THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DEATH

PASTORAL POWER, DEATH CONCEPT, AND NORMATIVITY IN THE HUNGARIAN PEASANT CULTURE

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Abstract: A number of recent anthropological studies focus on the contribution of beliefs and rites connected with death to the reproduction and legitimization of this-worldly social and moral order. The present paper conceptualizes some observations concerning the this-worldly normative character of Hungarian peasant death concept, with special attention to the relations between Christian "pastoral power" (FOUCAULT 1988, 1994) and normativity. The author attempts to demonstrate first of all that the this-worldly normative character of peasant death concept is on the one hand a product, and on the other a tool of Christian pastoral power. More accurately, he tries to define how this kind of power makes death a part of its own ideological basis through the construction, distribution and control of Christian knowledge about death, and how it tries to (re)legitimize and maintain its this-worldly influence through, among others, this knowledge.

Keywords: concept of death, pastoral power, peasant culture, Hungary

1. INTRODUCTION. DEATH CONCEPT, SOCIAL ORDER, AND REPRODUCTION

A number of recent anthropological studies focus on the contribution of beliefs and rites connected with death to the reproduction and legitimization of this-worldly social and moral order. An excellent example of this kind of analysis is offered by the study of BLOCH (1982) on the ancestor-worship of the Merina of Madagascar, or that of TELBAN on the same cult amongst the Ambonwari of Papua-New Guinea. According to the Ambonwari, TELBAN writes, "the spirits of the recently deceased – usually male, that is, a deceased father or brother – see even the most hidden affairs, protect lineage, clan and village morality and law, and punish wrongdoers, their spouses and their children. (…) spirits – in the cosmology of Ambonwari people – are always there as those judges and executors who enforce the law and village morality based on the wisdom of the elders and the ancestors" (1999: 316). As OKELY argues in the chapter written on death cult in her *The Traveller-Gypsies* (1983), in the sight of the Gypsy community the deceased Gypsy becomes a *Gorgio,* and it also treats him/her as such. This exchange of identities again and again offers occasion for Gypsies to reestablish their symbolic boundaries with which they distance themselves from the external world of the *Gorgio*s. The analysis of WEISS (1997) demonstrates how a dominant political discourse monopolizes the collective rites of mourning and commemoration in contemporary Israel, and how this discourse at-

tempts to reproduce the "ethos of sacrifice" and the commitment to the nation. EASTMOND (1988) analyzes the manifestations of political protestation in an actual funeral rite of a Chilean community of political emigrants in Sweden. Other examples could be also easily recalled.

In the present paper I conceptualize some observations concerning the this-worldly normative character of Hungarian peasant death concept, with special attention to the relations between Christian "pastoral power" (FOUCAULT 1988, 1994) and normativity. I focus – paraphrasing the expression of WIKSTRÖM (1993) – on the ethic dimension of beliefs concerning death and afterlife.

I attempt to demonstrate first of all that the this-worldly normative character of peasant death concept is on the one hand a product, and on the other a tool of Christian pastoral power. More accurately, I try to define how this kind of power makes death a part of its own ideological basis through the construction, distribution and control of Christian knowledge about death, and how it tries to (re)legitimize and maintain its this-wordly influence through, amongst other, this knowledge.

I limit my argumentation to these aspects of the relations between pastoral power and peasant death concept, and I examine the actual manifestations of normativity primarily in peasant folk beliefs on death and afterlife. I also have to emphasize that the normative effectiveness of these beliefs on the individual is in each case determined by the actual constellation of several factors (e.g. differences in the afterlife beliefs of various confessions, the character of individual religiosity, etc.); however, the analysis of these factors necessarily remains outside of the methodology at the disposal of the cultural anthropologist, who can rely "only" on his own observations, as well as on the context-dependent, and therefore normally incomparable self-qualifications of his informers. Thus the differentiation of the following observations, as well as the analysis of the quantitative aspects of normativity needs further research. The final aim of this study can be "only" to make manifest the logic of the relation between Christian pastoral power and the this-worldly normative character of peasant death concept.

In the first part (Sections 2 and 3) of this paper I examine some aspects of the organization and distribution of the knowledge constructed about the substance of death. Relying on the sociology of knowledge of BERGER and LUCKMANN (1998; BERGER and KELLNER 1984; BERGER 1967), and on the theory of power of FOUCAULT (1980, 1984, 1988, 1990a, 1994) I analyze this knowledge as a social product. In Section 4, starting from the notion of *the ideological dependence of death*, I present some manifestations of Hungarian peasant death concept, with special attention to the Christian sanctions concerning suicide, observable until recent times in the communities studied. Finally, paraphrasing among others the theory of HOMANS (1941), I try to concisely resume in Section 5, how Christian pastoral power uses the Christian knowledge on death for the protection of certain values and norms embodied in it, and through this for the reproduction and legitimization of its own this-worldly influence.

2. DEATH AS EMPIRICAL TABOO
AND THE CONSEQUENT AMBIVALENCE

We should accept as a starting point that human consciousness – at least until the point of his/her exitus – cannot access his/her own death as an inner experience (cf. BAUMAN 1992: 14; VAN BAAREN 1974: 12; HAUSSAMEN 1998: 210; FREUD 1995), it is a this-worldly empirical taboo for him/her. With other words, it is an ineluctable personal experience, which, however, remains outside of our self-reflexion throughout our whole life.[1]

Therefore, speaking about the cognitive ambivalence of death, I refer to the simultaneous presence of (a) the feeling of uncertainty emerging from the above-mentioned empirical taboo character of our own death,[2] and (b) the knowledge of its ineluctability. This constellation normally constitutes a powerful source of anxiety.

On the other hand, it is obvious that a number of other situations can also lead to anxieties which, at first sight, are very similar to the one emerging from the cognitive ambivalence of death. A palpable example is the examen at the end of the semester, of which the result is uncertain, but of which the deadline is irrevocably nearing. However, while such experiences can be sometimes actually avoided, and while we normally have several preceding experiences about their substance, by the projection of which we might abate our anxiety, the exceptionally dramatical character of the cognitive ambivalence of death – and, as I will explain later, its "ideological dependence" – emerges both from its harsh ineluctability, and from the fact, that we have to completely renounce any preceding knowledge offered by self-reflexion.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MEANING ATTRIBUTION:
DEATH (CONCEPT) AS A SOCIAL PRODUCT

In order to locate the problem of death in the social construction of reality (BERGER and LUCKMANN 1998; BERGER and KELLNER 1984; BERGER 1967) in a more or less comforting way, and thus effectively abate the anxiety emerging from the cognitive ambivalence of death, every culture is bound to attribute to it some meaning (cf. BLOCH 1982: 230; VAN BAAREN 1974: 14),[3] accessible and perceivable

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[1] This assertion is not contradicted by the fact, that during our life we might be witnesses to several deaths, for the quest of the survivors after the substance of death follows the same Baumanian "cognitive scheme" as when we think about the substance of our own mortality: "we are irremovably present in the picture as those who do the imagining: our living consciousness looks at our dead bodies" (BAUMAN 1992: 15), or, in the case of someone other's death, the agonizing body of "the other". Therefore, when we attempt to access, through self-reflexion, our own death, it is not our death to be actually experienced, but some very this-worldly experiences evoked in us by the death of "the other".

[2] Here and in the other sections of this paper, where I speak about death as an empirical taboo or as something which transcends our self-reflexion, I always refer to the relation of human consciousness to his/her own death, even where the context does not make it explicit.

[3] Of course, there is a great difference in the intensity of the necessity of meaning attribution to death between different cultures, a fact explicitly emphasized by the above-mentioned authors.

by human individuals, that is: to construct its own concept of death and afterlife. The construction of a death concept (partially) alleviates the empirical taboo of death, and makes it meaningful. This "slice" of knowledge as an ideology, as a "symbolic superstructure" settles on the physiological process of death, covering, reconceptualizing it, and substituting it with its own meanings (cf. BLOCH 1982: 227).

In the following paragraphs I examine two aspects of this process of meaning attribution.

1. First, I argue that more or less the whole process of the construction of knowledge about the substance of death is permeated by the epistemological imperativus of anthropomorphizing.[4] This mechanism, necessarily resulting from death as an empirical taboo, consists of our way of perceiving death and afterlife first of all on the pattern of our this-worldly life, by the projection of our anthropomorphic categories and relations.[5]

We could evoke several well-known examples concerning the anthropomorphic character of Christian eschatology, therefore here I rather refer to some anthropomorphic features of the peasant folk belief system, which is obviously not independent from the former one. These include typical motif of a change in the level of existence (the surviving substance of the deceased on its way to the other world has to cross over a bridge or the sea, where, according to several informers, has to pay toll); the ways of supporting the soul which, however, attaches to the body (feeding the dead on the night of the death-watch with the vapor of the food put into the window of the house; clothing the dead through the alms [clothes] given to those in need in this world, etc.); some activities of the deceased in the other world (mass or procession of the dead, etc.); the most wide-spread belief background of the objects buried with the dead (for he/she would miss them in the other world). Similar examples could be called forth in a large number.

We can therefore agree with the observation of BAUMAN (1992: 15): "Whenever we 'imagine' ourselves as dead, we are irremovably present in the picture as those who do the imagining: our living consciousness looks at our dead bodies".

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[4] I use here the notion of "anthropomorphizing" in a broader sense, as a synonym for "assimilating to this world". The significance of anthropomorphizing was emphasized already at the beginning of this century by a number of scholars. Thus by HERTZ (1960: 79): "Once the individual has surmounted death, he will not simply return to the life he has left… He is reunited with those who, like himself and those before him, have left this world and gone to the ancestors. He enters this mythical society of souls which each society constructs in its own image." VAN GENNEP (1960: 152) argues that "The most widespread idea is that of a world analogous to ours, but more pleasant, and of a society organized in the same way as it is here."

[5] The changing intensity of the necessity of anthropomorphizing depends, of course, on several factors, and cannot be defined as a "constant value" standing above history and culture. Concerning Hungarian peasant death concept, for example, it is obvious that both Christian dogmatics and peasant folk belief system relies on the mechanism of anthropomorphizing, but they are bound to do so to a different extent. While the realistic and well-founded character of the notion of afterlife is secured and maintained in dogmatics by the interplay of a number of "authority-constructing factors" like sacral sources or religious specialists, the same elements of folk belief systems are provided with an appearance of realism principally by their anthropomorphic character (see below).

2. On the other hand, I argue that although the community of the living "by re-creating itself beyond death (...) frees itself from /the majority of – the author/ external constraints and physical necessities which, here on earth, constantly hinder the flight of the collective desire" (HERTZ 1960: 79), the power distributing the death concept cannot, however, offer to its faithful an arbitrary image of the other-worldly future, which it cannot to bestow with an appearance of persuasiveness and authenticity.[6] In the background of this fact is the social product character of the death concept.

While constructing the reality which encompasses death, the assertions of Christian pastoral power draw their legitimacy from two basic sources. The first is the anthropomorphic character of death concept, namely that this concept – and those assertions – promise the fulfillment of our natural desire for a more or less unbroken continuation of existence, which almost equals to an entire withdrawal metamorphosis of death. The second is the this-worldly influence, comprising mostly the control of the process and social spaces of socialization,[7] which lays at the basis of the normative efficiency of pastoral power, and which thus endowes the beliefs distributed by it with the appearance of reality and legitimacy – in other words, can make them accepted as valid and self-explanatory readings of reality.

A key duty of those constructing the death concept is, therefore, to create and maintain the probability and validity of this slice of knowledge. This can be fulfilled on the one hand by the reproduction of the normative competence laying at the basis of the legitimacy, and on the other hand by the "rationalization" or "harmonization" of the death concept, that is, by the assimilation of its elements to (a) the extension and metamorphoses of the normative competence, (b) the biological dimension of death, and (c) to other significant social and cultural changes.

(a) The necessity of the harmonization of some changes of normative competence with the death concept is well exemplified by the 20th century reformulation – alleviation or disappearing – of the other-worldly, ceremonial and moral Christian sanctions against suicides. In the background of this change we find both the decomposition of the (at least European) hegemony of Christian readings of reality, the pluralization of religiosity at the end of the millennium, and the exacerbation of the

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[6] As BERGER (1967) emphasizes it, the (re-)legitimization of prescriptions and beliefs embodying the order of the society or of the community is essential not only in face of the "newcomers to the society", but – given that socialization is a continuous and incomplete process until our very death – is necessary also for those who "forget or contest" a part of the canonized explanations during their lives. The permanent constraint of (re-)legitimization is obviously present also in the folk beliefs concerning death, but this process is traceable only with difficulty because of the uninstitutionalized character of this form of knowledge.

[7] The control of socialization – in other words, the control of the "significant others" and their values and norms, the most important points of reference of the growing individual – is a key element of legitimization, which is closely linked to social control. Therefore we cannot be surprised by the strong competition for this control (e.g. for the possession of the spaces of institutional socialization). About the relations among the power, the normative competence of social institutions, and the subjective and intersubjective processes of reality construction, see more extensively BERGER–LUCKMANN 1998; BERGER 1967.

"open market competition" (cf. BERGER 1967) for the faithful, as well as the modifi-cation of the social judgement on the "self-determination of life".[8]

A further outstanding example of the necessity of this type of "harmonization" is offered by the history of Christian theology in the period of the controversies of the Reformation (these controversies also can trace back to the change of the normative competence of pastoral power), when the Protestant interpretation of predestina-tion, and the doctrine of "justification by faith" necessarily led to the denial of pur-gatory, that is, to the reconstruction of the space structure of the other world, and to the revaluation of the other-worldly function and effectiveness of prayers for the dead (MCGRATH 1995: 415; BÁNYAI 2000: 8–11; MOLNÁR 1994).

(b) On the other hand, the constructors and distributors of death concept can never lose sight of the biological aspect of life, which obviously sets limits to their reality-constructing activity: they are bound to continuously maintain the fragile harmony between the physiological dimension of mortality and the ideology "based on it", and to eliminate the discomposing elements (cf. BLOCH and PARRY 1982: 42). The same is emphasized by HERTZ (1960: 74), based on Melanesian observations: "...the dead rise again and take up the thread of their interrupted life. But in real life one just has to accept irrevocable fact. However strong their desire, men dare not hope for themselves 'a death like that of the moon or the sun, which plunge into the darkness of Hades, to rise again in the morning, endowed with new strength'. The funeral rites cannot entirely nullify the work of death: those who have been struck by it will return to life, but it will be in another world or as other species".[9]

(c) Finally, the power controlling the maintenance of death concept has to har-monize its notions about the substance of death continuously not only with the bio-logical dimension of the existence and with its own normative (reality-constructing) competence, but with other significant slices of reality as well, namely, with some

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[8] About the alleviation of the sanctions against suicide see below.

[9] Cf. the far-rooted theological debates (cf. NOCKE 1997: 476–485) on the details of human resur-rection, which often reflect the dissonance emerging from the conflict between the natural desire to completely withdraw the physical transformation caused by death, and those this-worldly experiences and doubts which seem to refute the fulfillment of this desire.

A folk belief element seems quite appropriate to illustrate the above said about the harmonization of the physiological dimension of death and the death concept. It is well known that most cultures at-tempt to "blur" the differences between the conditions of the dead and the living, thus abating the dramatical character of death. A most palpable way for this is to endow the dead with the attributes of the living, although this attempt has obvious limits, partly rooted in the physiological processes caused by death itself. The custom of feeding the (returning) dead, observable in a number of Hungarian peasant communities even in the recent past, is an excellent example of this "blurring". The definite majority of such observations known by me recount some symbolic form of feeding (the returning spirit feeds on the vapor of the food, or the food put aside for the dead during the burial feast is served on his/her table in the other world, etc.), and only a few of them asserts that the dead actually consumes the food, in a this-worldly way of eating. Obviously, this latter assumption would mean the attribution of a physical feature consequently refuted by experiences (the food, in most cases, is recounted to remain on the table, and it is given to beggars on the following day), and thus would raise doubts concerning the well-foundedness of the folk belief in the background of the custom. Feeding is done symbolically, for the biologically deter-mined, this-worldly notion of eating has to be assimilated to the physiological changes caused by death, in order to the folk belief of feeding the dead could appear realistic.

changes of society and culture (see the debates on reanimation and euthanasy in the second half of this century, etc. – these debates constrained the pastoral power to create its own standpoints, and to partly rewrite some details of Christian concept of death).

These examples again demonstrate that the complete freedom to attribute meaning to death is a mere illusion. This freedom is significantly limited by the fact that these beliefs are social products, and that the factors indispensable to the successful social process of reality construction, that is, to make a belief a solid and valid reading of the reality for the "newcomers in socialization", are normally also fairly limited.

As a summary, we can conclude that:

– the meaning attribution (the construction of death concept) helps human consciousness to cope with the problem of death, to make it meaningful (anthropomorphic) and anticipatable, and thus integrate it more easily into the system of categories and relations of the social construction of reality.[10] The meaning attribution offers the possibility to at least partially dissolve the empirical taboo of death and to alleviate the anxiety caused by cognitive ambivalence; but at the same time can also become a source of significant anxiety, as we will see, in the case of folk beliefs and rites connected to suicide and abortion.

– The power controlling the construction, distribution and maintenance of the death concept is bound to continuously take into account the biological dimension of death, as well as the history of its own normative competence. Furthermore, it also has to "adjust" from time to time to some other slices of reality and so changes its beliefs about death, in order to maintain the feeling of their probability (cf. WUTHNOW–HUNTER–BERGESEN–KURZWEIL 1984: 130).[11] This continuous constraint to legitimizing and harmonizing the knowledge about the substance of death is an obvious limit to its activity of reality construction.

– In the light of what is said above, we have to reckon with the "ideological dependence of death", however paradoxical this might sound from the mouth of a mortal. By this notion we mean the dependence of the symbolic order, emerging above the biological dimension of death, on the social institutions constructing and "controlling" the maintenance of the same order. The funeral rites and death beliefs are therefore inseparably interlinked with the (trans)formation of the history of this-worldly power relations, values and norms and the analysis of the former also casts light on the nature of the latter (RUBIN 1998: 171; HERTZ 1960; EASTMOND 1988: 77). We have no reason to doubt, in the assertion of LÉVI-STRAUSS (1973: 246), that "the image a society evolves of the relationship between the living and the dead is, in

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[10] This coping with death is, of course, not unparallelled. About "taming" the unknown and unexplicable through the meaning attribution, see also the literature about the origins of social representation LÁSZLÓ 1998a, 1998b; LEACH 1972; HARVEY–MILLER 1998; BERGER–LUCKMANN 1998.

[11] The necessity of rationalization and partial reinterpretation can be raised by other factors as well. In the field of the folk beliefs about the other world, we can observe a conspicuous occurring of modern technical achievements (see e.g. the "motif" of the phone in one of the folk beliefs below).

the final analysis, an attempt, on the level of religious thought, to conceal, embellish or justify the actual relationships which prevail among the living".

Amongst the many possible dimensions of this dependence, in the following sections I will consider the this-worldly normative and order-keeping character of Hungarian peasant death concept, with a special attention to the folk beliefs and rites concerning suicide.

4. DEATH CONCEPT AS A TOOL.
THE THIS-WORLDLY NORMATIVE FUNCTION
OF HUNGARIAN PEASANT DEATH CONCEPT

Until now I argued that knowledge about the substance of death is primarily a social construction, just like fear of death (cf. LEMING 1979–80: 349–350) or loss (cf. HERTZ 1960; SHEFF 1977; ANDRIOLO 1998), and that the categories of "this world" and the "other world" are intertwined through a thousand links, keeping continuous interactions with each other.

In the following sections I will concentrate on one of these links, the *this-worldly normative* function of Hungarian peasant death concept. A key element of this concept is the "common ethic horizon" emphasizing the interconnectedness of these two spheres of existence. This common ethic horizon contributes to the construction of two types of causality between (some elements of) the this-worldly life strategies and the images of death and afterlife:

(a) The relation of the deeds and character of the deceased to the Christian ethic codex *(cause)* determines his/her status or way of existence in the other world *(effect):* the sanction or reward for the former is realized in the afterlife.[12]

(b) The infringements of norms by the living lead to the intervention of the beings of the other world – for example the offended dead. This intervention can serve both as a warning against the infringement and to its necessary correction, and, in some cases, to revenge it (in this case the negative consequence of the infringement is embodied in the sphere of this world).

It is worth considering some characteristic manifestations of these types of normativity which were more or less widespread until recent times.[13]

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[12] It is worth to note that this aspect of causality can be found, apart from Islam and Christianity, in a number of other religious doctrines, but it does not necessarily become subject of ethic considerations. The other-worldly fate of the deceased (whether he/she can enter into the realm of the dead, or which status/existence he/she can obtain there etc.) depends, in a significant number of cultures, not on his/her relation to any of the this-worldly ethic codices, but rather on his/her fulfilling certain ritual expectations (having obtained the necessary ritual initiations; possessing some signs of belonging to the community, like his/her ear pierced through, etc. cf. VAN BAAREN 1973: 26–33).

[13] The folk beliefs illustrated here could have been obviously complemented by several further examples or variants, but I did not do so in the interest of a reasonable length of this paper, and for an unbroken continuity of ideas. For the same reason I also did not analyze the spatial extension of the

(a) The earlier mentioned "causal relation" can appear in Christian "guise", as we can find in the confessors' manuals or spiritual guides threatening various other-worldly sanctions or offering positive other-worldly existence, as well as in the respective peasant folk beliefs, etc. From these latter I quote only one example, which also well illustrates the mechanism of anthropomorphisation: "In the hell there are several kinds of sufferings, a different suffering for every kind of sin. The devils are clothed in soldiers' uniform, this is not a lie. The gate of the hell is closed, and there is an office there, with guards and phone, like on the earth. Whoever is damned, there is a way, on that way is taken by the evil. When they arrive at the gate of hell, everybody cries and laments. Whoever enters that gate, there is no further mercy, no more way out" (BOSNYÁK 1999).

The same normative character is emphasized by those transcendental and visionary experiences of the "laical spiritual leaders" of peasant communities – peasant prophets or seers of the dead – which visualize the elements and moral system of the "official reading" of the Christian vision of afterlife (cf. POZSONY 1998; LIMBACHER 1998; TÜSKÉS–KNAPP 1998; BOSNYÁK 1999), sometimes projecting the "medieval" image of infernal revenge drawn with exaggerated contours.

"Lays down, sleeps a bit, and then sees a vision. When she gets up, tells whom she met and where she met. She also told that there were children unborn, put away, there were also children wanted by the man, but unwanted by the woman, and thus put away. Well, those small children were in the *limbo* of the hell, there she met them. (…) If one puts away the child, that becomes an unconsumable flesh: she has to eat it all the time, and can never consume it, and then she goes to hell, where she will never receive indulgence" (BOSNYÁK 1980: 81).

The same logic works in the folk belief explanations given for the spectacular physical suffering ("ugly death") or absence of suffering ("beautiful death") of the agonized or peaceful departure. The former is associated with the fact or suspicion of norm-infringing behavior, as the cause behind such suffering, while the latter with the idea of norm-obedient life, as a token of the absence of suffering. In the cases where an obviously immaculate life course is closed by a long agony full of suffering, the sin suspected in the background is often attributed to some earlier generation, in order not to renounce the above logic (BALÁZS 1995: 248–250):

"Whoever curses, who did always wrong, whoever was envious, he dies an ugly death. Such a man agonizes long, suffers for long. He is said to be punished by God. He suffers for his sins alive" (BALÁZS 1995: 220).

"I heard that whoever puts away the child, his death is painful, he always moves his mouth, always bites, bites the flesh of the child put away. And God never forgives this to him, and he continuously eats the flesh of his child on the other world. This is true. We had a neighbour, the man did not let his wife to bear the child. They put him away. And when the man began to agonize, he continuously bit and bit. And

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beliefs presented, neither their relations to the death and afterlife images of the different confessions. The reader can easily find more examples in the respective studies and ethnographies.

continuously mopped his mouth, because he said that blood is flowing down his mouth. He told to his wife. I could eat all his parts, but I cannot bite his bones. This happened by us, here in the village, this was true." (ZENTAI 1983: 88).

The same type of causal relations can be found in contexts unconnected with Christian ideas, thus in the belief in the "cheating land-surveyor", who belongs to the group of the unquiet dead without an other-worldly status and as far as he returns to earth and puts the landmark back to its proper place. "There is sometimes somebody coming always back and asking 'where should I put it? where should I put it?' And then he has to be answered: 'put it there from where you took it, and then you'll have peace; and if not, not.' The landmark, which he put on the wrong place, while he lived. And then he puts it back on its proper place, and then there is no problem any more. Then he does not come any more" (BONDÁR 1982: 90).

(b) A second type of normative function can be observed in the folk beliefs concerning the return of the dead, when the this-worldly threatening (and sometimes revenging) appearance of the deceased is motivated by some infringement of norms of the living. Such cases are neglecting the testamentary wills, injuring the tomb of the dead or the order of the cemetery, or mourning the dead "beyond measure". In the latter case the survivor is warned by the returning dead that because of such weeping he/she "stands in such a high water that he/she is almost drowning" (ZENTAI 1983: 30) that "his/her little shirt becomes wet from tears" (VIRT 1987: 11), or that "his/her wings become wet, and he/she cannot fly together with the angels" (BONDÁR 1982: 38; see VIRT 1987: 111; BOSNYÁK 1980: 83; KOVÁCS 1982: 137; BOSNYÁK 1984: 139; BALÁZS 1995: 234). "Here, a week ago, Julis Marton told me that her mother died ten years ago, and in the first year she always returned to her home. And once she told her: 'Don't mourn for me, my daughter, don't cry for me, because I already stand in water up to my knees, and until you weep, I have to come home all the time, and have to carry these two buckets full of tears, don't cry for me, because I burst myself.' And she had two big buckets in her hands. And then Juli did not dare to cry for her, and she did not come any more" (ZENTAI 1983: 30).

These *normative* elements made peasant death concept until the recent past an emphatic element in the group of ideologies that stabilized the social organization, and system of moral values of those living together. In other words, these elements belonged to the tools which enjoined norm-following behavior, supported the interiorization of certain social norms, reminded people of their presence, significance, and the necessity of their respect.

To buttress this argument, it is worth examining the Christian sanctions against suicide which have survived in peasant communities until the recent past. The following cases give palpable examples of what was said above about the ideological dependence of death and the this-worldly normative character of meaning attribution to death.

4.1. AN ACTUAL FORM OF MANIFESTATION OF NORMATIVITY.
CHRISTIAN SANCTIONS AGAINST
SUICIDE IN HUNGARIAN PEASANT COMMUNITIES

The patterns of opinion and behavior inherent in peasant death concept were closely linked to the Christian evaluation of suicide.[14]

The "invited death" was regarded in these communities as a destructive deed against the basic ordering principle of existence (God), for "God gave the soul, and only He can take it back" (BALÁZS 1995: 242). As the suicide, when arbitrarily curtailing the course of life predetermined by transcendence, called into question the very basic principles of the Christian system of norms and values, the pastoral power attempted to diminish the possibility of this unwanted event by a series of sanctions.

These sanctions, falling on partly the suicide and partly the survivors, can be classified, on the basis of Hungarian peasant folk beliefs, custom descriptions, and canonical sources, into three types of segregation.

(a) *Eschatological or afterlife segregation.* The unquiet, upset soul of the suicide, according to the soul beliefs surveyed by me, either goes to hell and to eternal damnation right after death, or roams on the edge of the two spheres of existence "until the end of the world".[15] Thus it belongs to the group of the – temporarily or definitively – unpeaceful souls, which have no definite status in the afterlife (together with those unbaptized dead or the ones who "put their child away"; cf. PENTIKÄINEN 1968, 1989: 47–68; KUNT 1987: 89).

(b) *Ceremonial segregation.* On the one hand, the suicide him/herself refuses the indispensable rites of purification and transition, like confession and the last sacrament. On the other hand, and (partially) with reference to the former, in the course of his/her funerals the Christian pastoral power also enacts a series of punitive sanctions against him/her, which represents his/her symbolic excommunication.

In Catholic communities, on the day of the funeral of a suicide, the priest went to the house of the dead not in vestment, but only in a simple black soutane. The coffin often remained unconsecrated, and instead of the usual church rites only a sermon was delivered. No crosses were carried in the funeral procession, the tomb was only "covered", bells did not ring, and the corpse was often carried by a simple peasant field-carriage. The coffin was sometimes taken to the pit without any church service, through the back door of the cemetery, for "suicides, and those dead without

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[14] The reader might feel the following expositions about the various segregations rather general. However, I had to renounce a detailed historical presentation of the differences in the practices of the various confessions concerning suicide, principally because of the almost complete absence of necessary studies in Hungarian ethnographical literature. Therefore, when speaking about sanctions against suicide, I refer mostly to Catholic communities, for here we have the most abundant documentation (beliefs, custom descriptions, ecclesiastical sources etc.) about the presence of such sanctions.

[15] According to some folk beliefs, this roaming lasts as long as he/she should have lived "by the ordinance of God".

confessions, like Communists, are not allowed to be taken through the field conse-
crated" (BALÁZS 1995: 198–199; cf. KUNT 1987: 89; JUNG 1978: 144, 146; NAGY
1992: 56; BOSNYÁK 1984: 137; VIRT 1987: 98).

Suicides were normally buried not into the "holy land of the cemetery", but in
some part astray, "by the roadside" (VIRT 1987: 99), in an unconsecrated corner of
the cemetery (BOSNYÁK 1984: 137, 1980: 224), or its ditch (VASAS–SALAMON 1986:
246–247; VIRT 1987: 98; KOVÁCS 1982: 134). His/her funeral mass was celebrated
without mentioning his/her name, only with a general reference to the deceased
members of the family. The "ass burial" of the suicide has been attested by several
documents since the late Middle Ages (cf. SOLYMOSI 1996: 117; the relative pre-
scriptions of various collections of canon law; concerning the Calvinist church, see
ILLYÉS 1941). According to some 18th century sources they were often buried in the
fields outside the village, and sometimes the corpse was even burnt before (TAKÁCS
1987: 208–209; TÁRKÁNY SZÜCS 1981: 192).

"Towards the Remenice, at the Threefold Boundary were buried in the night
those who hang themselves, who killed themselves, who were found in the water. In
the night, in order the sun could not see them, and the village had no damage, no
hail-storm. Thus if there was a hail, it destroyed only a corner of the fields. They
were buried without a priest" (FEHÉR 1975: 65).

It is to be noted, however, that these sanctions were rarely applied all together,
and that recently also the attitude of the Catholic church underwent some major
changes. The sanctions concerning the funerals of the suicide were abrogated by the
2nd Vatican Council. Even the Codex Iuris Canonici (1986) mentions suicide only
accidentally, namely unsuccessful suicide as a disqualification to ordainment,[16] and
the notion of suicide cannot be found in any other paragraphs of the canon law.[17]
The changes in the attitude of the official church is indicated by the fact that the new
Ceremonial for funerals (Ordo Exsequiarum, 1977) contains two homilies to be
preached at the burial of the suicide. The same point is demonstrated by the changes
of emphasis of official declarations on the "sacredness of life". While one of the
latest cathecisms (1994) adopts a rather tolerant approach to suicide (at least in
respect to earlier official church attitude),[18] it regards abortion as an "abominable
practice", which is principally opposite to moral law. The Church sanctions this

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[16] See ERDŐ 1986: 715, 717. Ineffectual suicide, just like intentional homicide or effective abor-
tion, is a disqualification not only to ordainment, but also to the exercise of sacerdotal functions (see
the chapters of the canon law on dispensation). However, the earlier Codex Iuris Canonici, promul-
gated in 1917 and in vigor until 1983 (cf. CSORDÁS n.d.), mentioned also the suicide and those died
unbaptized amongst the persons who could not obtain church funerals, and memorial mass, etc. (Can.
1239–1242).
[17] See ERDŐ 1986: 811.
[18] Suicide is "seriously contrary to proper self-love. (…) The responsibility of the suicide is dimin-
ished by deep psychological perturbation, or deep anxiety and fear from afflictions, suffering or torture.
We do not have to despair of the eternal salvation of those committing suicide. Even they might be of-
ferred by God some way, known only to him, to salutiferous penitence. The Church prays for those having
attempted suicide" (The Cathecism of the Catholic Church 1994: 451–452).

"crime against human life" (The Cathecism of the Catholic Church, 1994: 458) with the punishment of the "automatic excommunication" (ibid. 450).[19]

The social weight of this ceremonial segregation is spectacularly demonstrated by the efforts of the survivors to bypass or alleviate it. In several villages of Kalotaszeg (VASAS–SALAMON 1986: 247) or in Csíkszentdomokos the suicide was carried to the cemetery at the time of the midnoon or evening bell, "in order he/she could get some ringing" (BALÁZS 1995: 199). In Gombos a non-professional "peasant cantor" was employed to "send off", "sing off" the dead (JUNG 1978: 146–147).

Similar rites and customs for the rounding off and symbolic correction of prematurely broken life courses can be observed in the case of those who died unbaptized. These include the baptism of the still-born child (cf. the early modern practice of the "child sign", IMHOF 1992; BOSNYÁK 1977: 116), the burial of the "unbaptized little pagans" (KOVÁCS 1982: 134) either "at the time of the midnoon bell" (FEHÉR 1975: 64; VIRT 1987: 98), or "into/near to the grave of an old dead" (FEHÉR 1975: 64), as well as the belief that the unbaptized child cries out every seven years until somebody baptizes him/her (and thus he/she can go to heaven; FEHÉR 1975: 64). Several folk beliefs consign the unbaptized children to "darkness" in the other world (eschatological segregation; cf. BOSNYÁK 1980: 225; KOVÁCS 1982: 139; BONDÁR 1982: 135). They were often buried during the night (VIRT 1987: 94), in a small box or coffin, most often by only the godparents or the close relatives, without priest, cross and bell (VIRT 1987: 64, 94; FEHÉR 1975: 64), near to "the ditch of the cemetery" (KOVÁCS 1982: 139), "into the dike" (VIRT 1987: 98), "to the roadside" into unconsecrated land (BONDÁR 1982: 151).

(c) *Moral segregation.* A number of folk beliefs obviously show that after the suicide the complex system of sanctions afflicted the survivors in a direct way, in the course of everyday communication as well.

Suicide, as one of the heaviest infringements of norms, led to intensive feelings of shame in close relatives, on the basis of the mechanism of the self-control of conscience (to be presented below). On the other hand, as in the background of a suicide, there is quite often some family conflict, or unworthy behavior towards the elder generations, the remote kinsmen and the village community paid much more attention than usual to the responsibility of the survivors, or to the relations between them and the dead. In some cases a suspicion of "complicity" was enough for public opinion to afflict the survivors with the negative judgment, contempt or stigmatization (of course, there were always exceptions).

Two recounts from Csíkszentdomokos spectacularly demonstrate the social weight of moral segregation:

"All the family remained terribly afflicted, it left a stamp on your heart, on your soul *(she bursts into tears),* an endless pain in your life. It is a terrible feeling, an unspeakable pain. I feel infinitely ashamed. Me, the mother, first of all *(she cries).* Even

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[19] The same resolute attitude is adopted in the Vademecum for confessors, in some questions of matrimonial moral 1999.

today I feel pain and shame. That my only child had to die like this" (BALÁZS 1995: 197).

"Whoever did it, it is no shame for him any more. But for the kinship, for the family. They all have to defend themselves, how they dealt with him, why he did it. At least the close relatives have to give account why he left this stamp. They feel ashamed, but so much that they sink into earth" (BALÁZS 1995: 196–197).

However, sometimes suicide was not uniformly judged by public opinion. Different personal relations to the dead, as well as the motivations and circumstances of the death could have a remarkable influence on the judgment of the community. Some "types" of suicide led to less negative moral judgment, like the ones committed because of love tribulation, extended family conflicts, insupportable physical pains, or in prison. Some folk beliefs – for example those connected with the "Stinking cave" of Torja – refer to such earlier cases of "voluntary death" (BOSNYÁK 1998; KUNT 1987: 90) undertaken in the interest of the survival of younger generations by the elder persons, which can be parallelled to the Durkheimian category of "altruistic suicide" (DURKHEIM 1982).

In partial summary, therefore suicide, as contrary to the Christian doctrine on the sacredness of life, is punished by pastoral power through the types of segregation above, which afflicted partly the deceased, and partly the survivors. These examples spectacularly demonstrate the ethic relations between the this-worldly life strategies (in this case, the mode of death), and the meaning attribution to the substance of death/afterlife (the negative existential perspective allotted to the suicide); in other words, the ways of using the ideological dependence of death enjoin to respect and follow some this-worldly norm of behavior (on this see the Summary below). Eschatological segregation was normally accompanied by ritual and moral segregation which, as a consequence of the negative judgement on suicide, *also* afflicted the survivors,[20] thus the more emphasizing the conflict between the Christian ethic codex and the act committed.

Apart from rejecting any positive perspective of other-worldly existence, any comforting *"healing theory"*,[21] Christian death concept therefore also associated sui-

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[20] It is worth to observe that the suicide, as his/her infringement of norms coincides with the last moment of his/her earthly life course, practically evades the carefully constructed mechanism of the self-control of conscience, and refuses the requirements of penitence and self-critic embodied in this-worldly secondary rites (confession, etc.). Perhaps this is why Christian ethic punished this deed so merciless both at the funerals and in the other world.

[21] I borrowed the notion of "healing theory" from GILBERT, to indicate those elements of meaning that can be associated to death for alleviating the pain of the survivors, and to help them to "modify their assumptive world to incorporate loss, thereby achieving a new sense of normalcy and purpose. In this way, they able to regain a sense of control and predictability, find some sort of understanding, and gain a sense of mastery to the event" (GILBERT 1995: 310). I also regard as such a theory the positive perspective of other-worldly existence (salvation, meeting with those deceased earlier, etc.) offered by Christianity, which can considerably alleviate the feelings of pain and loss of the survivors, and leads their activity of phantasy on a culturally paved way. Peasant death concept, on the other hand, contains several Christian explanations ("prior meaning structures", BRAUN–BERG 1994) for the reason of the death ("He was called by God"; "The time ordained for him has passed"; "We are all in God's hand", etc.), which attempt in a spectacular way to eliminate an important source of anxiety about mortality, that is, the fearful pos-

cide with an offputting concept of other-worldly future *(destructive theory)*. While the death of a person after a norm-following life course is a transitory, metamorphosis ideally complemented by Christian resurrection (collective rebirth), that of the suicide is, on the contrary, absolute, both in biological and metaphysical sense.

While the survivors of the deceased with a norm-following life course were supported and eased by the normal order of the ritual division of labor, the sympathy, and the emotional and moral countenance of the village community, the survivors of the suicide had to face eschatological and moral segregation, an intense feeling of shame woken by the mechanisms of self-control of conscience, and a minimal order of last honors ("ass burial").

In these peasant communities, therefore, the death of the suicide was regarded as an arbitrary deed without any transcendent control and support – a synonym of chaos, or at least of hopelessness. The individual who took into his/her own hands the determination of the place and time of his/her own death, that is, a privilege of the transcendent power, could be in command of the situation only transitorily, for that very moment – at least in terms of the Christian reading of reality. Entering the realm of the other world, he/she was bound to continue to exist as an – already despised – part of that previous, continuous social order, which avenged both on him/her and on his/her close relatives, in order to prevent similar cases in the future.

5. SUMMARY. DEATH CONCEPT, POWER, NORMATIVITY – THE IDEOLOGICAL DEPENDENCE OF DEATH AND THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF THE SELF

In the above I showed that the cognitive ambivalence rising from the empirically taboo character of death leads to the necessity of meaning attribution. Then I argued that the meaning attributed to death is primarily a social product, shaped by its distributing power (in this case by Christian pastoral power) partly "reflecting its own concept and similarity" (cf. HERTZ 1960: 90) on the model of its own value and moral system. In order to maintain its probability and self-evidence, this meaning has to be continuously legitimized and harmonized.

After these theoretical premises I examined one actual form of this ideological dependence of death, the this-worldly normative function of Hungarian peasant death concept. I made explicit the logic of this normativity, and presented its most

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sibility of the complete absence of control on our own death, and of the absolute contingency and aimlessness of death. In the mirror of peasant folk beliefs, therefore, the death of a person after a norm-following life course is a positive process passing off with the careful control of the supreme transcendence and in a supreme logic, as a consequence of a considered decision. The negative other-worldly existence promised for the suicide is, on the other hand, a destructive theory, which obviously has the contrary effect.

important "types", and some of their most spectacular examples. Then, in order to make the normative character of the meaning attribution to death even more palpable, I presented the Christian sanctions against suicide that were very much alive until recent times in Hungarian peasant communities.

After these examples of normativity, let us return to the question formulated in the introduction. After a formulation of the substance of pastoral power, I try to summarize, in lines of the theoretical model of HOMANS (1941), how this type of power uses the ideological dependence of death (that is, the relative freedom of the meaning attribution) for inciting the faithful to follow the life strategies proposed by it, for controlling the religious communities, and through that for reproducing its own this-worldly influence.

Religious socialization is undoubtedly the most important tool for the distribution of Christian world and death concept, and for the internalization of a "reading of reality" permeated with Christian ideas, norms and values.[22] This "reading" of reality, however, has to be continuously maintained, the sense of its validity and legitimacy reinforced. This is one of the functions of such public events like religious services or the teaching of cathecism, etc.

A significant part of the life of the individual, however, passes not in the context of public opinion (where the norm-infringing behavior and persons can be more easily recognized), but in more intimate circumstances, normally inaccessible to the eyes of the representatives of pastoral power. How can this power effectively control these inner dimensions, and discover and counterbalance the unwitnessed infringements of Christian norms?

As Foucault showed, pastoral power worked, as a response to this problem, and as an invisible extension of its own influence, the "Christian conception of the self" (or the "Christian hermeneutics of the self"; cf. FOUCAULT 1984, 1990b; MARSHALL 1996: 92–100): creating the Christian "moral subject" (FOUCAULT 1994: 182, 1990b: 25–32) and constructing the Christian mechanism of the self-control of conscience.[23] Pastoral power can be therefore regarded, says FOUCAULT (1994: 184), a form of power which "cannot be exercised without knowing what is in the head of people, without mapping their souls, without urging them to disclose their secrets. This power supposes knowledge of conscience and competence to its government".

Without examining in details the various (theological, sociological, psychological, etc.) explanations of conscience, let us accept as our starting point that somewhat simplifying interpretation, in terms of which conscience is an interiorized system of norms, the compass of self-knowledge, while the moral subject is that part of

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[22] About the significance of this, see CSERHÁTI–FÁBIÁN 1975: 190–194.

[23] The Cathecism of the Catholic Church quotes the following about moral conscience: "The individual meets, in the depth of his own consciousness, a law ordained not by him, and in face of which he is bound to obey. This law always calls him to love what is good and avoid what is wrong; in the necessary moment it always resounds in his heart (…) Conscience is the most hidden nucleus of the individual, a sanctuary where he is alone with God." (1994: 365). Some paragraphs later the cathecism quotes a line from a letter of Cardinal Newman: "Conscience is the very first amongst all the vicaries of Christ." Cf. the chapter about "The education of conscience", ibid. 366–367.

the self, which is socially controlled by this system of norms. I have to emphasize that conscience (or self-knowledge) is simultaneously controlled by several norm-constituting institutions, or rather all these institutions attempts to exercise exclusive control above some "portions" of our self-knowledge, defining there the contents of "good" and "bad", and determining the relative rewards and sanctions (cf. FOUCAULT 1994: 184). Obviously, the spheres of interests of these social institutions can change with time; they may reinforce or diminish each other, and in actual decision-making situations the individual does not automatically follow the mechanical requirements of these constellations, but takes into account a number of "external" factors.

Therefore when constructing the Christian ethic subject – that is, when "fencing it off" from the self –, the individual first learns how to discover and define himself, or more precisely the "slice" of his existence demanded by this type of power, in the mirror of the system of norms and values formulated by Christian life strategy.

In the frame of this construction in relation to ourselves as subjects of Christian ethics, pastoral power creates an intersubjective type of self-examination which can be regarded as a synonym for confession. This carries an implicit epistemological paradox, for – quoting FOUCAULT (1990a: 61) – it is a mental ritual "in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner...". In our case, this partner is conscience, an interiorized system of norms, which "...is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile..."[24] (FOUCAULT 1990a: 61–62). The mechanism of the self-control of conscience is the most effective, when it is "so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface" (FOUCAULT 1990a: 60).

In self-examination the individual exploits his relation to the interiorized system of norms. If this relation is not harmonious, he/she usually identifies his/her deed as an infringement of a norm, and defines his/her own discomfort as compunction.[25] This discomfort – which stimulates the correction of eventual infringements of norms – can obviously spring from several sources. In our context we focus on Christian knowledge about the other-worldly ways of existence, on its "threatening" (suffering in hell, eschatological segregation, etc.) dimension, which becomes a this-worldly, normative drive in the context of the common ethic horizon linking the two

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[24] KOŁAKOWSKI (1999: 63) says similarly: "… it is true that I formulate (the prohibitions and decisions of conscience – Péter Berta) but once formulated, it resounds in me as the sound of an impersonal supervisor. It is a part of my inner experience, of my self, but in the same time an external power, independent of me." Cf. the previous note.

[25] "Moral conscience is the judgement of reason, through which human being recognizes the moral quality of a certain action he is going to realize, he is actually doing, or he has already completed. One is bound to faithfully follow in everything he does and says what he regards as just and right" (The Catechism of the Catholic Church 1994: 365).

spheres of existence. (The dimension of the positive other-worldly way of existence (salvation) has of course similarly significant normative power as well.)

It is obvious that the maintenance of the self-control of the conscience demands "permanent motivations" (cf. GEERTZ 1973) that are able to keep continuously alive the need for self-examination.

In summary we can say that the ideological dependence of death is used by Christian pastoral power to construct an ambivalent reading of afterlife existence, by constituting it as the valid reading of reality, and by building a chain of causality between certain elements of individual this-worldly life strategies and possible other-worldly models of fate. This two-faced concept of the other world is on the one hand an important catalysator, a "permanent motivation" (GEERTZ 1973) for self-examination and self-evaluation of the conscience, and on the other hand it is a "compass" of individual life strategies, an emphatic element of constraints leading to a norm-following life.

This Christian construction of a death concept, created by pastoral power partly in keeping with its own moral institution and system of values, obviously contributes to the reproduction of this-worldly influence and the importance of the same pastoral power, since it plays an important role in maintaining the respect of certain Christian values and norms. From this point of view, the two functions of death concept as a social product and a social tool become spectacularly one. Pastoral power creates, religious socialization distributes, and through the mechanism of the self-control of conscience maintains it, while power itself "gains life" through the control of this knowledge.

In order to give a dynamic model of the relations between the Christian meaning attribution to death, the fear of death (as one of the "permanent motivations" inciting to the following of the norms), and the reproduction of the this-worldly influence of pastoral power, I borrow the theory of HOMANS (1941; cf. LEMING 1979–80) analyzing the approaches of MALINOWSKI (1948, 1972: 71) and RADCLIFFE-BROWN (1972) regarding the relations between religion/magic and the anxiety evoked by various life situations. HOMANS argues that the approaches of the two anthropologists are not alternatives which mutually exclude each other, but they form a synthetic unity, mutually complementing each other. MALINOWSKI focuses on the individual, when asserting that individuals are inclined to feel anxiety in certain situations. RADCLIFFE-BROWN, on the other hand, starts from the level of society, when arguing that the public order of norms expects the individual to feel anxiety at certain points of his/her course of life (HOMANS 1941: 168).

HOMANS in his synthesis of the structure of magic rites points on seven determinative components (here below I will describe only the first four), asserting that the primary function of these rites is to give self-confidence to the members of the society, to alleviate their anxiety, and to contribute to the survival of the organization of society. In the following I – somewhat simplifying – try to present of the structure of this synthesis in relation to the connections between fear from death and the Christian construction of death, in the context of Hungarian peasant communities, complementing it with an element which, implicitly, was also present in HOMANS' theory.

1 *(Primary anxiety)* Our relation to mortality is basically determined by the cognitive ambivalence of death. For neutralizing the respective anxiety, Hungarian peasant culture offered to its members first of all

2 *(Primary ritual)* the positive other-worldly perspective (salvation) of Christianity. An unrestricted identification with this perspective required not only spiritual commitment (faith), but also the acceptance and following of a differentiated ethic codex which influenced several points of the individual course of life.

If the individual followed a strategy of life in accordance with this horizon of expectations, that is, he did not infringe any norms necessary to his (faith in) salvation, then his/her *primary anxiety* probably remained latent as long as some other event (sight of a dead animal, facing the physical signs of getting old, etc.) evoked it.

In each such case the individual was constrained to examine and evaluate his/her relation to the complex horizon of expectations of religion (cf. the self-examinating and self-evaluating mechanisms of conscience), for an alleviation of his/her anxiety was primarily expected from the comfort of this religion. If this relation was proved harmonious,[26] there was no obstacle to the identification with the positive perspective and (at least partly) to the neutralization of anxiety.

3 *(Secondary or displaced anxiety)* The relation to death could again become problematic when the individual committed some infringement of norms that seriously risked his/her salvation.

Such infringements could become manifest both on the public and social level (like a public infringement of a public norm of behavior), and in the intimate dimension of the commitment to transcendence. While in the first case the evaluation and punishment belonged to the common competence of the professional specialist, the public opinion and the self-control of the individual, in the case of an "intimate infringement of norm" the duty of recognizing it was incumbent only on the mechanism of the self-control of the conscience.

In case a religious person committed a public or intimate infringement of norms that could seriously risk or make impossible his identification with a positive perspective of his other-worldly future, his anxiety from mortality probably emerged again. In the background of this anxiety, however, there stood now not the cognitive ambivalence of death, but the other-worldly punitions awaiting for him (suffering in hell, losing salvation, etc.), that is, the social construction of death and afterlife concept, the culture itself *(secondary or displaced anxiety)*.

4 *(Secondary ritual)* The alleviation of secondary or displaced anxiety was possible, within the frames of religion, only in one way:[27] by completing *secondary rites* focusing on penitence and propitiation. These rites symbolically recreated the order

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[26] That is, free of every infringement of norms, or only ballasted with such infringements that could be corrected and thus did not seriously hinder the individual in identifying himself with the positive religious perspective (his/her faith in salvation).

[27] Here I only refer to those infringements of norms which are amendable according to Christian doctrine.

infringed, restituted the harmonious relation between the transcendence and the mortal, and thus

5 *(Repeated primary ritual)* made it possible for the individual to easily identify himself/herself with the comforting positive perspective of other-worldly future, constructed for neutralizing the primary anxiety *(repeated, corrected carrying out of the primary rite).*

Of course, the theories expounded in this paper need further elaboration (e.g. from the aspect of the confessional or regional differences), and a more detailed historical context of the normative character of peasant death concept. In the following I can only refer to some of the most important reasons of the decline of the normative character of death concept, observable (also) in peasant communities.

I argue that the "fading" of the normative character is primarily connected to the recent changes in the factors responsible for the probability and legitimacy of the ideas embodying it.

On the one hand, as many researchers pointed it out, the recent transformations in peasant culture naturally led to deep transformations in the status and function of folk belief system as forms of knowledge. Apart from some microregions, folk beliefs mostly lost they functions sometimes played in the organization of everyday life. Instead of the facts of belief, they become narratives without any social weight.

On the other hand it is obvious, that the intensity of the this-worldly normative character of Christian eschatology (especially the role of the negative other-worldly perspective of existence) also declined significantly in peasant communities, due to progressive secularization, religious individualization and pluralism, and the decline of the norm-constituting competences of pastoral power, even if somewhat later than in other social strata, more sensitive to these processes of secularization.

The roots of this process probably go back to the 17th–18th centuries, when medicine set itself free from the control of pastoral power, became an autonomous discipline, and, supported by its until now unbroken authority, brought an end to the (at least European) monopoly of Christian discourse in defining the substance of death. As the problem of death constituted an organic part of its field of interests, medicine naturally constructed an alternative reading of reality on this subject. The construction, control and maintenance of institutional knowledge about death became thus divided, and pastoral power was constrained to cease from time to time a new portion of its once extended sphere of interests to various organizations of public administration, to public health organized under state control, or to public education, etc. (cf. the 18th century orders of Maria Theresia about the use of cemeteries and ways of funerals, or the process of creation of public cemeteries).

Christian knowledge about death, which once emerged as a "sacred canopy" (BERGER 1967) above the members of these peasant communities, has become by now, with the expression of BERGER (1967), one of the alternative readings of reality in the "market competition for the faithful". Emphasis on salvation secures obviously better positions in this competition than threatening with the vision of punishment in hell. Finally, paraphrasing FOUCAULT (1998: 142–143), we can say that the decline of a Christian death concept as a normative force is due principally to the

fact that pastoral power, once the motor of the probability and legitimacy of the ideas at the basis of normativity, moved out to a large extent from the focus of the playing-field of power of the norm-constituting social institutions; and this transformation had its impact on also the meaning and importance of the ideas connected to the substance of death.

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