

Older people's Imaginarium about life after death

El imaginario de los adultos mayores sobre la vida después de la muerte

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ABSTRACT: The paper analyzes the Older people's Imaginarium about life after death, we did a simpling worked with believers, people around over 60 years old, all them believers, Catholics, Methodists, Adventists and Pentecostals, who live in the Veracruz state capital, in Mexico. The information was taked through in-depth interviews and guided discussions about the topic. Research shows the imaginary life beyond has to do with actions and practices, cultural contexts, historical economic, religious customs that the company and / or individuals have accumulated in their daily lives. The central question is present in all the work is: What role is playing these imaginary in the earthly life? How to give meaning and how human life transform?

Keywords: Death; Life; Belief in the beyond.

RESUMEN: *El trabajo analiza el imaginario de los adultos mayores sobre la vida espúes de la muerte, en una muestra de creyentes mayores de 60 años, todos ellos creyentes católicos, metodistas, adventistas y pentecostales, que viven en la capital del estado de Veracruz, México. La información se llevó a cabo a través de entrevistas a profundidad y prácticas guiadas sobre el tema. La investigación muestra que el imaginario de la vida en el más allá, tiene que ver con acciones y prácticas, con contextos culturales, históricos, económicos, religiosos, costumbres que la sociedad y/o los individuos han acumulado en su vida cotidiana. La pregunta central que esta*

*presente en todo el trabajo es: ¿Qué papel juegan estos imaginarios en la vida terrenal?
¿Cómo dotan de sentido la vida humana cómo la transforman?*

Palabras claves: Muerte; Vida; Creencias en el más allá.

Introduction

*In heaven, in heaven, in the sky,
No more tears, no more sorrow, no more pain.
And when we are there, redeemed in heaven.
We will praise the Lord!
As we arrived at house of eternal peace,
we must fight against the forces of Satan and
vigorous always trumps with Him
we will forward with Jesus!
(Gospel Chorus talking about eternal abode).*

The illness, aging and death have shocked man for centuries, which is the reason always has been a longing for a different vision about life chances. When one life is not completed, it remains attractive and satisfying even with the passage of the years and united us forever with those we love. Everybody desire a life not correlated with death, a health not liable to illness, a kind of good that will not perish and go beyond the earthly nature.

This paper argues in all societies, there is a conception about world and eternity, from which the human being and society as whole create their own destiny, not only a destination but already, under heavenly bodies or treated by nature, but destination situations produced by himself. That is, a destiny which emerges in coreference between divine religious beliefs, physical nature surrounds it and social context in which has developed expertise.

My goal for now is to analyze the imagery of life after death (especially as regards vision of eternity), noting that the ability seniors are looking to infinity with feet planted on the ground and analyzing if this view has implications in their everyday life.

To do this, start from idea about the view of life after death is being built over years by being molded lifestyles. To extent the elderly are reducing their consumption needs, they will restrict their social and economic interactions, they are decreasing their

daily activities, either by illness or disability, or simply retreat; to extent also are changing their eternity views. Although this does not mean the older a poorer views of eternity have, in contrast to older, the vision of eternity is more essential, more specific.

The reason I want to emphasize the eternity construction is because I think is one of the main sources through which humans orient their conduct legitimized or censor their actions, measured and rated events, integrating such so not only generate explanations for here and now, but also for their past and their future. In short, they give meaning to life performing their own reality so they can find consistency last.

As an anthropologist I am interested in locating the problem of view of eternity, not so much in time dimension, but similarity between reality and eternity, which are so close with respect to experience generated by the individual. In other words, I want to analyze the vision of life after death from events and conditions, experiences that older adults generated throughout life. The way in which this vision of eternity structure their daily life within a spiritual project, from which is interpreted and establishes a relationship with the community and defined hope about not only future earthly but eternal.

Walking for Eternity

I start from the consideration of three authors whos in my view was whos gave me more information about the study topic within the social sciences: Delumeau (2000), Thomas (1983) and Aries (1987). Delumeau (2003) shows us elements that encourage the construction of ideas about the beyond, in art works. Describe how civilizations are intertwined and representations of "beyond". Note although the biblical foundations remain the same, there are a variety of images and evocations paradise accompanied the long Christian history.

Thomas (1983) shows the ideas that make up about life after death, models are generated as a result of man's need to appease, to tolerate and cope with result of death of "other." All these ideas for him are: survival models, which he calls "systems of hope." He expresses relationship between how much near and far can be "beyond". Man,

according to this author, sets these models hope to observe his inability to escape death and forgetting her annihilating effects.

Aries (1987) seeks to understand which conditions, actions or historical junctures, could promote specific way of conceiving eternity. His approaches suggest to analyze visions of death and "beyond", there are two elements: a) the social landscape in which people think a certain way of life after death; b) the historical development about contextual space.

Within this framework, states that elderly according to their circumstances, lifestyles and religious views, is how to construct its vision of eternity, adapting and reinterpreting it in every moment of his life, in order that by one hand can generate expectations of future welfare and on other, can continue to live in best possible condition everyday life.

Treading Eternity

Field data consists in 27 interviews, where we worked with 13 men and 14 women. 18 of these respondents are Catholic, 2 Methodists, 2 Adventists, and 5 Pentecostals. The religious selection of these groups was based on family and friendship relations existed between themselves. Those 60 to 75 years and 76 and older: the information according to 2 age groups were analyzed. Differences were also highlighted by sex, economic activity and religious group they belong informants. The analysis consists of the following: The vision of eternity for 25 informants was a subject which had been made to reflect and 2 of them was an unknown subject. Within those 25, life after death, appeared as having rules, principles, lines, trends, shafts, levels of structure, history, bodies moving under certain models which legitimize here from earth, which not invented until tomorrow night. I mean, there were all pre-study process, analysis and reflection.

When 25 informants were questioned about their vision of eternity, made reference to a given space, rather than endless time, where they will enjoy eternal life. These spaces, some were named as "paradise"; other as "heaven"; some called "glory"; others said it was "the kingdom of God or heavenly homeland." I could tell that the same

informant may refer to the same place with these same names, both Catholics and evangelicals. Also in people whose age range was between 60 to 75 years their vision of eternity and was far too general in its characterization, however in people 76 or older vision was clear and precise.

"I do believe in life hereafter, I already saw in sleep, but i didn't walk around. They are a white streets, people are like us, no souls, I talked to a lady like with you. She asked me, what do you looking for? I told her, I'll see my dad. She said, passing the Jordan River, a black dog will guide you." (SAR, 79, Catholic).

"There in the glory, will be a chorus of angels and several choirs of us, who praise our God. The sky will become a paradise wich God has prepared for us, for all who follow his footsteps. Everybody angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim will be happy and content in his kingdom ..." (CPA, 73, Gospel).

The vision of eternity is conceived in uncertainty ranging since the spiritual plane to an earthly plane and vice versa. For example, when referring to beings who are in eternity, obviously speaking of souls of deceased loved and lived a holy life, also speaks of "living beings" as deities and supernatural beings. The population in eternity will be made up of children, youth, adults and seniors of all races and peoples and angels.

For Catholics the answer is very repetitive in sense that it will be accompanied by saints and patron saints, virgins, angels and departed souls.

For evangelicals, in eternity, will be only those who have faithfully obeyed the "word of God". These living beings can be as many good souls, with faces and noticeable faces, accompanied by heavenly hosts, apostles, biblical figures such as Moses, Abraham, David, the prophets, among others.

The central figure in eternity will be the presence of God Father, curiously not mentioned very often Jesus (only three informants told me that Jesus is at the entrance of heaven welcoming us in our new home, two informants, they said that Jesus will be sitting next to God along with Moses and Abraham), only one person made an explicit reference to the Holy Spirit.

Both Catholics and evangelicals make mention different types of angels who will be to the care of all that is required in the kingdom of God. For evangelicals, these angels usually appear in choir so playing instruments; some of them very similar to the ones here on earth (flutes, harps, trumpets, tambourines, mandolins, guitars etc.) that together with the good souls will sing songs to God.

About other beings "alive" who could be in eternity, besides humans, are animals. The most cited were the doves, pigeons, sheep, lion, dogs, among others.¹ It is noteworthy that, among some respondents, there indecision about the existence of animals. It is noteworthy that the description did both Catholic and evangelical about this place, on plants, rivers, beaches, mountains, plains, generally very similar to the contexts in which they have lived, highlighting the most beautiful features of these places.

About buildings that may exist in eternity, informants have no clear idea about the type of buildings that will house the entire population of souls and heavenly hosts dwell there. 10 of them, if they believe there are buildings such as churches; four consider that walk among clouds. Especially, people associated with the field; 7 patients referred to cottages and cabins, as the kind of home where they will be. Six of them did not know what they answer.

I was surprised because 13 people, do not believe in biblical description given in chapter 21 of the Revelation of the sky, especially when referring to the golden streets, walls of jasper and precious stones, sea glass blocks.

"I think about sea of glass, streets of gold and precious stones, we should not take it literally, can you imagine the fish in the sea of glass?, Or slip we can give us on the streets of gold. Something is true the fish are not going to die if we take them out of the water, or plants, because there aren't deaths, sorrow, or suffering." (LH. 66, Gospel).

A curious question to highlight - although the descriptions seem to show another world - the similarity is that the sky will have in relation to what is life on earth, able to see how their vision built according to lifestyles showed them their reality. That is, the facility was to describe because of the ability to relate their reality and their

¹ Eight respondents cited the common scene of a child in the middle of a sheep and a lion in a garden full of flowers, fruit trees and many well as birds and animals of other species around them. With this scene informants want to show the harmony will reign in heaven, in similarity to the life you had in the Garden of Eden. Many of these scenes were recreated or taken from paintings or pictures of biblical passages.

incompleteness, their idea of perfection, usually seen through their religious vision in which they are assigned. The pursuit of perfection, points out gaps in reality, motivating search for possible worlds in eternity, life styles plausible where religious clarifies and harmonises the stage. I can say without religious beliefs would hardly be possible to recreate this imaginary world, the images are obviously reference the real world. Both the real world and the imaginary world, form a unit, which is constantly changing interaction and reciprocal manner. Both worlds are needed to survive

I noticed there were respondents who were more descriptive than others when asked his view of eternity. This may be due to poor approximation, either the membership or the references in relation to eternity, images, scriptures both Catholic and Protestant versions that deal with eternal life

I found intriguing differences such as: people between 60-75 years of age had a vision of eternity as a place where you can enjoy the peace of God's presence, joy, no problems of life today, a place out of time where there is only the present, with people like us. In contrast to men 76 and older, where the "cloud" is seen not just as a place of rest, but as a place of great religious and social activity:

"It is a busy place where the apostles, thousands of people dressed in white and bright; where there is no sleep or rest, but always praise and glorify the great God, we will be very busy." (FVM, 81, Gospel).

"It is a garden, where nothing to disturb us, we will be very busy getting to know many people, our view is going to lose in so many wonderful things wich God has created for us." (MSH 94, Catholic).

"Life in eternity is a different than our present life." (HGT, 89, Catholic).

With women step something different, especially Catholics, those 60 to 75 years (10 cases) showed more clear than it could be heaven vision turned to movies and images that they have internalized throughout their life; for instance:

"(...) We will be with God, with Virgin of Guadalupe, surely there will be our little saints and the souls of the departed and my husband who was very

devoted. Just like in the movies with angels around, surrounded by flowers.” (COU, 69, Catholic).

“In eternal life, we will not do anything, we will not walk much, nor grieve for the food, or for the children, for nothing, will be one other way to exist.” (G, 65, Catholic).

While women 75 and older, only 2 cases (unlike men) showed a certain disbelief in life after death:

“(…) There is not a life after death. Although sometimes I'm between a rock and a hard place, because I say: if all this exist?” (MOD, 80, Catholic).

Regarding differences by religious groups, found in the case of Catholics, I observed fewer demands for access to eternity, for example:

“To gain eternal life, just a minute before to die, dying could repent of all the evil he did in his life. They argue is Jesus forgave a few minutes before his death a criminal Barabbas of the meanest (...) God in heaven he will not impose us any requirement, just to be happy.” (HJ., 80, Catholic).

But for evangelical groups to achieve benefits of eternal life, you must have had a life of obedience and faithfulness to God. Furthermore, we believe God will have a well-defined schedule of activities to develop especially in regard to praise and worship to Him.

Eternity to reality

As can be seen, vision of eternity, shows existence of a shared memory where various aspects about social, family, personal life in which individuals have been immersed are. People in old age showed that compared to his past and present, seem generally not envision another possible vision than that of eternity, as Mead (1932) says, people realize that "the world will be can not be different from the world that will not

rewrite the past.” That's why in view of eternity was seen as system that gives coherence and meaning to life lived, where the past rather than the present together with the future, is product of socio-historical processes of struggle longing for eternity.

In this perspective, life after death is a strong desire in life that influences so the thoughts and daily events appear in the past or in the eternity look. Plans are made and lifestyles considering imposing eternity.² It seems not practical, but for older people is the best and sometimes the only way to think about tomorrow.³

After then, this longing for eternity, is not just a desire, it undoubtedly refers to lifestyles and how to respond to needs: health, safety, welfare, happiness, in a social context, time and space determined. Since one of functions of these longings for eternity, is the organization and management of personal and collective time on the symbolic level. Hence the need to recreate these visions that give identity and sense of existence to people. Which by the way, neither modernity nor postmodernity have disrupted.

While religious beliefs generate a specific particular view, this does not mean that unemancipated visions of hegemonic visions occur.⁴ Although sometimes the information poverty of eternity, as evidenced in interviews, makes these visions sometimes look very nourished or altered, not only by images from religious beliefs, but for artistic expressions that about this topic have been made either by literary narratives. But I think I finally have the visions presented their livelihood mainly on the reality that is lived, sometimes in a dialectical way are compared with the beliefs and vice versa. Hence sometimes eternity is displayed as continuation of other or as two separate worlds of conceiving human destiny and man's relationship with nature. Sometimes both worlds produce a synthesis of the meanings of their answers, always looking for consistency. And so these visions are repeated from generation to generation.

The yearning for eternity, always tended to reveal lifestyle, struggles, battles and conquests, duties, rights, obligations, identity, ideals and to draw contrasts between the

² Methodits pastor was telling me: "Man is the only creature on earth that God has put in your heart yearning for eternity, to live indefinitely now living forever requires spiritual provisions based on the Bible. Behold a remarkable extent, the Bible offers or rather puts in our hands the possibility of achieving a life without limits Mclean (2005) says we need to build our heaven and hell and that is really hard to properly manage all the beyond. To start building our heaven and hell must be remembered the structures of both are the same and we take eternity to the present, except that they are graphically different”.

³ Mclean (2005) says we need to build our heaven and hell and that is really hard to properly manage all the beyond. To start building our heaven and hell must be remembered the structures of both are the same and we take eternity to the present, except that they are graphically different. Eternity is invading time and this means the collision of two similar but different in meaning and sense worlds.

⁴ Mclean (2005) argues that the existence of heaven and hell is not solely a matter of faith, but we must recognize that faith is what gives rise to eternity. It is what allows us to take and we take eternity to the present.

real and the imaginary; sometimes managed to harmonize historical trends, with future prospects. (Often tried to tame future issue reduced the vision of eternity, not allowing, see all the drama that has occurred). Finally, in these visions are manifested who, both personally and collectively, where you are going, what you want, you want and need.

Now, keep in mind that older people organize their hopes for eternity based on two essential elements: the reward and compensation.

The reward the actions taken throughout their life. Compensation as redemption and replacement of all the shortcomings throughout their life experienced. For example, torment, pain, suffering as loneliness, sadness, darkness, chaos, among others, were described with much experience and with more detail. If for example had suffered much, hoped to enjoy in heaven, based on biblical passages about Beatitudes.⁵ In the heaven description, informants required apart from biblical knowledge, the common theme was to build opposition to suffering, lack and / or elemental necessity in mortality.

A relevant question is to show that although everyone wanted to go to heaven, showed much uncertainty to achieve this, arguing that "only God is the only one who knows." Especially in people aged 60-75 years however in people 76 or older the chance was less insecure. Although the people between 60 to 75 years came more often to religious services.

Often found that eternity, is presented as a "non-physical place" without limits,⁶ but to the extent that delved into the interview and access to the internal history of the people had, the description is made tangible, familiar, physics; believers are subjecting these areas to the same laws of the universe and only rarely characterized with the laws out of this world. And the key reference in the description of eternity is the real world. As both the real world and the imaginary world, form a unit, which is constantly changing interaction and reciprocal manner. Something more interesting AUNES, both worlds need to survive.

Thereupon, life after death, social analyst provides an opportunity to articulate the symbolic and imaginary components of community life with real social life, personal and from a temporality that defines the intent of the look and action future. All this in order

⁵Blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the kingdom of heaven", "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Mateo 5 and 6). While who had led a life of pleasure, suffering awaited them, especially if they had not been shared.

⁶It is useful to mention that heaven and hell for informants is a heritage of divinity, is a legacy to humanity whose limits are set by the sin that everyone builds.

to find your eternity reality, and reality find your eternity, hoping that no disagreements, but instead they can articulate and new meaning so that they can overcome cracks and wounds, transformations and crises fears gestated ⁷in the construction of these visions real or imagined. I believe that in this process of building new visions and hopes of eternity, we can contribute to fracture the official hegemonic visions.

And second, to find a thread, unspeakable of our collective and personal experience shared vision, where the talk of rescue intimate tone of what appears to be the exploration of our own concerns. This we help articulate the experience with the imaginary.

Based on the above, the question arises: Could you live without humanity eternity? How vital is the longing for eternity as a society and as individuals? Is it that the indifference to religious issues may mean the impoverishment of the vision of eternity?

Based on the foregoing, it is clear we must accept the emptiness of visions concerning eternity, but despite this, the longing for eternity there is, especially for people in later life need dealing their needs, and strains regrets that constantly plague because life without heaven on earth would become a hell.

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