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STATUS AFTER DEATH. UNDERSTANDING POSTHUMOUS SOCIAL INFLUENCE THROUGH A CASE STUDY ON THE CHRISTIAN-ORTHODOX TRADITION

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Abstract: In this paper we propose a conceptualization of 'posthumous social status' as a performative reality accomplished through collective actions that are materially and symbolically legitimated. We question the classical definitions of social status that lead to oversocialized theoretical models, and we argue for the necessity to reconsider the relation between social status and social roles in order to gain insight into the reality of a social presence after death. On this account, we claim that the prestige attached to one's position in society is a social phenomenon produced through autopoietic systems of social influence rather than a pre-existent and stable feature embedded in hierarchical structures and actions. Therefore, we clarify the link between social status and systems of influence through a case study in which we discuss how the Christian-Orthodox tradition is socially organized as a powerful realm of doing posthumous social status.

Key Words: Posthumous social status, social immortality, posthumous prestige, social status, social influence, systems of influence, performativity, autopoietic social systems

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Immortality is one of people's major concerns. Human beings are interested in transcending death, at least symbolically, by leaving their mark on the world. Social existence does not conclude in death, and various forms of "being present in society" unfold through commemorative practices. Still, sociology often ignores the reality of a posthumous social life. Classical sociological theories are mainly focused on describing and understanding how individuals are present in society during their lifetime, thus considering the antehumous (before-death) dimension of existence as the primary object of study. Even if posthumous life is an undisputed social phenomenon, a coherent and insightful sociological conceptualization is yet to be established in order to designate how people remain present in society after their death. In this context, we aim to propose a meaningful vocabulary to make sense of posthumous social life by relying on classical sociological concepts such as social status[1], social influence[2] and autopoietic systems[3]. Ultimately, we aim to propose a possible explanation of the mechanisms of gaining 'social immortality'[4].

We start from the assumption that existing posthumously is equivalent with having a certain prestige beyond death. As classical sociological theories suggest, prestige is closely related to the status-role system functioning in a society. However, we could not use the understanding of prestige in terms of roles to approach posthumous status. While antehumous status is defined as the prestige attached to a social role, posthumous status is not suitable for the same definition, because after death persons cannot engage in plain and intentional actions, and thus they do not play roles anymore. Although dead people cannot act directly in order to fulfil roles, it makes sense to further consider them influential persons in society. This is why we propose to reconceptualize social status and to understand both the antehumous and posthumous status in terms of social influence, rather than in terms of roles.

We show that antehumous and posthumous status is a mode of doing (or undoing) influence. Therefore, doing influence is a result of certain forms of social organisation. Influence is performed in action and it is socially accomplished through material and symbolic resources. If we approach social status in terms of influence, then we need a vocabulary to discuss "doing social status" instead of "having social status". Social status is achieved through collective actions legitimated by different social institutions and afforded within socio-material structures. On these grounds, we propose a pragmatic understanding of social status that might follow the same rationales employed by social theoreticians to understand gender. According to this perspective, we might think of doing gender rather than having a gender. Therefore, gender is not a pre-existing structural reality, but a social accomplishment embedded in everyday practice[5]. Gender is a system of classification similar to social

status, therefore we will approach them in analogous terms. While doing gender is doing differences between individuals in terms of relations of domination-subordination, doing influence is doing status in terms of prestige.

In sociological theories, we identify three systems of antehumous influence (i.e. systems through which people come to have effects in the world and on others): (1) systems of institutional authority, (2) systems of acknowledgment, and (3) systems of extended agency. Under systems of institutional authority, influence belongs to people who occupy positions that empower them to exercise control over others. In addition, influence might be understood as an unintended consequence of recognizing someone's merits and achievements in a particular domain. This process incorporates systems of acknowledgment. Last but not least, under systems of extended agency, influence could be mediated by different instances and environments, which means that influence is detached from intentions and overt acts. In each of the three aforementioned cases, influence comes to be distributed among people, objects, institutions, and other cultural resources and assets.

We consider that these three systems of influence also characterise the posthumous realm, given that they are transposed in autopoietic systems that support the influence of persons beyond death. Social immortality is achieved by creating autopoietic systems of influence through which people may generate effects in the world, irrespective of their embodied and individualised actions. Autopoietic systems of influence are social worlds capable of turning deceased persons into powerful actors. These systems become self-sustaining by creating and recreating means for individuals to engage in coordinated actions. Autopoietic systems are relevant to groups of people, for whom it makes sense to perpetuate channels that support particular types of posthumous social presence. The worlds accomplished through autopoietic systems are distinctive realities produced through discourses, performed in interactions, and transposed in objects and elements of material culture. Also, they are supported by social institutions which give legitimacy to forms of social organization that make certain people exert influence in the world.

We illustrate this view by discussing the Christian-Orthodox religion as a realm of doing posthumous social status through autopoietic systems. We consider Christian-Orthodox religion as being a particularly important epitome of understanding social immortality. Firstly, the Christian-Orthodox religion might be understood as a unitary autopoietic system to accomplish the posthumous influence of Jesus Christ. Also, the Christian-Orthodox tradition is based on a multitude of autopoietic systems that support the posthumous influence of different people under systems of authority, acknowledgement and extended agency. Each component of the Christian-Orthodox tradition is carried out to support the posthumous

presence of Jesus Christ through dogmas, rituals, spiritual experiences, and other performative actions. Organised on autopoietic systems of influence, the Christian-Orthodox religion becomes a powerful instrument to make people aware of the world[6], as well as a powerful resource to build an experience of the self and, ultimately, of the postself[7].

We thus argue that posthumous presence is supported by the development of autopoietic systems with theoretical consequences on conceptualising social status (antehumously and posthumously). In this context, we conceptualize social status as a performative reality, rather than as a structural constitutive one. The understanding we propose in the paper has a double significance. On the one hand, it is a contribution which explains how persons become socially immortal through the functioning of autopoietic systems developed both on religious and secular principles. On the other hand, it is a proposal to redefine the sociological vocabulary. Hence, we consider that social status should not be conceptualized in relation with social roles, but in terms of influence.

In what follows, we present four approaches to social status in classical sociological theories. Then, we propose a decoupling of social status from roles, which leads to a conceptualization of social status as a performative reality. This understanding supports our view of posthumous social status as a social phenomenon accomplished through autopoietic systems of influence. We illustrate this argument through a case study in which we discuss how *ecclesiastical patriarchate*, *ktetorikon dikaion* and *hagiōsýnē* are constructed as autopoietic systems that make certain persons influential beyond death.

From "having status" to "doing status"

It is a truism to reveal "social status" as a ubiquitous concept in sociological discourse, but it is a truism which is worth pondering on. From textbooks designed to establish a basic sociological terminology to the most complex philosophical treatises, from influential classical theories to postmodernist reflections of nowadays, from trivial assumptions characterising common-sense knowledge to the hard findings operating under the auspice of an elitist scientific community, the concept of social status was proven to be a significant tool to describe how societies are organised.

Social status as a pre-existent and structural constitutive reality

In this section we present four modes of understanding social status in theory and research. We show that the concept of social status is rarely used as a separate designator, but rather as a proxy device used to make sense of the social world. We present how the arsenal of sociological thinking has absorbed the concept of social status, which came to be

generically used to designate the relative position of individuals in systems of stratification, most often pointing to the honour or the prestige assigned to one's social standing.

Employed in different forms of reasoning, the concept of social status has a sort of attributive power, in that it comes to be eloquent, not by virtue of its purport, but as a matter of instrumentalities conveyed in its semantic structure: status tells something about systems as a whole, about types of relationships, about normative accomplishments, about patterns of resource allocation, about evaluative models etc. The concept of status does not circumscribe itself a meaning (it is an appendage) and it becomes nugatory when not applied in relation to other proprieties or features.

For instance, it might be observed that the notion of status has rarely been employed independently of other signifiers. "Status" was usually referred to:

- in conceptual junctions: status groups[8], contradictions of status[9], status symbols[10], status perceptions[11], status characteristics[12], status inconstancy[13], status processes[14], status beliefs[15], status rights[16];
- or in conceptual couplets: social status and equality[17], social status and social participation[18], social status and social order[19], social status and social influence[20], social status and power[21].

By questioning this approach, we propose a pragmatic reformulation of the concept through which we aim to surmount oversocialized models in understanding social status. In other words, we claim that society is not structured on systems of status, but social status is accomplished in action and it might be subject of change and redefinition. Therefore, we propose to understand social status as a performative reality instead of referring to it as a pre-existent or structural constitutive one.

Social status as a medium that produces sociality

Firstly, social status is understood as a pre-existent resource people rely on to construct sociality in interaction. By referring to symbols of "class status", Erving Goffman (1951) argues that "co-operative activity based on a differentiation and integration of statuses is a universal characteristic of social life"[22]. In this sense, each interaction requires adequate communication of social statuses by employing sign-vehicles of displaying one's position (status symbols). Furthermore, Goffman claims that status symbols are different from esteem symbols in that "status symbols designate the position an occupant has, not the way in which he fulfils it"[23]. Hence, compared to status symbols which incorporate rights and obligations, esteem symbols embody standards of performance, by displaying the degree to which a person succeeds in fulfilling social roles. According to his perspective, a status symbol has categorial and expressive significance:

> By definition, then, a status symbol carries categorial significance, that is, it serves to identify the social status of the person who makes it. But it may also carry expressive significance, that is, it may express the point of view, the style of life, and the cultural values of the person who makes it, or may satisfy need created by the imbalance of activity in his particular social position.[24]

Social status as a metaphor of social inequalities

Secondly, the concept of social status incorporates any definition that could support social inequalities or account for them as pre-existing realities. According to other theoretical perspectives, social status is used to make sense of social inequalities. Hence, social status is understood as a joint conceptualisation of different sources of reputation, prestige and honour, that are organised differently from society to society. Social status is used to define the advantages and disadvantages of individuals in relation to others.

Max Weber (1946), in his posthumously published text, discusses status groups in contrast to classes, both of them understood as phenomena of distributing power within society[25]. According to the Weberian perspective, status groups differentiate between individuals on the basis of their estimation of honour inscribed in codes of action, while classes allocate individuals in categories according to the economic criteria of ownership.

> With some over-simplification, one might thus say that 'classes' are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas 'status groups' are stratified according to their principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special 'styles of life'.[26]

Therefore, status distinctions guaranteed by conventions, laws of conduct and social practices organise individuals in "amorphous kinds of communities"[27] shaping a system of stratification guaranteed by socially agreed privileges and honorific entitlements. The broad register of interpretation uses the concept of social status in theoretical approaches to social class, which provide an understanding of action according to issues of differences between individuals and to inequalities in the distribution of power characterising a given society.

Social status as a multidimensional power structure

The employment of status in discussions of inequalities and power is one of the most salient approaches to theories of social structure. Understood as an organising force of social life, social status is ultimately

used to describe how societies are socially organised by referring to normative and culturally-relevant patterns of distributing symbolic resources among its members. Therefore, status comes to encapsulate assets of power significant in various social settings. This is sustained by theoretical references to social status, not as a unified descriptor, but as a multidimensional construct: economic status[28], political status[29], prestige[30], charismatic status[31], reward status[32] etc. This understanding of status on multiple levels supports discussions on status inconsistency, either in terms of conflicts between roles[33], or in terms of violations of expectations[34].

Social status as an explanatory construct

Moreover, social status is understood as an explanatory construct. Social status comes to be measured by income, educational level, occupation, monetary value of possessions, or other quantifiable characteristics, thus being constantly employed as an independent variable in empirical research. Integrated in correlations or causal models, it is used as an explanatory factor of human behaviour and brought up to stand for various issues: political liberalism[35], participation in voluntary associations[36], decision to help[37], health[38], support for reform in education[39], cultural consumption[40] etc. These studies are based on the anthropometric tradition of measuring social status, among which lies the interest in developing an "Index of Social Status"[41] as a method to rank people according to valued social assets and standings, which in turn makes social status define the averageness and extraordinariness of people. Of concern to us is the variability of operational definitions used to measure social status in each of these types of inquiry, pointing to some flexibility in working with the concept that makes social status an instrument that could designate anything that serves the purpose of exploration. Therefore, these generic *modi operandi* have implications in understanding how various social processes work. Not only do they undermine the power of a widespread concept to enrich the perspectives used to describe social reality, but they also give rise to self-containing approaches that explain a phenomenon by itself.

(Re)conceptualising social status as a performative reality

The system of social status appears as a pre-existing and passive reality in each of the approaches described above. This understanding results in building oversocialized models to understand the immediate world. Social status is considered to reside in systems of stratification and social structures. Therefore, social status appears as a force beyond the individual control: individuals may change their social status through intergenerational or intragenerational social mobility as long as society is permeable, or organised to allow a shift of positions.

Classical sociological theories seem to explain various social phenomena or collective actions by considering the social status of the individuals involved. For example, the positions occupied by individuals in a system are used to explain why individuals act in a way or another. By understanding social status as a taken-for-granted reality, systems of social status appear as one of the multiple modes of making sense of the world. Using social status to explain various phenomena produces the same error as using gender to explain social arrangements. Even if social status is widely used in causal models, its explanatory power is null mainly because the concept of social status designates how social differences might be interpreted, rather than describing how they are organised. By using social status as an explanatory factor of human action, social differences come to be explained by themselves, thus ignoring the fact that social differences are produced through actions, and that social differences do not exist irrespective of human actions.

The main problem of classical approaches is that they understand social status as a taken-for-granted reality. These theories do not question how social status becomes a significant feature in defining individuals as members of society. Generally, social status is understood as a reality that exists as such, and that describes social structures or systems of stratification. Social status is understood both as a subjective reality, something that individuals internalize through processes of socialization, and as an objective reality that exists irrespective of what individuals think or how they act. Thus, we consider that in developing theories of social status what remains to be decided is the ontological character of social status. How does social status exist as a reality? What kind of reality is social status? Generally, social status is described as a reality because the individuals, as members of society, come to experience it in relation with others. In addition, it is described as a reality resulting from different configurations of power characterising a particular society.

Social status is considered a quality that describes the positions occupied by individuals in society. In classical sociological theories, social status is ultimately understood as a taken-for-granted property used to construe roles played by people in particular social settings. This conceptualisation has led to the emergence of theoretical models in which social status is employed to explain different social phenomena. As an alternative to these approaches, we propose a mode of understanding social status as a property of action, instead of considering that it resides in social structures and systems of stratification. In other words, we show that social status is actually what is happening in society, instead of being a cause of what is happening in society.

Based on the limitations of classical sociological theories to develop autonomous (not proxy) theoretical models of social status, we propose to reconstruct the sociological vocabulary that integrates the concept of social status. Firstly, we propose to change perspectives and start talking

about "doing social status" instead of talking about "having social status".

1. We start from reconsidering the ontological character of social status. We do not understand social status as a constitutive or pre-existing reality, but as a reality accomplished through social actions. Therefore, we consider that social status does not reside in social structures or systems of stratification, but it emerges through actions. Social status is not a reality that describes individuals, even if it might be experienced as such, but it is socially constructed to represent an attribute that describes individuals.
2. Secondly, we propose to rethink how the concept of social status is relevant in sociological knowledge production. We consider that the concept of social status might be effectively employed to understand social process. Still, its value does not reside in its explanatory power, rather, social status might be used as a conceptual resource to describe how social worlds are organised. It means that we propose to start considering social status as the phenomenon that is being produced, instead of considering it a determinant of social phenomena and actions.
3. Moreover, social status is not something that individuals possess as members of a society, rather, social status is a performative accomplishment produced through ongoing and coordinated actions (of self and others), embedded in the material, institutional and symbolic organisation of the world.

Through social status we make sense of how individuals count in society. Their social status defines how persons come to be present in society or in particular situations. In other words, social status is used to define the social presence of individuals; it is a mode of integrating individuals in society and of defining them as relevant members of that particular society. Social status is socially constructed as an individual attribute, but it is not ontologically an individual attribute. By understanding people as intelligible and predictable actors, "doing social status" is ultimately a process through which people are invested with influence.

Therefore, we understand social status as an ongoing accomplishment produced through actions undertaken by different actors (human and non-human), who establish interactions with one another and with their social environment. However, we claim that the status of individuals does not depend only or predominantly on their own acts. Moreover, social status is not exclusively related with how individuals fulfil roles and expectations. Social status is not defined by the positions individuals occupy, but it depends on how persons are empowered to act

and gain influence in systems of symbolic configurations. Social status is a mode of investing people with influence discursively, materially and interactionally, in institutional contexts.

We illustrate this mode of understanding by exploring how posthumous status is accomplished. After their death, people cannot directly participate in the world, they cannot fulfil roles and they cannot be held accountable for their own actions. However, they are assigned with statuses as performative realities accomplished through practices in which the influence of the dead persons is performed, distributed and materialized through autopoietic systems.

Doing social status through autopoietic systems of influence

We propose to understand social status by employing the same vocabulary used to understand gender as a system of classification[42]. This means understanding social status as resulting in actions through which social differences and hierarchical structures are created and recreated. Social status (like gender) is produced through action and, at the same time, it structures action[43]. Social status comes to be performed and associated with particular displays, being defined in the relations between individuals and in situations in which differences between individuals appear relevant.

According to the classical perspectives on social status, the kind of social status people are assigned with depends on the role they play and on the influence they acquire in particular situations. In this case, influence is understood as an individualised and predefined mode of engagement in action. Typically, to interpret individuals as having a high status is to consider both what kind of actions they can perform in relation with other people, and what the consequences of their actions are. In defining individuals' social statuses, there are not only their own actions that matter, but also other actions produced by definite or indefinite agents, by objects and other elements of material culture, by institutions and by systems of beliefs. The social status of individuals does not depend exclusively on their own agency, but it results in performative actions in which individuals may or may not directly participate.

In other words, social status is not a structural constitutive, but a performative reality. Social status is achieved by doing and undoing influence. We consider that the influence persons have in society is not supported exclusively by their individualised and embodied actions, but it is also achieved through social institutions that legitimate discourses, materialities, and actions. Doing social status is doing various forms of influence, as a result of performative affordances. Systems of social status are actually systems of social influence. So, doing social status is doing (or undoing) influence by starting from the premise that social status is associated with a position with a more or less degree of influence.

We define the performative character of social status by considering the following principles:

1. *Social influence is produced through discourse:* In this sense, we refer to the performativity of language[44] by considering that "saying something is doing something"[45]. We also consider that if we define something as real it becomes real in its consequences[46].
2. *Social influence is performed in interactions:* Social status is achieved in concrete social settings whether or not the status carrier participates in these interactions[47].
3. *Social influence is transposed in objects and elements of material culture:* Non-human actors may participate as well in defining the social status of a person[48]. The material organisation plays an important role in producing social status, both by considering that it represents an infrastructure that shapes the possibilities to act[49], and by considering its capacity to reflect different social meanings and to objectify social realities[50].
4. *Social influence is institutionally legitimated:* Various normative structures support actions of producing social status[51].

Different kinds of social realities relevant for particular individuals and groups emerge with the performative production of social status. Social status results from performative actions, but it is a reality which in turn contributes to the development of various social worlds. Doing social status is doing realities that legitimate social arrangements.

In common sense reasoning, social influence requires agents' ability, either to exert effects on others, or to modify particular states of affairs. On this account, someone's influence appears as a function of how roles are distributed within a society. In other words, occupying certain positions provides individuals with the ability to influence others and to engage themselves in particular types of actions. Social influence is understood as being embedded in the systems of roles which individuals play by having or not having access to material and symbolic resources. So, we can observe two types of influence: positional influence and personal influence[52]. Positional influence describes systems of authority. It is related to the possibility of someone having authority over others, thus referring to the situation in which people are empowered to produce changes as a matter of their ability to apply rewards and punishments. Personal influence describes systems of acknowledgement. According to this perspective, persons gain influence in society due to their credibility, stirred admiration, knowledge, or expertise. The two systems of influence are not mutually exclusive since they overlap in various social contexts. However, beside these two systems of influence, we may identify cases of mediated influence, specifically when we observe that someone acts in the

world and exercise influence on others by means of a medium: laws, monitoring systems, objects, etc.

In classical theories, social status represents a way of assigning values to roles and actions. Consequently, social status is a mode of defining persons by considering the roles they fulfil and the actions they undertake. Thus understood, it seems that it does not make sense to discuss about posthumous status as long as the dead persons do not have agency and cannot be defined by the roles they are supposed to fulfil. On the posthumous realm, some persons are worth more than others, even if they do not have the possibility to act and to directly participate in the world. After their death, individuals gain a type of social presence through commemorative practices that basically represent modes of doing social status with implications on understanding human condition from the point of view of death as a rite of passage[53]. Therefore, doing social status is accomplishing the social presence of individuals through different actions in which they may or may be not direct participants and through actions in which human and non-human actors interact with one another.

The main point of the paper relies on the assertion that people gain influence even if they do not act in the world, so that influence is not a function of agency. Social influence is supported by the persons' embodied and individualised actions, as well as by various social processes that escape their control. In Weberian terms, social influence is located within larger social and cultural contexts[54]. In other words, influence is a social accomplishment, so it makes sense to talk about doing posthumous status in terms of doing posthumous influence. On the one hand, posthumous influence is the result of antehumous actions. On the other hand, it appears as an extension of antehumous influence through autopoietic system. Sometimes separate autopoietic systems might be developed to build persons as influential agents after death, even if they did not exert influence during their lifetime.

Moreover, we illustrate how social immortality is possible through autopoietic systems of influence. Our perspective is inspired by Nikolas Luhmann's understanding of autopoietic as self-creation or self-sustaining. Luhmann suggests that we speak of autopoietic whenever the elements of a system are reproduced by the elements of the system. According to Luhmann, social systems are reproduced though the basis of communication and if we consider communication as action, then autopoietic systems reproduce themselves on the basis of action[55]. In autopoietic systems "different elements of the system interact in such a way as to produce and re-produce the elements of the system"[56]. Still, our understanding is not grounded on functionalist perspectives, since we do not consider the system as being constituted by a series of interdependent components. We understand "systems" as forms of social organisation accomplished through collective actions institutionally legitimated and facilitated by different material affordances. Autopoietic systems

represent social worlds through which persons continue being socially present beyond their death, as we are going to illustrate further in the paper, with reference to processes of doing posthumous status in Christian-Orthodox tradition.

Systems of posthumous influence in the Christian-Orthodox tradition

Systems of authority: ecclesiastical patriarchate

In general terms, systems of authority might be defined as a set of social positions which empower persons to undertake different actions, otherwise impossible to accomplish. Therefore, some persons come to be assigned with authority and power by virtue of the position they occupy. This position puts them in the role of taking important decisions and undertaking significant actions. People that antehumously occupy functions of authority are more likely to gain posthumous presence, since they are more likely to accomplish influential actions or, at least, be accountable for actions that have further effects in the world. For example, persons that occupy public positions come to be posthumously present because their position amplify the effects of their actions and augment their involvement in the world. However, occupying certain influential functions during lifetime increases the probability to achieve posthumous presence and to extend their individual time capital[57] after physical death with a posthumous component. Such a situation might be illustrated by considering the institution of ecclesiastical patriarchate in the Christian-Orthodox tradition.

The Christian-Orthodox perspective on ecclesiastical patriarchate is significantly different than the perspectives grounded in Catholicism or encountered in other Western Christian cults. Firstly, the main differences might be observed by considering that, in the Christian-Orthodox tradition, the Patriarch is not appropriated as the deputy of Jesus Christ on Earth. Moreover, compared to the Pope, the Patriarch is not understood as a unique, perfect or infallible person through whom God expresses His wish. The same is true for other positions in ecclesiastic structures. The role of patriarchal seats, as well as those of bishop, archbishop, metropolitan or other clerical seats, is that of representing believers than directing their behaviour. Therefore, patriarchs, bishops, metropolitans and parish priests have, on the one hand, the role of mentoring believers towards achieving salvation and, on the other hand, the role of keeping the Christian-Orthodox dogma unaltered against possible reformations. In comparison with papacy, which is understood as an institution through which the will of God is expressed and promulgated, the ecclesiastical patriarchate in the Christian-Orthodox religion is represented by clerics who are collectively recognised as knowing the will of God, by virtue of

their authority, which is equally charismatic and epistemic. Through the institution of ecclesiastical patriarchate developed in the Christian-Orthodox religion, clerics could not impose the will of God on religious adepts since parishioners are understood as free to support, challenge or question ecclesiastical directives, especially when they are contrary to the canons and dogmas assumed through the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition. This view corresponds to the Christian-Orthodox definition of the Church: the Church is not constituted from a set of formal institutions and structures, but it is a communion of believers and clergy within the Love and Truth of Jesus Christ.

In Christian-Orthodox tradition, the ecclesiastical patriarchate is organised to support the posthumous presence of people that occupied a position of authority during their lifetime. The ecclesiastical patriarchate functions as an autopoietic system since Christian-Orthodox religious practices are organised to construct patriarchs, bishops, metropolitans and other influential members of the clergy (priests, monks) as relevant people in church activity, even after their death. For example, in terms of discourse, the adepts of the Christian-Orthodox faith refer to members of clergy by using a specific vocabulary (His Beatitude, His Eminence, "worthy of remembrance", etc.) through which people are invested posthumously with a high status, while performatively accomplishing their posthumous importance. Also, ecclesiastical patriarchate is an institution of doing the posthumous influence of clerics that occupied certain positions through interactions established in ritual contexts: patriarchs and bishops are mentioned after their death in liturgical contexts with the active participation of the faithful (Figure 1, b). Doing posthumous status through ecclesiastical patriarchate is not only achieved discursively and interactionally, but also materially. In this sense, we have to consider how graves, funerary plates or other commemorative objects are organised to accomplish the posthumous presence of those who occupied positions of authority in the Christian-Orthodox Church (Figure 1, a). Such material resources of memorialisation are not only placed in visible and easily accessible locations, but they are also integrated as objects with which people interact in their religious practice (lighting candles, bringing flowers, ritual prostration, worshiping, etc.). All these forms of doing the posthumous presence of representative members of clergy are institutionally legitimated by considering commemoration as a norm in the Christian-Orthodox tradition: the quality of membership to the Church is supported by processes of developing a kind of historical awareness in relation to the religious group of belonging. This norm of commemoration is grounded in the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition.

Figure 1. Posthumous status through systems of authority

(a) Doing posthumous status through the practice of painting relevant members of the clergy at the entrance of a Church



Photo credit: Biserica Soborul Maicii Domnului

(b) Doing posthumous status through the most important collective rituals characterising the Christian-Orthodox religious cult

Beatitude Romanian patriarchs of blessed memory Miron, Nicodim, Iustinian, Iustin and Teoctist, may the Lord God remember in His kingdom.

[Pe adormiţii întru fericire patriarhi ai Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Miron, Nicodim, Iustinian, Iustin şi Teoctist, să-i pomenească Domnul Dumnezeu întru Împărăţia Sa]

Excerpt from the Divine Liturgy

Systems of acknowledgement: ktetorikon dikaion

Systems of acknowledgement represent systems through which social influence is achieved as a matter of obtaining performance in a certain domain. In this case, performance is equivalent with a contribution that remains significant even after someone's death. Books, inventions, architectural constructions, works of art, etc., might be considered among the contributions with posthumous value. However, not each valuable contribution is capable to support the development of autopoietic systems of influence. A contribution has the potential of ensuring posthumous influence when it is assimilated as an integral part of the actions currently performed by the living members of a society. Not each valuable contribution is prone to produce posthumous influence. It is not sufficient that contributions make sense for people living after the death of the person who created them, because there might be situations in which contributions exist posthumously, but detached from the name of their creators. In order to constitute posthumous status indicators, contributions should be integrated among the means by which people achieve different types of presence antehumously. In other words, contributions that transform people into influential people beyond death are the contributions that support modes of social participation for the living within the world.

Ktetorikon dikaion represents a code through which the founder of a church is acknowledged certain rights. In the Christian-Orthodox tradition, these rights have spiritual connotations and are related to a system of beliefs in the afterlife. According to Christian-Orthodox perspectives, humans are creatures constituted from a mortal body (physical existence) and an immortal soul (which is the self-consciousness that might or might not found itself in communion with God). After bodily

death, the human soul might go to heaven (to eternal joy) or to hell (to eternal damnation), depending on the spirit the person had when she died. However, even the souls of those whose antehumous actions did not comply to orthodox cannons of kindness and love might be released from hell by means of prayers for the soul of the dead conducted by those who remained alive. This is possible because, according to the Christian-Orthodox perspective, there are two Divine Judgments: The Particular Judgment which is believed to occur on the fortieth day after death, and The Final Judgment which is believed to occur after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. At the Final Judgment, humans are no longer judged strictly in view of the deeds that they conducted during lifetime but, through the grace of God, their soul might be saved provided that the acts they undertook while alive produced positive (spiritual) effects in the world posthumously. Therefore, participation in the construction of a church by achieving the quality of *ktetor* is one of the resources through which people might ensure that the positive effects of their actions are extended beyond death.

In addition to ecclesiastical patriarchate, *ktetorikon dikaion* is an autopoietic system that supports the posthumous presence of church founders (*ktetors*). *Ktetors* are constructed, beyond their death, as relevant people in community life. For example, it is common that the name of church founders to be written on Prothesis as to be considered in the permanent diptychs. In Christian-Orthodox tradition, diptychs is a list of names of the departed commemorated by the parish during the Divine Liturgy, as well as in other religious services or contexts. Founders, donors or other people who significantly contributed in the building of the church (and thus fulfilling the role of *ktetors*) are ritualistically kept in communion with the living members of the church. Therefore, *ktetors* are constructed as significant members of the church even after their death (Figure 2, a). Through *ktetorikon dikaion, ktetors* are continuously present in church life and they have a privileged posthumous status since they are mentioned continuously in collective prayers (Figure 2, b). On this basis, *kterors* are mentioned in church services on the long term even after all those who knew the *kterors* directly died. *Ktetorikon dikaion* is supported by the forgiveness of sins as the way in which salvation is bestowed upon through divine grace.

Figure 2. Posthumous status through systems of acknowledgment

(a) Doing posthumous status through visible memorial tablets with the name of the ktetors engraved on



Photo credit: Ziarul Lumina

(b) Doing posthumous status through the most important collective rituals characterising the Christian- Orthodox religious cult

The ever remembered founders of this holy temple, the other contributors, donors and benefactors, may the Lord God remember in His kingdom.

[Pe fericiţii şi pururea pomeniţii ctitori ai sfântului lăcaşului acestuia, şi pe alţi ctitori, miluitori şi binefăcători, să-i pomenească Domnul Dumnezeu întru Împărăţia Sa.]

Excerpt from the Divine Liturgy

Systems of extended agency: hagiōsýnē

In this context, we understand agency as the capacity of a person to act with effects in the world. The type of actions that might be performed by a person represents a consequence of material, symbolic and institutional resources. Such cultural resources not only assign different persons with the capacity to act in the world, but they also support different discourses through which the effects of actions come to be recognised and interpreted. People use mediational means that are associated with power and authority to engage in various forms of action[58]. Through such mediational means, which may take various forms, people extend their agency beyond the limits of direct involvement within the world. Such a situation may also describe social environments that enable people to act after death, as to influence the living and their condition.

In the Christian-Orthodox tradition, *hagiōsýnē* functions as a mediational means through which people might still act in the world after death. *Hagiōsýnē* is a mode of existing in eternal communion with God, representing a spiritual state which all humans are invited to achieve. According to the Christian-Orthodox belief, *hagiōsýnē* is the highest level which a human being may accomplish, being the purpose for which God actually created human beings. Compared with other Christian denominations that either make sense of *hagiōsýnē* in terms of holiness or consider it as a gift of God to the chosen ones, in the Christian-Orthodox belief *hagiōsýnē* is the very purpose and rationale of human existence on Earth. Therefore, human life is understood as an endeavour to accomplish

hagiōsýnē through the shunning of passions (piety*)* or through the avowal of faith (martyrdom). In this context, *hagiōsýnē* is the accomplishment of love and truth as a result of the communion of a human being with God. According to this perspective, the saints are understood as individuals who accomplished *hagiōsýnē.* As such, they have a special posthumous position in the Christian-Orthodox cult, since their status is produced in multiple private and public contexts. The Christian-Orthodox saints are understood as having agency by taking into account that believers consider the saints' ability to mediate between God and living human beings. Agency is reflected in the saints' capacity to intervene in the world. Through their interventions (healing, helping) the glory of God is established and legitimated. Therefore, the bodily death within *hagiōsýnē* does not annihilate the human capacity to engage in the physical world, but it transforms the human condition. *Hagiōsýnē* transforms human beings into saints, thus bringing human beings close to God while redefining and extending human possibilities to act in the world.

Hagiōsýnē constitutes another autopoietic system that supports posthumous presence in the Christian-Orthodox tradition. Such a system is self-sustaining as long as the Christian-Orthodox religion invites people to make sense of their life as an act of *hagiōsýnē*, thus creating an experience of the world with reference both to an antehumous and posthumous realm in which human being might position their existence. The saints' presence in the world is constructed as a reality though performative acts such as prayers, hymns or poems. These forms of communication create a type of propinquity between the living and saints. Also, the posthumous influence of saints is accomplished through actions conducted within a ritualistic frame (e.g through collective services or individual prayers held in the honour of saints - *akathist* - and through pilgrimages to the places where the saints lived, died, or predicated – Figure 3, a). Material structures are of great relevance in performing posthumous status through the autopoietic system of *hagiōsýnē*: icons depicting saints, relics, the disposal of the corpse, tokens or other vestiges are objects that extend, beyond death, the agency of Christian-Orthodox saints (Figure 3, b). Moreover, the temporal organisation by means of calendars is another powerful resource through which *hagiōsýnē* is constituted as an autopoietic system of doing posthumous influence. In the Christian-Orthodox tradition each day is a day to celebrate particular saints which implies different forms of social participation in the production of posthumous status: Christian-Orthodox calendars propose a mode of being aware of the world by appropriating saints as relevant means to experience time.

Figure 3. Posthumous status through systems of extended agency

(a) Doing posthumous status by commemorating the incorruptible corpse of saints understood as facilitators of miracles



Photo credit: Ziarul Lumina

(b) Doing posthumous status by establishing a propinquity with saints in a private home

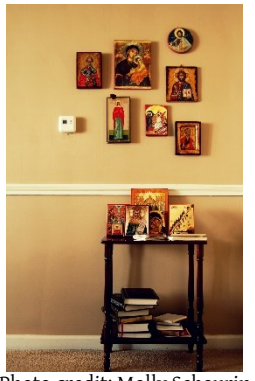


Photo credit: Molly Sabourin

Conclusion

The theories of social status are yet to be clarified beyond classical sociological perspectives. Sociological knowledge has evolved, new vocabularies were introduced to describe and understand social reality, but the conceptualisation of social status has not been adapted to them. As such, we aimed to adjust the understanding of social status to the realities of contemporary sociology. Therefore, we have discussed social status as a performative reality accomplished in actions which are discursively, interactionally and materially legitimated. We have claimed that social status not only explains or structures action, but it is also accomplished in action.

We have argued that social status needs to be reconceptualised in order to meaningfully reflect upon the processes through which different forms of social presence are accomplished by means of collective actions. We have shown that the classical understanding of social status (social status as a medium that produces sociality, social status as a metaphor of social inequalities, and social status as a multidimensional power structure) faces serious conceptual problems since they operate with social status as a reality which is taken for granted. Another problem characterises models where social status in used as an explanatory composite variable. Employing status in explanatory models of human action is like explaining a colour by means of its luminosity or like explaining the functioning of a vehicle by means of its speed. It has no substantial value in making social reality theoretically comprehensible.

In order to face difficulties produced by using social status as a pre-existing reality, we have contended that a key to solving the problem is to reorient perspectives from the vocabulary of "having social status" to the vocabulary of "doing social status". This means that social status is a deindividualised and disembodied accomplishment produced by human and material environment alike, through collectively legitimated and institutionalised actions. We have claimed that social status is not a constitutive reality which is to be observed by analysing social structures, but a performative one which is accomplished in action. Moreover, doing social status is doing or undoing influence through discursive, interactional and material means that are institutionally legitimated.

Social influence is achieved posthumously through systems of authority, acknowledgement and extended agency. These three systems also function on the posthumous realm by offering people the necessary resources to be socially defined as influential people beyond their death. In order to illustrate our understanding of posthumous social life as being facilitated by the creation of autopoietic systems, we have discussed how posthumous influence is achieved in the Christian-Orthodox tradition. Therefore, we have considered the ecclesiastical patriarchate, *ktetorikon dikaion and hagiōsýnē* as representing forms of religious organisation through which posthumous social influence is accomplished. However, autopoietic systems of doing posthumous influence might also develop in secular contexts by integrating institutional resources available in the social environment to produce posthumous presence. Autopoietic systems come to be relevant in defining someone's status after death when they offer the necessary resources to create and recreate influence by maintaining the components of the system. Such an autopoietic system develops itself as sustainable by offering affordances to accomplish posthumous presence through action. In other words, the existence of autopoietic systems is maintained concomitant with the production of posthumous presence.

We have shown that posthumous social status implies doing social influence through autopoietic systems that extend authority, acknowledgement and agency of persons beyond death. We have illustrated the feasibility of such a model by evincing how status after death (posthumous status) is produced through collective practices and institutions. This mode of understanding has implications in explaining how social immortality is possible: one infallible strategy to guarantee that one will gain social presence after their death is to ensure a performative presence through autopoietic systems. Accordingly, posthumous social influence is an ongoing discursive, material and interactional accomplishment that is emergent in networks of relations and practices.

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