About this situation, Jimmy K., one of the founders of Narcotics Anonymous, tells us: “At that time in the United States, very few addicts actually had the choice as we have today in the Narcotics Anonymous program” (NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS WORLD SERVICES, 2002, p. 16).

As drug abuse becomes a public health issue, that is, it is socially recognized as a disease, alternatives to treatment diversify. Narcotics Anonymous, which adapts the Alcoholics Anonymous 'recovery program', thus functions as an 'affective community', a place of memory for members who reinterpret their trajectory and, consequently, their social identity. Memories here act as catalysts for a new identity, forged by NA's worldview. Remembering and 'sharing' about the past, the member reconstructs himself as an individual and member of a group.

The sense of continuity and permanence present in an individual or social group over time depends as much on what is remembered as what is remembered depends on the identity of who remembers. Like identity, memory is no longer thought of as a strictly individual attribute, but is considered as part of a social process in which aspects of the psyche are intertwined with social determinants. Memory, therefore, is no longer considered as an individual phenomenon, but becomes a constitutive element of the process of building collective identities (SANTOS, 1998, p. 160).⁵

Through memory, the group rests its roots in the past. These memories confer stability and materialize the group's way of life. In the case of Narcotics Anonymous, the individual stories are, over time, incorporated even by a specific language, a ritual of their own, which give unity and identity to the group, in a sense of belonging that often contrasts with the notion of 'awakening', of 'individual' displaced 'from modernity. This 'awakening', a common feeling among the members, appeared in the interview as a profound discomfort with the expectations demanded by modern society. As we will see later, this may be the basis on which the trauma caused by drug abuse is based, as well as the recovery process.

Memory and trauma

Trauma can be defined as the result of a striking, violent, unexpected situation that brings with it the inability to cope, at least immediately, to recognize it. Trauma often silences

⁵ O sentido de continuidade e permanência presente em um indivíduo ou grupo social ao longo do tempo depende tanto do que é lembrado, quanto o que é lembrado depende da identidade de quem lembra. Da mesma forma que a identidade, a memória também deixou de ser pensada como um atributo estritamente individual, passando a ser considerada como parte de um processo social em que aspectos da psique se encontram interligados a determinantes sociais. A memória deixou, portanto, de ser considerada como fenômeno individual, passando a elemento constitutivo do processo de construção de identidades coletivas (SANTOS, 1998, p. 160).

and does not find sufficiently 'real' forms of representation. Realism, in this sense, may paradoxically serve as a form of denial of the event itself, in the face of the horror provoked by its representation. The narration of traumatic stories is not linear, there are blockages that can cause alternations and discontinuities, space-time lapses.

For Hartman (2000), there is a need for a discussion about the forms of trauma representations. The 'spectacularization' of trauma by the media, the 'routinization' of extreme images, ends up causing desensitization, leading to decreased empathy and the constant need for contact with this kind of vision. In this sense, questions would arise about the limits of representation. How to represent an extreme event? Given the desensitization caused by the flood of violent images to which we are subjected daily, how to approach, for example, the issue of the Holocaust and its representation without making the mistake of turning it into a simulacrum of the original event?

[...] video testimonials restore 'deep memory' as well as informative details specific to terror and suffering (...) Video-visual medium does not exist to serve the narrative but to embody the survivor by replacing degrading Nazi photos and sometimes injurious which, until recently, were the most common in Holocaust museums (HARTMAN, 2000, p. 207-235).⁶

Thus, its perceived in art a potent way of dealing with the Holocaust issue and the representation of this type of trauma. Paul Celan points out as 'the greatest German-language poet in the postwar years'. For him, absence, a hallmark of Celan's style, is a form of 'witness' to what finds no form of representation that can rise to such terror.

It is in this sense that the analysis of Márcio Seligmann-Silva (2000) also walks. For him, the Shoa historian finds himself at a crossroads between the need and inability to describe such a brutal event. "How to represent something that goes beyond our ability to imagine and represent?" (SELIGMANN-SILVA, 2000, p. 79). According to him, Hartman poses a question that shifts the form of representativeness of this reality to the question of whether it should be experienced. Trauma, thus, is a "wound in memory" (SELIGMANN-SILVA, 2000, p. 84).

In Narcotics Anonymous, narrating trauma by contacting it through group testimony is understood as a way to minimize the harm caused by trauma. As I have heard several times in my field research: 'shared pain is diminished pain'.

⁶ [...] testemunhos em vídeo restauram a 'memória profunda', tanto quanto detalhes informativos específicos do terror e sofrimento (...) O meio vídeo-visual não existe para servir à narrativa, mas para corporificar o sobrevivente, substituindo fotos nazistas degradantes e às vezes injuriosas que, até recentemente, eram o que haviam de mais comum nos museus do Holocausto (HARTMAN, 2000, p. 207-235).

Order, hierarchy, and control are political values embodied in medical practice that have long stigmatized and marginalized drug addicts, leaving them 'voiceless'. This view hindered access to public treatment policies that differed from admission to sanatoriums. Alcoholics Anonymous and later, Narcotics Anonymous, arise as alternatives, where the traumatic memories of drug abuse and more, the roots of this feeling of 'non-belonging' to modern society as a whole, could emerge, enabling a process of 'lost' identities reconstruction. Individual identities are thus collectively reconstructed in a dialectical process, where the group assists the member who helps the group.

The history of Ana

My name is Ana, I'm 51 years old and I'm abstinent for 04 years, 05 months and ten days. I was born in Flamengo, on the Dois de Dezembro street and this neighborhood is very significant. My family came from the Northeast to live in Flamengo. After four years of marriage, my father, who was a clerk at Banco do Brasil, received a proposal to go to Brasilia. We lived in a 'living room and bedroom', me, my parents and my two brothers. In Brasilia, my father got a functional apartment and started a career project. My father was a very hardworking man, an inspiration to me! At one point he was our father and mother, because my mother hated Brasilia, which in 1974 had nothing. We went to live in a functional 3-bedroom apartment and my father bought a cart. In Brasilia I am part of that generation of "outsiders" who were somewhat idle. We started to make culture there. Leaving the dictatorship, everybody hippie, free sex, Brasilia, flying saucer, smoking a lot of weed.

I started trying drugs at 14 years old. I was dating a boy who had a Harley. I was part of the 'crazy' gang. We were part of the marginal group. At the age of 14 I started to 'fail'. My brothers already used it. In my case, it was much harder for my father because I was the daughter. There was the fear of pregnancy. My mother had been a single mother.

My father started walking behind me. We started to have a very complicated relationship. First, I tried *lança-perfume*. I had smoked cigarettes before. My dad found it in my bag, I was 10 years old. He gave me a Homeric beating. I was studying at a nun's college. Being a civil servant at that time in Brasilia provided much comfort. My transgression started with cigarettes, boyfriends, etc. I felt like a delinquent teenager. I only went to try cocaine when I was 16. Before, I smoked weed. I didn't like to use it much, but I did.

‘What I had, very strong, was a lot of revolt. I had a lot of discomfort and that I knew I already had. I realized that I had a different perception’. I was very good at Portuguese and writing. ‘My way of relating to people was very emotional. When I was referred to talk to the high school counselors, I liked it. I felt like I was a different person’.

My father was always walking behind me. I stole motorcycles and cars. My father started walking with the police behind me. Took me to the IML to find out I was no longer a virgin and sued my sweetheart. At that moment we began to measure force. The more he tell no to me the more "insanities" I committed. He put me in the juvenile court. He had gun possession and I started stealing my dad's revolver to legally blame him. He beat me. It was a pretty complicated match. My dad wanted to protect me, but I didn't see it that way. He rented an apartment here in Rio and sent me here with my mother.

‘The watershed when my family and I realized that it was a health issue and not legal’, was when at the age of 15, I came from Brasilia to Rio for a ride. Me and another girl stayed in my father's apartment in Cabo Frio. I broke into the apartment and already knew some crazy guys from Cabo Frio and the apartment within days was full of men smoking weed and using cocaine. I still didn't take heavy drugs. There I was scared of me!

The doorman called my dad, he took his leave, rented a car and picked me up on the beach! I was taken straight to the Margarida Pension for Psychiatric Emergencies. It was the way my father found to 'protect me from myself'. Today I see it that way. I gave in. I always gave in. ‘I felt that there was something very different. I could no longer control myself. I had something different’. Then I learned that I was in great danger of being institutionalized. At that time many young people went. I was diagnosed with schizophrenia, but that didn't convince my parents. I didn't have the common-sense crazy profile, but my parents saw me as a very decompensated person. I stayed 12 years. My mother took me and we lived in Rio, in an owned apartment that my father bought. ‘My father was the family hero’. In Rondônia, my father was a rubber tapper. With all this, he went to college and acquired a heritage.

My 'progression' continued in Rio. In Brasilia there were philosophical discourses. Not here in Rio, it was *morro* and traffic. Here I met cocaine with a boy, the son of a doorman here from Flamengo, who became a great robber and got stuck in Bangu. And there was also Lama's. There was something glamorous, intellectual talk. I snorted inside Lama's bathroom in San Salvador Square, I went to the Alaska Gallery, I met the theater people. I never really liked cannabis. I admired who had a cultural production.

At the age of 16 I wanted to study and couldn't. 'I tried harder and couldn't work anymore'. Medicine didn't have much appeal. I began to relate to older property men and middle

class traffickers. I lived with a known Cabo Frio dealer, started snorting every day. I asked a lawyer for help when the dealer and I were arrested. I was released, but he got arrested. I ended up relating to the lawyer, who turned out to be a drug dealer. We started buying cocaine in Acari to resell in Saquarema. I wasn't going to the beach one day. I was locked away for days hiding from the sun, didn't sweat, didn't eat. It was 03 years using a lot of cocaine. The plug dropped when I scraped the bags of cocaine to snort more. I managed to make a very fine line. He blew this line, said I was going crazy. I beat him and hit him. I punched his nose that started to bleed. I beat his dog. My reference to revolt was that my father beat me. I was extremely aggressive. That night I took my things and asked my parents to stay in that clinic.

That same night I was at Lama's and met a lady. She told me that my story was very similar to that of her daughter, who had just left a clinic called Vila Serena. She told me to sleep at her house and talk to her daughter. There was no Narcotics Anonymous yet, it was Junkies Anonymous in 1986. I talked to her daughter and was admitted to Vila Serena. It was 40 days. What we hear changed our lives. There we first heard about addiction and alcoholism. That explained how I was a very different person. That explained my physical tolerance and why I didn't finish anything I started'. I found it to be an 'emotional illness'. That there was a feature that was the 'mutual aid groups'. I joined the Anonymous Addiction Support Group (GATA, Portuguese initials). I fell in love!

'The change was complete, visceral' I couldn't get out of seventh grade. At the age of 19 I went to make a supplementary, was granted my driver's license, did dental treatment, went to the gynecologist. 'It was as if from that moment on my whole perspective changed, my way of relating to life'. All that desire to be an ordinary young girl began to be possible. It was like I was 'born at 19'. There was a lot I couldn't do. Many years ago I did not wake up in the morning. There began a process that I understand of 'spiritual awakening'. It took many years for me to have an awakening to life that I had never understood. 'I tried to become a functional person'. I finished high school, started college in psychology. I began to respond satisfactorily to the program.

I initially reported that I've been cleaning for 04 years and I joined at the age of 19. 'The spiritual experience has happened to me now'. It was a long process. I still had relapses, but not today. The last substance I used was crack, on the 'cracolândia' train line. There I got desperate. Until that moment I had not 'surrendered' yet. It took a long time for me to surrender. 'When I was defeated then everything was different'. Then I had a 'spiritual awakening', the middle of despair. I am so grateful to be alive. I feel like a person having a second chance at life. I appreciate things that I had no idea were important. I love life! I ride my bike like it's the most

wonderful thing in the world, and it is! In 'cracolândia' I saw people with no legs, with injured legs. Society does not see the 'cracolândias'. They are ghettos of people who are dying in life. I thank for being whole. I identify with 'Kardecism'. I feel like an evolving human being. This story that we have from NA brings us something human, enriches us humanly and spiritually and that we have new chances. I like to think that I will have other lives and that nothing is being in vain. That there is a greater plan of a Higher Power and that I am part of this purpose. 'I consider that today my religion is gratitude and my Higher Power is life!'

Final considerations

Narcotics Anonymous (NA) is defined as “a brotherhood or society of men and women for whom drugs have become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean” (NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS WORLD SERVICES, 2015, p. 11). Thus, we perceive Narcotics Anonymous as what is conventionally referred to as a "mutual aid" group from the 12-step recovery program and 12 traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The concept of NA 'disease' is particular. Addiction (chemical dependence) is seen as a physical, mental and spiritual disease. Members are then motivated to rework their perception patterns of the world from a 'meeting with themselves' process in the group. The 'therapeutic key' to understanding the NA program is 'telling your story'. The present thus re-elaborates the past, not linearly, but creating a sense that acts as a catalyst for the feeling of belonging to a 'new way of life'. The group, in this sense, provides the 'social memory frames' (HALBWACHS, 1925) necessary for this reinterpretation of the past. In the interview above, the highlighted points present several moments in which it is possible to perceive this intersection between the interviewee's memories and the way these memories are reconstructed from Narcotics Anonymous's own language.

[...] I am interested in emphasizing Halbwachs's perception that memory is not and cannot be considered the starting point, because it never departs from emptiness; memory is acquired as the individual takes as his own the memories of the group to which he relates: there is a process of appropriation of collective representations by the individual in interaction with other individuals (SANTOS, 1998, p. 161).⁷

⁷ [...] interessa-me enfatizar a percepção de Halbwachs de que a memória não é e não pode ser considerada o ponto de partida, porque ela nunca parte do vazio; a memória é adquirida à medida que o indivíduo toma como sua as lembranças do grupo com o qual se relaciona: há um processo de apropriação de representações coletivas por parte do indivíduo em interação com outros indivíduos (SANTOS, 1998, p. 161).

In steps 04 and 05 members are encouraged to write a 'deep and fearless moral inventory'. In it, they get in touch with all the 'insanities', as our interviewee reported. These "insanities" that leave marks and cause trauma here are not silenced but recounted and retold in a perennial process of "healing" since in this view addiction is an "incurable and fatal" disease. Trauma thus acts as a generating factor of a common identity. At the beginning of the meetings, the members identify themselves as follows: 'good night, my name is 'x', recovering addict'. The category 'recovering addict' reinvents the identity of the individual, who becomes perceived as a member of an 'affective community' (HALBWACHS, 1968).

Therefore, traumatic memory in Narcotics Anonymous groups functions as a 'therapeutic tool', reworking the past through the present and group strength, combining traditional and modern elements. So for Narcotics Anonymous, 'medicine' is the word!

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