The Politics of Fear and Its Defense Mechanisms: A Terror Management Theory Perspective to Ahmad Khaled Tawfik's Utopia

سياسات الخوف ووسائل الدفاع النفسية:
نظرية "التحكم في الخوف في رواية "يوتوبيا" لأحمد خالد توفيق

Dr. Dalia Saad Mohamed Mansour
Associate professor - Department of English Language
Faculty of Language Studies - Arab Open University

د. داليا سعد محمد منصور
الأستاذ المشارك بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية
كلية اللغات بالجامعة العربية

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Abstract:

Terror Management Theory (TMT) is a social psychological theory inspired by the existential psychoanalytic writings of Ernest Becker. In fact, this existential psychology began in reaction to Freudian theories as they both explore the motivational consequences of human unconscious conflicts. TMT posits that the clash between humans' desire of life and their awareness of the inevitability of death stimulates paralyzing existential terror. This terror could be managed by cultural worldviews that provide a set of prescribed valuable standards which, if met by individuals, will help acquire self-esteem and develop the sense of being important and valuable in a meaningful reality. These prescribed standards of cultural worldviews will, eventually, give the hope of transcending death and attaining immortality in either a literal or a symbolic sense - either through a strong belief in religion and the afterlife or being part of something more enduring than ourselves like families, ethnic groups or professions.

This study examines the psychodynamics of traumatic cultural disruption, its consequences as well as its defense mechanisms with reference to a dystopian science fiction discourse - Ahmed Khaled Tawfik's novel *Utopia* (2009). Through exploring the anxiety-buffer and the mortality salience hypotheses, the study analyzes characters' attempted maintenance of psychological shields against the awareness of death and their continuous minimizing of the threats to their cultural systems and personal values.

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ملخص:

نظرية "التحكم في الخوف" هي نظرية نفسية اجتماعية استلهمت من دراسات التحليل النفسي الوجودي للكاتب "إرنست بيكر"، وقد بدأ علم النفس الوجودي كرد فعل لنظريات فرويد حيث تهتم النظريتان بالآثار التحفيزية لصراعات اللاوعي الإنساني. تفترض نظرية التحكم في الخوف إن الصراع القائم بين رغبة الإنسان في الحياة ووعيه بحتمية الموت يحفز الرعب الوجودي بداخله إلى درجة قد تصيبه بالشلل. وتفترض النظرية امكانية التحكم في هذا الخوف من خلال رؤى ثقافية عالمية تتيح توفير مجموعة من المعايير القيمة التي، إذا حققها الأفراد، تكسبهم احترام الذات وتزيد من احساسهم بأهميتهم وقيمتهم بطريقة واقعية ذات مغزى. وتعطي هذه المعايير المتعددة للرؤى الثقافية بارقة أمل في إمكانية تجاوز فكرة الخوف من الموت واستبدال هذه الفكرة بفكرة امكانية الخلود بمعناها الحقيقي أو الرمزي، أو من خلال الاعتقاد اليقيني في الدين والحياة ما بعد الموت أو الإيمان بكون الإنسان جزءاً لا يتجزأ من شيء أكبر من ذواتنا مثل العائلة، المجموعة العرقية أو الوظيفة.

وتبحث هذه الدراسة الدوافع النفسية للاضطرابات الثقافية المؤلمة وعواقبها ووسائل دفاعاتها النفسية وتطبقها على رواية الخيال العلمي "يوتوبيا"(٢٠٠٩) للكاتب "أحمد خالد توفيق" من خلال دراسة مفاهيم "تحجيم القلق" و"أزمة الفناء". وتحلل الورقة البحثية محاولات الشخصيات في بناء دفاعات نفسية لمواجهة الموت ومحاولاتهم الحثيثة للحد من التهديدات الموجهة لأنظمتهم الثقافية وقيمهم الشخصية.

كلمات البحث: سلطات الرعب، البشاعة، توتر منزلي، وفاء بلال، جوليا كريستيفا

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Fear and anxiety are inherent aspects of the human condition. In fact, the questions of how individuals "cope with their awareness of death are challenging ones that have fascinated and puzzled philosophers and social theorists" (Pyszczynski & al 24). It is, therefore, difficult to control the effects of our anxiety as in most cases the source of anxiety remains obscure to us; in other words, it is kept away from our awareness. This lack of awareness becomes the main source of our fear. One very basic fear is the realization that death is an inevitable fact.

In his **The Denial of Death,** the sociologist Ernest Becker argued that the fear of death is the primal drive for all human behavior. Later on, there was a growing interest in studying existential themes among psychologists. This actually resulted in the emergence of a new branch of psychology known as existential psychology that is concerned with the ways people come to terms with the basic givens of human existence. This branch of psychology also involves the inevitability of death, the uncertainty of the most sacred beliefs and values, and the bewildering choices in our lives that are met by an entirely different universe. Later, Greenberg et al. (1986) transformed Becker's ideas into a theory that could be tested empirically and is known as **Terror Management Theory** (TMT hereafter). It is noteworthy that TMT is based on psychoanalytic and existential theories, and it was developed by Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon and Tom Pyszcznki as "a comprehensive, explanatory and motivational theory that attempts to explain a wide range of human behaviors as stemming from unconscious death anxiety." (Kirac 120)

This study uses TMT to examine the psychodynamics of traumatic cultural disruption, its consequences, as well as its defense mechanisms with reference to the dystopian science fiction discourse – Ahmed Khaled Tawfik's novel *Utopia* (2009). Through exploring the anxiety-buffer and the mortality salience hypotheses, the study analyzes characters' attempted maintenance of psychological shields against the awareness of death and their continuous minimizing of the threats to their cultural

systems and personal values. The study will pinpoint the main characteristics of a dystopian discourse as reflected in the novel with continuous reference to TMT theoretical framework to provide more dimensions of perceiving this literary work and suggest more possible layers of meanings. The paper also attempts proving the dystopian discourse to be a rich one for examining and exploring TMT's main ideologies and major thematic concerns. This is in addition to shedding the light on the main contributors to TMT whose contributions were crucial to the development of the theory such as Ernest Becker, Michael B. Salzman, Tom Pyszczynski, Jeff Greenberg and Sheldon Solomon.

As stated above, TMT is a social psychological theory inspired by the existential psychoanalytic writings of Ernest Becker. It is also maintained by Sheldon Solomon that TMT is "based on the Darwinian assumption that humans, like all forms of life, are biologically predisposed toward self-preservation in the service of survival and (ultimately) reproduction." ("Clash of Civilizations?" 381)

This existential dimension is further highlighted when Michael B. Salzman in "Cultural Trauma and Recovery: Perspectives from Terror Management Theory", states that TMT considers "the terror inherent in human existence, and self-esteem. It appears to offer a powerful explanatory framework for understanding critical social and psychological phenomena occurring in naturalistic settings across persons, time, and place. Death, which is undoubtedly a universal human concern addressed in culturally different ways, offers a solid theoretical anchor for TMT." (175) Salzman adds that the human awareness of their limited existence is, in fact, terrifying. In case this existential terror is unbuffered, humans will get a feeling of being paralyzed and unable to function adaptively. TMT views this as an essential psychological conflict in humans resulting from the clash between humans' desire of life and their awareness of the inevitability of death.

As mentioned earlier, Ahmed Khaled Tawfik's *Utopia* is selected in this study to explore TMT's main ideologies and thematic concerns as well as suggest deeper levels of meanings in the text. It is worth noting that "the title of the novel itself could serve as a reverse genre reference,

as Tawfik's *Utopia* is clearly a piece of dystopian fiction, represented in Western literature by the works of G. Orwell, A. Huxley, A. Burgess and others." (Khayrutdinove 191) In this sense, **Utopia** is a dystopian social science fiction discourse which is classified as the First Arabic Science Fiction Bestseller. In fact, the novel's "referential nature, memorable language filled with English words, numerous uses of anaphor, the dominance of nouns and adjectives over verbs, taboo topics being tackled, as well as its postmodern narrative structure" (Khayrutdinove 192) are the features that make it highly representative of modern Arabic science fiction.

The novel is probably addressed to a middle class in crisis, yet also attempts a harsh criticism of exceptionally wealthy inhabitants of gated communities. As a dystopian novel "it is influenced by the respective European tradition while being socially relevant to the problems of today's Egypt as well." (Khayrutdinov 190) The novel is set in 2023 in Egypt which is divided into two separate territories – Utopia, land of the rich and the pampered and the land of the poor known as the "Others". The character of Alaa representing the world of the rich (the Utopians) is set in sharp contrast to the character of Gaber who belongs to the world of the poor known as the "Others". This sharp contrast is meant to represent two separate territories of two distinct cultures and a set of different worldviews in the same country. Such a discrepancy between these different worldviews and their irreconcilable clashes is illustrated in the creation of two extremely disparate worlds as stated in the novel, "And now two societies are formed: one of them owns everything and the other owns nothing. The second society is only important as a consumer market, nothing more." (Towfik 82)

The title of the novel **Utopia**, which is also the setting where a lot of events take place, is definitely ironic as the word suggests an ideally perfect state, place or condition with respect to politics, condition and laws while a closer look makes it a typical representation of a dystopian society. In a typical dystopian society, citizens are found to be under constant surveillance, and they have an implicit or explicit fear of the outside world. They are far away from the natural world which is banished and distrusted. This is typically represented in the world of

Utopia where the citizens are completely surrounded by giant gates, electric fences, security patrols and surveillance cameras to guarantee no interference of any outsiders - who, in reality, represent the banished and distrusted natural world. In a dystopian world, there is usually a figurehead or a concept worshipped by the citizens of the society. In the case of Utopia, it is the "phlegoistine" - the excessively expensive drug the Utopians worship and are ready to sacrifice anything for the sake of obtaining it. It becomes an obsession as well to the Others who cannot afford this phlegostine and are ready to do anything to get it. The expansion of this worshipped concept to the world of the Others makes their world a typical dystopian one as well.

For a deeper understanding of the main characteristics of the dystopian discourse as reflected in the selected novel, it is worth giving an account of the theoretical framework of TMT. One of the major existential concerns central to TMT is the isolation resulting from the conflict between people's desire to connect with others versus the experience of rejection and the fact that their subjective perception of reality cannot be fully shared. This experience of isolation and rejection was lived by the two worlds - the Utopians and the Others. The Others are even looked down upon and ostracized by all the Utopians.

Another basic existential concern central to TMT is meaning stemming from the conflict between people's expectations (beliefs) in a meaningful life and the random and inconsistent experiences they go through and that shatter these bases of meaning. This is basically seen in the world of the Others who lost hope of finding meaning in life due to their extreme poverty that makes them misfits in the society. Despite the excessive richness of the Utopians, they are also portrayed as isolated and lost in a meaningless world and accordingly their society turns out to be an illusion of a perfect utopian world.

In "Introducing Science to the Psychology of the Soul", Greenberg & Pyszezynski pointed out that people's existential concerns become deeper after extreme negative events such as devastating accidents, fatal illness or death of loved ones (212). This is apparent in Gaber's overwhelming fear for his sister Saffya after being sexually harassed by

Alaa the Utopian. Existential thoughts of death, helplessness and fear of loss become pervasive in such situations.

As stated earlier, TMT basically addresses issues related to the role of death fear in the human striving for significance. In **The Denial of Death**, Ernest Becker further elaborates on this idea as he says, "[f]or behind the sense of insecurity in the face of danger, behind the sense of discouragement and depression, there always lurks the basic fear of death, a fear which undergoes most complex elaborations and manifests itself in many indirect ways." (16) Like all other existential psychologists, Becker stresses death as the greatest of all human fears due to their awareness of its inevitability. Despite the reliability of this fact, it is always denied in **Utopia** by both the Utopians and the Others who showed great indifference to it. For Alaa, the Utopian, death is no longer terrifying or intimidating. When he thinks of it, he finds it a good means of breaking the routine. He even attributes positive meanings to death in a completely unconventional way that has a shocking impact. He, thus, says that "death becomes a kind of artistic beauty". (Towfik 3)

Death is even satirized as it turns into a game of hunting since the Utopians are in desperate need of excitement to overcome the endless boredom they experience even if this results in the death of the Other. It is in Utopia that "death retreats behind barbed wires and becomes nothing but a game that adolescents dream of." (Towfik 6) The idea of desiring death is recurrently accentuated by Alaa, who voices the Utopians, maintaining its being an exceptional means of excitement. He says in this respect, "the problem is that we don't die. I don't mean that we are immortal, but we've transcended illness and accidents. The Others get ill and go for hospital treatment, and their cars that still run on petrol flip them over into ditches or slam them into a tree. If only death were so easily available here! Then the excitement would be huge." (Towfik 20)

Despite this untraditional worldview towards death, the constant denial of its terrifying impact and the great anxiety it causes to the individual, Alaa never attempted committing suicide claiming it to be a vulgar act that belongs to the Others not the Utopians, "Why don't we kill ourselves? I don't know. Suicide seems vulgar, rather common. All that

foolishness reminds you of the Others." (Towfik 20) This claim is an attempt to rationalize not committing suicide despite the stressed indifference towards death as well as the continuous emphasis on desiring it. In this respect, death constitutes a great threat and anxiety to both the Utopians and the Others despite their constant denial of this fact and the great indifference they show towards death.

In their attempts to avoid the paralyzing feelings of helplessness and terror aroused by the inevitability of death, human beings thought of constructing shields against such existential threats. Accordingly, they develop anxiety buffers which are psychological mechanisms that help them eliminate such thoughts from their consciousness. One of these psychological buffers could be the indifference shown towards death as exemplified above. In fact, these psychological defense mechanisms "have been conceptualized as a dual-process model of proximal and distal defenses....whereby proximal defenses consist of attempts to suppress thoughts of death, whereas distal defenses address the issue of death in a symbolic manner by modifying perceptions of the self and the world." (Noy and Taubman 872)

Culture is, in fact, considered a psychological defense mechanism that helps manage existential terror and is constructed to "allow anxiety-prone human organisms to act adaptively." (Salzman 186) People are, therefore, motivated to strengthen their worldview and deviate from the culturally different that constitute an existential threat to them. This explains the continuous clashes between the two societies in Utopia as they constitute a threat to each other due to their entirely different worldviews. Each society, accordingly, augments its psychological structure to provide protection against anxiety resulting from the threat constituted by cultural differences. These psychological structures are defined by Salzman in "Cultural Trauma & Recovery: Perspectives from Terror Management Theory" as "the anxiety-buffer hypothesis" (175).

In "The Dual Process Model of Defense Against Conscious and Unconscious Death-related Thought: The Mechanics of Terror Management", Pyszczynski, Greenberg and Solomon maintain the same

thought by saying that anxiety is managed by a cultural anxiety-buffer that consists of:

> (a) a cultural worldview—a humanly constructed symbolic conception of reality that imbues life with order, permanence, and stability; a set of standards through which individuals can attain a sense of personal value; and some hope of either literally or symbolically transcending death for those who live up to these standards of value; and (b) self-esteem, which is acquired by believing that one is living up to the standards of value inherent in one's cultural worldview. ("A Dual Model of Defense" 835 -836)

In examining humans' response to the threat of death, Pyszczynski, Greenberg and Solomon analyzed the defense mechanisms or anxiety buffers they resort to in order to reduce or put an end to death-related thoughts. They, therefore, state:

> People respond to thoughts of death that are in current conscious attention with proximal defenses, that either push such thoughts out of consciousness or push the problem of death into the distant future by denying one's vulnerability to disease and other things that could terminate one's existence. When death-related thoughts are no longer conscious but still highly accessible, people engage in the ***distal terror management defenses*** of clinging to and defending their cultural worldviews and striving for self-esteem and close impersonal attachments.
>
> <div align="right">("On the Unique Psychological Import of
the Human Awareness of Mortality" 329)</div>

In fact, human beings strongly adhere to their cultural worldviews which manage their existential terror by providing a meaningful and orderly conception of the world as they struggle to meet its standards. It is in this cultural worldview that humans find a set of standards of valuable behavior and how to become significant contributors to such a meaningful reality. This would stimulate in them the hope of transcending death and overcoming its threats. In other words, the shared cultural worldviews guide different individuals about how to react towards a shared sense of reality and to achieve a sense of value.

The study of the role of cultural worldviews as a psychological defense mechanism resulted in the emergence of a new concept in TMT called "I-sharing". In "Introducing Science to the Psychology of the Soul: Experimental Existential Psychology", Koole, Greenberg and Pyszezynski introduced this new concept of I-sharing. In their view, I-sharing is concerned with the subjective experience shared by different people when they encounter each other. They believe that the feelings of isolation, for example, that people experience are usually temporarily relieved when they meet others who happen to share their subjective experiences. The theorists further explain the concept as follows:

> Consistent with the existential function of I-sharing, people who are reminded of their existential isolation are especially attracted to I-sharing. The desire for shared subjective experiences thus leads people to feel a deep existential connection with others who appear to share their subjective experiences. (214)

In "Cultural Trauma and Recovery: Perspectives from Terror Management Theory", Salzman explains the role of culture in constructing an anxiety buffer as he says, "culture is a roadmap that tells us how to live and what kind of person to be to see ourselves as having value and significance in a meaningful world, thereby achieving the necessary anxiety buffer." (186)

In fact, individuals aim at the achievement of cultural anxiety buffers to guarantee possible immortality if they live up to these cultural standards. It is in culture that the individual finds the possibility of the heroic transcendence of the existential dilemma of mortality, powerlessness, helplessness and certain annihilation. When individuals fail to maintain the cultural anxiety buffer, it is usually because they cannot achieve a sense of value within their culture or their faith in their culture is shattered. According to Salzman, the cultural anxiety buffer might break down "if the requisite faith in an imposed worldview exists, but the individual is blocked from achieving its standards of value because of impediments such as racism, sexism, and class structure." ("Cultural Trauma and Recovery" 178) This is typical of the dystopian world of the Others where their cultural anxiety buffer breaks down due

to their failure to achieve standards of value because of the discrepancy in class structure. Their cultural worldview, therefore, no longer functions as a psychological defense mechanism since it "seems to promise only poverty, humiliation, and degradation to a people [and] will not be one that a people will have faith in or derive anxiety-buffering self-esteem from by achieving its ontological standards." (Salzman 183)

It is definite that the affirmation of one's worldview would mean the absence of others. In fact, when people feel that their values are threatened, they start seeking to harm the different Other assuming that by doing such an act they are asserting their own cultural worldviews and values. In *Utopia*, the Utopians make constant attempts to hurt the Others, thus achieving high self-esteem as part of the system they use to protect themselves from death- related fear. Finding disagreements in cultural worldviews, the Utopians tend to put the different people down to minimize the threat posed by their differing views of reality. This is typically exemplified in Alaa's continuous attempts to act aggressively towards the Others, mostly represented by Gaber. It is a game of hunting where the poor are chased, killed and then have their arms cut off so that the rich achieve higher self-esteem and manage to buffer their existential terror through violence and dominance. In this respect, cultures become a threat to each other because each culture represents a number of different worldviews that are so meaningful if perceived separately.

Cultural diversity and multiculturalism, therefore, result in creating a sense of anxiety as the anxiety defense mechanisms will be different and might be thought of as fictional. Accordingly, individuals develop a sense of intolerance in case of cultural differences that are related to core existential concerns. They avoid any disagreements at all cost and when they encounter the different Others, they put them down to minimize the threat resulting from their different views of reality.

In order to maintain faith in their cultural worldviews, the Utopians need consensual validation; in other words, they need the other people to agree with their world views. Unfortunately, a society with a great discrepancy in social class would never allow for consensual validation since disparity between cultural worldviews makes people

incapable of understanding the Other. Alaa questions Gaber's clinging to life despite his miserable circumstances. He, thus, maintains, "What does he want from life? Why does he go on living? If I threatened him with a knife, he would shout and kick my hand. Why?" (83 – 84) This might stimulate anxiety because multi-culturalism shakes his cultural worldview and, in turn, his psychological defense mechanism against anxiety may be fictional.

TMT proves that cultural worldviews and self-esteem combine to provide protection against death-related fears as they promise some sort of literal or symbolic immortality for those who live up to its prescribed cultural standards. Those who believe strongly in religious doctrines assure themselves that they will transcend death. In other words, their faith and religious doctrines function as a defense mechanism or death anxiety buffer. This is known as literal immortality. Literal immortality is, therefore, mostly found in groups that believe in an immortal afterlife. It is one of the cultural worldviews that provide protection against the fear of death. In other words, convincing people that death is not really the end of life should decrease the effect of reminders of mortality on the pursuit of self-esteem and faith in one's worldview. The Others, in *Utopia*, seek this kind of literal immortality as most of them are religious, believing in an after-life. According to Alaa, this is the only hope left for them after leading an entirely miserable life, "some of these people are religious, because religion is the only hope they have for a better life after death." (Tawfik, 38) In fact, the hope of literal immortality is particularly effective in protecting humans from the most basic of all human fears. Despite this fact, the Utopians are mostly disbelievers and, in turn, undergo greater insecurity and anxiety representing a typical dystopian society. Alaa voices the Utopians when he maintains, "Some people here still insist on praying to a supreme being they can't see. Anyway, the younger generation has got rid of this habit." (12)

It is worth noting that immortality thoughts could be attributed to secular things that function as anxiety buffers to death threats as well. Rutjens and Wojtkowiak noted in this context the following thoughts, "Recent Research on buffers that are specifically secular and not directly related to immortality has shown that feelings of nostalgia ....imagining

having offspring...and belief in human progress...all provide a shield against existential threat." (139) This is typical of Gaber's speculations of a better, yet somehow impossible, future for himself trying to give himself hope of a brighter future in an attempt to shield against existential threat.

As far as symbolic immortality is concerned, it means that death is transcended by man's belief in immortality or the extension of one's being into eternity. This could be represented in a masterpiece painting or writing a book or even in one's own children as an extension of parents into the future. Parents, in fact, project their own selves into their children, perceiving them as a future beyond mortality. Ernest Becker elaborates on this matter in his *The Denial of Death* when he says that cultures "provide us with the hope of attaining *symbolic immortality*, by being part of something larger, more significant, and more enduring than ourselves, such as our families, nations, ethnic groups, professions, and the like. Because these entities will continue to exist long after our deaths, we attain symbolic immortality by being valued parts of them." (831)

The importance of the family as a form of symbolic immortality is indirectly stressed in the world of the Others in *Utopia*. This is seen in Gaber's continuous emphasis upon his deep attachment to his sister. His clinging to life is basically for the sake of not leaving his sister alone. He, thus, states, "I wouldn't die and let her live without a life." (Towfik 61) In reality, it is Saffya who acts as a life-giving force to Gaber, not the other way round. Since the Utopians generally lack the sense of family and its importance due to the Dystopian world they live in, they resort to other possible means of symbolic immortality – mainly the different perspectives of sex. It is implied in the text that this might maintain their psychological shields against the awareness of death. In TMT terms, this might be interpreted as an attempt to preserve self-esteem, which is part of the system we use to protect ourselves from death-related fear. Alaa resorts to sex, trying to create more perspectives of it to maintain his self-esteem, and probably a sense of heroism. The recurrent act signifies his hope of transcending death and attaining immortality in a symbolic sense. He, thus, states once, "I've been intimate with every girl I found appealing" (7). Later on, he thought of raping a sick woman, perceiving

this to be a heroic act, "[r]aping a woman who is sick with tuberculosis! This event would go down in history." (131)

Closely relevant to symbolic immortality is the new TMT concept "The Postself" which is defined as "the concerns of individuals with their reputation, image, and influence after death." (Rutjens & Wojtkowiak, 137) In other words, it is the way the individual wants to be remembered after death. This postself is not confined to religious beliefs; in fact, it could be part of secular or religious rituals as both can guarantee symbolic immortality and, in turn, reduce existential threat to its minimum level. In "The Postself and Terror Management Theory: Reflecting on After-Death Identity Buffers Existential Threat", Rutjens & Wojtkowiak explained the fine line between the postself and symbolic immortality as follows:

> The postself is based on an "I" perspective ("I will be remembered after death"), whereas models of symbolic immortality represent a cultural or religious worldview perspective ("The culture that I belong to will exceed my own death"). The postself does not refer to something that is *bigger* than the self but merely refers to the individual self that will continue to exist after physical death. (142)

Both Alaa and Gaber as representatives of the worlds of Utopia and that of the Others respectively tried hard to preserve this postself to bolster their self-esteem as explained above and will be further elaborated below.

The fact that cultural worldviews and self-esteem are considered death anxiety buffers culminates in Salzman's introduction of what is known as "The Mortality- Salience Hypothesis". In Salzman's view, "The Mortality-Salience hypothesis states that if a psychological structure provides protection against the terror inherent in human existence (knowledge of mortality), then reminding people of their mortality should increase their need for the protection by that structure by activating the need for validation of their sense of value (self-esteem) and their faith in the cultural worldview." (Salzman 175)

With regards to people's reaction to this mortality-salience hypothesis, people's initial action is usually to deny their vulnerability to death by saying that they are young or healthy, for example, and that death is so far off from them. This is typical of how the Utopians react towards death due to their trust in the high medical advancement they have and, accordingly, the very little chance of being vulnerable to death. Others actually seek any scientific evidence of a literal afterlife to shield themselves against any existential threats. Recent TMT researchers found that religious people, and sometimes religious fundamentalists, are less vulnerable to mortality-salience hypothesis and manipulations as their religious worldviews act like highly protective psychological structures with a set of standards that give them a sense of value and meaning of life. Having two dystopian worlds in this novel, it, therefore, becomes void of such figures and the characters, in turn, always feel insecure.

In fact, TMT researchers have found that the higher self-esteem people have, the less anxious they become in response to threats. To achieve high self-esteem, people attempt living up to the standards of their cultural worldviews where they can derive their value and worth. TMT researchers have found that the achievement of self-esteem is sometimes seen in suicidal acts that involve bombings, for example, promising possible heroism and immortality. People usually engage themselves in such actions assuming them to give some meaning and value to their life. Such suicidal acts might make them of primary value in the universe and strengthen their sense of heroism.

In *The Denial of Death*, Becker provides a general definition of heroism as an outstanding phase of self-esteem and a reflex of the terror of death as well. Hence, he noted:

> [H]eroism is first and foremost a reflex of the terror of death. We admire most the courage to face death; we give such valor our highest and most constant adoration; it moves us deeply in our hearts because we have doubts about how brave we ourselves would be. (12)

Ernest Becker sees the urge to heroism as a transcendental motive that seeks to overcome subjective perceptions of helplessness, inferiority

and powerlessness embedded in the big-brained and existentially terrified human creatures. In a typical dystopian world like Utopia, heroism is perceived differently as explained above. This is also seen in the main metaphor of the predator and the prey that is running throughout the narrative. For Alaa, this game of hunting makes him a legendary hero. In fact, the main reason behind Alaa's insistence upon going to the other land of the poor is achieving the highest sense of self-esteem: "I had become a man. I had gone there and returned with someone's severed arm." (147) Such attempted so-called 'heroism' functions as an anxiety-buffer or a defense mechanism that Alaa uses to unconsciously overcome the fear of mortality and inevitability of death. Like the Utopians, the Others' interest in sex could be interpreted as an attempt of achieving some self-esteem and overcoming the sense of long-lived despair, helplessness, inferiority and powerlessness. In TMT terms, this is an anxiety buffer that helps augment their psychological structure. Gaber thought of raping Germinal, the Utopian, perceiving the act of rape as a kind of victory at a larger scale – a form of oppression of a whole social class. He considers it a typical act of heroism. He maintains, "This is the only victory I can achieve. Humiliating this girl isn't humiliating a woman, but it is humiliating a class as a whole." (115 – 116)

Despite his determined revenge, Gaber couldn't complete the act of rape claiming that he sees Saffya's face not Germinal's. He, thus, says:

> What came over you? Is Utopia's power over you so absolute? Has Utopia come to dominate your hormones? ….Is it the dominance of Utopia, or is it the power of a sweeping conscience that makes you see every fragile, guileless girl as another Saffya? You won't know. You'll never know. (116 – 117)

This incident probably foreshadows the bleak futuristic image awaiting the Others, promising nothing but worse human conditions of helplessness and inferiority.

It is worth noting that despite the intense intergroup conflict and intolerance resulting from the clash between the different cultural worldviews of the two dystopian worlds in *Utopia*, Gaber finds a great

similarity between the two communities as he finds them sharing a lot of cultural worldviews:

> Here and there, we're both in love with violence.
>
> Here and there, we both have drugs.
>
> Here and there, we both avidly watch movies   about rape.
>
> Here and there, we both talk about religion all the   time.
>
> (104)

On the whole, it is noticeable that the study revealed dystopian science fiction discourses as a type of literature that is rich for the application of the existential psychology of Terror Management Theory. This refers to the fact that such discourses represent cultural disruption in its most traumatic levels and how it affects the individuals of different social classes psychologically. Through examining the mortality salience and anxiety buffer hypothesis, the study reveals how these individuals – despite their diversity in social class and cultural worldviews – maintain psychological shields against their awareness of death and all other threats to their cultural systems and personal values.

In fact, strong adherence to cultural worldviews manages their existential terror as this provides an orderly conception of a world where they strive to become significant contributors to its "meaningful" reality. In this respect, using TMT in the analysis of this dystopian discourse added deeper dimensions of meanings and suggested new means of approaching a text and exploring it. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended to explore Sci Fi dystopian movies using TMT for further researching. This would certainly add more horizons of meanings due to the fact that this audiovisual medium employs cinematic techniques which suggest different versions of threats an individual might encounter and psychological shields for defying them all.

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