

Self-induced serenity. A psycho-social approach to superstitions

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the role of cultural memory in urbanites' behaviour, by focusing on the feelings produced by obeyed and disobeyed traditional rules. Interviews, participant observation, and data collected from villages and towns in Moldova offered the analyzed data. This article argues that personal awareness of the full obedience to ritual prescriptions leads to a positive expectation of events, while as the decision to break taboos is followed by anxiety and a tendentious interpretation of the outcome. The rites of passage illustrate the magic reasoning clearly as they are designed to secure the transition against all unseen threats. This approach reinforces the connections between culture and human mind.

KEYWORDS

folk knowledge, superstitions, socio-cultural patterns, Romanian urbanites, magic

INTRODUCTION

One of the most frequent answers a Romanian ethnographer receives while asking informants: "Why are you doing this?" is "That's good to do!" (*Aşa-i bine!*). Sometimes respondents hide magic explanations beneath this cover-all remark, and the researcher has to pursue his interest with further questions or the

subject no longer knows the initial information and escapes the conversation with this general formula. A third situation is characterized by a certain suspicion an outsider provokes, and the standard answer aims to end the discussion quicker. "Good" should be understood as a synthetic definition both for fair actions and for bringing good luck. The reversed circumstances, when peasants say: "This is

not good!" infers traditional rules infringement which is always expected to be followed by unfortunate events.

Superstitions act as psychological assurances that nothing will go wrong and thus they provide tranquillity. Rural life is far harsher than the urban one, but villagers manage to keep their serene attitude to whatever fate brings them. It is the traditional cultural system that enables them to rely on magic reasoning. The community supports this perspective with countless examples, because it is governed by patriarchal authority. In this respect, "It is good to do so!" becomes similar to a different answer to the question "Why?", a response that acknowledges the wisdom of the forefathers: "This is what the elders say we should do".

Belief is reinforced by the efficiency of superstitions which survive the generations only when verified. "Seeing is believing" every time and subjects often stress out the fact that superstitions are to be true, since they witnessed or heard about things that certify them. Hence, superstitions create a circular movement: people preserve the traditional set of rules they saw working, but any type of misfortune is immediately decoded with a magic meaning.

Convictions do not fade away once villagers leave their native places and come to live in towns. As recent work on Romanian urban anthropology showed (Hulubaş, 2014), urbanites learn to dissimulate their folk knowledge, but maintain their magic actions and beliefs for their own benefit.

This article provides systematic empirical data on the importance of superstitions for

the individual inner peace. We start by presenting the salient literature, and then we discuss ethnographic evidence recorded between 2011 and 2014 from urbanites, during a post doctoral research. More information from The Folkloric Archive of Moldova and Bukovina supports our analysis. As testimonies will show, serenity and anxiety seem to be the obverse and reverse of the same circulated coin, which is issued under a psycho-cultural pressure. These states of mind may be analyzed as products of an efficient self-deception, according to Joseph Hallinan: "Illusion, though, is a two-way street. It can work in both directions, making us feel ill or well" (2014: 207). Still, the main difference between personal convictions and superstitions is that the latter are empowered by "a fixed, closed and regulated system of cultural forms" as E. W. Hofstee declared in a 1950 conference (Beijer, 1963: 15).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Superstitions continue to intrigue scientists because of their vivacity which defies the modern rational world. Highly industrialized countries offer examples of such behaviour (Newport, Strausberg, 2001), but most studies approach superstitions as paranormal activity, and mix near-death experiences with ghosts stories, spiritualism and every day magic beliefs. A distinction should be made though, according to socio-historical grounds. Countries like Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine or even Serbia a few decades ago (Simić, 1973:71) benefit from a valid traditional information since they still experience the first phase of urbanization out of four (Abraham, 1991, 41). The rural

socio-cultural system is active despite an apparent submission in any country that recently started the industrialization process. On the other hand, nations that pass through the suburbanization phase, as a second stage of evolution (here being the case of the Western Europe) or a third phase, defined by absolute decentralization and counter urbanization (The United States of America and Japan are considered to illustrate it), suddenly experience an acute “need for roots” (Weil, 2003) and “invent” traditions (Hobsbawn, Ranger, 2000).

A possible explanation for the recrudescence of magic reasoning in these countries and for the persistency of rural behaviour in the recent urban environment lies in the perspective C. G. Jung proposed: “There exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually, but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents” (1990: 43). Collective unconscious triggers responses to critical situations when human vulnerability needs to be surpassed. The socio-cultural system proved to be reliable over the centuries and manages to provide answers when rational instruments fail. This is why “many of these rules are concerned with important human events: birth, marriage, illness, and death” (Vyse, 2014: 26).

Nevertheless, psychological anthropologists define this attitude towards life as proper for under-educated specialists (Blum, Blum, 1974; Jahoda,

1969). Furthermore, they explain social difficulties by these cultural hold backs: “superstitious belief appears associated with less effective personality functioning. For example, superstitions belief is associated with significantly greater concerns about death, lower college grade-point average, greater alienation and anomie” (Tobacyk, Shrader, 1991), and the list goes on. As we shall see in the next two sections, Romanians are not worried about death, their concern is more about assuring the eternal peace to the departed since their restlessness affects the lives of the living, too, according to traditional beliefs (*strigoii* or *moroi*, two categories of the unquiet dead, come to haunt the relatives and the entire community, unless all necessary rituals are performed).

Other findings revealed that “belief in positive superstitions could have their basis in quite different mechanisms, such as the promotion of self-efficacy and optimism”, a fact that draws a line between them and bad-luck superstitions (Wiseman, Watt, 2004: 1541). Performance has been observed to improve in superstitious contexts, based on a positive focus on good-luck agents (Damisch and Stoberock, 2010). Negative superstitions, such as foretelling unhappy events on the account of mysterious signs, are believed to cause “undesirable personality traits” (Vyse, 2014: X). While researchers believe that anxious individuals, with a control obsession are more likely to adhere to magic reasoning (Irwin, 2000; Jahoda, 1969), we should not forget that man tried to rule over the forces of the universe since the dawn of human kind. Superstitions survive today as a result of their successful tests over the

centuries and because they manage to offer comfort in seemingly hazardous situations.

Konrad Lorenz, the theoretician of instinctive behaviour triggered by external stimuli, is quoted in *The Psychology of Superstition* with a similar conclusion: “for a living being lacking insight into the relation between causes and effects it must be extremely useful to cling to a behavioural pattern which has once or many times proved to achieve its aim, and to have done so without danger” (Jahoda, 1969: 145).

The connection between cultural data and mental processes first inspired Wilhelm Wundt to use ethnology as a source for the complex interpretation of the human mind, along with philology, history, and anthropology (1880-1883: 482-502). He proposed a psycho-physical view of the self, explained on animist grounds (1886: 517). Moreover, Wundt considers that the cultural history of mankind is defined, on a psychological level, by three stages: the totemic age of primate men, the age of heroes and gods and, finally, the enlightened age of humanity. His interdisciplinary approach which he called “compared psychology” is built on a trinity: “language, myth and *Sitten* (customs and morals)” (Jahoda, 1992: 174).

The last decades offered numerous examples for the usefulness of ethnographic methods in sociological and psychological research, due to the fact that “they do not separate people’s behaviour from the context in which it is shown” (Marcén, Gimeno *et al.*, 2013: 761). Person-centred ethnography included the respondent’s emotions in the study of

specific aspects and also generated a vast body of literature. All these psychological approaches prove themselves fertile as they permit connections between various aspects of the human behaviour within the inherited cultural system.

PASSING THROUGH. A FOLKLORIC WELCOME TO LIFE CHANGES

The observation noted above – that birth, weddings and funeral, identified by Van Gennep as “rites of passage”, in 1909, gather most of the irrational convictions – is well-founded. Human condition brings an awareness of its vulnerability and magic comes to compensate it. Perhaps the most striking survival of superstitions takes place in towns, in the case of the urbanites and their children. They mimic adaptation well and fulfil “the promissory character” (Goffman, 1959: 2) of the social interaction, meaning that ex-villagers will behave and speak in an urban manner, but once the conditions change, urbanites return to a more rural attitude. The rites of passage are one of the contexts that still impose precise sets of rules to all the participants. Even the most suspicious individuals give in to magic gestures and irrational explanations because folk knowledge does not leave blank spaces in life perceptions and establishes clear limits between right and wrong. On the other hand, scientific causes often run out, as in the case of several childbirth situations.

The struggle against old beliefs is well depicted in the words of I. V., a 42 years old urbanite from Vânători – Iași. I asked her about the taboo of kicking off dogs while pregnant and she responded that it apparently causes *doggy disease* (“boală

cânească”) to the newly-born. “I don’t believe it, but when I was with child I never touched a dog!”. And she went on about the subject of folk beliefs: “we want to ignore them, but we are aware they exist... we must take them into consideration, too!”.

This mysterious illness, caused by the contagion with an impure animal, is indicated in several villages from five Moldavian districts, too (Hulubaş, 2012: 171). Its symptoms are the disappearance of food appetite, and, as a result, the child loses weight, experiences growth disorders and he is very weak (Ciubotaru, 2005: 125). The same unwanted physical manifestations were described in 1909, in connection with *wolf disease* and *snake disease* (Coşbuc: 20). They all have in common an animal agent believed to have caused terror to the pregnant woman. The fact that a century later people still remember this taboo and keep it active may be explained by the fact that the vulnerability of pregnancy has not changed, despite all scientific developments.

The respondent cited above managed to condense in few words all the duplicity the rural to urban shift provokes. The urbanite appears to despise “the elders’ nonsense” since only what can be proven with rational means matters, but once found in a tensed situation folk knowledge activates itself and provides inner peace if respected. Psycho-cultural mechanisms maintain a rural behaviour with obvious results.

Social confirmations of the superstitions come from a specific time of reality interpretations. All sad situations are explained magically as breaches of

traditional rules. G. M., who left the village Vulpăşeşti from Neamţ, 50 years ago, to live in Iaşi, declared that children with visible handicaps have been conceived during holiday eves. His unchanged conviction is found in most of the villages investigated in Moldova. The taboo is related to the deity a holiday celebrates or to sacred hypostasis of the week days such as Sunday or Friday. The scholar P. C. argued that today’s reverence for these days is actually drawn from a previous cultural substitution of astral deities worshiped at specific times of the week (2009: 30). The Nordic etymology of Sunday supports this perspective: in German, it is *Sonntag*, Norwegian and Danish – *Søndag*, Swedish – *Söndag*, Icelandic – *Sunnudagur*, Finnish – *Sunnuntai*.

Two types of testimonies support the veridicality of unreasonable folk beliefs: things witnessed by informants and indefinite situations they only heard about. The conviction that *it does happen*, for example, for a child to lose his sleep after someone visited him is sufficient proof for a mother to magically secure the infant.

Weddings represent another ontological challenge that can be surpassed with ritual instruments. Nevertheless, some superstitions managed to acquire a modern camouflage that almost makes symbols fade away. It is the case of the honking while driving the bride and the groom for the religious precession. All the participants behind the wheel produce this sound that may cause irritation to people passing-by. There is no trace of awareness about the mythical significance of the road taken. Nonetheless, the bride

and the groom's path to the church builds "a spatial and temporal axis" in the context of the initiatory purpose of the marital ceremony (Ciubotaru, 2009: 87). All transitory phases are susceptible to malevolent attacks and loud noises are supposed to scare off evil spirits. A century ago, guns were fired into the air and whips were snapped for the same reason. Today, an apparent need for attention veils this archaic gesture.

James George Frazer published, in 1909, a book entitled *Psyche's Task*. According to the Scottish scholar, marriage is one of the four social institutions that benefited from a strengthened respect gained from superstitions. Crops are the first to suffer from taboo breaches, and eventually the entire community. Although only "the rules of sexual morality" are discussed with countless examples from all over the world, a clear connection between the man and the universe is obvious. The social indictment of an unmarried Dyak girl with child is grounded on the general repercussions: "it is offensive to the higher powers, who, instead of always chastising the culprits, punish the tribe by visiting its members with misfortunes" (Frazer, 1913: 48). Romanian beliefs also are that pregnant girls attract cold rough winds in the summer or sunshine rain (Hulubaş, 2012: 99-100). These abnormal meteorological reactions both sanction and draw general attention to a broken social norm.

The powerful conviction that the entire set of wedding ritual rules has to be obeyed made M. D. (65 years old, she came to live in Iaşi, 45 years ago, from the village of Rusenii Noi) threaten her own son, who seemed to disregard the magic importance

of the old ways. More exactly, he did not accept the "Hen" rite (*Găina*), which consisted in bringing a whole roasted chicken (including the head and legs) to the godfather or to the groom. The fried bird is garnished with flowers, beads and sometimes with a cigarette in its beak. The groom is tested during this rite, since he has to prove the ability to break the hen with bare hands, a gesture that signifies the marital union. The tradition demands that the hen is only brought in the case of a virgin bride, dances and ritual comic sayings also being performed by the cook who carries the hen.

M. D. frequently refers to ritual infringements as a source of unhappy events that can even affect the entire community. She declared that hot summers and the periods of draught are, in fact, caused by the women in confinement who walk on public roads without having been subjected to a specific religious ceremony intended to purify them from the sin of birth. Hence, she preferred not to be present to her son's wedding rather than witnessing an imminent disaster in her own family.

Urbanites achieve serenity not only by carefully respecting every traditional law, but also by letting other persons find out about the auspicious gestures to be done during the rites of passage. D. C. (age 29, she lived in Bălţaţi – Iaşi, until 9 years ago) told us that she tells what to do and seldom people ask her about the ceremonial rules, since they are familiar with her rural background. Besides the promptitude of stating the customs, people that benefit from a traditional memory develop a sort of indifference towards all possible reactions such as

indignation or contempt: "I tell the others what to do. They agree to it, fine, otherwise, so be it!" (M. G., 45 years old, she was born in Poiana Teiului – Neamț), "I know this has to be put [into the ritual bathing water of the recently baptized child], put it if you want to, if don't, fine. Yes! Afterwards they may say *But we didn't know about it!* Well, if I did... I had to tell them!" (S. G., 43 years old, she left the village of Roșcani, Iași district, 28 years ago and now lives in Iași). The reason for this courageous rural behaviour that deletes all the previous urban appearance of the subject is stated clearly by D. C.: "People don't realize it many times, but it [bad things] happens and since I know stuff... I realize what caused it. They wouldn't admit it".

Personal confirmations use this socially predetermined code to understand reality facts. Funeral ceremonies, as the last of the rites of passage we mentioned, also have long time magic repercussions. The general belief is that when a soul leaves this world unhappy he cannot achieve eternal peace and returns to haunt his family or community. This is why the entire group watches over the burying rituals – each member is in the danger to be disturbed by the restless soul.

Special attention is paid to accidental deaths (such as drowning or death by gunshot) and to the departed unbaptised babies. The latter are believed to become a sort of demons called *moroi* – from the old Slav word *Mora* – "witch" or "spectre". Alexander Haggerty Krappe related this word to the German *mahr*, "mare", a chthonian deity, the Polish *mora*, the Czech *mura*, "nightmare", Latin *mors*, *mortis* "death", the Lithuanian *Maras*,

"death", "plague", and the Latvian *Meris*, "plague" (1938, 229). Romanian *moroi* weep, according to people's testimonies, at night time and ask to be baptised. Special religious service is performed for them on Saint John's holiday (January, the 7th) and alms are given away for their redemption. M. D. followed each ritual step and attributes her familial welfare to this cultural obedience: "you had to go where the baby is buried, you go there and sprinkle that holy water while saying *Our Father*. I did so, I baptised them, I had religious service made for them, just as you do to any departed! I had religious service and I made them the tree... I took a tree branch, as they call it, and I put something on each bough: small shoes, an undershirt, underpants, stockings, a pink suit, if it was a girl, a blue one if a boy, I took to the church the ritual mush (*colivă*) forty days in row, I did (...) how do you call it... the ceremony for forty days since the death, I had alms table, I spoke to the priest and we came home, I called many children [to give them alms] and what do you know... things turned out so nice for us...".

Villagers are well-known for their thorough funeral preparations; any item that escapes the mind provokes remorse and consequently dreams and apparent sightings of the defunct. In 2004, I recorded data about the *afterlife house* (*coliba mortului*) custom from Vultureu – Vrancea. This practice is frequent in Southern Moldova and consists in a ritual "stage" setting of a house built on a wooden structure with walls made out of blankets. It is believed that the deceased will live in this shelter in his post-existence, hence everything one uses in

the every day life has to be placed inside: a bed with coverings, a table and a chair, dishes, a lamp, a carpet, a broom, several outfits and shoes, a mirror and so on. The purpose of this ritual performed 40 days after the death is to “transcendentalize all the goods given away by the family for the departed to use them” (Ciubotaru, 2014:334).

Every single piece is offered as alms to people witnessing the ceremony. Ș. V. (65 years old) from Vulturu – Vrancea declared that she made this house for her lost husband and she gave the bed to her son, although she knew that people outside the family should receive the alms (beliefs are that the offerings produce more joy when given to those in need and the deceased are more likely to “benefit” from them). As a result, she dreamt her dead husband sleeping on the floor, next to the bed in which her son was lying. She told him to get in the bed because he was shivering, but he responded that he could not disturb their son. Immediately after this “sign”, Ș. V. repeated the ceremony and gave away another bed for her husband.

The superstitious level of reactions towards life events has a two-sided shape: on one hand people feel the need to maintain the old set of rules despite the modern context. They achieve serenity and confidence in the future outcomes of life situations by focusing on the fact that all has been done from the traditional point of view. This benefit has been observed decades ago, when Gustav Jahoda remarked the important effect of superstitions on uncertainty and anxiety relief (1969: 134).

On the other hand, superstitions may no longer be obeyed nowadays and some chose to disregard them. Still, a certain awareness of this cultural crime sends different signals to the person in distress in the form of dreams or tendentious interpretations of the following events. The next section will provide two examples of this opposite situation, when spiritual heritage becomes a source of angst.

EXPECTING THE WORSE

Medical literature abounds in examples of the placebo response to fictive remedies. Joseph Hallinan enlarged the perspective on this mental process that defines almost everyday human actions and speaks about “kidding ourselves” as an inherited behaviour: “our observations of the world are seldom neutral. When we look, we look with a purpose – we don’t look *at* something; we look *for* something. (...) This search is unconsciously guided by our own expectations. We tend to see what we expect to see and to experience what we expect to experience. Yet, we are seldom, if ever, aware of this influence” (2014: 205).

Two medically trained persons will illustrate below a specific state of mind caused by ritual infringement. The first is an urbanite midwife who found herself in the impossibility to obey a taboo. The second case reveals a late phase of the evolution from the traditional system to the modern reasoning. Superstitions lost their magic explanations and sound irrational to present day educated people. The last stage before acculturation consists in a disobeying attitude that is always risky assumed.

The confinement period is universally recognized in the cultures of the world. "The scope of this enclosure is not only to protect the health of the mother. It permits thwarting the possible attempts of the enchantresses to hurt the mother of the child in a time when they are both the most vulnerable. This isolation equally permits to keep the new mother on the social margin. She has to stay away from the community life because she is considered impure" (Bartoli, 2007: 207).

Romanian taboos during the forty days of confinement include cooking, feeding the animals, walking on public roads and taking out water from the fountain (Hulubaş, 2012: 237-239). The first interdiction is related to the fire proximity that should not be offended by the ritual impurity of the new mother. Cooking took place on the hearth, where the Greek Hestia or the Roman Vesta once dwelled. A certain cultural memory of these deities remains since coercions protect this space as a source of the family's welfare or misery. Moreover, P. C. found and discussed the hearth cult in mythologies from around the world to reveal the implications of one Romanian wedding custom (1988).

This cultural background helps us understand better an episode that E. G. (70 years old, she returned to her native village Roşcani, after 45 years spent in Iaşi) passed through in her confinement period. She told us: "especially you shouldn't make the fire, because if you handle fire the child may be burned or hurt by the fire... Now what can I tell you... I tend to believe this one. When I had my second son I lived in a house in Păcurari and my baby was not baptized. Of course I

had to... my husband was working; I had to cook, to do something. After a while, at some point when my boy grew up, I had a niece over my place and she ironed something on the table; he climbed the table and the iron fell on the back of his palm. He has a sign here, a burn. Here, all his hand burned. At that point I realized and I said: «I handled the fire...» [while being in parturition]". We drew her attention on the fact that the fire from the cook is not the same with the hearth fire she knew in her native village. She answered that it is still a fire.

Such an attitude almost implies that the culturally guilty subject expected a punishment after he/she broke the taboo. All the loose connections (the burns are caused by an ironing machine and not by a source of fire, the hearth is a gas cook) she made around the fire symbol are irrefutable proofs for E. G., because the cultural pressure from her rural education imprinted in her mind the idea of imminent repercussions.

The magic cause – effect relationship induces a certain sense of order for life events. The fear of hazard and the unpleasant feeling of vulnerability to arbitrary situations have been universal features of the human race since the dawn of civilization. Magic appeared as an antidote and created the illusion of fate control. The modern men are not that far from this irrational perspective, since they use self-deception frequently: "we create, in short, our own cover stories. These then serve as a kind of lens through which we filter our experience of the world. They may produce a distorted sense of reality, but that distortion can serve a vital function, often by making the world

appear to be a rational, predictable place we can control" (Hallinan, 2014: 2).

The second exemplification of this expectant mental attitude is found in the same confinement context but it deals with a different belief found in the South-East of Europe. When birth at home was not yet forbidden, empirical midwives assisted the labour with therapeutic, psychological and magic methods (Hulubaş, 2012: 186-191). Folk beliefs are that the impure blood of birth defiles the midwife's hands and the woman she assisted has to pour water on her hands, to ask for forgiveness and to present her with new sleeves (a two-metre long white fabric or a loom woven towel). The ritual was active in Russia during the last century (Listova, 1992:130) and took the form of a national day in Bulgaria (Stavreva and Quek, 2008: 67).

Once moved into the clinical environment, birth lost its empirical agent but it surprisingly kept the ritual gift for the midwife. Even today in hospitals from Romania new mothers offer soap, a towel, and some money to the maternity nurses that assisted their labour (Hulubaş, 2014: 153-157). The initial meaning of purification is almost lost, but the idea of a mandatory gesture continues to put pressure on the modern women.

C. M., a resident doctor of 33 years old from Iaşi town, knew that the towel and the soap was intended to magically induce cleanness and health of the baby's skin, but when she gave birth she only offered money. Soon, the newborn suffered from pyoderma and her family accused her of having caused that by disregarding the ritual.

The absence of traditional information made this educated second generation town inhabitant fill in the gaps with logical deductions. Why would a towel and a soap be helpful at childbirth? Obviously, for hygienic reasons. Hence, the expectation of a magic punishment was moulded in this direction, and events immediately confirmed the cultural scenario. This is a clear case of a psycho-social self deception. Folk culture is lost but the community maintains its authority in imposing old practice. Since all the chances of achieving serenity were vanished by the guilty awareness of disobeying a rule, the latent angst sought for the first sign to irrupt.

This context of psychological and social effects of folk knowledge is facilitated by the recent shift from the rural life to the urban environment. A similar phenomenon was revealed in Ukraine: "The political, social, cultural, and daily life of an ordinary urban Ukrainian is explained by members of the community not through natural causes, but through traditional understanding of the way things happen. If your husband has left you, you must look for the white witch who will help you win him back; if you are frequently sick, you must look for the black witch who is making you sick. People sincerely believe in superhuman (demonic) influences in their lives, and try to protect themselves with the help of traditional knowledge. They have done it for hundreds of years and still do" (Golovakha-Hicks, 2008: 43).

Over the thousands of years, people learned to rely on their groups and on the cultural code of life events in order to assure themselves that fate is not a cruel

hazard. When the spiritual heritage dims in the process of advanced urbanization, personal convictions or invented traditions compensate the new acquired vulnerability. Good-luck superstitions are some of the most widely spread beliefs among modern people and their prominent effect is self-induced serenity.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, there has been a substantial interest on the personal convictions power to influence miraculous healing, the improvement of capabilities or to bring about a better health or a mental attitude. In the case of Romanian folk knowledge, early cultural imprints in the mind make a thorough selection of the auspicious and ominous actions. Most of the times, the explanation that “It is right to do so” offers enough support for a continuous transmission of superstitions. Empirical evidence has been presented above to suggest that tranquillity and anxiety are the two faces of the same socio-cultural pressure exerted by a rural type of society. The article thus contributes to the debate by adding ethnographical data. The magic understanding of life situations offers stable rules and patterns that permit a peaceful reception of changes. Recently urbanized countries hence offer the possibility to analyze mental mechanisms that led to the modern superstitious behaviour.

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