3

Death in Çatalhöyük

Wolfgang Palaver

> Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death – dry dwellers of eternity; and when their end approaches, they are stowed away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs.
>
> *(Benjamin 1996, 151)*

Looking back at Çatalhöyük from our own world we may be shocked to discover how closely the people lived to their own dead. Whereas the modern world is increasingly distancing itself from death by pushing the dead out of sight, so that it ends up with rooms "that have never been touched by death" as it was expressed by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin at the beginning of the twentieth century, the people in Çatalhöyük "seem to have slept on the platforms where their parents and grandparents were buried" (Hodder 2006, 24). Çatalhöyük was "as much a cemetery as a settlement" (Hodder 2006, 99). Contrary to our modern western world that is, at least since the nineteenth century, characterized by its denial of death, we discover death at the center of cults and cultures from the beginnings of human civilization until today if we look at the Andaman Islanders or Tikopia (see Becker 1975, 1997; Ariès 2008). Today we know that animals also respond to death significantly and that there is no clear-cut distinction between animals and human beings in this regard (Drake 2015; Waal 2015). The recent discovery of the early species of hominin *Homo naledi*, who disposed of their dead in a remote South African cave, triggered a discussion in which primatologists like Frans de Waal emphasized the fact that a special attitude towards death can already be observed among animals.

Death as Ultimate Violence

We also have to acknowledge the deep connection between death and
violence. According to Girard, "death is the ultimate violence that can be
inflicted on a living being" (Girard 1977, 255). The German sociologist
Wolfgang Sofsky calls death "violence as such," identifying it with "abso-
lute force" (Sofsky 2005, 58). To underline his insight he refers to the
writer and cultural anthropologist Elias Canetti and his understanding
of the "survivor" personifying the human temptation to fight death by
surviving others: "Horror at the sight of death turns into satisfaction
that it is someone else who is dead. The dead man lies on the ground
while the survivor stands" (Canetti 1984, 227; cf. Becker 1975, 105–
106, 132). The longing to survive death easily leads to killing because it
strengthens the assumption that killing overcomes death by becoming its
master. According to the cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker, "man has
always casually sacrificed life for more life" (Becker 1975, 24). This is
not only true for individual survivors as we know them from our modern
world and as they were clearly in the mind of Canetti, who tried to under-
stand paranoid power in the twentieth century, but it is also true for
human groups at the dawn of human culture. Becker, who was partly
influenced by Canetti, rightly remarked that in tribal societies not indi-
viduals but the people were the survivor (Becker 1975, 132). The indi-
viduals in archaic societies overcame their death anxiety by identifying
fully with the group and its cultural ideology. This was clearly seen by
the Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank, who also had a decisive influ-
ence on Becker and who understood sacrifice as an important means to
overcome death anxiety: "The death fear of the ego is lessened by the
killing, the sacrifice, of the other; through the death of the other, one
buys oneself free from the penalty of dying, of being killed" (Rank 1947,
130; cf. Becker 1975, 108). This sacrificial killing is, according to Rank,
"a purely psychic ideology, which rests upon the primitive feeling of the
group (collectivity)" (Rank 1947, 130). Sacrifices strengthened ritually
the survival of the group: "Ceremoniously killing captives is a way of
affirming power over life, and therefore over death" (Becker 1975, 102).
Also Walter Burkert, a German scholar of Greek mythology and cult,
observed that killing is part of many funerary rites and refers to "the
pleasurable shock of survival" that follows the confrontation with the
death of others (Burkert 1983, 50).

Meat-eating hunters also aimed at mastering death by incorporating the
power of animals. Trophies of killed animals symbolized this acquisition

of power over death (Becker 1975, 107). If these people participated in scapegoating, they not only followed a mimetic lure, but they also wanted to overcome death through surviving others: "He moves in to kill the sacrificial scapegoat with the wave of the crowd, not because he is carried along by the wave, but because *he likes* the psychological barter of another life for his own: 'You die, not me'" (Becker 1975, 138). This identification with the group that roots in death anxiety can even lead to self-sacrifice if it is seen as a means to immortality: "The individual gives himself to the group because of *his desire* to share immortality; we must say, even, that he is willing to die in order *not* to die" (Becker 1975, 139). Our modern world is full of examples of this sacrificial grasping of immortality if we think of piles of sacrificed soldiers in national wars or of contemporary suicide bombers. This pattern of collective and sacrificial survival seems to accompany humankind from its very beginnings until our world of today.

In the eyes of archaic people, death and violence were so closely linked that it was assumed that death was caused by someone's evil intention (Illich 1995, 178–179). Sigmund Freud quoted Westermarck's insight that archaic cultures were not able to distinguish between violent and natural death and that this explains the anxious attitude towards the dead who are seen as dangerous and revengeful beings:

According to primitive ideas a person only dies if he is killed – by magic if not by force – and such a death naturally tends to make the soul revengeful and ill-tempered. It is envious of the living and is longing for the company of its old friends; no wonder, then, that it sends them diseases to cause their death.

(Freud 2001, 69)

We also can refer to more contemporary examples where death is immediately attributed to some malignant evildoer. The French anthropologist Phillipe Descola in the 1970s studied the Achuar, an Amazonian community, and described how the death of a woman is immediately attributed to a certain man who functions as a "scapegoat" for the angry mourners (Descola 1996, 378). But also the soul of the dead woman itself is seen as a danger to the community, and the funerary rites – an "ostracism" of her image and her memory – aim at her ultimate departure because "the living cannot be truly living unless the dead are completely dead" (Descola 1996, 381).

Finally, we also have to realize that an archaic group would be so shaken by the death of one of its members that social rituals were needed to ensure the survival of the group (Illich 1995, 203). It has been the role

of religion to help humanity from its very beginning to deal with the threat of death, as broadly described by Malinowski:

The ceremonial of death which ties the survivors to the body and rivets them to the place of death, the beliefs in the existence of the spirit, in its beneficent influences or malevolent intentions, in the duties of a series of commemorative or sacrificial ceremonies – in all this religion counteracts the centrifugal forces of fear, dismay, demoralization, and provides the most powerful means of reintegration of the group's shaken solidarity and of the re-establishment of its morale.

(Malinowski 1948, 35)

Culture and religion emerged as remedies for death-fearing humans, the animal that is especially conscious of its own end. Looking at culture more closely it is even not possible to separate it from religion in its broader meaning because "culture itself is sacred, since *it* is the 'religion' that assures in some way the perpetuation of its members" (Becker 1975, 4). The terror that followed the awareness of their mortality led our ancestors to the imagination of the supernatural (Solomon et al. 2015, 67–68). But this should be understood not as something primarily cognitive but as a deeply practical and social matter: "Our ancestors received support for their beliefs from one another, but they also needed some tangible signs that the invisible world really existed. Rituals, art, myth, and religion – features of every known culture – together made it possible for people to construct, maintain, and concretize their supernatural conceptions of reality" (Solomon et al. 2015, 69; cf. Becker 1975, 7).

Looking at the beginnings of humanity we realize that a special treatment of the dead became more important the closer we approach *Homo sapiens*. Neanderthals, for instance, buried their dead and we have archaeological evidence that the oldest burial took place at Tabun Cave in Israel around 100,000 years ago (Drake 2015). From the Mousterian (70,000–50,000 BC) we have evidence of burials by *Homo sapiens* (Eliade 1978, 8–13; cf. Balter 2005, 279). These burials show clear signs of a belief in an afterlife (the use of red ocher as a substitute for blood; burials oriented towards the east connecting the hope of rebirth with the course of the sun; intentional burials in the fetal position probably also referring to rebirth; offerings of objects of personal adornment and remains of meals).

The terror of mortality that explains the emergence of burials at the beginning of human civilization has never left our world. It shaped rituals and religions until the beginning of the modern period and has not yet disappeared if we consider recent attempts to overcome death with the help

of advanced technology. It was Elias Canetti who understood much of his work as a fight against death, criticizing thereby all religions that make death acceptable, and who also understood that a scientific overcoming of death will result in a new type of religious endeavor: "Knowledge can lose its deadliness only through a new religion that does not acknowledge death" (Canetti 1978, 45). Also Jaron Lanier, a computer scientist and computer philosophy writer, criticizes all technological promises to overcome death as a new type of religion: "What most outsiders have failed to grasp is that the rise to power of 'net-based monopolies' coincides with a new sort of religion based on becoming immortal" (Lanier 2014, 310).

In the following I will apply two anthropological approaches to the meaning of death in Çatalhöyük that are very well aware of the close relationship between death, violence, and religion, also focusing clearly on the ritual dimension of the last. Both these approaches also deal extensively with sacrifice as well as with scapegoating. The first approach is mimetic theory as it was developed by the French-American cultural anthropologist René Girard. With the help of mimetic theory, this chapter describes the role of death and burials at the foundation of human settlements. The second approach is terror management theory, a social psychology that was developed by Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski, following the work of cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker, who has much in common with Girard's mimetic theory in terms of his emphasis on ritual to understand the beginnings of human culture as well as his reflections on sacrifice and scapegoating (Becker 1975; cf. Webb 1998, 2009, 63–95). Terror management theory recognizes how much death anxiety has driven the development of human civilization: "Over the course of human history, the terror of death has guided the development of art, religion, language, economics, and science. It raised the pyramids in Egypt and razed the Twin Towers in Manhattan" (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 2015, x). In a recent popular introduction to terror management theory these three authors also recognize that the "modern immortalists" follow the age-old yearnings for immortality, yearnings that connect "ancient burial sites to futuristic cryogenics labs" (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 2015, 92–99, 210). Terror management theory will help us to understand how death anxiety is related to cultural or religious worldviews. Girard's mimetic theory and Becker's anthropology converge on the problem of human beings whose "fear of being or becoming nothing and nobody" easily leads them "toward victimization" (Webb 2009, 87). Human rivalry plays an important role in both these approaches. According to Girard, it is a fundamental "lack of

being" that causes human beings to imitate the desire of others, leading
to rivalry and violence if the objects of borrowed desire cannot be shared
(Girard 1977, 146). Becker starts with death anxiety that necessitates
an existential self-esteem of cosmic significance that people can only get
from others, easily ending up in competitive struggles for recognition:

An animal who gets his feeling of worth symbolically has to minutely compare
himself to those around him, to make sure he doesn't come off second-best.
Sibling rivalry is a critical problem that reflects the basic human condition: it
is not that children are vicious, selfish, or domineering. It is that they so openly
express man's tragic destiny: he must desperately justify himself as an object of
primary value in the universe; he must stand out, be a hero, make the biggest
possible contribution to world life, show that he *counts* more than anything or
anyone else.

<div align="right">(Becker 1997, 4; cf. Becker 1971, 78)</div>

Society, according to Becker, is a "mythical hero-system in which people
serve in order to earn a feeling of primary value, of cosmic specialness,
of ultimate usefulness to creation, of unshakable meaning" (Becker 1997,
5). This is not only true of archaic societies but is generally valid. Becker's
broad use of the term religion allows him to apply it also to western soci-
eties of the modern world. Mythical hero-systems try to outlive death
by giving their members a feeling of lasting importance: "They earn this
feeling by carving out a place in nature, by building an edifice that reflects
human value: a temple, a cathedral, a totem pole, a sky-scraper, a family
that spans three generations" (Becker 1997, 5). Çatalhöyük may be seen
as one particular offspring of a very old mythical hero-system.

The Tomb as the Cornerstone of Culture

His discovery of the Neolithic site at Göbekli Tepe in 1994 led the late
German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt to the conclusion that Lewis Mumford's
neglected thesis that ritual centers preceded larger human settlements should
be rehabilitated (Schmidt 2008, 248–250). Mumford's book *The City in
History* came out in 1961 and could not include even early results from
the excavation of Çatalhöyük that was just going on at about that time.
Mumford's book is indeed worth looking at because it claims that cemeteries
and shrines precede larger human settlements. It was the ceremonial concern
for the dead and burials that led to larger villages and cities:

Mid the uneasy wanderings of Paleolithic man, the dead were the first to have a
permanent dwelling: a cavern, a mound marked by a cairn, a collective barrow.
These were the landmarks to which the living probably returned at intervals,

to commune with or placate the ancestral spirits. Though food-gathering and hunting do not encourage the permanent occupation of a single site, the dead at least claim that privilege … The city of the dead antedates the city of the living. In one sense, indeed, the city of the dead is the forerunner, almost the core, of every living city. Urban life spans the historic space between the earliest burial ground for dawn man and the final cemetery, the Necropolis, in which one civilization after another has met its end.

(Mumford 1989, 7)

Today Schmidt's excavations at Göbekli Tepe make Mumford's claims more plausible. Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski refer to an example from the Sungir archaeological site in Russia that was inhabited 28,000 years ago to show how early burials were connected to a religious worldview. Sungir consisted of

houses, hearths, storage pits, and tool production areas. The remnants of multiple elaborate burials were also found there, including those of two young people and a sixty-year-old man. Each body was decorated with pendants, bracelets, and shell necklaces, and dressed in clothing embellished with more than four thousand ivory beads; it would have taken an artisan an hour to make a single bead. The youths were buried head to head and flanked by two mammoth tusks. By devoting such inordinate amounts of time and effort to generate these elaborate burial constructions, the inhabitants of Sungir seemed to show that the symbolic supernatural world they created took priority over more mundane, here-and-now practicalities. Moreover, the grave sites indicate a belief in an afterlife; after all, why bother getting dressed up for a journey to the void?

(Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 2015, 68; cf. Balter 2005, 279–280)

Archeological sites like Göbekli Tepe and Çatalhöyük are also discussed in this overview by Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski that illustrates how human beings have dealt with death and life throughout human history. Following the work of Klaus Schmidt, they understand Göbekli Tepe (9600–8200 BC) as a "center of a cult of death" that later led to agriculture and the development of larger settlements (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 2015, 77; cf. Schmidt 2008; Coppens 2009; Gifford and Antonello 2015). Schmidt's hypothesis, however, is still in discussion because of the current absence of human burials. Schmidt expected that later excavations will find them (Clare et al., Chapter 5 this volume). But there are some interesting traces illustrating again how central death may have been at this site with its huge standing-stone rings:

Though archaeologists found no signs of human habitation or cultivation at Göbekli Tepe, they did unearth human bones mingled with the remains of vulture wings. (Vultures were particularly prominent among the animal carvings.) The

bones were coated in red ochre and appeared to be the remnants of ritual burials. Diggers also found an engraving of a naked woman and another of a decapitated corpse surrounded by vultures.

(Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 2015, 76)

The settlement at Çatalhöyük (7100–6000 BC), which was inhabited about two thousand years after Göbekli Tepe, is deeply connected with this earlier place of cult if we look at its symbolism (Hodder and Meskell 2011). Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski highlight the connection between the two sites by referring to the funerary customs at Çatalhöyük: "Anthropologists found decapitated skeletons; the skulls were again painted with ochre. Also interesting was the presence of carved vultures, which also appear prominently in the carvings at Göbekli Tepe" (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 2015, 77).

An early predecessor of Mumford was the Italian philosopher and historian Giambattista Vico (1668–1774), who emphasized the eminent importance of burials for human culture. He observed that it is a universal human custom to bury the dead and also recognized that the Latin term for humanity, *humanitas*, "comes first and properly from *humando*, 'burying' " (Vico 1948, § 12; cf. § 333, § 337; Harrison 2003, xi). René Girard is one of those modern thinkers who comes close to Vico's insights into the relationship between religion and basic human customs. He also focuses on the importance of burial rites. According to Girard, "once something like humanity exists there also exists the strange behaviour toward the dead that we call funerary: the refusal to see death naturalistically, as merely the cessation of life, with the cadaver no more than a sort of irreparably broken, useless object" (Girard 1987, 80). He even claims that "funerary rituals could well … amount to the first actions of a strictly cultural type" (Girard 1987, 164).

Girard, however, goes a step further in his reflection on burials, funerary rites, and how they are related to human culture. According to Girard, funerary rites stem from a primordial victimary mechanism that overcame an internal crisis in an archaic group by expelling or killing one of its members who was transformed into its god (Girard 1977, 254–256; 1987, 80–83, 163–165). In cultures in which the gods are absent or insignificant, the dead often take the place of the missing divinities, incarnating violence like archaic gods. Worship of the dead functions like the worship of archaic gods, helping to maintain order in the community. Death throws a community into crisis and it is not by chance that many funeral rites show clear parallels to the foundational

mechanism which also aims to create order out of chaos. In Descola's description of funerary rites among the Achuar, we can clearly discover elements echoing the scapegoat mechanism. Funerary rites strengthen the solidarity of the survivors and illustrate a certain union between life and death that goes back to the foundational murder. Through the lens of his hypothesis about the victimary mechanism, Girard recognized the tomb as the center of human culture:

> What is essential is the cadaver as talisman, as the bearer of life and fertility; culture always develops as a *tomb*. The tomb is nothing but the first human monument to be raised over the surrogate victim, the first most elemental and fundamental matrix of meaning. There is no culture without a tomb and no tomb without a culture; in the end the tomb is the first and only cultural symbol. The above-ground tomb does not have to be invented. It is the pile of stones in which the victim of unanimous stoning is buried. It is the first pyramid.
> (Girard 1987, 83; cf. Girard 2007, 39–42)

Girard's thesis that the pile of stones thrown at the foundational victim forms a first pyramid was further developed by the French philosopher Michel Serres in his book *Statues*, in which he underlines the foundational character of the Egyptian pyramids: "Every Egyptian brings his stone over the Pharaoh's body, and that lapidation, well ordered, produces at a stroke the king, the pyramid and Egypt" (Serres 2015, 22; cf. 161).

Girard's claim that the tomb is the cornerstone of culture accords with the claim of Fustel de Coulanges that in ancient times the "tomb was generally near the house" in order to facilitate worship of the ancestors (Fustel de Coulanges 1980, 28; cf. Harrison 2003, 25) and with Otto Rank's observation that the "tomb" is the "first house" (Rank 1989, 162). It finds in the Neolithic settlement of Çatalhöyük a fascinating and powerful illustration (Nakamura and Meskell 2013, 451–453). This settlement that provided housing for the living people together with the burials of their dead demonstrates the closeness of life and death in early culture: "Çatalhöyük had no special buildings or spaces reserved for burial. Intramural burial was the norm at Çatalhöyük and external areas were used for interment less frequently" (Boz and Hager 2013, 413; cf. Mellaart 1967, 204–209; Andrews, Molleson, and Boz 2005). Çatalhöyük is in this regard not a unique case but finds parallels in different cultures and ages, supporting Girard's claim that the tomb is at the center of human culture. Intramural burials were also found at contemporary Neolithic sites throughout the Near East (Boz and Hager 2013, 413). Hodder refers to the work of the anthropologist Raymond

thesis about the victimary mechanism as the cultural origin. There is, however, another widespread ritual institution that is much closer to Girard's hypothesis and also plays an important role in Çatalhöyük: building sacrifice (Hubert and Mauss 1964, 65; Becker 1975, 103; Burkert 1983, 39; Palaver 2013, 177–179). Otto Rank links building sacrifices with foundational myths like those about the city-founders Romulus or Cain, who began their work of construction by murdering their brothers, and concludes that these sacrifices "embody the idea that every created thing, if it is to be capable of life, owes its existence to some life destroyed" (Rank 1989, 199). Glenn M. Schwartz gives a definition of building sacrifice that shows some affinities with Girard's hypothesis:

Construction or foundation sacrifice consists of the killing of humans or animals for interment in building foundations, attested in East Asia and the Middle East. The rationale for such a practice is often said to be the provision of a solid and stable edifice … In some East Asian cases, this type of sacrifice involves the presentation of an offering, as when the killing is intended to appease a supernatural entity displeased by the building project, but other foundation sacrifices are said to animate the building to protect it and provide a connection to the supernatural world.

(Schwartz 2012, 7)

Sharon Moses discusses the possibility of child sacrifices at Çatalhöyük, explicitly referring in this regard to foundation burials (Moses 2012). And we can also refer with Clare et al. (Chapter 6 this volume) to the early Pre-Pottery Neolithic B site of Nevalı Çori, where "there is evidence for what has previously been referred to as a foundation sacrifice (Bauopfer) … Beneath the floor of House 21 there was found a crouched inhumation, again of a young woman, with a flint point embedded in the neck and lower jaw."

According to Girard's mimetic theory, building sacrifices represent a controlled repetition of the founding murder. Just as the killing of a scapegoat brought unity and peace to the community, all building projects should likewise receive lasting stability through corresponding sacrifice. A ritual sacrifice at the ceremonial beginning of construction can be seen as a repetition of the founding murder. Building sacrifices belong to the world's truly universal phenomena; instances can be found in essentially every culture, on all continents and throughout history. Also mythology and literature are full of examples and references to building sacrifices. Mentioned above are the stories of Romulus and Cain. In the Bible we also encounter Joshua's curse on the person who dares to rebuild the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:26; Kings 1 16:34), showing how this curse came to fruition during the reign of King Achab, and how Hiel of Bethel rebuilt

Jericho: "He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua son of Nun." This example highlights how often especially children were used for building sacrifices.

Building sacrifices also play an important role at Çatalhöyük: the initial construction of houses was ritually sanctioned, with infant interments at the threshold into the main room and many neonates used during construction (Hodder 2006, 117; Nakamura and Meskell 2013, 453). Hodder refers also to the interesting fact that during the construction of Building I four neonates were buried, although no neonates were buried during the occupation of the building. The importance of foundational burials is also highlighted by the "burials in foundation/construction contexts and near walls hav[ing] the highest proportion of individuals with direct goods (44–48 per cent), followed by platform, floor and midden burials (27–30 per cent), while room fill burials have the least amount (5 per cent)" (Nakamura and Meskell 2013, 453). According to Hodder, infant burials are often associated with foundations. He and Whitehouse describe the importance of rituals at the foundation of houses:

> Foundation rituals associated with the houses would have occurred every 70–100 years, and in some cases they appear to be associated with feasts. There is frequent evidence that house foundation was associated with highly charged events such as the burial of neonates and young children, and the placing of human skulls at the base of house posts. In the case of Building 42, the foundation of the house was accompanied by the burial of a man holding the plastered skull of a woman. The burial of neonates and young children in the foundations of houses perhaps implies involvement with a larger group than the inhabitants of these houses (suggested to be five to eight people per house on average, too small a group to produce a cluster of neonate burials at the time of house foundation). There may, in fact, have been some association between the closure and foundation of a house and the death of significant individuals in the house. The care taken in preparing houses for closure and rebuilding suggests elaborate ceremony and intense focus.
>
> (Whitehouse and Hodder 2010, 129)

The most striking example of a building sacrifice – if this foundational burial is interpreted with the help of Girard's mimetic theory – is the skeleton of an elderly woman aged over fifty holding a plastered female skull in her hands that was excavated in a midden beneath Building 42 in 2004 (Hodder 2006, 24–25, 148, 210, 260; Moses 2012, 65; Boz and Hager 2013, 420, 424; Nakamura and Meskell 2013, 450, 463–464; Carter et al. 2015, 100–102). It was definitely a founding burial because Building 42 was erected on this burial and not on a previous

house. This foundational burial also stands out for the fact that among the burial goods that were found was a leopard claw, the only leopard bone – despite the depiction of leopards in the site's imagery – that has been excavated in Çatalhöyük so far. The fact that new houses placed not on older houses but on midden required foundational burials – especially of neonates and children – resonates very well with the widespread practice of sacrifice that we know from many different cultures and religions. From a Girardian perspective building sacrifices most likely mediated back to a foundational murder that solved an internal crisis of an archaic human tribe through the killing of one of its members. The peace and harmony that resulted from this collective killing is ritually repeated in foundational burials that are also seen as contributing to a harmonious prospering of the house, building, bridge, or dam erected on those burials. Looking at the foundational burial of Building 42 one may wonder why the treatment of this buried body supports "the idea of concern for rather than the ostracizing of the weak and diseased" (Nakamura and Meskell 2013, 450). Doesn't such an observation contradict a ritual connection with the victimary mechanism? Not at all. The victimary mechanism results, according to Girard, in a double transference of bad and good attributions on to the victim (Girard 1987, 37; Palaver 2013, 153). A ritual repetition will often carry on with both attributes or develop in one of these directions. If the original event was in the end experienced as the powerful outbreak of peace and harmony, a ritual repetition will stress a positive attitude towards anyone who follows in the footsteps of the original provider of peace and stability.

Terror Management in Çatalhöyük

Throughout this chapter I have already made many references to Ernest Becker's anthropological reflections on the relationship between death and human culture. We also could observe a certain affinity of his insights to Girard's mimetic theory. Both share a special emphasis on violence and religion. What are Becker's basic assumptions? Sam Keen summarized in his Foreword to Becker's book *The Denial of Death* his thesis about the importance of death anxiety in the following way: "The basic motivation for human behavior is our biological need to control our basic anxiety, to deny the terror of death" (Keen 1997, xii). Society and culture provide us, according to Becker, with a hero-system helping us to overcome death anxiety. Here is how Keen describes Becker's thesis about the role of society in curbing death fear:

We achieve ersatz immortality by sacrificing ourselves to conquer an empire, to build a temple, to write a book, to establish a family, to accumulate a fortune, to further progress and prosperity, to create an information-society and global free market. Since the main task of human life is to become heroic and transcend death, every culture must provide its members with an intricate symbolic system that is covertly religious.

(Keen 1997, xiii)

Terror management theory is a social psychology based on Becker's basic insights and has developed experiments to prove them. Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski, the three founders of this approach, summarize their basic research:

Terror management theory posits that the unique awareness of death and tragedy renders human beings prone to debilitating terror, and that this terror is managed by a dual-component anxiety buffer consisting of a cultural worldview and self-esteem. In support of this analysis, experiments have demonstrated that dispositionally high or momentarily raised self-esteem reduces physiological and self-reported anxiety in response to a variety of threats, and that mortality salience produces a host of exaggerated positive responses to those who share or uphold one's cultural worldview, and exaggerated negative responses to those who are different or who violate important aspects of one's own cultural worldview. Although there is surely much more empirical work to be done, results of research to date are clearly in accord with the notion that concerns about death play a leading role in the ongoing drama of human life.

(Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 1998, 39)

According to terror management theory there are two pillars to respond to the challenge of human mortality: first, the protection of our self-esteem and second, the participation in a shared cultural worldview that often longs for the superiority of one's own group over others. According to terror management theory, experiments showed that a sudden reminder of death easily results in scapegoating and in an increasing enmity against foreigners.

When I started to think about the role of intramural burials at Çatalhöyük, my first assumption was that – following terror management theory to a certain degree – the relative peaceful state of this Neolithic settlement was probably caused by a permanent awareness of death that results from the close cohabitation of living and dead people. According to this initial assumption scapegoating and enmity cannot break out through sudden confrontation with mortality because reminders of death are all over the place. It is true violence does not play a big role at Çatalhöyük (Larsen et al. 2013, 408, 410; Boz and Hager 2013, 437, but see Chapter 4 this volume). But was this significant lack of violence

caused by the ongoing awareness of death? A recent experiment with Hindus in India has shown that people with a high awareness of death – the experiment used funerary workers and priests performing death ceremonies – was no help against a heightened cultural worldview defense (Fernandez et al. 2010). Whereas the control group that was not exposed to death permanently reacted in the typical way, increasing the defense of their own worldview as soon as they were reminded of their mortality, the group with a high exposure to death had a chronically high level of worldview defense, too. This experiment suggests that death awareness forces people to cling strongly to their cultural hero-system, helping them to keep death anxiety at bay.

My initial interpretation is most likely wrong. But maybe the basic assumptions of Becker and terror management theory are wrong, too. Is it really true that people fear death in general? Boz and Hager seem to suggest that the people at Çatalhöyük had a quite relaxed relationship with death:

The contextual evidence of the intramural burials at Çatalhöyük and the pre-interment treatment of the body suggest that people were familiar, at ease, and potentially at peace with the concept of the dead. Sharing a house floor and repeatedly witnessing the dead at different stages of decomposition were part of their daily life. Therefore, "fear" does not appear to be a part of a relationship that the people of Çatalhöyük felt for their dead.

(Boz and Hager 2013, 438)

It seems to be true that death anxiety is not really openly visible in Çatalhöyük. But this should not be taken as a proof that people at this Neolithic site were not affected – at least indirectly – by death anxiety at all. Such a claim would separate these people definitely from the rest of humanity. Surely these people were not haunted by death anxiety as human beings are in the modern world. But why should they have cared so much about the dead if death was not also a real challenge for them? The burials are not disposals of corpses that were just left behind while the living were moving forward with their lives. The burials show a special concern for the dead. They even attributed to their dead special power so that one can ask whether this was part of a social hero-system that helped these people to cope with death. For the attribution of power we can just refer to the foundational burial of Building 42 in which the buried woman was given power by the skull she embraced, or by the leopard claw that was one of her burial goods and stands for all the power and deadliness of a dangerous predator (Hodder 2006, 25;

Nakamura and Meskell 2013, 463). If we want to understand the relative peacefulness and their seeming ease with death at Çatalhöyük, we have to look at the cultural worldview that characterized these dwellers. Could ritual hunting be understood as a form of fight against death anxiety in the sense of Maurice Bloch's "rebounding violence" (Bloch 1992, 2010)? Was Çatalhöyük immersed in a cultural immortality worldview that was able to keep violence at a low level?

Where Ernest Becker was reflecting on possibilities to overcome destructive types of heroism that follow most cultural means to curb death anxiety, he was recommending a heroism of sainthood that opens up to the whole cosmos as it was given by the Creator, and he mentions Saint Francis of Assisi as an example of this heroism (Becker 1975, 163). In regard to being close to nature and acting out a low level of destructiveness, the people at Çatalhöyük were most likely closer to Saint Francis than are we modern exploiters of our world. According to Becker, archaic cultures were also able to give human beings a sense of contributing to cosmic life by being immersed in the world of the sacred (Becker 1975, 186, 206, 209; 1997, 5; 2005, 221–222). Contrary to Saint Francis, however, archaic people did not have a strong notion of personal individuality. Additionally, we can also seek with Becker a "moral equivalent to war" that may govern a group or culture (Becker 1975, 126, 145; cf. Keen 1997, xiv). The people at Çatalhöyük were most likely united not by fighting outside enemies or scapegoating outsiders among them, but by their hunting rituals and by a cult of the dead that immersed each individual in a hero-system that connected them via their house with the ancestors and kept death fear at bay.

References

Andrews, P., Molleson, T., and Boz, B. 2005. The human burials at Çatalhöyük. In *Inhabiting Çatalhöyük: Reports from the 1995–99 Seasons*, ed. I. Hodder, 261–278. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.

Ariès, P. 2008. *The Hour of our Death*. New York: Vintage Books. Original edition, 1977.

Balter, M. 2005. *The Goddess and the Bull*. New York: Free Press.

Becker, E. 1971. *The Birth and Death of Meaning: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Problem of Man*. 2nd edn. New York: Free Press. Original edition, 1962.

  1975. *Escape from Evil*. New York: Free Press.

  1997. *The Denial of Death*. New York: Simon and Schuster. Original edition, 1973.

  2005. *The Ernest Becker Reader*. Seattle: Ernest Becker Foundation in association with the University of Washington Press.

Benjamin, W. 1996. The storyteller: observations on the works of Nikolai Leskov. In *Selected Writings, Volume III: 1935–1938*, ed. M. W. Jennings and H. Eiland, 143–166. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press. Original edition, 1936.

Bloch, M. 1992. *Prey into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience*. The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures. Cambridge University Press.

    2010. Is there religion at Çatalhöyük … or are there just houses? In *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization: Çatalhöyük as a Case Study*, ed. I. Hodder, 146–162. Cambridge University Press.

Boz, B., and Hager, L. D. 2013. Living above the dead: intramural burial practices at Çatalhöyük. In *Humans and Landscapes of Çatalhöyük: Reports from the 2000–2008 Seasons*, ed. I. Hodder, 413–440. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute.

Burkert, W. 1983. *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*. Translated by P. Bing. Berkeley: University of California Press. Original edition, 1972.

Canetti, E. 1978. *The Human Province*. Translated by J. Neugroschel. New York: Seabury Press.

    1984. *Crowds and Power*. Translated by C. Stewart. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux. Original edition, 1960.

Carter, T., Haddow, S., Russell, N., Bogaard, A., and Tsoraki, C. 2015. Laying the foundations: creating households at Neolithic Çatalhöyük. In *Assembling Çatalhöyük*, ed. I. Hodder and A. Marciniak, 97–110. Leeds: Maney.

Coppens, P. 2009. Göbekli Tepe: the world's oldest temple. *Nexus Magazine* 16 (4): 35–40.

Descola, P. 1996. *The Spears of Twilight: Life and Death in the Amazon Jungle*. Translated by J. Lloyd. New York: New Press. Original edition, 1993.

Drake, N. 2015. Mystery lingers over ritual behavior of new human ancestor. *National Geographic News* (September 15). Accessed 2016/01/09.

Eliade, M. 1978. *A History of Religious Ideas, Volume I: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Translated by W. R. Trask. University of Chicago Press.

Fernandez, S., Castano, E., and Singh, I. 2010. Managing death in the burning grounds of Varanasi, India: a terror management investigation. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 41 (2): 182–194. doi: 10.1177/002202 2109354376.

Firth, R. 1936. *We, the Tikopia: A Sociological Study of Kinship in Primitive Polynesia*. London: G. Allen and Unwin.

    1967. *Tikopia Ritual and Belief*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Freud, S. 2001. *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. Translated by J. Strachey. London: Routledge. Original edition, 1912–1913.

Fustel de Coulanges, N. D. 1980. *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Gifford, P., and Antonello, P. 2015. Rethinking the Neolithic revolution: symbolism and sacrifice at Göbekli Tepe. In *How We Became Human: Mimetic Theory and the Science of Evolutionary Origins*, ed. P. Antonello and P. Gifford, 261–288. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Girard, R. 1977. *Violence and the Sacred*. Translated by P. Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Original edition, 1972.

1987. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World: Research Undertaken in Collaboration with J.-M. Oughourlian and G. Lefort*. Translated by S. Bann and M. Metteer. Stanford University Press. Original edition, 1978.

2007. The evangelical subversion of myth. In *Politics and Apocalypse*, ed. R. Hamerton-Kelly, 29–49. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Harrison, R. P. 2003. *The Dominion of the Dead*. University of Chicago Press.

Hodder, I. 2006. *Çatalhöyük: The Leopard's Tale: Revealing the Mysteries of Turkey's Ancient "Town"*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Hodder, I., and Meskell, L. 2011. A "curious and sometimes a trifle macabre artistry." *Current Anthropology* 52 (2): 235–263. doi: 10.1086/659250.

Hubert, H., and Mauss, M. 1964. *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*. Translated by W. D. Halls. University of Chicago Press.

Illich, I. 1995. *Limits to Medicine: Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health. With a New Introduction by the Author*. London: Marion Boyars. Original edition, 1976.

Keen, S. 1997. Foreword. In *The Denial of Death*, xi–xvi. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Lanier, J. 2014. *Who Owns the Future?* New York: Penguin.

Larsen, C. S., Hillson, S. W., Ruff, C. B., Sadvari, J. W., and Garofalo, E. M. 2013. The human remains ii: interpreting lifestyle and activity in Neolithic Çatalhöyük. In *Humans and Landscapes of Çatalhöyük: Reports from the 2000–2008 Seasons*, ed. I. Hodder, 397–412. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute.

Malinowski, B. 1948. *Magic, Science and Religion, and Other Essays*. Glencoe: Free Press.

Mellaart, J. 1967. *Çatal Hüyük: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Moses, S. 2012. Sociopolitical implications of Neolithic foundation deposits and the possibility of child sacrifice: a case study at Çatalhöyük, Turkey. In *Sacred Killing: The Archaeology of Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, ed. A. Porter and G. M. Schwartz, 57–88. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Mumford, L. 1989. *The City in History: Its Origins, its Transformations, and its Prospects*. New York: Harcourt. Original edition, 1961.

Nakamura, C., and Meskell, L. 2013. The Çatalhöyük burial assemblage. In *Humans and Landscapes of Çatalhöyük: Reports from the 2000–2008 Seasons*, ed. I. Hodder, 441–466. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute.

Palaver, W. 2013. *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*. Translated by G. Borrud. Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Rank, O. 1947. *Will Therapy and Truth and Reality*. Translated by J. Taft. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Original edition, 1945.

1989. *Art and Artist: Creative Urge and Personality Development*. Translated by C. F. Atkinson. New York: Norton. Original edition, 1932.

Schmidt, K. 2008. *Sie bauten die ersten Tempel. Das rätselhafte Heiligtum der Steinzeitjäger. Die archäologische Entdeckung am Göbekli Tepe*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.

Schwartz, G. M. 2012. Archaeology and sacrifice. In *Sacred Killing: The Archaeology of Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, ed. A. Porter and G. M. Schwartz, 1–32. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Serres, M. 2015. *Statues: The Second Book of Foundations*. Translated by R. Burks. London: Bloomsbury. Original edition, 1987.

Sofsky, W. 2005. *Traktat über die Gewalt, Fischer-Taschenbücher*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag. Original edition, 1996.

Solomon, S., Greenberg, J., and Pyszczynski, T. 1998. Tales from the crypt: on the role of death in life. *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 33 (1): 9–43. doi: 10.1111/0591-2385.1241998124.

2015. *The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life*. New York: Random House.

Vico, G. 1948. *The New Science*. Translated by T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Waal, F. de 2015. Who apes whom? *New York Times*, September 15, A23. Accessed 2016/01/09. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/15/opinion/who-apes-whom.html?_r=1.

Webb, E. 1998. Ernest Becker and the psychology of worldviews. *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 33 (1): 71–86.

2009. *Worldview and Mind: Religious Thought and Psychological Development*. The Eric Voegelin Institute Series in Political Philosophy. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

Whitehouse, H., and Hodder, I. 2010. Modes of religiosity at Çatalhöyük. In *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization: Çatalhöyük as a Case Study*, ed. I. Hodder, 122–145. Cambridge University Press.