

FBOs in Central America: A Critique of Power, Religion and Social Development in Maurice
Echeverría's *Diccionario esotérico*

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ABSTRACT

Latin American literature has a rich tradition of translating recreated realities and social commentaries into fictional works. In Central America, especially in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, these commentaries often speak to the plight of the people and the unjust actions of many governments during and after their still fresh civil wars. One Guatemalan author, Maurice Echeverría, stays within the broader trajectory of Central American literature with his novel *Diccionario esotérico* by creating a fictional work that speaks to a reality and asserts social commentary. This text differs from the corpus, though, by moving beyond the war and the post-war eras to a very current and prominent reality. This novel, which presents a critique of abuses of power in all of their manifestations, gives way to a striking commentary on evangelical organizations. This study will focus on extrapolating this critique to an actual evangelical organization working in Central America, thereby drawing connections between Echeverría's critical/theological stance and real systems of power.

*For all of the children who need a voice;
especially Monito, Carlitos, Jose, Marta, and Pollito.*

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Introduction

Latin American literature has a rich tradition of translating recreated realities and social commentaries into fictional works. In Central America, especially in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, these commentaries often speak to the plight of the people and the unjust actions of many governments during and after their still fresh civil wars. One Guatemalan author, Maurice Echeverría, stays within the broader trajectory of Central American literature and its cynical nature with his novel *Diccionario esotérico* by creating a fictional work that speaks to a reality and asserts social commentary. This text differs from the corpus, though, by moving beyond the war and the post-war eras to a very current and prominent reality. This novel, which presents a critique of abuses of power in all of their manifestations, gives way to a striking commentary on evangelical organizations. This study will focus on extrapolating this critique from the novel and then applying it to an actual evangelical organization working in Central America, thereby drawing connections between Echeverría's critical/theological stance and real systems of power.

When the term 'power' is used in this study, it refers to Foucault's definition of power relations. For Foucault, power is created and maintained through societal discourse. In his "Two Lectures," Foucault explains that power is "something which circulates... It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands... Power is employed... through a net-like organization" (98). Foucault asserts that "manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body ... cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse" (93). Ideas that benefit and bring profit to certain persons are normalized, or made to be understood as normal in society. They are learned and passed from one individual to the next, making individuals the

carrier of this phenomenon but not the producers of it. This is where the power lies for Foucault—in each individual in society producing, accumulating, and disseminating the common beliefs of their community about who should and does hold power and who does not. This discourse is what for him creates and maintains power relations. This project focuses both on this discourse of power in its many forms (physical, discursive, social, psychological), as well as abuses of power in their many manifestations, which can be roughly defined as an event in which the party in power mistreats or misrepresents the others or the peripheries. These abuses of power in the novel tie in with the author's assertion of social commentary, or the expression of feelings, especially of anger or discontent, with certain issues or situations occurring in society. It is generally seen as rebellious as it often speaks out against the majority, the government, or those in power. Echeverría uses the abuses of power in the novel to spark social commentary.

My interest in the topic stems from my life experience in the region. While earning my bachelor's degree in theology, I took a semester off to travel in Central America. During this trip I spent one and a half months in San Salvador, El Salvador interning for an evangelical faith-based organization (FBO), called Orphan Helpers. This organization works with orphans and gang members in government-run orphanages and detention centers. I spent a week volunteering with the FBO two years prior to this trip and became very attached to the children and interested in spending a longer period of time with them. When I returned as an intern for Orphan Helpers, though, a whole different side of the organization was revealed. I found some of the practices and treatment of the children to be ethically questionable and was concerned about the organizations' motives. This trip caused me to think critically about FBOs from an organizational standpoint. My desire to look at FBOs, their effectiveness, as well as their practices in an analytical manner motivated me to pursue an active investigation of Orphan

Helpers. Combining this research on Orphan Helpers with my work on *Diccionario esotérico* provides an intriguing starting and ending point for this study, as a commentary on evangelicals is first extracted from this piece of cultural production reflecting a reality in Central America, and then the conclusions of the novel are tested against those drawn about Orphan Helpers. This approach will allow us to examine the critique presented in the novel in depth and in new contexts.

This study will begin with a summary and analysis of Echeverría's *Diccionario esotérico*. We will examine the critique of power in the work and then look specifically at the commentary on evangelicals and the Biblical references in the text, and will then culminate with the construction of the protagonist's religion and how that adds to the critique being asserted. The conclusions made in this first chapter will then allow us to segue into a second chapter on my research regarding the practices of FBO Orphan Helpers. The conclusions drawn in the first chapter will be compared against those reached in the second, allowing for a dialogue between the cultural realities and commentaries extrapolated from *Diccionario esotérico* and my research.

Chapter 1: Maurice Echeverría's *Diccionario esotérico*: A Madman's Critique of Power

Introduction

The Guatemalan poet, author, and columnist Maurice Echeverría was born in 1976 in Guatemala City where he still resides and works today. Four of his short stories have been published in anthologies from both sides of the Atlantic. He has published three novellas—*Este cuerpo aquí* (1998), *La ciudad de los ahogados* (1999), and *Labios* (2003)—two *cuentos*, or short stories—“Sala de espera” (2001) and “Tres cuentos para una muerte,”—one collection of poetry called *Encierro y divagación en tres espacios y un anexo* (2001), and one novel, entitled *Diccionario esotérico* (2006). He has also published five digital collections of poetry. The bulk of his prose has been published in Guatemala and does not circulate in the United States. He has won many awards for his works, including the *Los Juegos Florales Hispanoamericanos de Quetzaltenango* in 2003 and 2004 for his short stories “Cábala para principiantes” and “La píldora del día después.” He also won the *Premio de Novela Corta de la Editorial Magna Terra 2003* for his novella *Labios*. Echeverría was also awarded *La Fundación Myrna Mack* twice in 2005 for his poem “Agenda” as well as for his short story “El antes y el después.” In 2006 he won the *Premio Federico García Lorca de Poesía*.

The following pages will focus on his award-winning novel, *Diccionario esotérico*, a novel that has been largely ignored by literary criticism. Echeverría was awarded the *Premio Centroamericano de Novela Mario Monteforte Toledo* in 2005 for this novel. This award was initiated by a group of Guatemalans involved in the arts—authors, painters, sculptors, an architect, and the founder of three Guatemalan newspapers—including Mario Monteforte

Toledo, Efraín Recinos, Marco Augusto Quiroa, Manolo Gallardo, William Lemus, Alfredo Balsells Tojo, José Rubén Zamora, Marta Regina Fahsen, Elmar René Rojas, and José Toledo Ordóñez, and has been won by other Central American authors such as Ronald Flores, Rogelio Salazar, and Jacinta Escudos. Echeverría is the youngest winner of this prize (Haas 8).

Diccionario esotérico is esoteric in extra-literary terms; obtaining the text proved almost impossible as the tome is not circulated or for sale in the United States. A handful of copies exist in select libraries in the interlibrary loan network. I contacted the author, who was reluctant to send a copy and simply told me that it would be available some day through an Internet vendor such as Amazon.com. Later in an interview, I questioned why his works were so difficult to find and if he wished one day to circulate them more widely and ‘sell his message’ like so many authors would. He replied that “en realidad, ya no me interesa ese asunto de ser un escritor famoso, ni siquiera a estas alturas ser un escritor a secas” [in reality, the subject of being a famous writer does not interest me, nor at this point do I ever want to just be a writer] (Echeverría). Eventually I found the novel through interlibrary loan and was informed by the librarian that the copy I received was one of only seven in the interlibrary loan system. A similar phenomenon was experienced when searching for scholarly articles on and reviews of Echeverría’s works. This vain search resulted in the discovery of a mere two articles on his works; one article on his collection of short stories, *Encierro y divagación en tres espacios y un anexo*, and the other on *Diccionario esotérico*.

In the article “Ficciones que duelen: Literatura y violencia postconflicto en Centroamérica,” Nadine Haas examines *Diccionario esotérico* as a product of the violent culture Guatemala is forced to become as a result of its post-conflict state. Haas looks at the presence of violence as an aesthetic in Central American literature, specifically literature from Guatemala, El

Salvador, and Honduras, as a repercussion of the violent conflicts (war, military rule, etc.) these countries so recently experienced. Her contention is that “la violencia va acompañada de la magia, es decir de lo inexplicable, pero también de lo fascinante” [violence is accompanied by magic, which is to say the inexplicable, yet also by the fascinating] (10). Haas’ exposition of *Diccionario esotérico* as a fictional cultural product of a very real post-conflict state is similar to the critique that will be presented in this study in that they both view this novel as cultural production of social truths. Haas does not, though, delve into the critique of power or religion presented in the work, nor does she examine the protagonist’s own religion and how that reverberates throughout the work, points on which I will elaborate in subsequent pages.

It can be concluded from the lack of literature on *Diccionario esotérico*, as well as the difficulty involved in locating the work, that this novel is quite uncommonly known and unstudied. There are other factors that contribute to the novelty of this work, especially if we examine its chapters from a stylistic viewpoint. The novel is extremely hard to place within the broader panorama of contemporary Central American literature, as its style and content are so very dissimilar from its contemporaries. *Diccionario esotérico* does not fit into any of the largely overarching standard styles presented in works currently coming out of Central America—*testimonio*, *testimonio* once-removed, and detective/noir fiction.

Popular Literary Movements in Central American Literature

Testimonio has occupied a central role in the cultural production of the region in the past thirty years. The genre “translates literally as ‘testimony,’ as in the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense” (Beverly 32). *Testimonio* can be characterized by a first-

person singular voice that could effectively speak for a group or culture, generally one that is oppressed in some sense by conflict, violence, and poverty. Following John Beverly's investigation into the genre, we can discern that *testimonio* is unique in that it "represent[s] in particular those subjects—the child, the 'native,' the woman, the insane, the criminal, the proletarian—excluded from authorized representation when it was a question of speaking and writing for themselves rather than being spoken for" (31). *Testimonio* then gives a voice to those who historically have not been afforded one and serves as "a fundamentally democratic and egalitarian form of narrative in the sense that it implies that any life so narrated can have a kind of representational value" (34). *Testimonio* can be viewed as "a tool of resistance against violence and oppression" and a "method of collective [identity and] healing and social justice" (Metz 8). One of the most acclaimed and well-known pieces of *testimonio* is *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983) by Rigoberta Menchú. This work was written from Menchú's perspective with the help of Venezuelan-born intellectual and anthropologist, Elizabeth Burgos. Menchú speaks on behalf of the indigenous Guatemalan people as a whole and how they were affected by the 36-year-long civil war that had a focus on persecuting and murdering Mayans and indigenous groups.¹ Menchú's book closely reflects the style, structure, and reception of *testimonio*.

The fact that often intellectuals need to interfere in the production of *testimonio* has been problematized by many authors. John Beverly comments that "because in many cases the narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer, the production of a *testimonio* generally involves the tape-recording and then the transcription

¹ The Commission for Historical Clarification concluded that the army committed 93% of the violence and that the guerrillas committed 3%. The report cited 83% of the victims as Mayans and 17% Ladinos (Warren 210-11).

and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is an intellectual, often a journalist or writer” (Beverly 32). The fact that editors, translators, or other intellectuals of the sort must become involved in the process of revealing these stories is debated as an intrusion on the story teller’s authenticity and originality, as they are able to tweak or change the story. David Stoll famously problematized this in the case of Menchú’s *testimonio* when he traveled to Guatemala to investigate her claims and compare them to government documents and the historical accounts of others in her community. He discovered that Menchú falsified certain aspects of her story in order to convey the message needed to move the guerrilla movement forward. Historian Greg Grandin presented a counter argument to Stoll’s book, claiming that the majority of his claims were inaccurate. He recognizes two elements of Stoll’s argument to be true, though—that Menchú omitted the fact that she did receive some education and that she falsified an account of witnessing her brother’s murder. Grandin, unlike Stoll, acknowledges that it was not to make her story more tragic or more appealing to readers that she left out her education, but “to protect the identities of the Catholic nuns who were involved in the kind of pastoral activism associated with liberation theology” during a time of conflict (6). He informs the reader that Menchú worked as a maid at the school in order to pay for her stay, and “did not study with the rest of the students, and she took classes part time a few days a week in the afternoon” (6). Nevertheless Stoll and Grandin both expose some falsities and contradictions present in Menchú’s story that could potentially be a result of “the hegemonic power-relation ... maintained in such testimonial collaboration, with the witness still dependent upon the editor, a representative of the dominant culture, to have agency, or a ‘voice’ regarding the past” (Weiser 3). To remedy this conflict, or at times to criticize the value of *testimonio*-style fiction, some authors subscribe to a new popular genre in Central American writing, that of the *testimonio* once-removed.

Testimonio once-removed can be described as writing in which the narrator ceases to be a part of the “witness-editor relationship” (3), as he or she is once-removed from that bond, looking at it from an outsider stance (Kokotovic “Testimonio Once Removed” 559). Misha Kokotovic explains that *testimonio* once-removed “represents not the firsthand experience of oppression communicated in *testimonio* proper, but rather the potentially transformative experience of reading such accounts” (559). An example of this can be found in Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *Insensatez* (2004) as he puts into writing the very real tragedies of indigenous Guatemalan Mayans and their “concise reaction to military brutality [in contrast with] the narrator’s verbose, if not insensitive, internalization of this statement” (Weiser 4). Ignacio Sánchez Prado comments on the stylistic nature of this text as a form of *testimonio* once-removed that “forms part of a new tendency of Central American writers to reclaim literary writing, both fictional and nonfictional, as a means to transcend the value accorded only to revolutionary or testimonial ‘imperatives’” (10). In this work the plight of the Guatemalan people is presented in the form of an official report being read by an initially insensitive narrator. By the end of the text the narrator is transformed into a sympathetic character that has been moved to care and to act, all as a result of his encounter with the *testimonios* he reads. Kokotovic contends, “*Insensatez*, unlike a *testimonio*, does not invite the reader to identify fully with the narrator. Instead, it uses the partial transformation of the narrator” in an attempt to go beyond the purely emotional reaction evoked by *testimonio* and instead to move the reader to action (560).

El material humano (2009) by Rodrigo Rey Rosa is another example of *testimonio* once-removed. This novel is written much in the same fashion as *Insensatez* and also shares focus on the violence against the people of Guatemala during the civil war. In *El material humano*, however, the protagonist is a writer conducting investigations in the archives of the National

Police on the crimes against humanity committed during the civil war in Guatemala. The novel is structured almost as a diary, as the narrator spills his thoughts, notes, and feelings onto each page in an intimate fashion. Both this novel and *Insensatez* bring the narrator “into an engagement with horrific realities that they might otherwise have resisted. The effect of that engagement on the narrator suggests the potential that *testimonio* may still have to move even cynical readers” (Kokotovic “Testimonio Once Removed” 559).

Given the literary context that Echeverría’s novel can be placed within, we can see how his text deviates from the larger umbrella of *testimonio*. Though *Diccionario esotérico* uses fiction to produce a social commentary, it does not fit into this genre because it is not based on a *testimonio*-like event, nor was it written to critique or strengthen the use of *testimonio* in literature. There is no *testimonio* in the novel that transcends the pages of the work and transforms the narrator, inspiring the reader to also become transformed by these events as there is in these *testimonio*-once removed texts.

Another prevailing genre in contemporary Central American literature is detective/noir fiction that presents narratives about detectives, private eyes, and crimes. This literary movement in Central America takes fictional detective type stories and uses them to highlight social realities, such as the aftermath of war and military rule or political corruption. Kokotovic separates Central American noir fiction from noir fiction in the rest of the world, by terming it “neoliberal noir” (“Neoliberal Noir” 15). Kokotovic claims that this movement in Central America started much later than in other parts of Latin America as a response to the end of the civil wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala as well as the neoliberal policies imposed on such countries after the end of these wars. Kokotovic writes that “since about 1990, most of the continent has experienced something of a boom in narratives that use elements of detective or

crime fiction to criticize the effects of the neoliberal, free market capitalism imposed on Latin American societies over the past two decades” (15). The critic also considers Central American noir to be distinctly different from Latin American noir, in that it “generally expresses a deep disillusionment with the outcome of the revolutionary struggles and marks its distance from the Left more categorically” (16).

Managua Salsa City: Devórame otra vez! (2000) by Guatemalan author Franz Galich is an example of this genre in that it explores the “the inter-connections between street crime, urban decay, the privatization of utilities, and government corruption” (McLeod 233) in Managua. Another example of Central American neoliberal noir is Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *Tirana memoria* (2008). In this novel “the author once again speaks out courageously about repression, abuses of power, military dictatorship, and cold-blooded executions in Central America, this time setting his novel in El Salvador in 1944” (Whipple). The novel is narrated by a woman whose journalist husband has been arrested along with many other journalists and intellectuals in an over-zealous attempt to protect the military regime from scrutiny. The plot thickens as her visitation rights decrease progressively, and then her husband is transferred to a prison from which many prisoners have simply disappeared. To complicate things, her son falsely states the general’s death on the radio, forcing him to flee and hide from the military. The majority of works coming out of the genres of *testimonio*, *testimonio* once-removed, and neoliberal noir tend to focus on the corruption of the government or the suffering of the people during or immediately following the civil war. Like the texts of these genres, *Diccionario esotérico* uses fiction to communicate a social commentary. Echeverría, though, moves beyond the plights of the people during the civil war and then in the post-war period, creating what he refers to as “la primera verdadera novela de posguerra” [the first real post-war novel] (Echeverría).

The fact that *Diccionario esotérico* does not fall into the currently dominating genres of *testimonio*, *testimonio* once-removed, or neoliberal noir separates it from the broader literary trajectories in contemporary Central American fiction. The difficulty involved in finding a copy of the novel as well as the scarcity of sources on the work lead me to believe that not only is this book a *Diccionario esotérico*, but it is also a *novela esotérica* [esoteric novel]. The following pages will contribute to the literature by presenting research on this text which is not commonly known or studied in academia. My investigation will also go further than previous critical studies by treating this novel not simply as fiction but also as a piece of cultural production speaking to a very factual reality that engages social commentaries on the role of power and religion in the region. To be more precise, I will focus my study on the critique of power, in all its variations, that is carried out in the text and pay particular attention to the role of religion. The following pages, therefore, will also unearth and analyze the Biblical references in the work, thereby allowing for a critical reconstruction of the protagonist's religious paradigm in *Diccionario esotérico*. This, in turn, will enable a critical evaluation of the text's representation and problematization of the place of religion in post-war Central America.

Summary of *Diccionario esotérico*

Part One

Diccionario esotérico is a 368-page novel split into three sections. The text almost has a diary-type feel to it because of the intimacy, emotion, and straightforwardness offered by the first-person narrator, Daniel. He lives with his girlfriend and love of his life, Carmen, in Guatemala City. The protagonist has a very needy ex-girlfriend, Dídi, who now lives with her

violent boyfriend, JR. She still calls Daniel for help or advice from time to time. Daniel loves Carmen, but from very early on in the novel presents himself as somewhat sex-obsessed, which manifests in his cheating on her. He sleeps with La Marta, the housekeeper, and threatens her not to tell anyone. Carmen has a *tía abuela* for whom she is affectionate, and who invites Daniel to attend her evangelical church one Sunday. He goes, despite his will, and leaves early, disgusted by the ritual. He briefly encounters a man from the church named Abraham, though he does not focus much attention on the experience.

Flavio is Daniel's friend whom he regards as a mentor. Flavio is an intriguing and complex character who drives a taxi by choice even though he is a millionaire. He was raised in the circus and at some point in life became quite wealthy. Flavio is very knowledgeable in the occult and travels all over the world to investigate different libraries' collections on the matter. He composes his own volume on the topic, called his *Libro de sombras*. Flavio takes a liking to Daniel, instructs him in the occult sciences, and even takes Daniel with him to London on an investigation. Daniel begins spending more and more time with Flavio and is eager to learn from him. Daniel begins to attempt to do magic and begins carrying with him a *Maximón* figure. *Maximón*, also known as San Simón, is a folk saint worshipped in many of the highland areas of Guatemala. These communities blend Mayan religious rituals and beliefs with those of Catholicism, hence the veneration of the Mayan god *Maximón* in a Catholic manner. In these communities there is an effigy of and shrine to this god that is rotated between homes during Holy Week. The people of the towns come to venerate *Maximón*, offering him cigars, cigarettes, liquor and more. In return they ask him for good health, good marriages, and healthy crops.

As Daniel divulges the details of his teenage romance with Didi, the reader discovers that her parents are extremely wealthy and allowed her to use their money to do as she pleased, so

she and Daniel spent most of their time traveling to Miami, London, Amsterdam, and the like. Their travels presented them with opportunities for wanton drug use and sexual exploration; as a result they remained high for the majority of their time abroad and participated in multiple orgies—even in a pornographic film. At some point Didi is kidnapped and repeatedly gang-raped. Once she is rescued, Daniel is disgusted by her and the thought of what happened to her, and soon ends their relationship. He moves on, though they maintain contact and occasionally have sex. Didi begins a relationship with JR, a man of whom her parents do not approve, resulting in her becoming cut off financially. Didi gets pregnant by JR and goes to Daniel's home to talk to him about it. They wind up having sex and Carmen walks in on them. Carmen ends the relationship with Daniel, though instead of assuming responsibility, Daniel thinks it is because she is jealous of Didi, Flavio, his increasing interest in the occult sciences, and of *Maximón*. Daniel's relationship with Didi, his constant cheating on Carmen, and his refusal to assume responsibility for his actions help the reader to begin to understand that this protagonist is extremely narcissistic.

After the breakup, Daniel and his *Amigos de Bajo Presupuesto* [friends with low income] decide to make a film. To finance this film they resort to a method with which they are quite familiar—stealing. They occupy the home of a single woman, ransacking the house and then stealing her car. They rob many other homes, using the money to go on shopping sprees and making short films with the leftovers—films Daniel calls “tan respetables y necesarios para la Humanidad” [extremely respectable and necessary for Humanity] (72). Again we see the narcissistic quality of the protagonist developing, as well as the presentation of a skewed moral system when he allows himself to steal, cheat, etc., but then produce films he finds ‘respectable and necessary for humanity.’ Daniel uses these films as an attempt to escape his obsession with

Carmen and his disappointment that she is gone. At night he touches her clothes and even dresses in them. His obsession begins slowly winding into hatred for Carmen masked by intense love for her. He decides that she is a witch from the 17th century and then wrestles with this notion throughout the rest of the book, sometimes referring to her as a witch and other times as his one true love. This conflict can be considered a result of his narcissism, as he does not allow himself to claim responsibility for their ended relationship and so must search for qualities in Carmen on which to place blame.

Daniel decides to see a therapist, Dr. Francisco, only to decide on his own that he is not responsible for any of his problems, but that his father, whom he did not know, and his stepfather, with whom he was never close, caused his mental sickness and twisted mind from a very young age. Carmen is currently responsible for his mental torment, as she is a malignant force with the sole purpose of destroying him and playing with his head. Again we see that Daniel takes no fault for his actions or thoughts, but instead blames those from his past. He refers to her as a “bruja que el Demonio ha colocado cerca de mí para jugar con mi equilibrio espiritual” [witch that the Devil has put close to me to play with my spiritual equilibrium] (77). Daniel never listens to Dr. Francisco but instead treats his sessions as a game, trying to deceive him into thinking he is well one day and very ill the next. He continues going to therapy until he decides that Dr. Francisco is tricking him by continuing to treat him so that he can continue to charge him. He decides to try group therapy instead—many different types of 12-step programs—until he settles on a group of Codependents. There he talks constantly about Carmen, the witch from the 17th century, and it is there that he meets Pinzón. We see the development of paranoia in the protagonist’s thoughts and actions, as manifested here in his reaction to the breakup with Carmen as well as his time with the psychologist.

The moment in which Daniel knew he and Pinzón would be friends occurs in one of the first Codependents meetings he attended. After disclosing his story about Carmen the witch, Pinzón presents a solution: burn her. After the meeting Carmen calls Daniel, wanting to come get her things, and Daniel and Pinzón commence the plan. Carmen comes to the apartment, collects her things and is almost ready to leave, when Daniel, with the powers of his mind, makes a giant Grandfather clock fall on top of Carmen, killing her. Daniel burns her body and buries her ashes under a tree in a forest—the same forest, we later discover, in which he buried his nagging grandmother after killing her.

Part Two

This section begins with Daniel in what can be interpreted as a paranoid killing rampage. He kills Dídi and JR and kidnaps their baby Miguel, whom Daniel thinks to be a holy angel. He cares for Miguel for a short time, but then kills him, offering him as a sacrifice. Daniel goes to the house of Flavio in a paranoid state, upset that Flavio may be jealous of his increasing skill in the occult and that he never shares his *Libro de sombras* with him, and kills Flavio and Flavio's cat. Daniel begins to pass all of his time studying and practicing magic. He creates a room designated only for magic in which he performs rituals and ceremonies. Because his mind is still tormented with thoughts of Carmen he decides that he wants to bring her back to life and believes he can do so if only he is able to master the art of resurrecting the dead through magic. He collects animals from the streets—dogs, chickens, etc.—and keeps them for a few days before killing them and attempting a magic ritual to bring them back to life. He is unsuccessful and buries their corpses in the same forest where he buried Carmen. He brings one dog back to

life for just a moment, and then it expires again.

Daniel decides that perhaps the rituals were not functioning because he was using animals, and then deviously invites some of the locals into his home. *Pegamenteros*, or ‘glue sniffers,’ are how the protagonist refers to children that live on the streets and sniff glue as an escape from hunger, the elements, and their reality. Echeverría focuses on this population in a few of his poems, including “Cuerpo” and “Yo soy ese.” Lines such as “Pálidos se muestran los bordes / líquidos: es el / panteísmo de algún licor” [The peripheral liquids show themselves to be pale / it is the pantheism of some liquor] (Echeverría, “Cuerpo”) and “Eso que camina con mirada dormida, / eso que se suicida en las esquinas soy yo / o algo parecido a mí: mi fiebre” [That thing that walks with a blank look, / that thing that commits suicide in the corners that is me / or something that looks like me: my fever] (Echeverría, “Yo soy ese”) demonstrate this recurring theme of *pegamenteros* as well as the dichotomy of power and peripheries in his works. When asked in our interview why he focuses so much of his interest on children and children of the street, he replied simply, “un niño es una metáfora. Un niño de la calle es una metáfora dos veces” [a child is a metaphor. a street child is a metaphor two times] (Echeverría). Daniel teaches one of the eight how to kill, and after leaving the house for a short bit, returns to find two of the *pegamenteros* dead. He attempts to bring them to life, fails, and buries them near Carmen. He renames the other six and tries to conduct other rituals with them alive, soon kicking them out of the house for not respecting magic. He decides he is ready to resurrect Carmen and brings her ashes to the magic room in preparation of the ritual. The ceremony results in the sudden appearance of a giant worm—*la Oruga*. The *Oruga* is enormous, slimy, disgusting. It’s only apparent functions are the absorption of fluids through its skin and then secretion of dark, filthy goo. He grows fond of the creature, though it also repulses him. He cares for the *Oruga*, feeding

it milk through its skin and caressing it, as though it were a household pet. The presence of such a creature is one of many elements of magical realism in the text. Echeverría's use of magical realism is dissimilar from other Central and Latin American writers in that it is characterized by an aesthetic of *asco*, or disgust. This phenomenon will be discussed in a later section.

After a few weeks the *Oruga* develops a vagina. Daniel is not sure what to do. He considers conducting the ritual another time, in case he had done something wrong the first time. As he continues pondering the appearance of the *Oruga*, though, he surmises that the *Oruga* is Carmen, that Carmen is slowly growing out of the *Oruga*, which will eventually shed its filthy skin like a cocoon. He begins to regard the *Oruga* and Carmen as one entity, becoming sexually fond of—and then sexually active with—the *Oruga*. The day after this sexual encounter, Daniel awakens in severe, gut-wrenching pain. He can barely stand and does not know who to call for help. He decides that the person that should help him is Abraham, the man he met only once outside of the evangelical church of Carmen's *tía abuela*. He manages to drive himself to the temple where Abraham helps him out of the car. Daniel tells Abraham of all that he has done—the murders, the *Oruga*, everything—in almost a confession, and then faints. He awakens in the home of Abraham who insists that Daniel say aloud that he accepts Jesus Christ in his heart and begins to read the Bible. Daniel does so.

Abraham brings Daniel to temple with him on Sunday to meet *los Hermanos* [the Brothers]. The protagonist anticipates that he most likely will not truly convert to Christianity but does not inform Abraham of this, though he does tell Abraham that he should have never come to find him. Following this, Abraham enters Daniel's room with two of the *Hermanos*, Pedro and Efraín. Daniel describes the event, beginning with Abraham yelling, “‘Vas a creer, hijo de la gran puta?’, y me propina un golpe que me bota los dientes, ‘Vas a darle tu corazón a

Cristo, miserable?’, y me rompe la nariz” [‘Are you going to believe, you son of a bitch?’ and he hits me so hard my teeth fall out, ‘Are you going to give your heart to Christ, miserable?’ and he breaks my nose] (188). They beat him repeatedly, humiliate him and take his clothes, burn him with cigarettes, tie him up with barbed wire, cut off his ear, and threaten him that if he does not accept Christ they will burn him, kill him, take him to the police. He finally succumbs, saying he accepts Christ. The *Hermanos* leave him nearly dead in a ditch. Though the protagonist makes well known his opinion of evangelicals throughout the text, this is the only encounter between he and evangelicals to which the reader is exposed.

Daniel stays in the hospital for weeks after the incident. When he leaves the hospital he spends time walking around the streets of Guatemala City. The few pages that describe this journey are the only ones in which Daniel speaks of himself in the third person. He seems almost crazy, walking around saying “Hocus Pocus,” growing his filthy beard long, wearing clothes from the trash, drinking excessively, and sleeping with the *pegamenteros*. He spends a lot of time reflecting on the *pegamenteros* and their characteristics. The narration changes back to first-person, Daniel realizes he has spent months with the *pegamenteros*, and is disgusted with himself. He decides to return to his apartment, the *Deptobunker*. He returns to find that the manager has rented the place to someone else. He enters the apartment anyway, wanting to claim his possessions and finds the *Oruga* dead in pieces with a message written in its fluids, “Todo aquel que adore a la Bestia conocerá la ira de Dios” [All those who worship the Beast will know the wrath of God.] (214).

Part Three

Daniel buries the remains of the *Oruga*, which he refers to as Carmen, and begins to treat her grave with great respect, bringing flowers. He walks around the forest and decides to stay there with the *Pegamenteros* and never return to the *Deptobunker*. He informs the six *Pegamenteros* that he renamed—Blake, Piedra Filosofal, Boehme, Zósimo, Papús, y Osiris—, and a few others that are with them, that they will live in the forest and that “Ahora voy a vivir con ustedes. Voy a ser el jefe” [Now I am going to live with you all. I am going to be the boss] (223). He has them construct a hut for him and assigns them tasks such as hunting squirrels for food, revering the tomb of Carmen, and following all of his orders. Some *Pegamenteros*, which he now calls *Patojos* [Guatemalan slang for children/urchins], are ordered to study and practice magic while others have different assignments—Osiris is to spend nights in Daniel’s hut and offer her body to him. He soon names the group the *Ejército Trismegisto* and describes the group as

un frente de guerra cuyo fin inmediato es combatir las iniquidades feudalizantes de la dictadura religiosa, principalmente cristiana, que ha sometido a Guatemala desde hace más de cinco siglos y ha tomado ahora un nuevo impulso con el ascenso vertiginoso de las comunidades protestantes. Es un movimiento armado de conciencia nacional compuesto principalmente por elementos específicos de un segmento preciso del lumpen-proletariado urbano, los llamados *Pegamenteros*. A partir de hoy, es una fuerza activa militar, con grados e insignias, organización y mística revolucionaria, enfocada en formar tropas

destinadas a la lucha contra los abusos de la espiritualidad judeocristiana. (225)

[a war front whose immediate purpose is to combat the feudal iniquities of the religious dictatorship, principally Christian, that has been forced upon Guatemala for over five centuries and that now has taken a new impulse with a vertiginous ascent in the protestant communities. It is a movement armed with national conscience composed principally of specific elements of a precise segment of urban lumpenproletariat, those named glue sniffers. From today onward, it is an active military force, with ranks and insignia, revolutionary and mystical organization, focused on forming troops destined for the fight against the abuses of Judeo-Christian spirituality.]

One of the main goals of the group is to seek revenge against Abraham and his cohort. Daniel acquires more powers each day; the power to speak in tongues, to predict things that will happen, to see angels and demons, to heal the sick, and more. He asks Pinzón to join the *Ejército Trismegisto* as his right hand man who helps “con la concreción de un Ejército de soldados, para destruir a Abraham, y a todos los templos evangélicos del país” [with the concretion of the army of soldiers, to destroy Abraham, and all of the evangelical temples in the country.] (230). Pinzón is sickly excited for the task, and finally tells Daniel that he was one of Didi’s kidnappers and rapists, information that makes Daniel content. To finance and maintain the mission and the camp in the forest—*Campamento Mercurio*—they rob buses full of people and collaborate with the *Mara Salvatrucha* as well as the *Mara 18*, two of the most violent and widespread gangs in Latin America (and now the United States, as well), to sell drugs. The gang members under the

command of Pinzón also fund the ‘military prison’ into which Flavio’s home has been converted. There they abduct and hold evangelicals captive, torturing them and killing those that refuse to denounce their faith. Daniel begins teaching the *Patojos* magic lessons based on the *Diccionario esotérico* that Flavio wrote; and he also teaches a course on Carmen, omitting her evangelical faith and claiming that an evangelical is responsible for her murder. He enforces a strict bedtime and naptime, along with a schedule for weight lifting, honoring the tomb of Carmen, bathing, and martial arts lessons. They sing a hymn written by Daniel each day at the same time. There are statues of both Daniel and *Maximón* erected in the camp. All of the *Patojos* go through a rehabilitation process in which they shed their addiction to glue. The protagonist murders those who betray him or his ideals, though he ironically teaches that violence should only be used when necessary—only against evangelicals (247, 248). He is also sexually active with many of the *Patojas* and commends orgies in the camp. The protagonist’s hypocrisy and skewed sense of morality becomes more obvious as his ideology unwinds and his treatment of the *Patojos* is examined.

From Flavio’s *Diccionario esotérico* Daniel extracts the idea to create *homúnculos* [homuncules] he calls *Vorrks*. He creates a small army of *Vorrks* with the mission of training them to “hacer que, al escuchar la palabra ‘Jesús’, o ‘Jesucristo’, o ‘Cristo’, el homúnculo se convierta automáticamente en un homicida salvaje, y mate al culpable de proferir semejante palabra, no importando si se trata de niño, anciano, o mujer” [upon hearing the word ‘Jesus,’ or ‘Jesus Christ,’ or ‘Christ,’ the homuncule will convert automatically into a homicidal savage, and kill the person guilty of uttering such a word, not distinguishing between children, the elderly, or women.] (296). Daniel sends a *Vorrk* to kill Abraham, who ends up also killing his wife and children. The *Ejército Trismegisto* then sends *Vorrks* to Christian households all over the city to

murder them when least expected. Christians all over Guatemala City are driven crazy by the movement and demand answers from the government, who is quick to respond with false reports that it is the housekeepers that are murdering their families and then committing suicide. The government shuts down the newspapers and orders the assassination of journalists who continue to place blame on the government. Here the reader is presented with a blatant critique of power and the abuses of it as the government lies and then hides from the masses.

The *Ejército Trismegisto* kills people in the streets and in the churches, cutting off the ears or testicles of the victims and hanging their bodies on lampposts. They continue torturing the victims and leaving them to die in the prison. The actions of the *Ejército Trismegisto* add to the overwhelming aesthetic of *asco* throughout the text. Daniel decides that a movie should be made about him, his ideals, and his movement. He orders that his *Amigos de Bajo Presupuesto* come to the camp to make the film, and they do so. Daniel holds two dinner/orgies in their honor—one upon their arrival and one upon their termination of the documentary. Daniel is content until Pinzón brings him the heads of the *Amigos de Bajo Presupuesto* and informs him that they betrayed him, giving the film to the Catholic Church who got involved thinking this was a “revolución anticristiana” [anti-Christian revolution], which it so became thereafter (325). Daniel is so enraged that he murders two *Patojos* with his bare hands—again displaying the protagonist’s hypocrisy—, and then orders the destruction of the Catholic Cathedral, which occurs two days later. The evangelicals bribe the military to fight for them and the tanks and helicopters begin to circulate. The fact that bribes and almost force are necessary in order to have the government acquiesce to assist furthers the power critique.

Suddenly Daniel begins losing his powers. He is terrified of someone finding out and frantically searches in the *Diccionario esotérico* for a solution, and it reads, “La comodidad

narcisista es un lujo que el mago no puede darse, porque la magia se funda en el coraje, y el coraje no es más que la continua superación del ego” [The narcissistic commodity is a luxury that the magician cannot afford himself, because magic is based on courage, and courage is nothing more than the continual superseding of the ego.] (328). He pays no mind to the warning, searching for other answers, but finds nothing. His fear thickens as a mob of *Patojos* approaches him, with a long list of insults and demands. They are tired of being mistreated and make demands, including more flexible working conditions and the workers’ rights that the *La Ley General de Trabajo* [General Work Law] requires. Daniel does not comply, and the *Patojos* begin their rebellion. They burn and defile the *Diccionario esotérico*, name Pinzón their new *Comandante General* [General Commander], and decide to burn Daniel. Before they are able to finish the act of burning him, though, a massive attack takes place in the *Campamento Mercurio*. The government’s military, the Catholics, the evangelicals, and more launch an attack against the *Ejército Trismegisto*. The vast majority of the *Patojos* die, but Daniel escapes the attack, staying nearby to look on. When the fighting ceases, he returns to the camp to find that everything has been burned and all of the *Patojos* in the river, dead. He wades into the river, finally admitting he failed and ready to die. Blake, one of Daniel’s favored followers, pulls him out of the river, though, and takes him to his mother’s house.

Daniel stays in Blake’s mother’s house for quite some time; he stays in bed with no desire to do anything else. With his operation failed and ended, the government has put a reward out for his capture so he cannot leave the house. After some time Blake finds two false passports for them to use to travel to Mexico, which reinvigorates Daniel for the first time since the movement. He thinks on potentially starting a new movement in Mexico, and decides that he cannot leave Guatemala without saying his goodbyes. He spends hours walking around the city

as he has so many times before, and sees some of the *Pegamenteros* and old neighbors, none of whom acknowledge or recognize him. Daniel ends up at the Codependents group, where he feels relief seeing familiar faces that know him and listen to him. He admits to them that he killed Carmen and that it was the biggest error he ever committed. He realizes after a few moments that something does not feel right; something is happening without his knowledge. He looks outside. There is no one in the streets. And then the mob appears. The group knew all along what Daniel had done and one of them had alerted the others. The mob enters the building angrily and screaming—Daniel finds it strangely beautiful. They grab Daniel. He finds himself burning in flames but not feeling any pain, and ends the book saying, “estoy lejos, estoy tan lejos, estoy justo donde quiero estar: por encima de este miserable pueblo de malditos evangélicos” [I’m far away, I’m so far away, I am just where I want to be: above this miserable town of damned evangelicals.] (368).

A New Form of Magical Realism

As discussed in the introduction, *Diccionario esotérico* is quite revolutionary in style as it does not fit into the most popular veins of literature coming out of Central America, that is, *testimonio*, *testimonio* once-removed, or neoliberal noir fiction. There are, however, some similarities in style between this work and others coming out of Central America. *Diccionario esotérico* follows a broader trajectory of Latin American fiction that includes elements of magical realism. Magical realism is a literary genre that became popular in 20th century Central and Latin American literature in which magical and fantastical elements are combined with a realistic narrative to create a more pronounced commentary, story, or reality. Carpentier coined

magical realism *lo real maravilloso* [the marvelous reality], which John Brushwood describes in further detail saying that magical realism in Spanish American literature includes the marvelous that “exists naturally; one does not have to invent strange juxtapositions/associations” (20). Magical realism, then, takes magical elements and uses them in the narrative in a way that appears normal or ordinary to both the reader and to the characters within the story; and these novels are characterized by a tone that is accepting of these elements as part of a realistic narrative. Many, but not all, novels that ascribe to this aesthetic do so in order to make a social commentary, as does *Diccionario esotérico*. Other Central American novels that create social critique via magical realism have been written by canonical authors such as Gioconda Belli.

In *La mujer habitada* (1988) Nicaraguan author Gioconda Belli creates a tale in which two female protagonists break all of the prescribed notions of how a woman should be. While women in the novel are supposed to be passive, these two protagonists cross into action, one as a mythological warrior from the era of the Spanish conquest that inhabits the spirit of the main character, who then finds the courage to join the Sandinistas as a *guerrillera* [guerrilla] and fight for what she believes. This work uses magical realism to transform the protagonist into a woman inhabited by this warrior and her ideals, which in turn challenges the phallogentric society, government, and war regime of that time.

In his text *Diccionario esotérico*, Echeverría uses magical realism to create a social commentary and evoke emotion in the reader; but it is used in quite a different manner than in other Central American texts. Echeverría’s magical realism is characterized by the visceral feeling of *asco* – disgust, filth, and repulsion. *Diccionario esotérico* presents the reader with a protagonist whose aversion to evangelical persons and ideology is strewn throughout the entire work, and whose actions and language are often quite vulgar and, frankly, disgusting.

This aesthetic of disgust is maintained throughout *Diccionario esotérico*, from Daniel's repugnant treatment of people, his perverse sexual experiments and encounters with women, men, groups, and the *Oruga*, his murderous tendencies, and his personal hatred for evangelicals. Echeverría carries this disgust through to his use of magical realism, transforming this sometimes enchanting literary device into a tool of repulsion and antagonism that allows the author to further exaggerate the filth, embarrassment, and repugnance invoked in the reader. Echeverría gives new meaning to the notion that magical realism brings fantastical elements into a realistic narrative, as many of the magical devices in the novel are characterized by realistic events or personas. For example, the character Daniel has many qualities that are realistic. He is a narcissist who refuses responsibility for any of his actions, an overly sexed male, a manipulator and murderer. These qualities on their own are realistic, but their culmination in the protagonist seems fantastical in that they evoke disbelief in the reader that this character could possibly get any worse. Echeverría uses magical realism in this sense not in an overly fantastical way, but as a vehicle for exaggerating the disgusting qualities of the protagonist.

Daniel's character in general can be defined as despicable and repulsive. Here we have a protagonist who is more than capable of murder, participates in orgies, has sex with a giant worm, kills a baby, murders children, takes the life of his lover and then wants to resurrect her for his own pleasure, brings life to creatures simply to use as killing machines, turns groups of people against others, and all without ever taking responsibility for a single one of these actions or considering the thoughts, feelings, desires of the other people he affects. This character is selfish in all that he does and evades blame and responsibility for all of his actions. Quotes such as "es cuando debo despedirme de este país, que tan ingratamente me ha tratado" [It is time that I say goodbye to this country, that has treated me so ungratefully] and "ciertas traiciones a las

que fui sometido, ciertas brutalidades que alguien alguna vez me propinó” [certain betrayals that happened to me, certain brutalities that someone once committed against me] emphasize the protagonist’s narcissism and evasion of responsibility (360). The use of a protagonist of such narcissistic quality and apparently nonexistent moral fiber begs hatred and disgust from the reader. The presence of this type of protagonist is characteristic of Echeverría’s magical realism in that his flaws are realistically achievable and yet they still solicit disbelief, disgust, and awe from the reader. His negative qualities are overly and overtly exaggerated in order to convey an aesthetic of disgust. The first-person diary-like narration contributes greatly to this mood as the protagonist’s openness and intimacy with the reader allow the reader to know his true feelings and thoughts seemingly without censorship.

It is not only Daniel’s characteristics but also his treatment of people that is despicable. His killing of Carmen after he cheats on her and she in turn leaves him, and then his attempt to resurrect her because of his loneliness exemplify his selfishness and disregard for the feelings of others. His relationships revolve around self-satisfaction and personal entertainment or gain. Daniel’s attitude towards Didi demonstrates this point even further, beginning with his view of her after she is kidnapped and gang raped. He writes that “después de que secuestraron a Didi me empezó a dar asco estar con ella: Esos secuestradores la habían violado demasiadas veces. Era intolerable para mi gusto selecto. En esos repetidos actos de posesión sexual, los demonios de los secuestradores ... se habían trasladado al cuerpo de Didi. Era un riesgo coger con ella. Lo hice, pero lo hice con asco” [After they kidnapped Didi being with her started to disgust me. The kidnapers had raped her so many times. It was intolerable for my select liking. In those repeated acts of sexual possession, those devils of kidnapers had transformed Didi’s body. It was a risk to have sex with her. I did it, but I did it with disgust] (61). Later when Didi comes to visit

Daniel at the apartment in which he lives with Carmen, he takes advantage of her vulnerable and fragile state, asserting, “viéndola así, toda débil y maltrecha, quise terminar de humillarla. Poco a poco, le di besos, pequeños, reconfortantes, casi tímidos besos. Dídi fue cediendo. Me daba asco. Soy un actor. En poco tiempo, la tenía desnuda sobre la mesa de la sala. La estaba violando; pero ella no sabía” [Seeing her like that, all weak and battered, I wanted to finish humiliating her. Little by little, I gave her kisses, small, comforting, almost timid kisses. Dídi was giving in. She disgusted me. I am an actor. In no time at all, I had her naked on the living room table. I was raping her; but she did not know it.] (63). This horrible treatment of others intensifies the mood of *asco* that permeates the novel.

Daniel’s beliefs also contribute to this aesthetic. In an obvious way, the protagonist is repulsed by and has an immense hatred for evangelical beliefs. His personal belief in magic and resurrection also add to this aesthetic, as they are selfishly motivated and used as an excuse to evade the assuming of responsibility for his actions. Daniel kills multiple people throughout and for the sake of his journey to becoming a better magician. He murders Dídi and JR because he believes that he must receive possession of Miguel, the angel, so that the angel can bless him and protect him. He soon takes the life of the baby angel, too, as a sacrifice. The protagonist ironically uses magic, something that may not seem rational to most, to rationalize his actions. Daniel’s beliefs in magic and resurrection allow him to commit murder without taking responsibility or feeling guilty; they make it possible for him to kill an innocent infant without a single hint of remorse. These beliefs plus the position of power to which he appoints himself allow Daniel to place himself beyond reproach, beyond question, and in a role that affords him the capacity to do as he pleases because in his mind he is doing it for a higher purpose.

The protagonist’s characteristics, treatment of others, and beliefs all demonstrate

Echeverría's tendency in this novel to use magical realism characterized by realistic events, people, and qualities to exaggerate elements of *asco*. He uses magical characters to achieve the same goal. The *Oruga* in the novel is certainly an element of magical realism. This giant worm appears out of nowhere after Daniel completes a magical ritual. It is disgusting, slimy, filthy. The worm has two apparent functions, absorbing milk through its skin and secreting black slime. This *Oruga*, in its actions and being, is disgusting. Daniel eventually decides that the large, slime-covered, black worm must be the filthy cocoon surrounding Carmen's lovely body, and he makes love to it. The passage in which he describes the event is a truly disturbing example of the aesthetic of *asco* communicated in this novel through magical realism. He states:

Es tanta la excitación que voy al cuarto de magia y abrazo a la Oruga, la toco, la voy lamiendo toda, hasta llegar a la vagina, que también me ocupo de lamer, como si estuviese lamiendo la mano de Dios. La vagina despide contracciones nítidas de placer, la Oruga se sacude entera, mi falo está duro, está listo, amplificado, poderoso, y lo meto en la mortal vagina, que lo recibe, murciélago envolviendo con sus alas un tesoro de blanqueada carne roja, un tesoro estrangulado, henchido, enrojeciéndose. (173)

[It was so much excitement that I go into the magic room and I hug the worm, I touch it, I am licking it everywhere, until I get to the vagina, that I also begin to lick, as if I were licking the hand of God. The vagina releases sharp contractions of pleasure, the entire worm shakes, my phallus is hard, it is ready, amplified, powerful, and I put in into the deadly vagina, which receives it, a bat wrapping its

wings around a treasure of bleached red meat, a strangled, swollen, reddening treasure.]

The creature itself along with Daniel's feelings and actions toward it intensify the mood of *asco* in the text.

The death of Rosa, one of the members of the Codependents group, illustrates the somewhat fantastical, or highly exaggerated, culminating with an element of *asco*. Rosa is a dramatic character who speaks of committing suicide because of the heartbreak she experienced at the hand of another member of the group. When she finally does commit suicide, she takes a bottle of pills, a pair of scissors, and a gun to the roof of her apartment building. She takes 23 pills, slits her wrists, and then shoots herself in the mouth, plunging from the roof and landing "sobre la abuelita de un niño" [on top of the grandmother of a little boy] (85). This event, though not entirely impossible, happens in an 'over-the-top' manner, from the excess in tools used for the suicide to the perverse finale in which Rosa falls on an elderly woman whose grandchild is standing by watching. This is the overtly exaggerated semi-magical writing characteristic of this novel, complimented by the element of disgust created by the falling of Rosa's corpse onto the grandmother of a small boy.

All of these passages show how the magical realism used in *Diccionario esotérico* differs greatly from the magical realism used in the mainstream of Latin American works because of the work's overall aesthetic of disgust. Echeverría uses magical realism not in such a fantastical manner as authors such as García Márquez, but as a means to exaggerate the element of *asco* in the work, to invoke emotion in the reader, and to communicate his social commentaries. This study will now move away from stylistic analysis to a discussion of the social critiques present in

Diccionario esotérico.

***Diccionario esotérico* as Social Commentary**

In its essence *Diccionario esotérico* is a commentary on power in general and all institutions and persons that take advantage of it. In an interview with the author he informed me that

Diccionario esotérico no es una crítica exclusiva a los grupos evangélicos: es una crítica al poder en todas sus expresiones, las institucionales y las periféricas. No podemos olvidar que el personaje principal adolece de todos los defectos de aquellos a quien critica: la víctima como victimario perfecto...*Diccionario esotérico* es una crítica al poder en cualquiera de sus formas, seculares o religiosas. No importa si eres creyente o ateo, si tu relación con el poder es malsana, te convertirás en un hijo de puta.² (Echeverría)

[*Diccionario esotérico* is not a critique only of evangelical groups: it is a critique of power in all of its expressions, the institutions and the peripheries. We cannot forget that the principal character assumes all of the defects of those he critiques: the victim as the perfect murderer...*Diccionario esotérico* is a critique of power in

² Maurice Echeverría here affirms that in his novel there is no one ‘bad guy’ or ‘good guy;’ that these lines cannot be drawn in a clear black and white fashion. Instead, the good and the bad cross lines and are at times indistinguishable from one another. This style is reminiscent of neoliberal noir fiction, a genre that displays characters of the same sort of caliber. Though *Diccionario esoterico* shares this in common with neoliberal noir fiction, it still cannot be considered part of this literary movement because of the differences mainly in theme and overall plot of the text. See section on neoliberal noir.

all of its forms, secular or religious. It does not matter if you are a believer or an atheist, if your relation with power is unhealthy, you convert into a son of a bitch.]

There is a stark dichotomization of the institutions of power and those in their periphery in this work. Those on the periphery are lumped into one autonomous, unimportant, negatively stereotyped group, noted when Daniel mentions that “la gente lo aglutina todo en una misma categoría: la categoría de la Mendicidad, de la Delincuencia, de la Marginalidad” [People lump everything together in the same category: the category of Begging, of Delinquency, of Marginality] (205). The divide between the power and the margins is demonstrated in Daniel’s description of the *Pegamenteros* and their similarities and differences with other marginalized groups. He writes:

Los Pegamenteros no son ni criminales ni mendigos. Viven mas allá de la pobreza. Bueno, son mendigos, pero no corrientes...Sin embargo, los Pegamenteros no son mano de obra de la pobreza, ni del hambre. Los Pegamenteros no comen, no tienen hambre: evitan el hambre, repudian el hambre. Se entiende la diferencia? La comida no entra tan fácilmente en la boca pastosa y química de estos fakires tóxicos. Su delgadez es cadavérica, ejemplar: son invisibles. Así es: invisibles. (205)

[The glue sniffers are not criminals or beggars. They live beyond poverty. Ok, they are beggars, but not constantly ... Without doubt, the glue sniffers are not the laborers of poverty, or of hunger. The glue sniffers do not eat, they are not

hungry: the evade hunger, they refuse hunger. Do you understand the difference?

Food has trouble entering the dried and chemical mouths of those toxic fakirs.

Their thinness is cadaveric, exemplary: they are invisible. Invisible.]

The marginalization and treatment of the *Pegamenteros* by society serve as an example of the stark chasm between power and the periphery and the abuses of the former on the latter. These abuses occur first at the hand of society as a whole, then at the hand of evangelicals, and finally at the hand of Daniel.

The *Pegamenteros* and their perceived ‘invisible’ nature expose one of the greatest abuses of power in the novel, committed by society in its entirety. The *Pegamenteros* cannot be characterized as criminals or beggars; but they can be identified as children. They are homeless, orphaned, runaway children that sniff glue to get high and rarely eat or bathe. They are incredibly visible because they are overwhelmingly present in the streets of Guatemala City and other Central American cities, and yet they are ignored by society and treated as invisible. People that live in these cities have no option but to pass many of these children each day, and yet rather than aid them, empathize with them, or give them food, the society in the text chooses to ignore them as if they are invisible. This is an abuse of power that falls on all of society because rather than see the heartbreaking truth—that children are living and dying in the streets—and be moved to action, the masses look past the *Pegamenteros* and do nothing.

The reader hears second-hand about many of the abuses of the evangelicals from the protagonist; how they steal, take advantage of the weak or unintelligent masses, how one pastor takes advantage of his housekeeper, and much more. The reader is not made aware of what events sparked Daniel’s hatred for evangelicals nor the frequency with which the events

occurred—that is to say we are not informed of how many times he witnessed an evangelical steal or take advantage of people. There are other abuses in the text, though, that are experienced almost first-hand by the reader, as the protagonist causes them to feel as if they are present witnesses when the abuse occurs. Abraham’s mistreatment of a weak and vulnerable Daniel is the best example of this phenomenon. Daniel goes to Abraham sick and begging for help, and Abraham uses that weakness to attack him. Being vulnerable implies handing over power or judgment to another and exposing one’s own wounds or weaknesses, which is precisely what Daniel does. Abraham takes advantage of Daniel in his state for his own motives, converting him to Christianity. The fact that *los Hermanos* and a group of bystanders are often participating or watching the beatings and the torture of Daniel offers a critique of evangelicalism, as it implies that the evangelical group as a whole supports this behavior or is implicated in it as well.

Daniel not only receives abuse but also abuses others. He manipulates and takes advantage of the *Pegamenteros*—these drugged, dirty, and forgotten children. He puts himself in a position of power and demands that they align to his ideals and follow his orders. He maintains this position with threats, bribes, and almost force, assuming many of the qualities he criticizes in evangelicals. Daniel rehabilitates the group, teaches them courses, feeds them and houses them, but only for his own benefit—only to create an army of willing subordinates to do his bidding. Again, these actions reinforce the idea that he adopts what he critiques in the evangelicals, as he finds them to be manipulative ‘social engineers,’ and yet here we see that he acts in the same way to obtain and maintain followers. The abuse of power manifests in the protagonist’s manipulation of the marginalized *Pegamenteros*. Daniel, originally the victim of the evangelicals, now develops into the victimizer of these children, adopting the techniques and facets of the ideology that were first used by his victimizers. Just as Echeverría stated, the

protagonist displays how the victim is the perfect victimizer; then how he transforms his victims, the *Pegamenteros*, into the victimizers of his first victimizers, the evangelicals. Daniel essentially adopts all that he critiques while manifesting and perpetuating abuses of power.

The protagonist is not simply abusive in a psychological or emotional sense, but he also physically abuses the *Patojos*. As the leader and god of the *Ejército Trismegisto*, Daniel appoints himself to the highest position of power allotted in the group. This affords him the ability to assign tasks and beliefs to his followers, including the task he gives to multiple young *Patojas*—that of sleeping with him. He incites orgies and takes advantage sexually of many young girls in the group, as well as other women throughout the text (Dídi, La Marta). His physical abuse moves beyond sexual exploitation to murder. The protagonist's homicidal tendencies are strewn throughout the novel, beginning with the murders of Carmen, Dídi, JR, Miguel, Flavio, and countless animals early on in the plot. The killings do not cease there, as he also murders *Patojos* when they refuse his orders or beliefs, or when he becomes filled with rage, like when he discovers his *Amigos de Bajo Presupuesto* betray him and he consequently breaks the necks of two *Patojos*. This physical abuse also emphasizes the power abuses committed by the protagonist against this peripheral group of street children, as well as his changing role from victim to victimizer.

Aside from commenting on the abuses of power committed by society, evangelicals, and the protagonist, *Diccionario esotérico* also presents a blatant critique of the abuse of power by the government. As the 'war on evangelicals' escalates in the novel, the government tries many times to cover up what is going on or place blame on people who are not involved in order to divert attention from the events. They arrest gang members, thinking they are involved, they place blame on the housekeepers for the deaths in evangelical households, saying that they are

murderous and suicidal, they close the newspapers and assassinate journalists that continue to demand action and answers from the government. This critique of the government as corrupt and unsupportive of its people is reminiscent of neoliberal noir novels, as this type of commentary on the government is common in the genre.

Though this novel serves as a critique on all forms of power, this chapter will focus primarily on the commentary on evangelical organizations, persons, and churches, as it is the most prominent critique in the book. The negative qualities of evangelicals that Daniel incessantly harps over are also those which he most readily assumes when he forms his own organization. The author uses the protagonist's statements and then actions, in the form of adoption of his own criticisms, to communicate his critique of evangelicals.

Commentary on Evangelical Groups

Diccionario esotérico presents social commentary on evangelical groups, churches, and the persons who function as extensions of their processes. It is intriguing that this critique appears only to extend to evangelicals and not to all religious or Christian sects. In order to better understand why this was the case, I asked the author if he had some sort of experience with evangelicals that influenced his writing, and he replied,

No he tenido ninguna experiencia directa. Pero eso no deja de ser falso, dado que en Guatemala es imposible no tener una experiencia directa con los evangélicos, aún sin uno serlo. En este país levantas cualquier piedra, y allí hay un pequeño ente neopentecostal, revivalizado, remachante, Biblia en mano. Entrás a una

tienda, y el cuate que te atiende está escuchando *ad aeternum* a su predicador en la radio o la tele. El fenómeno de las tecnoconversiones evangélicas es pervasivo. (Echeverría)

[I have not had any direct experience. But this does not mean my critique is invalid, given that it is impossible in Guatemala not to have direct experience with evangelicals without even being one. In this country if you pick up whatever rock, and there is a small neo-Pentecostal, revived, riveted, Bible in hand. You enter a store, and the dude that helps you is listening *ad aeternum* to his preacher on the radio or the television. This phenomenon of the evangelical techno conversions is pervasive.]

This critique is developed throughout the novel and conveyed through different characters' actions, including the protagonist, Abraham, evangelical pastors, and other perspectives. The main manner in which the commentary is manifested, though, is through the protagonist's criticism of evangelicals and then his latter appropriation of many of the elements he critiques. This section will focus on the protagonist's aversion towards evangelicals and will beg the questions on what aspects of evangelicalism does Daniel focus his aversion, how does the protagonist act on this hatred, and what is the author communicating through the protagonist's emotions and actions? We will explore answers to these questions and then examine Biblical references present in the text and how those, too, relate to the protagonist and his ideology. These two sections will aid in the culmination of the last section, the construction of the protagonist's religion.

The protagonist repeatedly expresses disgust and discord with the overarching belief system of evangelicalism and for individual elements of this ideology, specifically what he believes to be the manner in which evangelicals take advantage of others and their overwhelming manipulative nature. Daniel refers to their belief system as perverse, saying, “tanto el cristianismo, como el nuevo cristianismo, no son más que ideologías perversas, edificadas con la fuerza de la crueldad” [Christianity, like the new Christianity, isn’t anything more than perverse ideologies, edified with the force of cruelty] (238). He later refers to evangelical beliefs as an “ideología grotesca” [a grotesque ideology] (355), and as lies, saying, “pienso en los cristianos, en sus abovedadas mentiras: ponen techo a sus mentiras, hacen templos, lo pervierten todo” [I think about the Christians, in their vaulted lies: they put a roof on their lies, make temples, they pervert everything] (331). Daniel declares evangelicals as money hungry and makes reference to them stealing on multiple occasions. The protagonist clearly has no tolerance for any aspect of the evangelical belief system, characterizing it as perverse, outlandish, and false. He asserts that evangelicals steal, lie, and coerce others by force into doing their bidding—all opposite of what a Christian organization or faith should exhibit.

One of the elements of this religion which enrages Daniel and that he discusses with frequency is the tendency to selfishly and weakly take advantage of others. He draws a comparison between evangelicals and vampires, exclaiming, “de los evangélicos yo siempre he dicho que son todos unos impostores. Considero que son exactamente unos vampiros. El vampiro existe bajo la forma actual del evangélico. El evangélico es un experto chupasangre: chupa la sangre de su prójimo para poder en consecuencia seguir vivo” [Of evangelicals I have always said that they are all impostors. I believe that they are vampires. The vampire exists below the actual form of the evangelical. The evangelical is an expert at sucking blood: they suck the

blood of their neighbor so that they can in return continue living] (30). Comparing evangelicals to vampires also implies that they are duplicitous, selfish and malicious, as vampires strike only for the good of themselves without preoccupation for what will happen to others and they get what they need by deceitfully attacking others. Folkloric tales of vampires hold true that “during their night vigils they would search for unwilling victims from whom to drink the living blood they needed to survive” (Hume and McPhillips 4). A vampire not only sustains their own life by sucking the blood of another, but also transforms the other into the same form of being—a vampire. This metaphor indicates that the protagonist finds evangelicals to sustain themselves by living on the power and life they suck out of unknowing and “unwilling victims” and then in turn convert them into evangelicals. Evangelicalism in this sense seems more like a viral disease passed on through infectious transfer than a school of thought adopted by those who consider it thoughtfully and then choose to concur. At one point Daniel states, “no hay símbolos en la religión evangélica. No hay inteligencia. Como no hay inteligencia, la audiencia es, naturalmente, muy grande. El único símbolo operacional de la religión evangélica es el propio Dios: su Palabra” [There are no symbols in the evangelical religion. There is no intelligence. Because there is no intelligence, the audience is, naturally, very large. The only operational symbol of the evangelical religion is their God: his Word] (31). This quote supports the theory that the protagonist believes evangelicals not to truly consider and ponder their joining of the faith, but to simply and without question receive it or have it inflicted upon them, like a disease.

These passages communicate the protagonist’s belief that the people who compose evangelical groups and churches are also extremely manipulative. He comments on this manipulative nature as manifested in the physical structures of the religion in his statement: “los evangélicos son grandes maestros de la ingeniería social. Porque al entrar al templo evangélico

inmediatamente se siente uno como más liviano” [Evangelicals are grand masters of social engineering. Because upon entering an evangelical temple one immediately feels lighter] (31). His aversion to the manipulative quality of the people in the evangelical church can be noted in his description of the pastor when he describes him as “un hombre bello y talentoso, un pernicioso sofista, un exaltado y exultante seductor, siempre en busca de la herida y de la sangre, mordiendo con dos colmillos blancos el cuello ya lívido de su deportivo público.” [a handsome and talented man, a pernicious sophist, an exalted and exultant seducer, always in search of the wounded and of the bleeding, biting with two white fangs the neck now pallid from his public sport] (30). Here the imagery and metaphor of the vampire is continued, used as a way to exaggerate the manipulative and seductive nature of the evangelical pastor. Daniel develops this character later on in the work when he discusses how he seduces and takes advantage of La Marta, the housekeeper that used to work for Daniel.

These references demonstrate again that Daniel believes evangelicals to be predatory creatures, searching for the wounded and the weak to manipulate, seduce, or force (as the vampire bite leaves the victim no choice...) them into joining the movement. Abraham’s treatment of the protagonist exemplifies this, as Daniel reaches out to him in a moment of weakness, vulnerability, and pain, and Abraham, in turn, beats Daniel and forces him to accept Christ. These instances help the reader to recognize that ownership of the critique of evangelicals is not only that of the protagonist’s, but that of the author’s, as well. In most instances Daniel is expressing discontent and commentary on evangelicalism, as we have noted above. He does not generally recollect for the reader the actual occasions in which an evangelical commits a particular act, but generalizes and shares his thoughts—most commonly only these thoughts and not the events on which they are based. In this illustration, though, the author gives the reader an

actual event that displays some of the negative qualities in Abraham that Daniel discusses throughout the novel. The reader is given the chance to ‘witness’ this event and then form an opinion, though there is not much room for anything more than a negative opinion towards these evangelicals because of their actions.

The metaphor for evangelicals as vampires expresses and exaggerates the protagonist’s discontent with the evangelical ideology, their manipulative nature, and their tendency to take advantage of the weak. The metaphor does not end there, though. In their book *Popular Spiritualities: The Politics of Contemporary Enchantment*, Lynne Hume and Kathleen McPhillips examine vampirism as an occult spiritual system or experience for many contemporary practitioners and fans of the movement. They present an intriguing argument that relates the process of adopting aspects of the fantastical, such as what is found in vampirism, into daily life to many contemporary spiritual movements. They assert that

Theorists such as Singer tell us that the make-believe play of children has a dimension that can be termed the realm of the possible, which lets them entertain the possibility of alternative actions and life situations. In much current, popular spirituality, there is an element of make-believe that allows such a possibility to be entertained by adults. Indeed they may arrive at a new belief system that seems to answer epistemological questions and provide a new self-identity and a new type of community. (3)

This passage analyzing the appropriation of a vampiric belief system allows for a very provoking interpretation of the protagonist’s metaphor of evangelicals as vampires. When regarding this argument against the claim that evangelicals are like vampires we can surmise that some of the components of evangelicalism are fantastical and that the childhood make-believe that extends

into adulthood makes it possible for grown adults to align themselves with this belief system, in which many of the elements may not be otherwise believable. Perhaps one of the most stunning elements of this criticism is that the protagonist eventually assumes a belief system very similar to that of the evangelicals. This goes to say that the protagonist and his religion also, then, transform into the very vampiric system that he originally critiques, appropriating a fantastical belief system that requires a mind prepared to accept elements of pretend.

Biblical References in *Diccionario esotérico*

Diccionario esotérico is laden with Biblical references, most all of them used by Daniel in reference to himself and his organization, despite the fact that he is renouncing evangelicalism and Christianity as a whole. The use of Biblical allusions by the protagonist reemphasizes the fact that he assumes the very qualities he criticizes. In a war against all things evangelical and Christian, Daniel uses Biblical references and evangelical language, thereby calling to attention the exaggerated hypocrisy of his own ideology. The use of these references shines light not only on the duplicity of the protagonist's belief system, but also lends itself to a deeper criticism of evangelicals, as the *Ejército Trismegisto* is characterized in much the same way as the evangelical organizations in the novel. We will now examine the different Biblical references and the ways in which the protagonist uses them to appropriate the discourse of the opposing force, as though through its usage and resemanticization he manages to subvert its overarching power and hegemony.

Daniel explicitly refers to himself as a God/Savior with phrases like “el Padre Salvador” [the Savior Father] (252) and “soy un Dios” [I’m a God] (363), and also indirectly in the

descriptions of his actions and powers.³ The protagonist claims to heal the sick on more than one occasion, and alleges that he “h[a] logrado que un invalido camine con solamente ponerle las manos encima,” to which “los reclutas redoblan su lealtad” [I have made a lame man walk just by putting my hands on him. At the sight of this, the recruits doubled their loyalty] (240). This ability to make a lame man walk through a single touch evokes the biblical Jesus’ ability to make the paralyzed walk (New International Version, Matthew 9:1-8, Matthew 8:5-9). The protagonist also maintains that he is able to speak in tongues, exclaiming that “antiguas lenguas salen de [su] boca” [ancient languages come out of his mouth] (229), and, “hablaba en lenguas desconocidas” [he spoke in unknown languages] (240). The notion of speaking in tongues is strewn throughout the Bible (Acts 2:4, 1 Corinthians 12:10, Mark 16:17) but is not generally focused upon or witnessed in liturgical church services.⁴

Contemporary churches and gatherings in which one can witness a person speaking in tongues are generally of the neo-Pentecostal⁵, fundamentalist evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic and neo-Charismatic movements. Daniel alludes to a belief in spiritual warfare when he states that he “pued[e] ver los ángeles que [l]e rodean, y a los ángeles de los ángeles, y los demonios...Y las Cosas [le] hablan” [I can see the angels that encircle me, and the angels of these angels, and the demons...And these Things they speak to me] (228). Spiritual warfare

³ An alternate analysis of these names as Biblical could be conducted, though this is not the focus of this paper.

⁴ There is a small resurgence of this practice in some high church/liturgical movements, such as in neo-Pentecostal movements in both Protestant and Catholic churches and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Neo-Pentecostalism is a movement started in the 1960’s and 70’s in some Protestant and Roman Catholic churches that allowed for the growing presence of charismatic/emotional worship, i.e. speaking in tongues, healing by prayer, charismatic prayer, being overcome by the power of the Spirit, etc. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal began in the late 60’s and is quite similar to neo-Pentecostalism. Both movements continue to be relevant in some churches worldwide.

between angels and demons is Biblical (Mark 1:21-18, Luke 4:31-37) and is still a prominent belief in the Christian church, though, like speaking in tongues, it is more widely focused on in fundamentalist evangelical sects than in liturgical High-Church sects.⁶

The protagonist's language can be characterized as influenced by Christianity in some statements, such as "la banqueta está caliente" [The banquet is hot] (363), which is based on Jesus' acts of setting the banquet for his disciples and serving them Communion before his death (Luke 14:17). The 'banquet/table is now ready' is said in many Christian church services as a precursor to the ceremony of Communion. Daniel also claims to baptize—not name, but baptize—the river beside which the *Campamento Mercurio* is situated, "río cagliostro" (227). There are repeated mentions of the water as cleansing and renewing to the group, which is a Christian notion modeled after the sacrament of baptism, the event in which a person becomes a member of the Christian faith, blessed by the Holy Spirit, and brought into communion with the Father and the Son. Generally a baptism involves either the full immersion of the person's body into water or the pouring of Holy Water onto their forehead. The water is a symbol of new life and cleansing in Christianity and apparently also in Daniel's theology.

Later in the novel, as the *Ejército Trismegisto* gets ready for battle, the protagonist lays out the setting for the reader, describing Blake as being on Daniel's left and Pinzón on his right. This could be a reference to the crucifixion of Jesus, in which the figure of the Savior/Messenger

⁶ Spiritual warfare between demons and angels is regarded in many different ways by different Christian sects but can simply be explained as the belief that some sort of evil force or power interferes with God's will or good forces in the world. The mainline Roman Catholic Church and many Protestant sects find spiritual warfare to be more of an internal war between good and the daily temptations of evil that is not discussed often in church services, etc. (though there is a charismatic movement within the Roman Catholic Church that focuses more on demonic possession). Fundamentalist evangelical sects like Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity believe in demonic possession and the power of the laying on of hands and praying over a person and to expel demons. They design church services, prayer groups, and mission trips specifically to enter communities and cast out individual's demons.

(Daniel, we must remember, identifies with this tropic character) is sent to die with two criminals beside him, one who mocks Jesus and one who rebukes the other criminal and then asks for Jesus to forgive him and remember him in his Kingdom (Luke 23:32-44).

Near the end of the novel the protagonist reveals his view of himself and of the role he so wished to fulfill for his followers. He proclaims that, “en [él] termina elocuentemente el mundo” [The world ends eloquently in him] (363). Stating that the world ends in him is a reference to the book of Revelation in which Jesus states: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22:13, also see Revelation 21:6). He also uses the word Logos twice throughout the work, which is a term from the Greek language meaning “word.” Logos is used in the original Greek text of John 1:1 as Jesus says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” It is obvious that Daniel aspires to be the beloved savior of his followers and perhaps even of the citizens of Guatemala. He wanted to give them a purpose, as noted in this statement: “antes vagábamos por las calles, como fantasmas desposeídos, pero hoy obedecemos a una convicción superior: el deseo de liberar a la patria de las huestes del fundamentalismo protestante” [Before we just wandered the streets, like homeless ghosts, but today we obey a superior conviction: the desire to liberate this country from its fundamentalist protestant hosts] (237). The higher purpose and desire to liberate or set free mentioned in this passage are notions found in the Christian church and in the Bible (set free the oppressed Luke 4:18, set free from infirmity Luke 13:12, Jesus sets one free John 8:36, “the truth will set you free” John 8:33). Near the end of the novel, Daniel reveals his disappointment in being unable to fulfill this desired role, saying, “Yo quise ser para ellos un ángel de relaciones; quise tejer una nueva escritura, una nueva esperanza, un nuevo amor. No me dejaron. Puse en sus manos la musa del poder, y la rechazaron como a una ramera. Les ofrecí libertad, y prefirieron

seguir alimentando el obeso olvido” [I wanted to be for them an angel of relations; I wanted to weave a new scripture, a new hope, a new love. They did not let me. I put in their hands the muse of power, and they rejected it like a harlot. I offered them liberty, but they preferred to keep on feeding their obese oblivion] (357). Again we see Christian language in the protagonist’s wording. The biblical Jesus is said to have brought new Scripture, hope, and love to his followers and Daniel claims to have wanted to do the same. It is difficult, though, to find any trace of hope or love in Daniel’s theology. It does seem, though, that he desires to be like Jesus in that he aspires to be regarded as a mighty, powerful, and beloved savior, yet only for selfish reasons.

This section demonstrates the Biblical references and Christian language used by the protagonist throughout *Diccionario esotérico*. It is through these examples and allusions we can see to what extent the Bible functions as a critical inter-text to Echeverría’s novel and to the protagonist’s religion. Though he claims to be fighting all that is can be interpreted as evangelicalism, the protagonist uses much of the same language and rhetoric of evangelical Christianity. These references used by the protagonist, as well as the section on the critique of evangelicals in the novel, allow us to piece together the puzzle of the protagonist’s twisted and confused religion in which he exudes both aversion toward and adoption of evangelical elements of faith.

Constructing the Protagonist’s Religion

We now see that the protagonist’s belief system revolves around hatred for evangelicals and their beliefs, which then evolves into the adoption of the very qualities he critiques. The section on the commentary on evangelical groups shines light on the starting point of Daniel’s

ideology, his hatred, and then the Biblical references section allows us to recognize the progression of this ideology into the assumption of evangelical characteristics, as most all of the Christian and Biblical references presented are used by and in reference to the protagonist. This could perhaps be traced back to the metaphor of the evangelical as a vampire; once one is bitten they transform into the same type of being and then continue to perpetuate the system, finding their own new victims. Daniel is ‘bitten’ by Abraham, progressively converts his ideology to one similar to that of evangelicals—appropriating many of the same elements—, and then ‘bites’ others, transforming them to his ideology. We can, therefore, peg the protagonist’s ideology as a religion, commenting on its similarities to an evangelical belief system.

The protagonist’s belief system can be characterized as a religion because it qualifies as a system of beliefs with its own ideology, world-views, and spiritual practices all culminating in the devotion to a god figure. This religion shares many aspects in common with the Christian system and ideology exhibited in evangelicalism, as demonstrated in the section above. It is a system of beliefs based on realizing a higher purpose and acting in the name of it, as well as the belief in and following of a god. It is a religion based on the protagonist’s belief system and therefore based primarily on narcissism. Daniel is at the center of his own religion, playing the role of the god, referring to himself as the “savior” of his followers on multiple occasions. All of the beliefs in this religion are geared towards realizing Daniel’s desires. Therefore this religion has a savior and a higher purpose, which the protagonist claims is to free Guatemala from the overbearing doctrine of the evangelicals—though it appears to the reader to truthfully not be much more than obey Daniel in all his orders. This faith has a Holy Book, Flavio’s *Libro de sombras*, or what Daniel deems his *Diccionario esotérico*. The protagonist even creates a hymn, and refers to it as such, that the *Patojos* sing on a daily basis. There is a venerated

mother/woman, Carmen, who could be compared to the Mother Mary in that Carmen essentially gave birth to Daniel's mindset/psychological break that allowed him to create, or at least act on, such an ideology. The protagonist, furthermore, teaches a course on Carmen to all of his followers and has them visit her tomb with flowers. There is some sort of eternal flame that is not meant to ever die and there are statues of the founder/savior, Daniel, as well as of their venerated saint *Maximón*. The beliefs, practices, and physical structures in the protagonist's religion, therefore, are reminiscent of a Christian ideology. There are also many spiritual disciplines incorporated into the protagonist's belief system that again appear to be based in Christian faith.

This religion practices spiritual disciplines much like in Christian sects, including meditation, communicating with the otherworldly, healing, and speaking in tongues. Daniel meditates and teaches his followers to do so. He disciplines himself to practice meditation and focus, and eventually is able to see something happening in another place in which he is physically not present and to predict events that will occur. His spiritual courses and the practice of meditation allow some of the *Patojos* to communicate with spirits. Daniel also speaks in tongues on multiple occasions and he heals the sick. The group practices a daily cleansing ritual in the river that Daniel 'baptized,' as well as the veneration of Carmen's tomb. These ideas are evocative of the commentary made by Hume and McPhillips on some contemporary belief systems and their tapping into the realm of make-believe that allows people to consider possible what would otherwise be recognized as impossible. The combination of spiritual disciplines, along with the belief in a higher purpose and the presence of a Holy Book, an eternal flame, a hymn, a Savior, a venerated woman, etc. witnessed in the protagonist's religion are all extremely reminiscent of Christian or evangelical belief systems.

There are many passages that exemplify the protagonist's religion as a product of interference with evangelical Christianity, or even of the Christian Bible and ideology as an inter-text for the protagonist's belief system. Many of these examples were included in the section on Biblical references within *Diccionario esotérico*, which displayed how many of the protagonist's beliefs are rooted in the Holy Book and theology of the Christian faith. We will examine more of these passages now. The protagonist focuses parts of his critique on the evangelical pastor specifically, saying, "el Pastor es un hombre bello y talentoso, un pernicioso sofista, un exaltado y exultante seductor, siempre en busca de la herida y de la sangre" [The Pastor is a handsome and talented man, a pernicious sophist, an exalted and exultant seducer, always in search of the wounded and of the bleeding] (30). He also chastises an evangelical pastor who takes advantage sexually of his housekeeper, La Marta—Daniel's former housekeeper. Looking at these instances against the actions of the protagonist, though, we see similarities. Daniel also is seductive and on the lookout for the wounded and bleeding, as he appeals only to the *Pegamenteros*—children who are drugged and have no other place to go or other leader to follow—and Pinzón, a man with a very twisted mind hungry for blood and suffering. The children are vulnerable, weak, under the influence of chemicals, and invisible to the rest of society, and Daniel very willingly takes advantage of this, as well as Pinzón's thirst for blood. The protagonist also takes advantage of La Marta when she works in his apartment, which eventually leads to her resignation. Daniel's willingness to commit the very same actions that he condemns shows a breach in his moral system that allows him to somehow do what he wishes without reproach or regret. The protagonist also disapproves of evangelicals stealing money to become rich, even though he does the same to finance his films as well as his movement. This example along with that of taking advantage of La Marta are both intriguing

because the protagonist commits them before he ever criticizes evangelicals for them. This seems to display again a break in Daniel's moral system and mind, as he is afforded the ability to do as he pleases but still holds evangelicals to some sort of moral code.

The protagonist comments on evangelicals as social engineers that deceive people into following their movement. He claims that evangelicals trick people into joining them, saying, "los 'enfermos' son amenazados constantemente con las fantasías más oscuras: 'si usted intenta escapar de aquí', dicen, 'entonces va ir a dar a la cárcel, el hospital, o la muerte'" [the 'sick' are constantly threatened with the darkest fantasies: 'if you try to escape from here,' they say, 'you will end up in jail, the hospital, or dead'] (80). This is a tactic with which Daniel becomes familiar, as he manipulates the *Patojos* into believing that the outside world does not want them and that they all must fight against the churches and government that refuse to help them. The protagonist also states that there is no intelligence in the evangelical ideology and that people simply follow blindly, but then also makes statements such as: "no estoy seguro que los *Patojos* hayan comprendido bien el mensaje; de hecho, me pareció que no entendieron nada, es decir: nada de nada. Los muy serviles aplauden cualquier cosa ... No importa ... Justo lo que quería" [I am not sure that the *Patojos* have understood the message very well; actually it seems to me that they did not understand anything, its to say: nothing of nothing. The very servile group applauds whatever thing ... it does not matter ... just as I wanted] (238). These affirmations demonstrate that the protagonist values a similar religion with no thought or intelligence, just blind following. He reemphasizes this when he reveals that "los *Patojos* [le] obedecen en todo: son como perros amaestrados. Son como...[sus] dedos. Pero más bien son como un dedo único, en forma de horda, rascando la paranoia de los residentes" [the *Patojos* obey him in everything: they are like trained dogs. They are like his fingers. But more like one finger, in the form of a horde, scratching the

paranoia of the residents] (315). These passages allow us to see that the protagonist truly does adopt every aspect of evangelicalism he criticizes and that he does not actually appear to want to fight evangelicals to redeem a sense of right and wrong or save the country from their unjust grasp, but instead seems to truthfully want to be in a position of power. Abraham's bite not only converts him to a similar ideology, but transforms him into a being that seeks the weak and abuses power, just as he did with Daniel. Daniel now desires not to fight the power or group that abused him, but instead wants only to follow his vampiric instinct and find others who are vulnerable to have power over; and he wants his power, and abuse of power, to supersede that of his victimizer's—the victim becoming the perfect victimizer.

By forming his own religion the protagonist creates his own reality and morality, both of which center around his existence and his ego. In this morality, there is no right or wrong for him, the leader, because he is above that. Right or wrong categories are, predictably, saved for his followers. Right is based on listening to Daniel, following his orders, and not crossing him. Wrong involves questioning, betraying, or refusing Daniel. This reifies his role as “savior” and central figure of the religion, as he expects the morality of his followers to revolve around him. His belief that he is this creator and messenger of an important message and his personal appointment to power allows him to assume the negative qualities he so abhors in the evangelical community. This position of power places him beyond the reproach of any member of the group, affording him the ability to kill when he pleases and to take advantage sexually of numerous *Patojas*. He believes himself to be a savior to his followers, teaching them a sacred lesson about how terrible evangelicals are, and yet he uses similar tactics and references as the evangelicals he criticizes. Just like Abraham who is willing to beat and nearly kill Daniel in order to get his message across, Daniel assumes the mindset that he will stop at nothing to spread his message

and stand for what he believes.

Conclusion

This section allows us to truly acknowledge the protagonist's religion as a product of contact with evangelical Christianity as many of the structures and practices within the religion, along with the mentality and ideology of the leader of this religion, are compatible with the evangelicalism witnessed in this text. This severe abuse of power and of people by evangelicals and then again by the protagonist reemphasizes a critique of religious systems such as these, as well as the overall and overwhelming abuse of those on the peripheries. Putting together the puzzle of the protagonist's theological paradigm and making the connection between it and evangelical ideology help to unearth a critique in the novel of evangelical organizations and churches that can be extended to evangelical Nongovernmental Organizations (NGO's), or Faith-Based Organizations (FBO's). These sections will help me now to expound upon how this work is a piece of cultural production representing a reality, and upon its social commentary on evangelicals.

Chapter 2: FBOs and Effectiveness in Central America

Introduction

As we saw in chapter one, there are many aspects of *Diccionario esoterico* that lend themselves to a commentary on evangelicals. For the purpose of this chapter the word evangelical will refer to Christians whose focus falls on conversion and being born again, evangelizing, and a personal relationship with Christ. Their theological stance can be placed near the middle of the spectrum, less liberal than the mainline Protestant sects and less conservative than fundamentalists. Through the examination of Biblical references used by the protagonist, as well as the many characteristics of his religion reminiscent of Christianity, it becomes obvious that the criticism of evangelicals evident throughout the text is furthered in the author's use of the protagonist's ideology. Examining *Diccionario esoterico* as a piece of cultural production allows us to view the critique on evangelicals presented not just as part of the work of fiction but as speaking to a reality in Guatemala and other Central American countries.

When asked what ethical questions the reading of *Diccionario esoterico* provoked, Echeverría replied “eso hay que preguntárselo más bien a sus lectores” [this question would be better directed towards its readers]. I read the text as a scathing critique of evangelicals that can be extended to faith-based organizations (FBOs) working in Central America. In a recent conversation I informed the author of my interpretation and then asked him in our interview his thoughts on FBOs. He responded,

Hay críticos ... que creen que hay algo estructuralmente corrupto en estas

iniciativas de cooperación. Yo simplemente diré que hay que tener cuidado siempre con cualquier persona que cree saber lo que le conviene al otro y lo que el otro necesita. Detrás de ello puede haber una tremenda carga de soberbia, de ignorancia, de beato esnobismo. (Echeverría)

[There are critics ... who believe that there is something structurally corrupt in these cooperative initiatives. I simply will say that we should always be cautious with anyone who believes that they know what will be best for another person and what another person needs. Behind that person there could be a tremendous load of pompousness, of ignorance, of snobbism.]

The ethically questionable themes of an ‘army of God’ and of ‘saving’ the children exhibited in the protagonist’s religion can be interpreted as an available extension of the commentary on evangelicals to evangelical organizations, such as FBOs, that in some capacity work with children. The author’s reply gently supports a reading of the text in this way. This chapter will be dedicated to my research on one particular evangelical FBO, Orphan Helpers, that works with orphans in government-run detention centers as well as incarcerated gang members in San Salvador, El Salvador.

Brief Overview of Previous Research

There is a growing canon of literature on non-governmental organizations (NGOs), though the field of study is relatively new. The United Nations (UN) coined the term ‘NGO’ in

1945, however the debate over it continues today. Much of the literature is focused on this task, defining the term and characterizing what exactly constitutes a NGO. A brief definition acceptable for the purposes of this study is a non-criminal, non-profit organization working independently from the government on a local, state, national, or international platform. NGOs are generally organized around a set of common values that push them to work in some capacity in and for their communities, often providing services the government no longer does because of a neoliberal shift in global polity. NGOs hold a wide array of tasks and goals including campaigning, advocating, educating, providing services, providing financial loans, and more.

The study of FBOs is younger than that of NGOs and the literature available on the subject is scarce. Again, there has been much discussion on defining the term and classifying what characterizes a FBO. This task has proved quite difficult, as with the term NGO, because of the widely ranging tasks and goals of these groups. FBOs also have varying religious motivations and beliefs, as well as different degrees of religiosity portrayed in their policies, mission, and activities. When I use the term FBO, I refer to an organization that is religiously motivated. This can refer to religious congregations, organizations founded or funded by religious organizations such as parishes, or religiously inspired NGOs. In this study we will only examine organizations that are faith-based NGOs. There is an argument in the field as to whether or not the term ‘faith-based’ is too restrictive and “excludes all but the few agencies that fully act on faith” (Smith and Sosin 653). They also claim that the term is “problematic because it implicitly assumes faith can be represented by a readily identifiable set of practices ... and provides few layers for distinguishing the behavior of agencies that rely on faith from the definition of agencies” (653). I do not find the same issues with the term ‘faith-based,’ and assert that the two terms can be read in quite a similar, if not identical, manner. I use the term to signify

a base in some aspect of a religious belief system or religious organization. This base can vary greatly as can the involvement of the religious ideology or group in the organization's activities, staff, mission statements, and so forth. The majority of the literature on the subject also tends toward the use of faith-based over faith-related, so for the purposes of this study I will do the same.

Most all the research available on FBOs focuses on the time period after the Bush Administration established the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) in 2001 that strengthened FBO service provision with federal funding and also encouraged states to work with FBOs because they were thought to be more effective in providing services to those in need than their secular or governmental counterparts. The research available on these organizations, then, generally centers on FBOs based in the United States and providing social services. The majority of the articles examine and elaborate on the differences between these religious organizations and their secular counterparts, and then the varying degrees of religiosity within the FBO realm.

Authors such as Steven Rathgeb Smith and Michael R. Sosin, Thomas H. Jeavons, and Rose Ebaugh et al. have all "posited characteristics of faith-based organizations and have suggested that such organizations vary in their degree of religiosity and institutional ties to denominations and churches" (Ebaugh et al. 414). In his article, "Identifying characteristics of 'religious' organizations: An exploratory proposal," Jeavons proposes seven characteristics of FBOs that separate them from secular organizations. Smith and Sosin, on the other hand, use the term 'coupling' to compare relationships between faith-related organizations and the faith or religious group to which they are connected. They build on Karl Weick's original definition, which states, "the degree to which an agency is linked to faith may be conceptualized as the

extent of ‘coupling’ of the agency to resources, authorities, and cultures that represent relevant faiths” (Smith and Sosin 655). They postulate that “the tighter the coupling to religion, the more an agency’s social organization reflects the demands of that religion” (656). Ebaugh et al. present an article in which they attempt to develop a clear method that distinguishes religious versus secular organizations, looking at how religiosity is expressed in such organizations through title, mission, hiring tendencies, funding, approaches to service distribution, and more.

The majority of the literature on FBOs does not move beyond defining and distinguishing these organizations. There are some articles that address the actions of these FBOs and approach important themes discussed frequently in the research on secular service providers, such as effectiveness. There are multiple articles providing information on FBOs working in health reform and provision of health services by authors such as Fredrica Kramer, Chisara N. Asomugha et al., and Mark B. DeKraai et al., while only a few articles address the effectiveness of FBOs working in the United States. An example of one that does is *Faith-Based Social Services: Measures, Assessments, and Effectiveness*, edited by Stephanie C. Boddie and Ram A. Cnaan, which focuses on the effectiveness of FBOs working in four different cities in the United States and proposes that the measurement of effectiveness for these organizations should differ from that of secular ones.

Bridging the Gaps: FBOs and Effectiveness in Central America

The growing FBO movement is not exclusive to the United States but can also be witnessed in countries all over the world. There is an influx of FBO presence in Latin America, as well as a rapidly growing movement towards evangelical Christianity and mega church

activity. The literature on the FBOs in Latin America is quite scarce.⁷ One of the only texts to my knowledge that addresses the topic of FBOs in Latin America is entitled *Bridging the Gaps: Faith-Based Organizations, Neoliberalism, and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean*. The editors of this work, along with authors of previous research on the issue, Anne-Marie Holenstein and Kurt Allen Ver Beek, recognize the lack of literature on the subject to be possibly a product of “the ways faith and spirituality have been ‘stigmatized’ and thus ‘taboo’ and absent from development studies literature” (Hefferan, Adkins, and Occhipinti 6). This book, edited by Tara Hefferan, Julie Adkins, and Laurie Occhipinti, is an anthology of short essays about FBOs working in different capacities in Latin American and Caribbean countries. These authors study a wide spectrum of FBOs ranging from Catholic to Evangelical Protestant to Buddhist to Rastafarian, and examine their particular responses to neoliberalism and development and how those relate to their faith.⁸

This text presents a stimulating commentary on the stark contrast between the evangelical FBOs with strong religious coupling in every aspect of the organization and then the other Christian FBOs that are faith-based yet with little coupling to other areas of the organization besides mission statement and motivation. After a brief discussion on a few of the chapters from this book we will examine how the overall conclusions from this book dialogue with those in *Diccionario esotérico*, and then how those relate to my research on Orphan Helpers.

⁷ I have attempted to find research on FBOs in Latin America for multiple projects over the past few years. I have consulted with two specialty librarians, at Virginia Tech and at Radford University, neither of which were able to find more on the subject of FBOs in Latin America with a focus on working with children.

⁸ Neoliberalism refers to the process of governments relinquishing responsibility for many social services they once provided. Public organizations, like non-profits and NGOs, often are put in place to provide these services that the public needs but are no longer receiving from the government. Neoliberalism is a term characterized by three basic principals—privatization, open markets, and austerity measures.

A chapter written by Jill DeTemple, Erin Eidenshink, and Katrina Josephson provides a discussion of gender through the eyes of *Agape*, a Pentecostal evangelical FBO based in Cochabamba, Bolivia and working in many small, rural towns around that area. *Agape* treats development as a spiritual and material endeavor and acts on this belief by providing ‘Bible-based’ education to indigenous children. This education includes lessons on the proper and distinct roles of men and women in the household (men are the breadwinners, women are the homemakers), the difference between evangelical Pentecostalism and other “false sects” (123), and why being a good Christian involves also trading in indigenous languages and garb for the Spanish language and Mestizo or North American clothing (129). Their curriculum includes a “life plan chart” in which “accepting Christ as a personal savior is a vital step toward good hygiene, academic progress and physical health” (119). Children are awarded stickers “on their life plan charts for a public acceptance of salvation [and] mp3 players are awarded to children for the best Christian testimony” (123). Ideas of familial roles are also projected onto this curriculum. While teaching in a culture where extended family housing is the vast norm, children are taught that ‘good Christians’ live with the nuclear family, separating themselves from their non-Christian neighbors and living the righteous and distinct life Christians are called to live.

Agape is clearly an extension of neoliberalism and ethnocentrism; while claiming to promote the ‘equality’ of men and women, they support the domestication of women and Western ideals over Bolivian traditions, providing services with the end goal of converting children and their families—which ultimately also means Westernizing them. These practices do not embody the message that men and women are equal, or that *all* men and women are equal, but rather that Westerners and those around the world that choose to assume their beliefs and customs are superior. Though they most likely believe the manner in which they are working in

the community to be the best way to serve them, as conversion to Christianity is of utmost importance to evangelicals for a successful life and afterlife, it does not appear that their efforts truly help them to develop. The authors assert that “Agape conflates Christianity with material success and ‘civilized’ ways of living, often in stark contrast to local, Andean realities ... It also, consciously or unconsciously, elides ‘Christian’ homes with those based on a Western model, effectively giving patriarchy and Western modes of consumption the imprimatur of Biblical authority” (128, 130). Religion here appears to be a tool of an ethnocentric and authoritarian mode of development and Westernization instead of a way to aid their Bolivian ‘equals’ in a way that appeals to them.

In another chapter Paul A. Peters offers an engaging dialogue on whether it is the religiosity of successful (meaning well-accepted in the community and aiding in their development) FBOs, such as Catholic FBO *Fe y Alegría* working in Peru, that have made them more effective or “the flexible structures of NGOs in general, coupled with the legitimacy and authority afforded by faith relationships” (166) that allow for such success. The primary goal of *Fe y Alegría* “is to provide a quality education to disadvantaged and marginalized children, with social development goals placed ahead of religious teachings” (169). He goes on to argue that the legitimacy of FBOs is intrinsically connected to the communities’ social perception of faith (168). Peters determines that because of the positive social implications of the religious myths and ceremonies native to the Peruvian village and yet still upheld by the organization, *Fe y Alegría* was successful, legitimized, and accepted into the community. Peters does not believe a NGO necessarily needs to be religious in order to achieve such success. In terms of helping communities to truly develop or being accepted into the community, this sort of organization with a base in Christian ideology, but with an emphasis more on providing social services than

on religious instruction, continues to seemingly ‘outperform’ those FBOs with a strong focus on conversion and religious teaching.

A similar point is made in chapters by Julie Adkins, Laurie Occhipinti, and Carmen Martinez Novo. Occhipinti writes about OCLADE and *Fundapaz*, two FBOs working in indigenous communities in Argentina, both with Catholic roots but neither using specifically Catholic funding or teachings. They both treat the respective indigenous communities with the utmost respect, taking the stance that such communities should be learned from rather than taught. Rather than viewing these communities as “backwards” or opposing modernity, as we saw with FBO *Agape*, these organizations look to the indigenous as “alternative model[s] to the dominant society of ‘the poor’ [and as] ... distinct populations whose values and interests are seen as not just genuinely different but morally superior” (Hefferan, Adkins, and Occhipinti 209). Occhipinti salutes these FBOs for framing “local poverty in terms of the greater inequalities of global capitalism” (202) and viewing economic expansion not as the only path to happiness or development but one of many. OCLADE and *Fundapaz*, like the Presbyterians in Guatemala studied by Adkins, choose solidarity with communities over altruism or dominance, which seems to offer the possibility of a true alternative to the Westernizing, patronizing, capitalistic, and ethnocentric development that characterizes the efforts of so many other NGOs and FBOs. These FBOs, as well as the Catholic Salesian Mission researched by Martinez Novo, seem to be more accepted and effective in their communities because rather than taking an ethnocentric stance and attempting to teach the indigenous communities something ‘better’ or more modern, they value and respect such communities and try to learn from them while also working with them.

There are many religious organizations with roots in Catholicism and Presbyterianism

encountered in *Bridging the Gaps* that are accepted in the communities in which they work and seem to be truly helping people. The evangelical FBO's presented, though, do not appear to be as successful at infiltrating their respective communities and accomplishing their goals of aiding in development. The authors allude to the low level religiosity carried through the beliefs and actions of the mainline protestant and Catholic organizations as being largely responsible for their success. Personal religious motivation for employees and volunteers with a focus on serving the community in whatever way necessary seems to function better than mandating religious instruction and conversion. These organizations seem to stray from a neoliberal approach where services the government no longer provides are delivered by NGOs, and instead create solidarity with the communities, finding ways to help them move beyond reliance on the West/Western organizations and their service provision. Instead of aiding in their success, then, religiosity actually inhibits it for these evangelical FBOs that focus all of their services and efforts around conversion and not enough on true development.

The conclusions drawn in this text, along with those I extracted from *Diccionario esoterico*, left me with questions about the effectiveness of evangelical FBOs and the desire to conduct a study similar to those in *Bridging the Gaps*. I wanted to look into the inner-workings of an evangelical FBO in Latin America and further examine the effectiveness of an organization that is tightly coupled to their religious beliefs to discern if these same conclusions apply. The organization I chose to research, Orphan Helpers, is one I worked with on three separate occasions while traveling in El Salvador. It is my hope that this study, though small in scale, will contribute to the scarce literature available on the subject and potentially spark interest in other researchers, providing them with a starting point for further investigations.

Orphan Helpers: A Real Life “*Ejército Trismegisto*”

Introduction

Orphan Helpers is a faith-based NGO based in Newport News, Virginia with offices in El Salvador and Honduras. A recent report claims they are beginning to serve the country of Panama but provides no details. They work with street children, gang members, and orphans in government run detention centers and orphanages. At the time of my internships with the organization, and at the time I was conducting my research, they operated halfway homes for three groups: teenage boys, teenage girls, and teenage mothers. I was informed, however, in a recent interview that these homes have since closed. For the purposes of this study I will be focusing solely on their work in El Salvador, as I had the unique opportunity to take a trip and hold two internships with them over the course of four years (traveling for one week with them in 2005, and then holding two internships with them in 2007 and 2008) and am well acquainted with the Salvadoran staff. I wanted first to observe the inner-workings of this FBO and to create research questions based on my examination of the organizations mission statement, website, and annual reports. The goal of this study is to look into Orphan Helpers’ approach to helping the community in which they work and how their faith base is manifested in that. Then I will compare my findings with the conclusions drawn in the previous sections on *Diccionario esoterico* and *Bridging the Gaps*.

Their Mission

Orphan Helpers' mission is "to serve and minister to the physical, spiritual, emotional, and educational needs of orphaned, abused, and incarcerated children by effectively partnering with individuals, churches, businesses, organizations and governments" ("2010 Annual Report" 4). Of their goals to serve the physical, spiritual, emotional, and educational needs of these children and teens, they believe it essential to "start with evangelism where the first seeds of hope are planted"(10). They hold true that God has a plan for everyone and their "goal is to help marginalized and disenfranchised children pursue God's unique plan and purpose for their lives [by focusing] on discipleship that leads to transformation by the renewal of our minds as described in Romans 12:1-2" (*Orphan Helpers*). Orphan Helpers' vision is "to see at least one Christian standing beside every orphaned, abused, and incarcerated child helping them realize God's plan and purpose for their life" (*Orphan Helpers*).

Annual Reports

Orphan Helpers was founded in 2000, but only has annual reports from 2007-2011 available on their website. These annual reports provide us with information about the finances of the organization, as well as some of their success stories, and news about projects and expansions. I will briefly summarize these five reports and then analyze that data.

In its 20 pages the 2007 annual report contains a letter from the founders, a letter from the executive director, a financial report, four success stories (written in the style of *testimonio*) of children or teenagers who were orphaned or ran away and have now been helped by Orphan

Helpers and accepted Christ, and then stories of more helped children intermixed in the pages about what services the organization provides.⁹ This year a list of staff members in each country, as well as the names of the board members, was included in the annual report. In 2007 there were 14 employees in the United States and 32 in El Salvador.¹⁰

The 2008 annual report is made up of six pages that include two pages of brief statements on what programs the organization has been working on in El Salvador and Honduras, one page thanking their partners, one page on the financial report, and one page for each cover. The end cover has a list of quick facts about Orphan Helpers and their work.

The 2009 report follows the style of 2008's report. At 6 pages long it again includes information about the organizations programs, a financial report, and an end cover with quick facts about Orphan Helpers. This annual report also includes two lists of data regarding the numbers of children that have been served, the number of volunteers over the past year, the poundage of donations, as well as numbers of how many children have attended Bible study classes, received diplomas, accepted Christ, been baptized, and more. Some examples are "370 kids accepted Christ," "17 baptisms," "1,875 attended Bible Study classes," "73 teenagers in our halfway homes," and "Orphan Helpers has helped over 2,500 children this year" ("2009 Annual Report" 2).¹¹

The 2010 annual report is much more detailed like the 2007 report. It marks the 10-year anniversary of the organizations founding and includes two pages of info graphic quick facts on how many children the organization has helped and in what ways.¹² Some of those statements include "2,635 children helped," "612 diplomas and/or certificates awarded," "5,000 orphaned,

⁹ See screen shot 1 and 2 in Appendix C

¹⁰ See screen shot 3 in Appendix C

¹¹ See screen shot 4 in Appendix C

¹² See screen shot 5 and 6 in Appendix C

abused, and incarcerated children touched by the love of Christ,” “2,150 attended Bible Study classes,” and “875 kids accepted Christ” (“2010 Annual Report” 19). This report also states that there are 52 teenagers in Orphan Helpers’ halfway homes, and 23 employees working for the organization in El Salvador and nine employees in the United States.¹³ It includes detailed descriptions of the cities in which they are present and the locations in which they work, what they have done over the past year, and their plans for the upcoming year. This report also provides a list of staff members’ names in each country, as well as the names of the board members.

The annual report for 2011 consists of eight pages and is formatted in much the same way as the 2008 and 2009 reports. After the cover page, comprised of a black and white photo with red letters, there is a page with the mission and vision statements, translated testimony from children, and short descriptions of the services they provide.¹⁴ This page and the last page again have lists of quick facts on how many children they have helped and how many volunteer hours have been spent, etc. These facts include one stating that there are five halfway homes, two for teenage boys, two for teenage girls, and one for teenage mothers and their children.¹⁵ There are two pages dedicated to the financial report and then a closing page emphasizing what the organization does for the children. There is a link on the website that leads to a page on all of Orphan Helper’s activity in El Salvador. This page states that there is currently one halfway home in operation and that there are 14 employees working in El Salvador—a large decrease from 2010’s report of 23 employees.¹⁶ This report is the first to separate ‘educational diplomas earned,’ approximately 69, from ‘vocational certificates earned,’ about 367, which in previous

¹³ See screen shot 7 in Appendix C

¹⁴ See screen shot 8 in Appendix C

¹⁵ See screen shot 9 in Appendix C

¹⁶ See screen shot 10 in Appendix C

years were lumped into one category labeled ‘diplomas/certificates awarded.’ This report also says Orphan Helpers is now working in Panama in a list of quick facts, though expenditures in the financial report only state that money is going to El Salvador and Honduras, and there is no mention of this alleged work in Panama again throughout the report.¹⁷

Table 1: Important figures from the Annual Reports

Annual Report Year	Donations Received	Amount Spent in Headquarters	Amount Spent in El Salvador	Amount Spent on Fundraising	Total Amount Spent
2007	440,510	257,856	172,485	118,475	952,874
2008	959,204	326,545	280,714	321,665	1,491,314
2009	820,362	299,278	312,359	201,644	1,304,511
2010	805,903	306,807	282,674	94,592	1,255,007
2011	737,050	303,434	242,423	108,169	1,325,360

*all figures in white represent dollar values

Analysis of Annual Reports

The annual reports offer a fair amount of information about the organization and what they do, but they also provoke many questions. Table 1 summarizes some of the key points

¹⁷ See screen shot 8 in Appendix C

overviewed in the financial reports included in each of the annual reports. This table also displays the amounts of money spent in the United States office headquarters versus the amount spent in El Salvador, which allow us to see that even though there are 2.5 times as many employees in El Salvador (9 employees in the U.S. and 23 in El Salvador listed in the 2010 Annual Report) and all of the programs and halfway homes that Orphan Helpers supports are located not in the U.S. but in El Salvador, that there is consistently a significantly larger amount of money being spent in the U.S. Headquarters than in El Salvador, with the exception of 2009. Orphan Helpers states in each annual report that the vast majority of their income is spent on programming, which does not translate into the direct amounts of money seen in the reports.

The two most recent reports included more facts and data about the organization in the form of info graphics showing exactly how many hours of volunteer work was done, how many children were helped, and more. This addition could stem from a need to display more accountability and effectiveness, because quantifiable data in the form of simplified numbers and pictures may help donors and partners to view the organization as more effective, subsequently maintaining interest and funding. These figures, though, inspire many questions, mainly about how the organization quantifies such obscure data as religiosity, conversion, and acceptance of Christ. They claim in 2009 that “370 kids accepted Christ,” and that “1,875 attended Bible Study classes” (“2009 Annual Report” 2). Then in the 2010 annual report states that there were “2,635 children helped,” “612 diplomas and/or certificates awarded,” “5,000 orphaned, abused, and incarcerated children touched by the love of Christ,” “2,150 attended Bible Study classes,” and “875 kids accepted Christ” (“2010 Annual Report” 2). These figures lead me to wonder what Orphan Helpers considers ‘helped’ to mean, what ‘touched by the love of Christ’ means, and how they quantify these categories. I also question how they measure how many children accept

Christ.

Another item that caught my attention was a drastic decrease in teenagers in the halfway homes from 2009 to 2010, as teenage presence dropped from 73 to 52 teens. This could be attributed to age, as after kids reach 18 years of age they must leave the home, but it could be a result of many other factors. I believe this decrease could also show dissatisfaction on behalf of the teens with the way the organization runs the halfway homes.¹⁸ Only reports from 2007 and 2010 include lists of employees, and a comparison of the two shows a decline in number and a seemingly low retention rate of employees. During this time the number of staff decreased in both the United States, from 14 to 9, and El Salvador, from 32 to 23. A mere 2 of 14 employees on the United States staff from 2007 were still around in 2010, and 10 of 32 staff members in El Salvador from 2007 were still working with the organization in 2010. I found this data to be potentially problematic, again, because it could signify dissatisfaction with the organization.

This review of the reports clearly sparked many questions, for example, why the styles and lengths of the annual reports varied so greatly, and why there were only five of them available on the website when there should be 12; and why there were no real explanations of how Orphan Helpers was ‘helping’ the children or why these data were all presented in colorful info graphics or lists of quick facts with no explanations. The discrepancies are also striking, especially the exclusion of the fact that the halfway homes in El Salvador closed from the 2011 report and a false statement in its place saying there are still homes in operation. There appears to be a disconnect between what the reports stated and my experience with the organization. For example, while in El Salvador I never witnessed or heard of personal counseling sessions for kids in detention centers or teens in halfway homes, never saw or heard of computer literacy

¹⁸ When I was in El Salvador last, many of the boys in one of the halfway homes expressed discontent with their situation there and even admitted a desire to run away.

courses being taught (though I know computers were donated to the main offices for official and some unofficial use), and only knew a few teens who had the opportunity to participate in vocational training. The inconsistencies in the reports themselves as well as between the reports and my experience provoked the interview questions that I then proposed to employees of the organization. This section brings me to reflect on a quote from Maurice Echeverría when asked about whether he believed FBOs to be inherently good, bad or a mixture of the two. He replied,

No son inherentemente buenas o malas. Seguramente hay casos admirables y otros más bien repugnantes. Hay oenegés que sanean y otras que son carcamales. Oenegés que son corruptas y con doble fondo –ideológico o financiero– y luego las oenegés que emanan sentido común y responsabilidad universal. Un criterio serio demandaría investigación objetiva y estadística. (Echeverría)

[They are not inherently good or bad. Surely there are admirable cases and other that are more or less repugnant. There are NGOs that heal and others that are decrepit. NGOs that are corrupt and with double motivations –ideological or financial—and then the NGOs that emanate common sense and universal responsibility. A serious criteria would demand and objective and statistical investigation.]

I insert this quote here to remind us of Echeverría's commentary on abuses of power. He states that there are NGOs, or FBOs, that are good and others that are corrupt and have morally questionable secondary goals, such as gaining money. He told me he does not propose any sort

of model of what the perfect NGO would look like, but he does say that a criterion would have to be statistical investigation into the organization. In the financial reports from Orphan Helpers this sort of investigation is not present, in fact it appears to be purposefully evaded. Their use of infographics, quick fact lists with no explanations of what the ‘facts’ are describing, pie charts, and short 1-2 page financial reports with very little detail do not provide the reader with full insight into what is happening in the organization. This coupled with the discrepancies that we will touch on later in this section seem to point to impure and perhaps selfish financial motive within the organization.

Interviews and Methodology

My main goal in interviewing employees and board members of Orphan Helpers was to learn about inconsistencies and information not provided in the reports, such as how the organization measures success and quantifies their data, insight into how employees/board members perceive the organization to be faring, and what they believe the largest challenges and issues facing their organization to be. I asked 15 questions (see Appendix B) hoping that finding these answers would help to clarify questions raised by the annual reports.

I attempted to interview the Executive Director, the founders, the Director of Communications, and another general employee in the United States, and then three former and two current employees ones in El Salvador. Multiple attempts to contact the executive director went unanswered and the founder responded by directing my questions to another employee of the organization, who, in turn, never replied to me. I asked the founder again if he would consider answering the questions, and he referred me to his wife, who is a co-founder and fellow

board member. I did reach her, but she was unable to answer my questions at that time. She informed me that if I emailed the questions that she would answer them when she had time; she never did. Two former employees of Orphan Helpers in El Salvador agreed to participate, but only one followed through on the request. Neither of the two current employees in El Salvador I attempted to interview agreed to partake in the questionnaire. Out of the seven people that originally agreed to assist me, only two actually followed through and answered the questions.

I hypothesize that the interviews will reveal that there is much room for improvement in emotional and educational services such as counseling and access to state-approved education geared towards the children and teens, as well as the honest presentation of data in the annual reports and provision of said services. I also hypothesize that though Orphan Helpers aims to address the spiritual, emotional, educational, and physical needs of children, that spiritual needs are those that receive the most focus and that they will most likely be lacking in meeting the emotional, physical, and educational needs of the children.

Results

The former employee in El Salvador that was interviewed was orphaned as a child and lived on the streets. He lived in an orphanage and as a teenager was introduced to Orphan Helpers there. He was in the first group of boys to move into a halfway home, and eventually became director of the home. He worked there for a few years and then in one of the detention centers in which Orphan Helpers works. He left Orphan Helpers and now works with a different FBO in the San Salvador area. His experience living the life of an orphan and a ‘helper’—in multiple capacities—gives him rich insight into what is going on with this organization in El

Salvador. He prefers to keep his identity concealed, so I will refer to him throughout the study as John. The other person who agreed to answer my questions is currently employed in the Headquarters office of Orphan Helpers. This woman, to whom I will refer as Sarah, answered on behalf of the organization. These answers will help us to examine the differences perceived by two employees that work or worked with the same organization but in different countries.

When asked what it means when Orphan Helpers says that they ‘helped’ 2635 kids, John answered that it really is not helping the children in the traditional sense of the word nor in a necessarily direct manner; rather that to Orphan Helpers it means evangelizing and “pasando momentitos con los jóvenes y haciendo actividades con ellos” [spending moments with the kids and teens and creating activities for them to do] (“John”). Sarah’s response to the question was that

“the 2,635 children helped include all the children who came in and through the government centers where we work, including each orphanage, detention center, and halfway home in 2010. We consider that we helped them because our Orphan Helpers employees are teachers, caregivers, vocational trainers, and counselors in these centers and their effect and influence spans over the entire population in those centers.” (“Sarah”)

Saying that the organization is helping every child who enters every detention center and orphanage in which they work is quite ostentatious, as many children are there only for a very short while, and because it is possible to enter one of those centers without ever coming into contact with one of the employees or even to be in contact with them but to deny interaction.

Answering another question about the retention rate for teens in the halfway homes John says it is quite low. He attributes the low retention rate of teens in these homes to bad administration, a lack of support from the organization, and a lack of passion or love for the children and the work on the part of the administration. Sarah to some extent seems to evade the question, stating that it is difficult to monitor such numbers and that they do so with the very numbers we see presented in the annual reports. She then informed me of the closing of the homes due to a “lack of funding and a redirection of our strategic model and plan” (“Sarah”). The financial reports do seem to allude to low retention rates, as John says, demonstrated in the drop of teens in homes from 73 to 52 from 2009 to 2010. There is an inconsistency between Sarah’s comment that all halfway homes in El Salvador closed in December 2011 and the 2011 Annual Report, published on January 16, 2012, which claims that there are five halfway homes still in operation. This is the same number of halfway homes mentioned in the 2010 report, which provided a break down of the location of these homes, three in El Salvador and two in Honduras. It appears that the report is making a false claim that these three homes in El Salvador are still in operation when in fact they are not. As mentioned earlier, there is a link on the main website that allows one to see what Orphan Helpers is doing in El Salvador, which states that there is one halfway home in operation and that there are currently 14 employees working for them there. These discrepancies beg the question which of these three different accounts is true? The amount of money designated for El Salvador in 2011 was \$242,423, about \$40,000 less than the previous year. The amount of halfway homes decreased from three to zero and the number of employees in El Salvador reduced from 23 to 14. Sarah claimed that the closing of the homes was due to a lack of funding, and yet in 2007 El Salvador received \$172,485, almost \$70,000 less, and yet still allegedly managed 2 halfway houses and maintained 32 employees. There are

some serious inconsistencies appearing in these reports about both the provision of services and the spending of funds.

When asked about the major issues facing the organization, the interviewees provided diverging accounts. The former employee in El Salvador explained that in order to be successful in this line of work, the management needs passion and love for what they do—otherwise they treat the teens like criminals who have not changed, and the teens respond, fulfilling that vision by reverting to the previous lifestyle or seeking out a more positive atmosphere elsewhere. According to John, the administration take jobs with the organization for selfish reasons (El Salvador is a poor country with a high unemployment rate) and keep these selfish reasons at the forefront of their mind while working there.¹⁹ They do not have any interest in hearing the opinion of the workers or teens and they tell the staff in the United States that they are doing everything requested of them. He expressed disappointment that the administration in the United States do not seem concerned with how workers and children think the programs are working, but instead only ask these questions to other high-ranking employees. Sarah’s answer to the question regarding the largest challenge facing Orphan Helpers was “language and cultural barriers” (“Sarah”) and the short stay of some of the kids in the centers. To work on the language barrier she said Orphan Helpers was working on sending instructors to El Salvador to teach staff English, though she never made a reference to any of the staff in the United States learning

¹⁹ I experienced many employees in higher-ranking positions that displayed very negative attitudes towards the teens. If the teens wanted to do an activity outside of the halfway home, the management often would not allow it because they did not trust them. These employees often chose entertaining American visitors over providing programs for these children; I remember specifically one time I arranged to take all of the girls and boys from the three halfway homes to the movies. We were ready to go and very excited until the Director at the time decided, about 5 minutes before we were to leave, that the bus would be best used to give a tour to a group of American evangelicals visiting a local church than to take the kids on an outing. Events like this happened frequently, and kids were not presented with fun programs or outings very often unless they were speaking at fundraising benefits to get the organization money, etc.

Spanish.

As far as programs are concerned, John stated that Orphan Helpers does provide English classes, computer literacy classes, vocational classes, and diplomas. The English classes and computer literacy courses are only taught in the boys' halfway home, though. John says as far as he knew the computer classes were only taught in 2008; and now that the halfway homes are no longer operating, I am uncertain of where these computer or English courses could be held. The vocational classes offered, as well as the diplomas, he claimed, were not helpful in society. The vocational classes offered are generally craft-based classes (dyeing textiles, working with paper to make crafts, painting trinkets) and though fun and interesting, will not be helpful in finding a job or sustaining themselves later in life. The diplomas mentioned in the annual reports are apparently given by Orphan Helpers and do not have any real significance outside of the walls of the orphanages and detention centers because it is not given or recognized by the state. He said that there are absolutely no ways in which the organization addresses the emotional needs of the children or teens.

Sarah's account of services provided by Orphan Helpers contrasted greatly with those of John. She posited, "for the most part, the diplomas are given by the state and government for advancement between grades for the children. The certificates awarded usually acknowledge a child's completion of a vocational training course or class that is offered at the center" ("Sarah"). She informed me that some centers do not receive vocational training but do receive basic educational classes. Of the vocational training she mentioned, it did appear that the craft-based courses occupy the majority or entirety of this service. Concerning emotional services Sarah stated that "each Orphan Helpers employee in the centers counsel the children one-on-one and in large group settings. Orphan Helpers is also implementing a church-based mentoring program

through the local Central American churches where the children will have one-to-one mentors” (“Sarah”).²⁰

To end the interview John informed me that he did not believe Orphan Helpers was achieving their mission and that there was abuse of power on the part of the administrators, that there was not enough support or materials to be successful in the detention centers and orphanages, and that of the programs the organization conducts maybe 25% are done well. He finds the largest issue facing the organization to be bad administration and a lack of passion for the work. There are no leadership strategies taught to administration or other employees, so leaders in each location use their own motives, ideas, etc. to run programs.

Conclusion

These interviews reveal drastic differences in accounts of an employee in the United States and one that worked on the front line for many years in El Salvador. They also help to expose discrepancies in the annual reports that are reflected in the financial reports and the sections on service provision. Of their mission to minister to the spiritual, physical, emotional, and educational needs of the children in El Salvador, it appears that they are focusing majorly on spiritual needs, as I hypothesized. There are some physical needs met by the donations of clothing, shoes, and sports equipment to the kids, as well as the creation of activities for them by Orphan Helpers staff. The halfway homes provided the physical need of shelter for the years they were in operation.

Concerning the emotional and educational needs of the children, though, Orphan Helpers

²⁰ They were working on a project like this when I was there in 2007 that was not working out well. I would assume it is the same program about which she is speaking.

has much room to grow. These children who have been abandoned by or left their families and become homeless, joined gangs, or been raped and had babies at their young teenage ages have heavy emotional needs that accompany the trauma they have lived. They cannot be simply converted to Christianity and then be expected to change, but need guidance and counseling. Orphan Helpers claims to offer this service to the children, but as seen in this research, we are justified in questioning whether or not they truly do so. These children also deserve a chance to become educated and be exposed to the possibility of a legitimate future rather than a secured position in a gang. Orphan Helpers offers some courses, but should work to supply state-certified diplomas so that the children can use them to get a job. The most disturbing part of this analysis has been not the lack of provision of these services but the false claims and misleading quick facts in the annual reports, as well as the inconsistencies between these reports and the interviews with John and Sarah. Discrepancies about the halfway houses, the courses in English, computer literacy, vocational programs, counseling, the educational courses, the diplomas, and more should seriously be addressed by the organization if they wish to build legitimacy and accountability; and if they wish to be portrayed as an effective FBO they need to work on providing the services they claim to provide, as well as offer programs that meet the four types of needs they declare to be serving. I would also assert that the review of the financial reports paired with these inconsistencies possibly reflects another of the organizations' true goals—to gain money. If the number of employees in the United States decreased from 14 to nine why are they still bringing in the same amount of money to the headquarters office each year when there are still more staff members, programs, services provided, and children to care for in El Salvador and their yearly budget decreases, to the point where halfway homes must close?

Orphan Helpers' approach, like the *Agape* group mentioned in a previous section, can be

characterized as primarily neoliberal, ethnocentric, and Westernizing. They value conversion to Christianity and the provision of services, such as donations of clothing, planning activities for children, offering some educational courses and vocational courses, and, before the halfway homes closed, providing shelter to teens with no place to stay, over true development. While many of these services are useful and necessary, they do not help the children to move beyond their current situation once contact with the organization has come to a halt. There are no Salvadoran customs brought into the organization, but Western evangelism is imposed onto the group, as is Western dress, in the form of donations, and the Western language of English, as the organization has been working in Spanish-speaking countries for 12 years and few of their American employees know any Spanish at all. Evangelicals generally believe conversion to Christianity and the acceptance of Christ to be a life altering experience; but does this conversion really change the lives of these children? It appears that providing this strictly spiritual aid, along with the small amount of services they provide to meet other needs, does not do much more for the children than provide them with hope that God has a plan for them, only to be let down when there is no one to direct them on their way after this acceptance of Christ. If the children leave their respective halfway homes or orphanages, they will be forced to go back to the streets, living in destitute conditions. As we saw in *Bridging the Gaps*, this type of FBO is generally not as well accepted in the community or effective at providing true change and possibility to the residents as their counterparts who are not evangelical or who are less religious in mission, actions, etc.

Concluding Thoughts and Future Research

This study on Orphan Helpers brings us back to Echeverría and his critique of the abuses of power. The many discrepancies and misleading information seen in the FBO's annual reports demonstrate just how dangerous these abuses of power can truly be. This FBO, which works with children just like the *Pegamenteros* in *Diccionario esotérico*—and many of them actually are a part of this group—impose their ideology onto these young minds, providing them with services and in some cases food and shelter, just as Daniel does in the novel, only to leave them again with nothing when the children turn 18 or leave the orphanage/detention center/halfway house. This peripheral group of children, ignored by all of society and shunned to the street, is abused a second time by this organization that pushes westernization and conversion onto the children, breathing false hope into their hearts, and then leaves them after the numbers for the quick fact lists are collected (so reminiscent of the protagonist in *Diccionario esotérico*, no?). This serious abuse of power demonstrates how *Diccionario esotérico* truly can be seen not only as a work of fiction but as a piece of cultural production speaking to a reality in Central America. The study on Orphan Helpers also validates Echeverría's critique, revealing it to be the reality in the case of this organization. Echeverría's commentary on the great danger of power and its abuses is manifested in this study.

Though this research is telling, I recognize that it is small in scope and propose it more as a starting point for future research. I hope that this study in some way adds to the scarce amount of literature on FBOs working in Latin America and inspires more work on the subject. The effectiveness of these organizations must be questioned and challenged so that those who truly are working in and with communities in a successful manner can do so without question due to

legitimacy or accountability that were abused by other FBOs. Those organizations that are abusing power and presenting false data must be held accountable for their actions. Because there is limited literature on the subject, a model or guide for those organizations that perhaps are not effectively helping their communities is needed so that they are able to seek guidance and redirect their attention to a more effective strategy. I would also like to encourage future research on Maurice Echeverría's texts. As we have seen, his work is full of rich commentaries that speak to realities in Central America. There is a need to further study how authors such as Echeverría focus on the subaltern group of street children—a group that is subalterned in so many senses—they are poor, homeless, drug users, on top of which they are also children, which is another subalterned group all in itself. Echeverría's social commentaries, subject matter, and recurring themes make his work relevant and significant in all of Central and Latin America. His critique of power and the danger of its abuse, though, make his work pertinent in any context. We can summarize this position with a concluding thought from the author, when he comments: "No importa si eres creyente o ateo, si tu relación con el poder es malsana, te convertirás en un hijo de puta" [It does not matter if you are a believer or an atheist, if your relation with power is unhealthy, you convert into a son of a bitch].

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Appendix A

Interview with Maurice Echeverría

¿Cuál era tu motivación por escribir *Diccionario esotérico*?

Establecer una fábula literaria de carácter y argumento esperpéntico y matices a ratos sinfónicos en torno al fenómeno del poder. También concretizar una novela de aliento. Y en particular, hacer la primera verdadera novela de posguerra.

¿Qué tipo de experiencia tienes o has tenido con los evangélicos?

No he tenido ninguna experiencia directa. Pero eso no deja de ser falso, dado que en Guatemala es imposible no tener una experiencia directa con los evangélicos, aún sin uno serlo. En este país levantas cualquier piedra, y allí hay un pequeño ente neopentecostal, revivado, remachante, Biblia en mano. Entrás a una tienda, y el cuate que te atiende está escuchando *ad aeternum* a su predicador en la radio o la tele. El fenómeno de las tecnoconversiones evangélicas es perversivo.

¿Tienes experiencia con las ONGs? ¿En qué contexto? ¿Hay unas que admiras y otras que no? ¿Por qué?

Poco puedo decir sobre las oenegés, salvo que no son inherentemente buenas o malas. Seguramente hay casos admirables y otros más bien repugnantes. Hay oenegés que sanean y otras que son carcamales. Oenegés que son corruptas y con doble fondo –ideológico o financiero– y luego las oenegés que emanan sentido común y responsabilidad universal. Un criterio serio demandaría investigación objetiva y estadística. Guatemala es un país que se oenegizó bastante en la primerísima posguerra. Ese fue su momento de gloria. Luego toda la atención se fue al Oriente Medio, acaso. Muchos piensan que las oenegés son artículos del Louvre, que estimulan la hemiplegia de los sur/países y la lógica de la victimización, o que son estructuras neocoloniales y prolongan el moralismo misionero. Otros piensan que son composiciones de solidaridad válidas, y una manera de compensación en un mundo asimétrico. Yo en general mantengo la actitud del maestro zen: ya veremos. Una oenegé que me ha llamado mucho la atención es *Integral Heart Foundation*, liderada por Mick Quinn y Débora Prieto, con un modelo más vibrante que cualquier otro hallable en el paisaje oenegista –basado en el trabajo de Ken Wilber, nada menos. Es una bella oenegé para el siglo XXI.

¿Tienes experiencia con las ONGs que se basan en creencias religiosas, o sea, organizaciones que trabajan en la comunidad con niños, los pobres, etc. que también tienen un componente religioso? ¿Cuáles opinas de estas organizaciones?

No me muevo en el mundo de las oenegés, así que en realidad no tengo noticia de ninguna oenegé de éste o cualquier tipo. Lo que sí puedo decirte es que no tengo ningún criterio esencialista al respecto: por tanto no las condeno o defiendo *a priori*. Hay críticos –seguramente Mario Roberto Morales es uno de ellos, aunque la verdad no lo he leído realmente como para

afirmarlo— que creen que hay algo estructuralmente corrupto en estas iniciativas de cooperación. Yo simplemente diré que hay que tener cuidado siempre con cualquier persona que cree saber lo que le conviene al otro y lo que el otro necesita. Detrás de ello puede haber una tremenda carga de soberbia, de ignorancia, de beato esnobismo.

Sé que *Diccionario esotérico* es una crítica de todas las instituciones del poder, incluyendo la religión. ¿Tu comentario es solo sobre las organizaciones evangélicas u organizaciones religiosas en general? O sea, crees que una ONG que sea religiosa pueda funcionar bien? ¿Cómo?

Diccionario esotérico es una crítica al poder en cualquiera de sus formas, seculares o religiosas. No importa si eres creyente o ateo, si tu relación con el poder es malsana, te convertirás en un hijo de puta.

¿Cuáles son las cuestiones éticas que la novela provoca? ¿Cuál es la ética de *Diccionario esotérico*?

Norman Mailer dijo que el propósito del arte es intensificar y hasta exacerbar la consciencia moral de las personas. Yo estoy en buena medida de acuerdo, siempre que se entienda que el arte explora los límites morales desde fuera, justamente, de la moral, ya no digamos del moralismo. ¿Cuáles son las cuestiones ética que la novela provoca? Eso hay que preguntárselo más bien a sus lectores, por demás casi inexistentes.

¿Por qué es tan difícil encontrar tu libro aquí? ¿Todas las obras tuyas son tan difíciles de encontrar en los EEUU? ¿Quieres que circulen o no? ¿Porque no ‘vendes’ tu mensaje como la mayoría de los escritores?

En realidad, ya no me interesa ese asunto de ser un escritor famoso, ni siquiera a estas alturas ser un escritor a secas.

¿Cuáles son las conexiones entre *Diccionario esotérico* y tu poesía?

El *Diccionario Esotérico* es poesía.

¿Por qué estas tan interesado en los niños, particularmente los niños de la calle? Parece que son un punto central en este libro y en tu poesía, también. ¿Por qué? ¿Qué quieres decir sobre ellos?

Un niño es una metáfora. Un niño de la calle es una metáfora dos veces.

¿Tienes en tu mente una solución para arreglar los problemas que padecen estas organizaciones evangélicas? ¿Cómo propones que una organización religiosa maneje los problemas y temas presentes en el libro—pobreza, hambre, uso de drogas, desigualdad, etc.?

No ofrezco soluciones, ni propongo nada.

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Orphan Helpers Employees

In Spanish

1. Cuantos huérfanos se vuelvan ‘ayudantes’/empleados de Orphan Helpers? En promedio, cual es la duración de empleo?
2. Porque evangelizar es una gran parte de su trabajo, es muy difícil cuantificar o medir los efectos de su trabajo. Cuando dice en su reporte anual del 2010 que ayudaban a 2635 niños, que significa ‘ayudar’ y como lo miden?
3. Los 612 diplomas mencionados en su reporte anual de 2010 fueran dados por el estado o por Orphan Helpers? Cuales clases enseñan los empleados de Orphan Helpers que cuentan para el diploma?
4. 2150 niños asistieron a clases de estudio Bíblico en el 2010--eso es mandatorio en los centros de detención y orfanatos como CISNA o es opcional?
- 5.Cuál es el promedio de la duración de estadía de los jóvenes en las casas de fe/esperanza/etc. ?
6. Ustedes enseñan estrategias de liderazgo a los líderes en El Salvador? Como saben si ambos piensan lo mismo?
7. Usted cree que la barrera de lenguaje (la mayoría de los empleados en los EEUU no hablan español y en promedio solo los empleados en administración o traducción hablan inglés, limitando la comunicación entre empleados de los EEUU y ES) causa problemas o limita el entendimiento de lo que está pasando en ES y como afecta a los niños/si les

gustan los programas/etc.?

8. Como maneja Orphan Helpers las necesidades emocionales y psicológicas de los niños en El Salvador? Hay sesiones de terapia que están programadas regularmente?
9. Cuantos niños participan en capacitación vocacional en ES--niños en las casas de fe/esperanza/etc. o en los centros de detención?
10. El reporte anual del 2010 dice que en muchos casos la única educación que reciben los niños está dado por profesores de Orphan Helpers. En cuales casos ocurre esto--hay algunos en El Salvador?
11. Ustedes dan clases de computadoras en El Salvador?
12. En tu opinión como piensas que a Orphan Helpers le esta yendo? Crees que está realizando su misión?
13. Cuales piensas que son los asuntos centrales que enfrenta su organización?
14. Habías trabajado con organizaciones no lucrativas o ONGs antes de trabajar con Orphan Helpers? Cual es/era tu posición en Orphan Helpers? Comentarios finales?

Interview Questions for Orphan Helpers Employees

In English

1. What are your leadership strategies and do you teach those to your staff in El Salvador?
How do you make sure you're on the 'same page'?
2. How many orphans become helpers? What is the retention rate? What is the retention rate of employees in the U.S.?
3. Because evangelizing is a big part of what you do, it is hard to quantify the effects of your work. When in your annual reports you write "2635 children helped" in 2010, to what does 'helped' refer and how do you measure that?
4. Are the 612 diplomas mentioned in the 2010 annual report given by the state or by Orphan Helpers? What classes do Orphan Helpers teach in El Salvador that go towards the state requirements for graduation?
5. What do you find to be the central issues facing your organization?
6. How often does your board meet and what are they responsible for? What's their purpose?
7. What is the retention rate of children/teenagers in the halfway homes in El Salvador? To what do you attribute this?
8. Do you believe that the language barrier (the majority of US staff only speaks English, only a few higher-ranking employees and translators in ES speak English, limiting the amount of true interaction between kids/teens and US staff, as well as kids/teens and visiting groups) leads to problems or limits understanding of how things are happening in

ES and how kids are effected by them/what they think about them/if they like whats going on?

9. How does your business background affect how you govern and manage OH? How does it affect your view on accountability, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness?
10. How does Orphan Helpers address the emotional needs of children in El Salvador? Are there counselors in any of the facilities? Any regular counseling sessions?
11. How many kids participate in vocational training in El Salvador?
12. Your 2010 Annual Report says, “in many cases, the only education these children receive is from OH teachers.” Are there cases of this in El Salvador?
13. Is PC-literacy being taught in El Salvador?
14. How do you perceive Orphan Helpers to be faring? Do you believe you are realizing your mission?
15. Did you have any experience working with or managing non-profits before working with OH? What is/was your position while working with Orphan Helpers? Final comments?

Appendix C

Screen Shot 1: Annual Report 2007

Testimonio-Style Success Stories

Orphan Helpers 2007 Annual Report

http://orphanhelpers.org/GetInvolved/LatestNews/2007AnnualReport/tabid/245/Default.aspx

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But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are **Hard pressed on every side...**

Katerin

Katerin's uncle sexually assaulted her for weeks. Her fifth grade teacher could not miss the fact that her young student was pregnant. Honduran social services were called in. Katerin was sent to Nueva Esperanza, a government orphanage.

Katerin's uncle went to jail and her mother blamed her. "It is your fault that you are pregnant and that my brother is in jail. You could have said 'No!'"

She gave birth to a baby boy just after her 13th birthday. She was afraid that the girls in the orphanage would make fun of her because she had a baby. She would not visit her baby in the upstairs nursery where nearly 50 infants and toddlers stayed.

Initially, the government was simply going to release her back to her mother. ORPHAN HELPERS appealed to the judge. The government could also move her to another center for older girls, a tough center where despair is pervasive.

ORPHAN HELPERS had sent Jan Morrison to Honduras to begin a recovery program for sexually abused children. She arrived at the exact time Katerin was being hard pressed on every side. Katerin learned that none of this was her fault. She was so relieved. We were able to get Katerin and her son moved to a Christian orphanage for unwed mothers. Through it all, Katerin was not crushed.



HOPE
ROMANS 5:5

yet not crushed;

4

Perplexed...

Rita

Rita is a small girl, some might say she is skinny. Rita has been raped more times than she can remember. She knows her assailants very well: members of her family, neighbors and assorted gang members. She gave birth to two children before she was 15. Both babies died.

When she was 14, Rita's boyfriend became enraged and shot her twice. He was a gang member, well acquainted with gruesome violence. He set the pistol down and went for his machete, a 20" blade of steel he had used many times in the past. Rita grabbed the gun, and shot and killed her boyfriend. She lived for the next three years at Sacred Heart, a juvenile detention center for girls near Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

The perplexity of Rita's experiences in life would have led many to suicide. She thought about it often enough. She could not imagine a life where she didn't have to constantly look over her shoulder to anticipate whenever her next assault would come. She knew that she was easy prey. Her twin sister was killed by the gangs in June 2007.

"Hope" was not a word in her vocabulary. Then one day she met "Hope", the most wonderful person she's ever known. Rita now lives at the "Hogar [Home] Esperanza", a Hope House established by the Torrey Family of Virginia Beach. She is making excellent grades in school and has many new friends in her church youth group.

Perplexed? Yes. Rita has definitely been perplexed. But, despair? No. Rita has Hope, and hope does not disappoint.



but not in despair;

5

Screen Shot 2: Annual Report 2007

Testimonio-Style Success Stories

Orphan Helpers 2007 Annual Report

http://orphanhelpers.org/GetInvolved/LatestNews/2007AnnualReport/tabid/245/Default.aspx

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Persecuted...

Ruben

In March 2006, Ruben Valle was released from El Espino, the most violent juvenile detention center in El Salvador. While riding on a bus, four rival gang members tried to kill him. Passengers were screaming in panic for their own lives. Either the gun would not fire or the would-be shooter could not, or would not, pull the trigger. No one knows for sure... but Ruben's life was spared. Then, he was attacked and badly beaten by members of the 18th Street gang...his own gang.

Later, Ruben was shot in the stomach and barely survived the attack.

In 2003, William Arvalo of ORPHAN HELPERS introduced Ruben to Jesus. His baptism in September 2004 was broadcast on national TV. These transformations in the nation's worst juvenile penal system were big news. Ruben's gang leader was waiting for him upon his release. "He saw me on TV. I was sure he was going to kill me," he explains, "but he told me he respected my courage. I was so afraid!"

Ruben moved into the Faith House, a halfway home for boys pursuing a life of purpose. A year later he became a counselor for ORPHAN HELPERS, working at a detention center where his reputation as a gang member was well known. God used Ruben to reach dozens of boys whose past mirrored his own.

On June 22, 2007, Ruben married Nellie Johanna, a pastor's daughter and follower of Christ. "My wife and my in-laws don't see me as a gang member, even though I have gang tattoos. To them, I am a son of God. I never imagined that God could be so good, so kind. He has been faithful to me." Ruben is now an ORPHAN HELPERS counselor at CISNA, a government orphanage for 140 boys.



but not abandoned;

6

Struck down...

Luis

Luis Carlos was moved by music. The melodies and the strange words of praise songs were infectious. He decided to check out the ORPHAN HELPERS chapel services held daily in the Ilobasco detention center, home to a hundred street boys, petty and violent criminals, and gang members.

Luis never intended to be in the gangs. It just happened that way. He never knew his father who abandoned him, his two sisters, and his mother. In find acceptance, young Luis became friends with members of a gang. The pressure to join was too much, so he joined.

He committed serious crimes to support himself and comply with his gang. One day, they boarded a bus, pulled out their weapons and demanded everyone's money. A plain-clothed police officer started shooting and Luis was wounded. After recovering, he was tried and sentenced to four years. He was 14.

"God has a plan for your life," explained Ruben to the boys in chapel that day. "I was like you and God showed me that he had other plans for me." Luis Carlos listened intently. The idea that God had a purpose just for him, a future, a destiny...he could not resist. He had to give his life to Jesus.

During the next two years Luis learned to play those songs he loved so much. He started giving his testimony in public. He was a natural public speaker. His passion was electrifying. Change was so dramatic, so evident that the authorities asked to send him to the Faith House. He enrolled in the Bethel Bible Institute. During the three months there, he sang and preached to hundreds of orphaned and incarcerated children across El Salvador and Honduras. He told them, "God has a plan for your life." Luis Carlos was murdered by the gangs on June 17th 2007.



but not destroyed.

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

7

HOPE
ROMANS 5:5

Screen Shot 3: Annual Report 2007

List of Employees

Orphan Helpers 2007 Annual Report

http://orphanhelpers.org/GetInvolved/LatestNews/2007AnnualReport/tabid/245/Default.aspx

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Executive Director's Letter

ORPHAN HELPERS continues to refine its model of ministry to meet the physical, spiritual, emotional, and educational needs of orphaned, abused and incarcerated children in Central America. Our strategic "preferred partner" status with the governments of El Salvador and Honduras differentiates us from the orphanages operated by individuals, churches and their affiliates.

These governments have opened wide their doors to ORPHAN HELPERS, encouraging our evangelism, discipleship, educational and training programs. There is nothing in the United States that compares to our situation in Central America. In the US, there are 1) no government orphanages, and 2) no tolerance for programs to government "settings" that force Christian principles and values.

We serve in more than a dozen orphanages and detention centers throughout El Salvador and Honduras. We are eager to replicate our successful model in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Panama, countries with similar situations. The need to expand must be powerfully considered in light of limited resources. When there is only enough money to run 1/4 tank of gas in the car, you can't drive far without looking for the next gas station. That is the challenge of being a young ministry, growing fast and living by faith.

Our Halfway Home services now include one Faith House (boy) and one Hope House (girl) in San Salvador and a Hope House in Tegucigalpa. We plan three homes for Honduras which are the basis for the "multiplier effect" that will surpass dozens of orphanages and former gang-members back into careers where we first found them. The impact they will make is incalculable!

We are in the second phase of developing our Sexual Abuse Prevention and Recovery Program. Sexual abuse is the number one problem we face. Physical violence, especially gang-related, is close behind. The government of El Salvador told us this new program represents a fundamental paradigm shift not just for these children, but for their culture.

Our vision is clear. Our mission is well defined. Our execution is continuously improving. Our friends, partners, staff and the children we serve inspire us to press on. *To God be the glory...great things He will do.*

—Richard Sargain

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"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."
James 1:27

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."
Matthew 9:37-38 (ESV)

Screen Shot 4: Annual Report 2009

List of Quick Facts

Orphan Helpers 2009 Annual Report

<http://orphanhelpers.org/GetInvolved/LatestNews/2009AnnualReport/tabid/241/Default.aspx> Google

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Programs

Basic Education
Most of our children are either illiterate or very poorly educated. Teenagers may be four to five years behind their age group. Children we are the only school in the government centers. We teach reading, writing, language, math, PG-literacy and ESL (English as a Second Language).

Evangelism & Discipleship
Our staff conducts devotional services, prayer meetings and Bible Studies every morning. The government employees also attend. Discipleship and mentoring programs are the heart of the Orphan Helpers ministry.

Vocational Training
Job skills are critical for our children to attain self-supported independence. Orphan Helpers provides instruction, certification and career counseling in cosmetology, ceramics, sewing, jewelry making, baking, and other skill sets.

Counseling
Orphan Helpers' staff provides group and individual counseling to assist in the recovery from sexual, physical, and emotional neglect and abuse... perhaps our greatest challenge!

- Orphan Helpers has helped over 2,500 children this year
- 39 Orphan Helpers teachers
- 370 kids accepted Christ
- 17 baptisms
- 373 diplomas and/or certificates awarded
- 1,343 attended OH vocational training classes
- 1,875 attended Bible Study classes
- 73 teenagers in our halfway homes



Gladis

Gladis is 5 years old. The police took her to an orphanage in Honduras because she was being physically abused by her father.

Her mother wanted to care for her, but could not afford to as a newly single mother. Gladis told us that she is happy because she has food, a place to live, and she can learn to the word of God, go to school, and play.

This precious girl accepted Jesus in her heart through the Orphan Helpers teachers and longs to go to church to learn more about the word of God.

Denis

When Denis was very young his father abandoned him... his mother had to work all day to provide for Denis and his three siblings. When he was 6, he saw his older brother do drugs for the first time. And at 11 he started smoking cigarettes, doing drugs, and drinking heavily. He felt that nobody loved him and nobody understood him.

As a teenager, Denis was wild. He started dating a girl and she became pregnant. They got married when they were only 16.

When Denis's older brother was sentenced to jail, he visited Denis into doing favors for him and his gang. Denis got tangled in a kidnapping scheme and the police arrested him. He was sentenced to 6 years at the Habasco juvenile detention center. No one in his family ever came to visit him. While he was serving his time, he came to know the Lord through the mentorship and Bible Studies of the Orphan Helpers inmates.

Denis moved into the Faith House this May. He is 19 years old and is working as an electrician apprentice. Denis plans to be reunited with his son and wife and obtain a good job to be able to support them. He wants to continue serving the Lord and working for Him.

Denis (in orange shirt) talking with gang members at their meeting



Screen Shot 5: Annual Report 2010

Info Graphic Quick Facts

2010 Annual Report

http://orphanhelpers.org/GetInvolved/LatestNews/2010AnnualReport/tabid/254/Default.aspx

Get Involved > Latest News > 2010 Annual Report

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CELEBRATING 10 GREAT

10 year anniversary

1 Our founders' vision is becoming reality

4 798,000 hours of service by Salvadoran and Honduran staff

3 8,000 days of service from North America's mission trips

2 More than 100 teams travel from North America to Central America

5 5,000 orphaned, abused, and incarcerated children touched by the love of Christ

JOHN 15:8 // "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear

ORPHAN HELPERS
FRUITS OF OUR WORK
2010 //

2,635 children helped	35 Orphan Helpers teachers
42 baptisms	612 diplomas and/or certificates awarded

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Screen Shot 6: Annual Report 2010

Info Graphic Quick Facts

2010 Annual Report

http://orphanhelpers.org/GetInvolved/LatestNews/2010AnnualReport/tabid/254/Default.aspx

Get Involved > Latest News > 2010 Annual Report

THINGS IN 10 GREAT YEARS

- 6** 57 tons of clothing, school supplies, hygiene products, PCs and more... *all as checked baggage*
- 7** Orphan Helpers joins the Board of **ISNA** (El Salvador's Ministry of Children's Social Services)
- 8** **IHNFA** (Honduras' Ministry of Children's Social Services) cites Orphan Helpers as strategic partner in report to United Nations
- 9** One dozen North American churches pursuing "sister-church" partnerships in Central America to help orphans
- 10** **Realizing that the church needs the orphans more than the orphans need the church...it's our collective destiny**

much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

875 kids accepted Christ	2,150 attended Bible Study classes
980 attended Orphan Helpers' vocational training classes	52 teenagers in our halfway homes

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Screen Shot 7: Annual Report 2010

List of Employees

2010 Annual Report

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Screen Shot 8: Annual Report 2011

Cover Photo

The screenshot displays a web browser window with the URL <http://orphanhelpers.org/GetInvolved/LatestNews/2011AnnualReport/tabid/311/Default.aspx>. The browser's address bar shows the URL, and the search bar contains the text "Google". The browser's toolbar includes links for Yahoo!, Google Maps, YouTube, Wikipedia, News (483), and Popular. The browser's tabs show "Orphanage", "Purdue OWL: MLA Formattin...", and "Poema Cuerpo de Maurice E...".

The website's navigation menu includes the following items: Home, Who We Are, Where We Work, **Get Involved**, Events, Trips, Photos, and Cont. The "Get Involved" item is highlighted in red.

The main content area features a large cover photo for the 2011 Annual Report. The cover photo is a black and white image of a young girl sitting on a ledge in front of a playground. The text "ORPHANHELPERS" is overlaid on the image in a large, bold, sans-serif font, with "ORPHAN" in black and "HELPERS" in red. Below the text, there is a red button with the word "Expand" in white. At the bottom of the cover photo, there is a red banner with the text "ANNUAL REPORT 2010-2011" in white.

The footer of the website includes the text "open publication - Free publishing - More annual report" and a breadcrumb trail: [Home](#) > [Get Involved](#) > [Latest News](#) > [2011 Annual Report](#). There is also a "Regi" link with a small icon.

Screen Shot 9: Annual Report 2011

List of Quick Facts

2011 Annual Report

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Home Who We Are Where We Work What We Do Events Tips Photos Contact

MISSION STATEMENT

To serve and minister to the physical, spiritual, emotional, and educational needs of orphaned, abused and incarcerated children by effectively partnering with individuals, churches, businesses, organizations and governments.

VISION STATEMENT

To see at least one Christian standing beside every orphaned, abused and incarcerated child helping them pursue God's plan and purpose for their life.

BASIC EDUCATION

Most of our children are either illiterate or very poorly educated. Teenagers may be four or five years behind in their age group. Often, we are the only school in the government centers. We teach reading, writing, language, math and ESL (English as a Second Language).

¡HOLA! MY NAME IS BELKIS

I've lived a life filled with pain. I have been cheated by people I loved more than my own life. I left home because my uncle hit me. I walked the streets for three days and two nights, looking for someone to heal the wounds in my heart. When I finally tried to return home, my family said they wanted nothing to do with me. The authorities found me wandering the streets. That's how I came to Gasitas Kennedy on November 27, 2010.

I was bitter. But Orphan Helpers educator Uncle Walter counseled all of us teens, and he told us that we were appreciated and accepted as we were. From that day, I began to think that my life had meaning, and that things were not as I had thought. I always thought I was garbage and worthless.

When I started to attend the sewing workshop, I met Aunt Aida, an Orphan Helpers teacher. She told us that our stay in the center was God's purpose for us. I've learned a lot, and I thank my Aunt Aida for teaching me to sew and much more.

I recognize that God really exists ... that at no time has He left me alone ... and that through faith in Him, I'm going to leave here. Thanks to Orphan Helpers, and to everyone who has supported me, and helped me to succeed.

Belkis Damari Núñez

EVANGELISM & DISCIPLESHIP

Our staff conducts devotionals, prayer meetings and Bible studies every morning. The government employees also attend! Discipleship and the Gospel of Jesus Christ are the heart of the Orphan Helpers ministry.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Life skills are critical for our children to obtain self-supported independence. Orphan Helpers provides instruction, certification and career counseling in: literacy, cosmetology, economics, sewing, jewelry making, baking, and computer skill sets.

COUNSELING & MENTORING

Orphan Helpers' staff provides group and individual counseling to assist in the recovery from sexual, physical, and emotional neglect and abuse. A church-based mentoring program is being implemented with each new church partnership.

MINISTRY FACTS (7/1/2010 - 6/30/2011)

<p>3 Countries: El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama</p> <p>15 Centers: government-run orphanages and juvenile detention centers</p> <p>5 Halfway Homes: 2 Hope Homes, 2 Faith Houses, and 1 Promise House</p> <p>50 In-Country Staff: teachers, counselors, and vocational trainers</p>	<p>1,500 kids at any given time</p> <p>2,147 children helped in fiscal year</p> <p>378 kids accepted Christ</p> <p>69 educational diplomas earned</p> <p>367 vocational certificates awarded</p> <p>Avg. 33 monthly in-country volunteers</p> <p>8,197 in-country volunteer hours</p>
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Expand

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Reg

Hover here, then click toolbar to edit content

Screen Shot 10: Orphan Helpers Website

List of Programs, etc. in El Salvador

Orphan Helpers in El Salvador

http://orphanhelpers.org/WhereWeWork/ElSalvador/tabid/182/Default.aspx

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Our Centers

- [CIPI](#)
- [CISNA](#)
- [El Espino](#)
- [Female Reinsertion Center](#)
- [Sendero de Libertad](#)

Fast Facts

Language: Spanish (official),
Nahua

Currency: US Dollar

Religion: 57% Roman Catholic
21% Protestant
5% Other
17% None

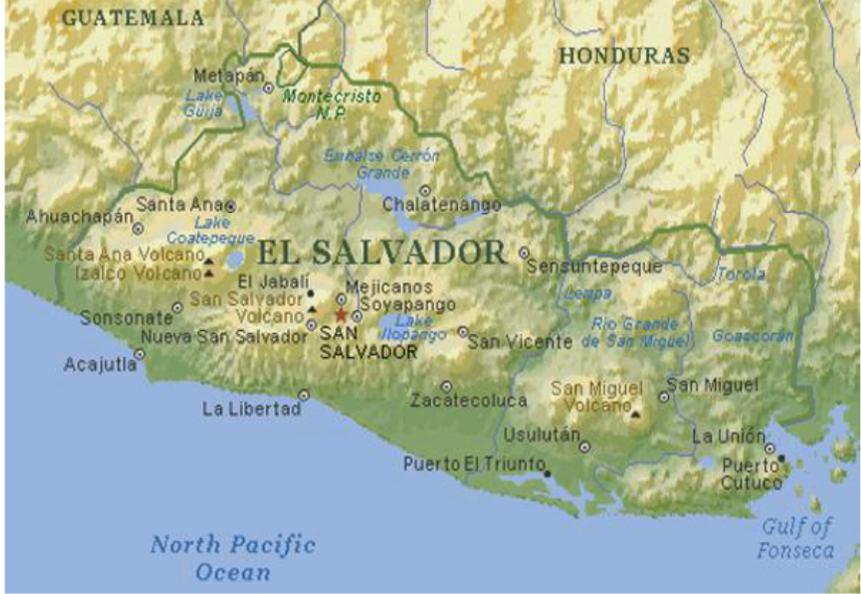
Government: Republic

Capital: San Salvador

Population: 6,071,774

Literacy Rate: 81%

PDF



Orphan Helpers works in four cities in El Salvador: San Salvador, Soyapango, Ilobasco, and Ahuachapan. We currently have 5 centers and 1 halfway home here with a total of 14 staff who teach, care for, and support the children.

El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America, but has the third largest economy. The country is about the size of Massachusetts and is the most densely populated country in the Western hemisphere, with over 6 million people in 8124 square miles. The national language is Spanish, and 80% of the population is literate. El Salvador uses the US Dollar.

El Salvador has a Pacific coastline, and is located west of Honduras and south of Guatemala. Natural resources include hydropower, geothermal power, petroleum, and arable land. Major industries include food processing, beverages, petroleum, chemicals, fertilizer, textiles, furniture, and light metals.

Appendix D



VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
e-mail irb@vt.edu
Website: www.irb.vt.edu

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 27, 2012

TO: Vinodh Venkatesh, Ashby Owens

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires May 31, 2014)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Thesis: FBOs in Latin America

IRB NUMBER: 12-150

Effective February 27, 2012, the Virginia Tech IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore, approved the new protocol for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm> (please review before the commencement of your research).

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved as: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.101(b) category(ies) 2**

Protocol Approval Date: **2/27/2012**

Protocol Expiration Date: **NA**

Continuing Review Due Date*: **NA**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals / work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution



MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 5, 2012

TO: Vinodh Venkatesh, Ashby Owens

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires May 31, 2014)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Author Interview

IRB NUMBER: 12-338

Effective April 5, 2012, the Virginia Tech IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore, approved the new protocol for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm> (please review before the commencement of your research).

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved as: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.101(b) category(ies) 2**

Protocol Approval Date: **4/5/2012**

Protocol Expiration Date: **NA**

Continuing Review Due Date*: **NA**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals / work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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