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Contributions of Anthropology to the Study of Organization: The Case of Funeral Home

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1. Introduction

In our contemporary world, there is a new conception of the dead, dying and death, its ritual and its ceremony, which allows the existence of companies engaged in the handling of the corpse, its final disposal and of holding the funeral rite. These companies live under a market economy, within which a system of exchange between suppliers and consumers, merchants and common people is structured, mediated by the dead body, which facilitates the encounter between two worlds, that of the undertaker and that of the symbolic references with which society represents death.

However, unlike any other kind of organization, the funeral home is, without exaggeration, a sui generis organization: no other organization is directly related, in its marketing and business development, with death. Management and marketing like theoretical perspectives provide to organization the way for their development; however, in the funeral home case, the anthropological perspective facilitates an extensive network of responses related to the complexity of these businesses and draws symmetrically their place into society, culture and themselves.

This research began in 1991, when I started working in the funeral sector at Promotora de Jardines Cementerios S.A. As for many, my getting in this sector was coincidental. It is not frequent that someone seeks for employment in a funeral home or in a cemetery. Initially, my entering obeyed to the labor projection of acquiring experience in the coordination of working parties. Thus, for twenty months I worked as the commercial director of one of its sale teams.

Subsequently and for three years, I carried out commercial and marketing tasks for Funeraria Medellín Ltd.; in the year 1997, I coordinated the restructuring of the commercial and services department at La Ofrenda Ltd.,in the city of Pereira. In 1998, after seven years of direct linking with the sector, I carried out managerial consultancy in Latin America for the Los Parques Corporation in Guatemala City, Grupo Metropolitano del Este in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, and Prados de Ventilla in Bolivia.

These experiences in the sector generated reflections related to the raison d'être in the society of a mortuary and my anxiety by my role set against the different actors with whom I interacted. On the one hand, there were those who arrived requesting for their services at the same time as they experienced an intense pain due to the loss of a loved one. On the

other hand, there were the organization's directives, their shareholders, the teams of work to my charge, and with them the commitment of complying with the collecting, training, formation and maintenance of the salespersons, to reach the sale budgets, placement and design of products, development or growth of current markets, the design of "loyalty" strategies, and the permanent and direct interaction with the direction of marketing with the objective of enriching their knowledge of the market.

In that moving about, I was able to recognize a double language: one that was totally "dehumanized" toward the corpse, a distant emotion toward "the other", already dead, allowing the mortuary to be developed as such; without it, the business of the funeral sector cannot perform its social object. And another, of contained words in the external and internal messages as part of a commercial and marketing work that referred to words such as company, hope, faith, endorsement, friendship and love, all of which are promises in the time and necessary in a moment of sorrow.

Thus, I got to know a specific metalanguage nourished on nicknames for funeral workers, such as "the undertakers", "the rascals", "the vultures", "the ravens", "the lump of salt", among so many others, and which vary from region to region. Also, in my experience in organizations in which I have performed the role of worker or advisor, I have observed how each of them requires imperatively the possibility of exercising different personnel-collecting tactics out of the prototypes illustrated in the sales management literature and of marketing of services, the design of contact mechanisms and approach of the mortuary toward the family of the employees, to sensitize and diminish the group refusal toward the work that they carry out in any level of the organization.

These experiences lead to the research project: "The cultural context as factor of competence for the mortuary", written in 2002 as the thesis to opt for the title of Master's in Administration, whose director was Professor Omar Aktouf from HEC of Montreal. Subsequently, in the year 2008, I publish the book under the seal of Pontificia Bolivariana University Press, titled: "The mortuary, a task between the human thing and the economic thing"; academic works that permit me today to write this chapter, which is presented or fourth parts as follows: First part is about death, dying and marketing, which are displayed by approaches from anthropology overlapping with discipline such as management and marketing to contextualize the funeral home activities. Second part talks about the mortuary inside the economic context of the tertiary sector and a conceptualization of its existence. Third one explains the impact of meanings of death in the funerary activities. Last part deals with the characterization of supply and the demand for funeral services. Conclusions are presented at the end of the chapter.

The methodological design of this research uses ethnography, which reaches a phenomenon comprehension and social order. In-depth interview and observations were used as methodological tools. Interviews were done to directors and former-directors of Latin American and Allied Cementeries Parks (Asociación Latinoamericana de Parques Cementerios y Afines –ALPAR-) were recorded in audio and video formats. The aforementioned led to define the funeral service in business, economic and legal contexts. Furthermore, the observation was guided around the mortuary ritual in three cities of Latin America that are Medellín -Colombia; Barquisimeto-Venezuela, and Guatemala City - Guatemala. This observation ranges from the moment that a family requested a funeral service to the actual ceremony. In some cases, I could accompany the family members in

their activities after the funeral. Families who used cremation and inhumation were observed. As part of the ethnographic work, a written record of the phenomena observed through the field book was carried out.

2. The death, dying and marketing

"The social sciences do not deal with death ever. Are satisfied with recognizing the man as the animal of the tool (homo-faber), brain (Homo sapiens) and language (homo-loquax). And yet, the human species is the only one for which death is present throughout his life, the one that accompanies the death of a funeral ritual, the only one who believes in the survival or in the resurrection of the dead".
(Morin, 1974)



Picture 1. Dialogue. Cemetery of San Pedro, Medellín - Colombia, 1999
By Claudia Patricia Vélez-Zapata

Death is a natural and cultural event. As a natural event, the medical sciences may delay it, but they cannot eliminate it. It is inevitable because with death life ends. The opposite of life is death, and as such, it is inescapable. Beyond the presence of a corpse that shows how a human life is over, there are the meanings of death (Bower, 1996; Huntington and Metcalf, 1979). He who died does not ask more, but those who survive the death of that other continue their existence and, therefore, their questions will not be expected (Louis-Vincent, 1993). The thought of death leads unquestionably to think about life, existence, in everyday life, in the divine, the profane, in yesterday, today, tomorrow, in the future; it leads us to think about ourselves and about others.

The human concepts of life and death are strongly influenced by their cultural context. Man is a social, cultural, biological (Morin, 2000) and historical being. Humans live in continuous

imbrication with others while we are individuals who live our daily lives as a continuum of non transferable individual experiences.

It should be understood that the individual human being is social and that a social man is individual, i.e., part of mankind´s structure is this apparent duality of the concept of humanity. This concept of humanity also refers to what mankind does, feels and thinks. All of the aforementioned dimensions are referenced in mankind´s world of life. This is not only an organic matter, but also a psychic and transcendent one, which is diverse and complex, which ranges from creating and organizing the chaotic, between the real and he imaginary, the divine and the human.

Over time, death and the handling of the corpse have had a different connotation. Concepts about life and death are different according to the values that move a society. In a society centered in principles such as those of the capitalistic world − consumption, production, performance and profit −, death is seen as a consumer item that involves modification of the ritual expressed by culture, and therefore the principles, values and beliefs that circumscribe the death and its content are constantly changing due to political, economic, religious and moral reasons (Aries, 1998).

Death can be viewed from different perspectives. The legal concept of death implies that we are not talking about an event but a process. The perspective of the Criminal Law regarding a person´s death would be to wonder about the process that led to the death of the individual. From the perspective of the Family Law, the death of an individual involves the provision of some goods among the groups of consanguinity. The legal determination of death based on medical events occurs under specific conditions. From the Judeo-Christian religions' point of view, death can be considered as the separation of soul and body, or as God's call to the heavens and the completion of a task on Earth (Eliade, 1998). Death, in this context, could be considered the result of a random ordained by God, the divine, it could be considered libelous, deserved or salvation, but in one way or another, people evade talking about it (Aries, 1983). The social concept of death, for the western cultures, determines that death is unknown, a fact which is inappropriate to talk about (Di Nola, 1995).

The pain is felt due to another person´s death, which leaves a gap for those who survive (Louis-Vincent, 1993). It is the pain of death which frustrates a relationship, which somehow makes one feel the experience of death itself, although conceived as a step beyond where one expects a better life. The death of a loved one as an active part in life itself is not reached to accept or to rationalize even after a long time of grief and mourning. The death of a being for those who have built and shared a life means the loss of a part of oneself, the completion of construction together.

For the funeral home, this body means the event that connects the company with prospective clients. It is relevant to understand, contrary to what is usually heard in common language, that this future consumer is not the future corpse; the demandant is the society, motivated by the knowledge of its finitude and recognition of their moral obligation towards others.

The company is immersed in the culture; therefore, the reference point for its development is the culture in a society. The funeral home does not escape from this fact. The culture involves talking about values, ethical standards, objects and materials produced by its

members, the accumulation of signs and symbols, meanings, and traditions among its members, that is to say, the culture is the symbolic heritage.

Marketing is based on the economy, and it is assumed as a management tool linked to the organizational planning process-oriented management of markets and their demands. Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals (Kotler, 2002). The exchange or transaction is the key objective of the concept and practice of marketing and it is the opposite concept which has revolved an instrumental part of the proposals as a contribution to business. However, in the analysis and implementation of marketing, it is necessary to link the reading of the cultural context; since it gives reason to be to the entire human phenomenon.

Describing markets includes tasks such as review of competition, the definition of the agents involved in the purchase decision process and the characterization under quantifiable and unquantifiable parameters of groups of consumers. This means that not only marketing information aimed at defining the socio-demographic population factors is sought, but also attitudes, lifestyles, beliefs, values, which are not more than all the elements that relate to the culture that is embedded in society, establishing itself as the predominant context in their decisions.

Therefore, for an organization in charge of treating the body and facilitating the means for the ceremony and ritual of death, the cultural context should be the focus of all marketing activities. Thus, only from this understanding and interest, strategies and actions for facing the family, society and in general each agent that is related to the funeral home can be contextualized.

3. The funeral in the economic context of the tertiary sector: towards a conceptualization of its existence

The increase use of the classification of economic sectors is referenced by pioneer work of authors Fisher (1935) and Clark (1941) (Garcia and Sanz, 1992) who designed a model based taxonomic tripartite division of economic activities: primary, secondary and tertiary industry sector or services.

Having a precise definition of services is a work in progress, however, the commonly accepted definition is: "The services are benefits of working with the following characteristics: 1. They cannot be stored or incorporated into another production. Disappear in the moment of its realization. Neither originates from a previous production. 2. Assume a direct relationship between producer and consumer. 3. Its usefulness and value in use depends on how they are made, both spatially and from the temporal perspective" (Peinado, 1998: 240).

The definition of service leads to the problem of classifying or establishing types of service activities, such difficulty has been addressed by different scholars taking into account its heterogeneity and ambiguity implicit in the conceptual definition and not leaving out multiple activities. This is compounded by its continued growth and the incursion of technological advances and general science that increases the difficulty.

The criteria for classification takes into account the conditions of: 1. Distribution of social and personal production. 2. Marketable services provided in situ, durable and nondurable,

and 3. Permanent and temporary, reversible and irreversible private and collective provision, and non-marketed and marketed services (Weller, 2001), as further addressed Sachs and Larrain services may be of a tradable and non-tradable, the latter being defined as goods or services that can only be consumed, but cannot be exported or imported (1993).

Funeral services from economic standpoint, as a business unit, today could be considered as tradable services, taking into account the use of telecommunications in the service of the ritualization, therefore; a company whose business is providing the funeral service has two options: be physically located in different contexts - expansion - or use as an intermediary telecommunication channels from the place of origin to the context that demands it, in other words, the virtual delivery of a funeral service.

Beyond the economic perception, linking the cultural context that ritualization can be made in a different place of origin is impossible. You can adjust the setting in visual and symbolic terms but the socio - emotional relationship, the social status of being among those involved with the corpse, cannot be replicated in other settings.

As type of service, there are multiple services listed by national ranking and the sectorial classification of services of the World Trade Organization - WTO - but none of them mentioned the funeral service activity. Only in the International Standard Industrial Code - ISIC – that is mention in section "Other services“ and classified under code 9303 that corresponds to "Funeral and related activities".

The International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities - ISIC - seeks to satisfy the requirement of classification of the data according to categories of international comparable economic activity; as well as reconcile different needs and capabilities of countries based on international requirements. ISIC classifies activities according to their nature, describing Major Divisions, Groups and Sub-Groups of activity and they represent the following major divisions:

1. Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing.
2. Mining and quarrying.
3. Manufacturing.
4. Electricity, gas and water.
5. Construction.
6. Wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels.
7. Transport, storage and communications.
8. Finance, insurance, real, estate and business services.
9. Community, social and personal services.
10. Activities not identified.

Taking into account that the branches of the tertiary sector activities contributed to about 90% of new jobs that were created in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990 decade, and in the late decade of 2000, accounted for 55% of total employment (Weller, 2004), It is certain that funerary activity is no exempt in contributing to these figures, despite not being included as such, one might think that the activity is not considered relevant and is therefore not described. This may be due to two factors: on one hand are the difficulties that the sector contains, as paradoxically as it deepens its analysis, as a sector and the classification of their activities, growing uncertainty over others in the same terms. Second, the cultural conditioning regarding death and its ritual as a distant or denied reality.

The funeral service activity does not have a description of other activities, registered in various economic sectors, such as the agricultural and manufacturing. Similarly it seems that its tax contributions, generating direct and indirect employment and the large number of companies that are engaged in this business, exclusively in charge of ritualization, and setting aside service providers and new emerging manufactures, of what might be called derived demand, such as florists, marble stores, technological and waste control, funeral caskets, religious items, musical groups, among others, failed to have relevance.

A funeral home shall have the infrastructure for the provision of services, ritualization of death, such as: funeral vigil rooms, cemetery and cremation services. You can also find companies that do not have any infrastructure, but on the contrary, market or act as intermediaries of all organizations involved in providing the service and as such prepare packages sold through organized and aggressive sales teams consolidated as an intermediary agent. It is important to note that the first commitment is not exclusive of the second it is possible to find organizations with their own resources and include in their offers, other services; this also is the result of the changes and flexibilities that entrepreneurs identified and incorporated into their strategies.

While the center of activity is given by the market, it could be argued that the funeral is concentrated in two core businesses, which in turn differ from each other:

- The sale of burial space property in the ground or mausoleum and the direct provision of partial or total burial ritualization services through their own physical resources and;
- The marketing of third party services, becoming portfolio intermediaries for different funeral industry organizations.

We are clearly facing an economic activity that moves the market and trading, and generate such administrative and marketing activities allowing the purchasing preference of a target market and potential profitability stipulated on investments generally made, the use of organizational resources to the operation. Similarly, the funerary practice and companies or organizations dedicated to this function are affected by the contexts and discourses in which are immersed as business organization. Thus referring to the different frameworks that define the actions and decisions of the business are political, legal, and economic factors as well as cultural and technological conditions.

From the analyzes presented, it is possible to approach an understanding of the funeral business, and one way or another understand and comprehend, which in the words of Edgar Morin would be a contribution that the current text and the funeral, makes to "Copernizar[1] death" (1974).

Our society does not regard death as a part of life itself and all speech that always brings this proposal may be considered a contribution. The problem is not given by the death but in the attitude towards it, in denial of their existence and the consequences that come with this attitude, very human, but not manageable. Sigmund Freud says that the man is always surprised by death. It is a necessity with a tendency to deny and forget (2006). So in daily life, habits, work, activities, conversations, discussions, leisure spaces, death is not usually present and therefore its proponents as an everyday thing or a topic to be discussed could be classified as decontextualized or depressed or just boring.

[1] Copernizar is related with Copernicus.

Edgar Morin sees a need to uncover the deep passions of man before death, consider the myth of their humanity and consider the man himself as the guardian of the secret unconscious. If you want to separate repetition of the myth, from the evidence that gives it its magic dimension - religious, it is necessary to "copernizar" death (1974).

The work of a funeral home, through all its administrative and marketing practices, is for society to convene a way to think of death. It forced to link the term in the dynamics of business, communication and to release series of internal and external activities to the market that justifies the purpose. The funeral business practices might be read as a dimension e found beyond its commercial function; as an entity most likely to relativize death; as a way of contributing to scape the pathetic, the shocking and the darkness that wraps it; and as a help to the man involved in it, who will inevitably die. From the rationalization of death life is to live, preserving and respecting its cultural dimension.

4. The impact of the meanings of death on the funerary activities

> "[...] In general, each individual perceives the death of the other, possibly yours, according to a perspective that comes from their own profession (and therefore, their code of ethics), the order of their intellectual interests, their ideology or group to which it is integrated. Thus, this only brings to focus the problem of a fragmented view of death, which may be interesting, even original, but not sufficient for a thorough understanding of the problem".
> (Louis–Vincent, 1993)

Although in modern times, individuals seek to make death a forgotten subject, hidden, sad and lonely, the subject of a single subject, it points out to the community that something has happened, and that therefore there are large and lavish breaks. For a moment the continuity of social rhythm is affected: in the city nothing remains the same. Death is a social fact, takes place in a social context, in terms of organizations and institutions and economic activities arising from it through business and professional definitions of the different social roles involved in treatment, research and analysis, interaction and meaning.

The meaning of death is defined socially and as such by the culture, the nature of the funerary rituals and the ceremony that emanates from it, grief and mourning, reflecting the influence of social and cultural context in which they occur. Thus, cultures express and symbolize the problem differently; they understand one way or another. The concept of death and whatever comes around it, is and will be, paradoxically, as alive as the societies themselves. Small or large differences will be imposed by the very personal concept of death of each and, therefore, of each group or family unit. Death is the input of many working spaces both individually and collectively, is and will be more than an end or termination, start the engine of endless questions, search for reasons of principles of life and living, opportunities for reasoning, logic, for aesthetics, art, and things to do.

One of such social elaborations about dying, observes death from the formation of companies around the burial practice as an integral part of the economic aspect. This factor is present in the rituals of death, which generates demand for devotions, prayers, boxes, candles, burial spaces, spaces of celebration, processions, iconography and cremations; this creates organizations in charge of supply and provision of such objects and services and the sale of burial sites for small spaces or to keep human remains.



Picture 2. "Waiting" s.f. Original Copy on paper
Pilot Public Library Photographic Archive, Medellín - Colombia

4.1 The employees of the funeral. Denial of death and double sensitivity

Belonging to an entity related to the funeral home presents interesting and relevant features from two perspectives. Firstly, the sensitivity to the event of death varies with the person´s area of performance. Only the staff working directly with service areas such as funeral vigil rooms, cemeteries or crematories is directly related to the time of the ceremony and, therefore, handles a greater sensitivity to pain and the event of death. These departments witness the death. The other processes are purely operational functions.

Secondly, members of a company related with the funerary or cemetery are socially stigmatized. That is, the fact of working for these organizations is difficult for the individual in their relationship as a social being. Anyone who starts or has started working with an organization of this type has been seen like a different person and has the risk of being nicknamed with expressions linked to death by the person´s family and friends, which is a consequence of the strangeness and concern regarding the nature of the person´s work.

At the funeral companies a dual sensitivity can be read and in it is a contradiction to the fact of death. The sensitivity to loss, suffering and sadness of death depends on the contact and presence of employees to this reality. Therefore, only a few areas of the organization on a compulsory basis are aware of the role that the company has as the entity responsible for the ceremony of death. The other areas ignore the social order despite suffering social stigmatization for belonging to this type of business.

> "Yes, I see it, for me it's different because we are in pain, we are in the midst of it. I say the seller has a point of view from outside of what pain really entails because the business for a seller is to sell. I do not care about these feelings. I only worry about selling because this is where I obtain my profit, and when the vendors are selling, the people don't have a need at that moment and administrators have no contact with anyone or the family of the deceased, they are stuck in the office in charge of the accounts, but they are not stuck in the pain. So, I always say that the funeral home and cemetery are too delicate areas. And what is our fight with the salesman? We will not disturb the customers, i.e., do not get into the cemetery. What is our complaint in the cemetery? The family of the deceased is approached by the salesmen to sell the parcel, but they say: "Look, I'm burying my loved, how can you approach me to sell a parcel at this time? Let me mourn my dead; do not come near me to sell. I want you to respect me because I'm crying my dead. Do not come near me. I do not want to see what it is seen as vultures or for you to come to take advantage of my pain, you know I'm burying a deceased and you want to sell a parcel to earn a commission?" This is the thought that the client has in that time. It is very different after you visit the client before he/she loses a loved one, because the clients will say: "Yes, it may happen tomorrow. I might pay you or not, I don´t usually buy; it's scary. The important thing is not to be there then. "(In-depth interview as part of the field work of the research project. Barquisimeto - Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 2002).

Death is understood as an inherent fact of life. Therefore, the questions regarding death depend on the person´s point of view and his/her intentions. Louis - Vincent Thomas puts it this way: "In general, each individual perceives another individual´s death as possibly his/hers, according to a perspective that comes from his/her own profession (and therefore, his/her code of ethics), the order of his/her intellectual interests, his/her ideology or group which he/she belongs to. Therefore, this would only show a fragment of the problem from which death is understood. The aforementioned may be interesting, even original, but not sufficient for a thorough understanding of the problem "(1993: 10).

The feeling that death brings depends on the understanding and meaning of death based on the precepts that are given by the culture as well as the attitude assumed towards loss. While death at any level is a traumatic event, the process of overcoming it becomes linked to the psychological structure of the individual. Now, the question regarding the funeral home would be in relation to their sensitivity to the fact of death, compared to the anguish, sadness, the problematization of those who are facing death. He who dies has not built a relationship with any member of the company and this allows us to understand logical reasons and the feeling, for us, towards those who die is nonexistent. The sensitivity of service area employees, both of funeral vigil rooms, cemetery or crematories (funeral vigil rooms, cemeteries, crematories) is crossed by the continuous meetings with their own reality of finitude. Normally, we live as if we are never going to die, realizing that particular

psychic process that Freud called "denial". We are aware of the existence of death only when we have the chance to test it in others, and only then we feel to be subject to the same fate. As Voltaire wrote: "The human species is the only one who knows that it must die, and this is only known through experience" (Di Nola, 1995: 11 - 12).

Regarding the consequences of social stigmatization of employees that belong to a funerary or cemetery company, the nature of the company brings unique challenges to the recruitment of the staff, especially in the sales departments which have the highest turnover rates. Companies do not usually set out in the first instance the name of the business or activity they engage in, just as you would in any business of banking, manufacturing or marketing. What is usually done is to attract new employees for the interest in the role, functions or prerogatives of the job per se and then talk about the occupations of the company. Then, in the recruitment process it is normal to see the implementation of activities aimed at generating links with the family and the society, and the assessment of the work within the company. This is a way to demystify belonging to the funeral homes, so that one may see this occupation like something "regular".

In this sense, the organization is forced to continuously train their staff in order to prevent them from falling into states of depression and, as a result, to the deterioration in the service. Surely, these training efforts could impact employees on strengthening their learning on how to live, to understand and act accordingly to the meaning of that lived moment. However, funeral homes and correlated companies survive to the internal contradiction since other areas and its employees are foreign to the subject of death, ritualization and their meanings. As a person mentioned in Barquisimeto said, "other areas are not in touch with the situation". We can speak of many codes, whether for sale, marketing, staffing, but the issue of death and its ritual. Its content needs to be made up, dressed up, adorned and thus displaced from the language, displaced from the quotidian of funeral companies.

4.2 Characteristics of demand and supply for funeral services. The adaptation of service portfolios

4.2.1 Demand as the market power: Features of the funeral industry

Within the understanding of the market are demand and supply. This determines, from an economic perspective, the quantity sold of each item and the price at which it is sold. Thus, the consumer group determines what to buy in the market and the suppliers what products will be offered. Nonetheless, the funeral transaction's peculiarities are evidenced in how the consumer is exposed to unique vulnerable conditions, different levels of rationality and varied characterizations of what is demanded by the funeral homes or death related companies.

The funeral companies offer services known as basic services and cover legal requirements and the totality of key elements in the care of a corpse that include the preparation, licensing of burial or cremation, the body transfer, provision of hearses to transport the body, the casket funeral vigil room, and civil and ecclesiastical formalities.

The funeral also gives the possibility of hiring additional services or surplus referred to all the family requests that modify the contents of basic services, such as changes in the styles of coffin, special body preparations, number of cortege vehicles, special persons of cortege, floral arrangements, special family car, death notice or press notices, transport of

companions, musical accompaniment, among others. The establishment of those basic services that satisfy the consumer needs is not adequate as it solely considers its objective nature. Consequently, defining a service standard and its complementary accessories is inappropriate, inadequate, and pretentious or misfit as the moral, religious and symbolic issues impact the economic nature of the funeral homes.

The funeral services market has particular characteristics that affect demand and allow the definition and delimitation of funeral services; also, they could be considered general for Western societies where ignorance about services and the mandatory nature of their consumption are the most relevant issues, followed by the condition of their occasional use and the lack of information.

The first characteristic is ignorance and compulsory consumption of funeral services, in which no customers can escape their cultural condition in relation to death and ritual; therefore, for consumers it is not usual to think about previous analysis around a funeral or death. Ignorance is typical of an individual's cultural background and, as such, it is involuntary. From a marketing viewpoint, unwanted products and services are considered as "consumer goods that consumers do not know or would not normally think to buy" (Kotler, 2000: 233); normally, a person does not hire a funeral service at the time of death or earlier just for pleasure or leisure. This request is due to complete a certain number of obligations with the body, the order of the legal, moral and social development. The legal arena establishes how the family or person in charge of the corpse look after the non-modifiable character of the body and places it in the hands of others, usually constituted as companies that guarantee the protection and conservation of the optimum conditions in public health and hygiene. The moral responsibility is directly related with the duty and commitment of the treatment of the inert body and the completion of the mortuary ritual of the deceased is viewed from the history and life of the deceased and how companies comply with society.

The second characteristic relates to the occasional use in the demand for funeral services. The hiring of funeral services will only be at the time of death and not before this. The frequency of use should be determined through the rate of mortality. Furthermore, this feature could be considered the main engine of creation and adoption of what has been named prearranged funeral trust or, in a few words, the prepayment of funeral services.

The third and last characteristic is the lack of technical and policy information related to the manipulation of death. The lack of information, incompetence and inexperience in what should or should not be done with the corpse is another characteristic of the demand. Surely, a consumer does not know the regulations governing the thanatopraxy, laws, burial, cremation, exhumation, transfer and handling of dead bodies, and the historical contexts that have led to current funeral practices.

4.2.2 The offer in the funeral activity: what is it and what does it sell?

> "[…] Located between the time of death and the time of the acquisition of immortality, funerals (of which the sepulture is just one of the results), at the same time, constitute a set of practices that embodies and determines the change of state of the dead, institutionalizing a complex of emotions: they reflect profound disturbances caused by death in the circle of the living."
>
> (Morin, 1994:25)

Understanding the task and the functioning of the funeral homes could be categorized as an evident one since it is just like any other organizational practice. This task is registered under an organizational problematic and its logics. However, the funeral homes are charged of a specificity frame by their own nature. Similarly, this project focuses on the understanding of the meaning of death and its complexity. From a medical point of view, talking about death and understanding it becomes practically elemental. Death is the ending of life, or its contrary. It is its symbolic charge which makes it fascinating or banned, banished, paradoxically banished.

The supply planning, service features, pricing determiners and marketing strategies to reach the market and the communication parameters, will take the fundamental basis of demand characteristics, or what it is known as knowledge of needs from the marketing perspective.

The infrastructure of a funeral home is conceived in different ways. One of these conceptions is that it is an entity that brings together a diverse range of services which are necessary for the disposal of the corpse. Under this logic, the funeral home is a trading business. It can also have its own facilities such as cemeteries, ossuaries and vigil rooms and sell them. If this should be the conception, we are now in front of a real estate type of business without abandoning the intermediation condition.

Furthermore, the funeral homes manage five fundamental elaborations which are deduced from the conclusions drawn from this research and that are mediated by the influence that culture has on them. Moreover, they not only permeate the guidelines for the identification of their offer, but they also permeate the administrative logics.

These elaborations are as follows:

- The prevision as a communication and alignment scheme, mainly from the sales force.
- Prearranged funeral trust and the immediate need.
- The memorability as a transcendent and differentiated factor of the funeral home activity and its services.
- The funeral cortege.

The first elaboration is the prevision. For the funeral homes, the prevision as a communicational parameter means that their alignment is not related to the product on its real level (Lamb, 1998), or in other words, the promise of service or communication parameters are not given in functional terms because there is an automatic risk of weakening the sales force results and its future structure against organizational changes The funeral homes speak in terms of anticipating the future and the assurance of financial and logistic support against the death of someone. Their promises of services are full of family benefits achieved by taking a cautious position with an ineluctable fact of life and death as it is. The funeral home does not use words, symbols or signs to support or strengthen its partnership with death when communicating with the market and this is why the concept of prevision is used.

The second elaboration is the prearranged funeral trust and immediate need. The feeling of penury and doom has created the need of solidarity in human beings around the painful events, such as disease, disaster and death; with this sense, mutual aid is reached. Since earlier times, one could purport to such social organizations for help. History can be found in Greece where guilds of craftsmen are gathered economically to help each other. Also,

social organizational such as colleges or fraternities arose in Rome in order to defend the interests of the widows of the mercenaries, who died in war and assisted those who were affiliated with them, at the risk of disease and death. Organizations that were governed by statutes and ordinances, functions were specified for Presidents, Treasurers, among others, and that formed its government. The aforementioned could be the history of what we now call Non-Profit Corporations (Velez and Montoya, 1992).

During the Middle Ages, "Gilda" appears in Europe. These were associations of merchants and artisans for the purpose of mutual aid, which aimed to help people in trouble and defend the interests of the guild. In Spain, there were the guilds, which were also designed to mutual aid and which were then replaced in the eighteenth century by Montespíos that could be said, were charity banks.

Mutual practice was inspired by the Industrial Revolution, the emergence of socialist ideas, cooperatives and trade unionism, which is why it could be argued that mutualism is the foundation of all ideas of solidarity economy that are known today.

In Colombia, the mutual philosophy is brought by Spanish missionaries, establishing a mutual aid, in these social organizations where poor people have paid fees which were collected, for helping others when someone died. Hence, the poor segments of the population began to create mutual aid funds specializing in funeral aid. The aim was to avoid begging and to achieve a proper burial at the time it was needed for the funeral. In 1864, the first company obtained official mutual legal personality, created in Colombia by a group of artisans in Bogotá, whose main objective was to assist people in case of illness or death and the only requirement to join it was to profess the Catholic religion.

For a long time, the funeral business was linked to two factors, the spot contract services, i.e., at the time of event or, by contrast, it underwent a long process of money recovery, in some cases unrecoverable. Around the eighties, the losses, the need to do profitable business and the search for increase in the rates of funeral future services causing the end of the mutual system to give way to private funerals and then, in little more than a decade, employers developed strategies and tactics for prearranged funeral business.

Pre-exequy, pre-need, pre-sale or pre-paid are some generic terms receiving these alternatives by which a person hires indefinitely the monthly payment and even weekly or fortnightly, ensuring for a group of enrollees their funeral services. Thus, pre-sale programs are a savings scheme, whereby people assume they acquire, by weekly payments, monthly or annually, usually modest and lower quantities compared to the costs of a funeral service contract at the time of death. The possibility of facing the economic problem that arises following the death of an individual within a family group disappears.

Consequently, the logic shown is this: if the manager is concerned only with the immediate need, the market would be reduced to the rate of mortality. The essence of business is, then, to think and rationalize, sale of funeral services in advance of the event of death, ensuring a steady flow of cash, so that in the financial way, the funeral business transforms into a business portfolio.

The funeral establishment sells the promise of future services. The concept of pre-sale, vital to the funeral industry, also refers to the guarantee given to persons or members of a target market to support them with the provision of one or more funeral services in the time that

they so request. The average time to provide the service is between five and twenty years of age, which means that a person buys at present and is projected to use the service five to twenty years later. While this is an average utilization and the upper and lower ranges are given by the characteristics of statistical data, performance can be found above or below them; in general, considering a normal probability distribution.

Therefore, the funeral home is conceived as a socially responsible and serious business to their shareholders, who should project their future finances and reliability to provide these services and the guarantee of spaces purchased either on land or in height. The company, to calculate the future services, will use the mortality rates. Ultimately, the business is also a business of risk.

The notion of memorability: it is a third elaboration that from the perspective of marketing of funeral services is the concern for the memory that keep those duel people; it concerns that related with mortuary ritual. It aims for the kindness and respect, as well as the care of every detail, relevant into traumatic trance. The family and their environment will feel that despite the difficult time, the organization that is engaged has been responsible for all the details of the celebration and as such its content is stored in the memory of all who witnessed and celebrated the ritual as a sublime moment.

This care, from the logic of marketing, brings results focused on strengthening the brand image; brand associations focused on respect, repurchase and increased sales participation. In fact, all assessments, subsequent visits to the family and their concern for excellence in providing the service is directed from the commercial practice and the seller is trained to obtain new sales and referrals -persons recommended to then be addressed by the sales force-.

Accordingly, it is possible to observe that the funeral organization does not invest large sums of money in the planning or design of mass media. The financial efforts and organizational learning are focused on strengthening its brand through what is known as the "one to one" or "face to face", and the continuous training of staff directly involved with service delivery and commercial forces.

The increasing technological developments provide opportunities for companies. So it is possible to find within the range of options filming or recording of images to be placed in the vaults, websites dedicated to remembrance of objects, a variety of specialty products in the decoration of funerary items, photo ceramics, tombstones for niche, arrangement of tombs and mausoleums, facades and interiors of cemeteries, among others.

The fourth elaboration is the funeral cortege. It is not a new component of the celebration of the mortuary ritual; it has its historical and social background. Accompanying the body by the relatives and those close to the body is a part of the mortuary ritual ceremonial, which can be seen in many cultures. The adoption of the accompaniment, which is designated by the word funeral as cortege is an inherent and necessary activity to content the moment.

The ritualization of death has been defined by some codes that have prevailed in society since the colonial era. So the cortege has not been random, but on the contrary, it has been requested by the family in wills in order to safeguard the hopes in the "afterlife". It also participates and stands, like other ceremonial elements, for social differentiation. The cortege form will vary according to the culture and historical moment. All this can be seen

in the processions that take place in rural or urban areas, the road to the cemetery is then a cultural event arguably affected by religious practices and perceptions of life and death.

The glossary of funeral terms defines the funeral cortege as the set of people that come in a ceremony. For the funeral homes, it is similar and is treated by trained personnel. This may be a service included in the contract or at an additional cost, but it will always be an added value provided to uniformed personnel and selected under the parameters of body and physical elegance in keeping with the occasion, which will handle synchronized movements and expressions stately and additionally, will manage the logistic of ceremony. Arrangements depending on the conditions of the service involve even carrying the casket at the entrance and exit of the religious ceremony and place of burial or cremation. The funeral cortege means a factor of differentiation and competence in service provision and, as such, it is a generator of added value which allows strengthen their good name and know-how.

This could have an additional hiring cost, but it will always be an added value provided by uniformed and selected personnel under an elegant dress code and physical parameters according to the occasion, who will handle synchronized movements and polite expressions, and furthermore, will manage the floral arrangements and depending on the conditions of service could, even carry the casket at the entrance and exit of the service and place of burial or cremation. The cortege is key to a source of differentiation and competition for the funeral home in providing the service and generates an added value to its goodwill and know –how.

5. Conclusions

> The becoming of man, in fact, is always a death partial and continuous. We give up part of our lives to proceed forward, and each action accomplished is a kind of closing of accounts with a piece of our existence. From childhood to adolescence and youth, then maturity and old age, part of us is left behind and is consigned to death. So our life is built about death. Death and the subject who dies will not be found.
> (Di Nola, 1995: 12)

There is no doubt that death is par excellence the event of human existence, not only because of its universal character, but because the man is the only living creature that is aware of his mortal destiny (Morin, 1974). The acceptance of death and the reproach of it are two immovable conditions of existence, of our human condition. Death is an event not only natural, but also social, religious, cultural, cosmic. Death, even without being an event foreign to nature, always somehow infringes the dynamics of a community, creates instability, worry, anxiety and distress. Death, like many other events, is social and therefore, has a cultural connotation.

In Western society, patterns of thinking and mentality in modernity as well as how are perceived and understood the facts of death and dying and their ritual have resulted in the generation of companies engaged in the manipulation of the body and elaboration of mortuary ritual (Aries, 1998). The body encourages the encounter of two worlds: the world of pain, farewell, mourning, and the world of commercial transactions and exchange of funeral services.

The different social facts are traded in a marketplace, the society itself has led them to be traded and, hence, are part of an economic world in which concur supply and demand and, therefore, administrative and marketing techniques for performance optimization and resources channeled to an economic end. Around the corpses and the fact of death are generated companies or business organizations with all their content and complexity as companies concerned with the management of the body, the completion of mortuary ritual and the tension linked to economic problems due the death of an individual. Death thus becomes also a commercial event and as such, an object of consumption (Aries, 1998).

The funeral organization is a complex type of organization that must be understood from different perspectives. The first demarcates the funeral company immersed in commercial intermediation, in the real estate, the financial sector, and it is also subject to risk. The role with itself is profit, profitability, cash flow, liquidity, branding, recall and retention in the market.

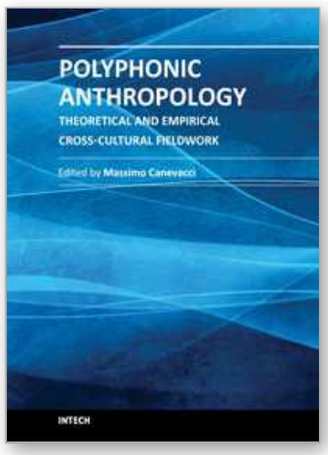
From a social perspective, it shows that the funeral company is a type of company that deals with the activities carried out in the final rite of passage (Della Vita, 1995; Van Gennep, 1986) of an individual. Ritual activities are multiple, symbolic behaviors that occur in a sequence and are repeated periodically (Dennis, 1985). The practices related to death and burial of a person are closely related to religious beliefs about the nature of death and the existence of life after it (Bower, 1996) and include psychological, sociological and symbolic functions of the community members. Thus, the study of the treatment provided to the dead in every culture provides a better understanding of their vision of death and human nature (Morin, 1974). The funeral home participates in the desire for the immortality of man.

The call for the multidimensional perspective -administrative - social - human involves the link with human sciences such as anthropology, sociology, history and then becomes a speech designed to project its activity beyond the instrumental management approach including structural approach of the knowledge of the funeral based in a dialectical dialogue, that is built between the company, the culture and the society.

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Polyphonic Anthropology - Theoretical and Empirical Cross-Cultural Fieldwork

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This book connects anthropology and polyphony: a composition that multiplies the researcher's glance, the style of representation, the narrative presence of subjectivities. Polyphonic anthropology is presenting a complex of bio-physical and psycho-cultural case studies. Digital culture and communication has been transforming traditional way of life, styles of writing, forms of knowledge, the way of working and connecting. Ubiquities, identities, syncretisms are key-words if a researcher wish to interpret and transform a cultural contexts. It is urgent favoring trans-disciplinarity for students, scholars, researchers, professors; any reader of this polyphonic book has to cross philosophy, anatomy, psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, architecture, archeology, biology. I believe in an anthropological mutation inside any discipline. And I hope this book may face such a challenge.

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