CHAPTER THREE

DYING TO LIVE: TERRORISM, WAR, AND DEFENDING ONE'S WAY OF LIFE

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Abstract: The present chapter reviews research concerning the existential motivations for terrorism and militarism based on Terror Management Theory (TMT). Whereas terrorism and militarism entail methods of extreme violence, TMT entails a set of psychological processes that help protect the self from the aversive awareness of mortality. TMT proposes that humans develop and maintain cultural worldviews and hold strong ties to their social groups because these constructs help individuals psychologically transcend death by providing a link to something larger and longer lasting than the self. Thus, in some cases, this existential fear may intensify identification with radical causes (e.g., ethnic, nationalist, or religious) in an attempt to achieve such a sense of symbolic immortality. Further, challenges to the efficacy of one's worldview or the esteem of one's social group undermine these death-denying qualities, resulting in a sense of humiliation or perceived injustice that may be attenuated by violent attempts at regaining agency, esteem, and dignity. This chapter describes both laboratory research and real-world examples of TMT processes that factor into increases in risk-taking, support for both religious and secular terrorist activity and militarism, and willingness to self-sacrifice to protect one's way of life.

Keywords: Terror Management Theory, death, mortality salience, terrorism, war.

"In order to be a martyr bomber, you have to want to live."
                    —Abdul Shami, leader of Palestinian Islamic Jihad
                                                        (Goldberg, 2001)

"We must say, even, that [man] is willing to die in order *not* to die."
                              —Ernest Becker, *Escape From Evil*
                                                    (Becker, 1975 p.139)

In 1916 the Irish Republican Army (IRA) staged the Easter Rising as a protest against British rule but received only lackluster support from the Irish public. When the British responded in a violent fashion, the Irish public united behind the IRA, providing a steady stream of troops, supplies and bloodshed. Likewise, when the Sri Lankan government enacted a series of brutal and oppressive domestic policies against the Tamil population, the Tamils nearly unanimously rallied behind the Tamil Tigers or LTTE in response. Similarly, it has been argued that the 9/11 terrorist attacks were planned with the intent of eliciting extreme retaliation from the United States, thereby uniting the Muslim community behind al Qaeda (Richardson, 2006). If this was really their goal, it appears to be succeeding ("Terrorism analyst: National intelligence", 2007); al Qaeda's claims of Western repression gained credence when two Islamic nations were invaded by Western soldiers under the banner of a War on Terrorism in which ordinary Muslim civilians as well as regular soldiers died by the thousands. There has been a dramatic spike in terrorist attacks by Islamic groups since the Western military response to 9/11 (Bergen & Cruickshank, 2007; Karl & Radia, 2008).

A substantial number of civilians in many Muslim communities have invested support in organizations like al Qaeda to combat the foreign occupation of the Arabian Peninsula, an Islamic Holy Land, and restore the status of their culture. Since the 2003 invasion destabilized Iraq, there have been more suicide bombings in that country than the total of suicide attacks throughout the rest of the world since 1981 (Richardson, 2006). At the same time, tens of thousands of Western soldiers have willingly put themselves in harms way in Iraq and Afghanistan to defend their countries and way of life. What is it that drives diverse communities to advocate extremist violence and revere people who are willing to lay down their lives for their culture? And what factors are involved in motivating the actual self-sacrificial behavior?

This chapter uses Terror Management Theory (TMT; Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989) to examine the factors that encourage violence, terrorist and counterterrorist killing, and martyrdom (for a discussion of peaceful terror management, see Niesta,

Fritsche, & Jonas, 2008). We first present an analysis of group processes involved in individual radicalization and the formation of extremists' ties to their communities.   We then explore how challenges to these communities, in the form of humiliation, perceived injustice, competing cultures, and vulnerability, are capable of arousing violent defensive reactions. We discuss the impact of such violent defenses in support for both terrorism and military extremism, potentially resulting in an ironic perceived moral imperative to perpetuate these unfortunate hostilities. We conclude with a discussion on specific existential factors at work in soldiers and citizens alike that help motivate martyr behavior, such as the creation of a martyr culture, social support for self-sacrifice, conflict power-asymmetry, control restoration processes, religious influences, and the perception of collective continuity.

Terror Management Theory

Whereas terrorism entails a method of violence, TMT encompasses a broad set of psychological processes that help protect the self from an increased awareness of mortality. Based on the work of Becker (1971; 1973; 1975), Rank (1936/1950), Yalom (1980), Lifton (1976; 1979), and others, TMT proposes that human behavior is motivated by the uniquely human existential problem of the awareness of death. With the evolution of self-awareness and the capacity for complex thought came the ability to comprehend the inevitability of death. To combat awareness of their transient existence, humankind (a) developed cultural worldviews that imbue the world with meaning, order, permanence, and standards for valued behavior and (b) strive to achieve a personal sense of value within these systems by living up to the standards of value that they proscribe.

Specifically, TMT maintains that cultural worldviews provide a buffer from existential anxiety by supplying lasting constructs upon which individuals may achieve a sense of immortality. This psychological defeat of death may take a literal form (e.g., heaven, nirvana, paradise, etc.) or a symbolic form (e.g., impacting students, publishing books, raising children, etc.), where permanence may be achieved by impressing one's essence into an everlasting culture. And so, in order to personally achieve psychological equanimity in the face of death, people need to feel that they are valuable members of their cultural worldview (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997). Adhering to one's cultural worldview confers self-esteem, the indication that one is a valuable participant in a permanent, meaningful world. The existential fear of death is thus alleviated by the non-conscious construal that one is not

finite in an absolute sense; an essence of the self will continue to exist post mortem.

There are several problems with this method of attaining control of anxiety. Most importantly, one can never ascertain with absolute certainty whether one's worldview is correct. When one's cultural worldview is juxtaposed with other beliefs and customs, the potential for doubt is raised about the validity of one's own cultural worldview. People are thus inclined to symbolically defend their way of life in various ways. Broadly, they rely on the social consensus of others around them to validate their worldview and help confer a sense of self-esteem, which combine to protect them from anxiety. Seen in this light, increasing globalization and intercultural contact poses a threat to the security people feel in their own worldviews.

Identification with Radical Causes

One's groups and communities are important because of the consensual validation they provide for fragile, socially-constructed worldview belief systems. The mere existence of others who uphold our cultural worldview socially verifies our way of life, implying that it is indeed on the right track toward defeating the problem of mortality. Whereas one's personal identity is doomed to expire, one's social identity transcends physical limitations by providing a communal existence, larger and longer lasting than oneself (Castano, Yzerbyt, & Paladino, 2004). TMT suggests that this is why it is imperative for an individual to cultivate and defend their collective, social identity.

Indeed, terrorists and counter-terrorists only rarely act violently for sadistic personal gratification; more often than not, they act on behalf of the groups they seek to represent. They frequently invoke language that connects them with 'their people', whether 'their people' be American, Basque, Chechen, Irish, Muslim, Tamil, or any other variation of political, religious or social ideologies. Just as identifying with a cherished or victimized community can be a very strong motivator for well-meaning disaster relief efforts, it can be a strong motivator for political extremists as well. Osama bin Laden's messages routinely exhibit a strong identification with the *umma*, the Muslim community-at-large. Such intense identification with his "Muslim nation" has led him to advocate violent defense in their name ("Transcript: bin Laden accuses the west", 2006). But importantly, this strong identification is not just an idiosyncrasy among violent leaders — the foot soldiers who carry out the attacks also report very strong ties to their communities. Suicide bomber

Hamza Abu-Surur, for instance, was said by his brother to have committed his attack "for me and my country and my people and the honor of the *umma*" (Oliver & Steinberg, 2006).

Much research has explored the impact of social identification on intergroup hostility and aggression. Importantly, the quest for continued existence, both literal and symbolic, plays a central role. Working from the TMT notion that individuals are able to gain a sense of symbolic immortality from identification with the groups to which they belong, Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino, and Sacci (2002) found that reminding Italians of death increased their perception that Italians are a distinct and unique ethnic group, as well as identification with Italians. Many other studies conducted with Scottish, Israeli, American, and German populations have shown that subtle reminders of death significantly increase people's desire to protect their ethnic/national identity through hostile or discriminatory behavior toward outgroups (Castano, 2004; Florian & Mikulincer, 1998; Greenberg, Schimel, Martens, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 2001; Ochsmann & Mathey, 1994). The existential psychological importance of a communal ethnic identity helps to explain myriad communal patterns from the relatively benign ethnic enclave, to the deadly battles for Basque, Tamil, or Chechen independence, all the way to the outright caustic goals of terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, Christian Identity movement, and al Qaeda.

TMT suggests that nationalistic identification, in much the same way as communal ethnicity, provides symbolic reprieve from threats to one's continued existence. As a superordinate, a nation's stature represents the merits of its subsidiary groups and their ways of life. A nation that is economically strong, morally righteous, and militarily powerful is more effective in warding off the ultimate adversity – death. Accordingly, research has shown that increased mortality salience produces nationalistic biases, such as amplifying the virtue of one's own nation while degrading the virtue of other nations (Nelson, Moore, Olivetti, & Scott, 1997). Several studies have also shown that a subtle reminder of death even produces stronger identification with and reverence for national icons such as flags and national currency (Greenberg, Porteus, Simon, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1995; Jonas, Fritsche, & Greenberg, 2005). Mortality salience also elicits nationalistic bias in prosocial behavior; Jonas, Schimel, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (2002, Study 2) found that mortality salience motivated Americans to give more money to American charities, but not to foreign charities.

Nationalist terrorists, like loyal soldiers in any military, view themselves as taking up a special place in their group's history, by attaching to

themselves an identity that stretches backward and forward in time. Notorious IRA foot soldier Shane Paul O'Doherty envisioned his symbolic immortality in declaring that he hoped to be permanently memorialized in a mural or song for risking his life throwing bombs for the IRA (Cullen, 2005). Beyond amplifying one's identification with relevant national, ethnic, or religious groups, subtle awareness of mortality has been shown to significantly increase the ferocity of physically hostile actions toward antagonistic others (McGregor et al., 1998).

People need not live among their group in order to identify with them. Identification with non-localized communities, leading to violence against other groups, is increased when issues concerning one's group are accompanied by increased awareness of death. Injustices such as poverty, hunger, and violent repression have elicited violent reactions from diaspora communities worldwide. While identifying with the suffering of those within one's own broad group has radicalized many terrorists, few serve a better example than Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh. An affluent student at the London School of Economics, Omar Sheikh confessed that he was radicalized by a film titled *Death of a Nation,* which portrayed the slaughter of Bosnian Muslims by Serbs. After viewing the film, Omar Sheikh immediately began organizing relief for the Muslim population in Bosnia. He ultimately went on to "defend" the *umma* by organizing the bombing of the Kashmiri and Indian Parliaments, the attack of the American Cultural Center in Calcutta, and the beheading of Daniel Pearl of the *Wall Street Journal* (Richardson, 2006).

Studies have demonstrated that reminders of mortality and killing, very similar to those likely contained in a film about the slaughter of Bosnian Muslims, significantly increased strength of group identification among those who had originally held loose identities (Dunkel, 2002). Other studies have shown that observing transgressions against a group one strongly identifies with elicits extreme negative reactions toward outgroups, even at considerable cost to the individual (Meindl & Lerner, 1983; Meindl & Lerner, 1984). This is consistent with Greenberg et al.'s (1990, Study 1) finding that reminders of death lead to more negative evaluations of outgroup members who were not disliked under neutral conditions. People who are both members and non-members of terrorist groups can therefore be moved to extremist violence by strongly identifying with the suffering of a cherished group.

Sub-State Suffering and Superpower Syndrome: Humiliation and Perceived Injustice

Another important component in the process of radicalization and violence is cultural humiliation, the feeling that one's way of life, one's community, and oneself are viewed with disdain by others. Perceptions of injustice against ones community are a frequent source of humiliation. Disrespect for one's beliefs, values, and behaviors undermines the ability of one's worldview and self-esteem to buffer death-anxiety (Friedman & Rholes, 2007; Schimel, Hayes, Williams, & Jahrig, 2007). Lifton (2003) explains that a sense of collective humiliation may be so powerful that those who experience it may never relent in their attempts to recover a sense of agency, self-respect, or dignity. TMT research has shown that such humiliation prompts action to reassert one's worldview and self-esteem, which often entails aggressive action toward those perceived as responsible for the humiliation.

Feelings of humiliation can result from either personal experiences or inferred affronts linked to large-scale intergroup conflicts. As an example of the former, Richardson (2006) tells of Dermot Finucane watching British troops routinely ransacking his father's house looking for evidence of IRA activity. The repeated intrusions and disrespect shown by the troops toward his father and family in their own home eventually drove Dermot and his brothers to join the IRA. They later recounted that they were "proud as punch" and felt like "top-men" in light of their new opportunity to restore their family's honor and dignity. As an example of the latter, Dr. Baruch Goldstein felt that Jewish-Israelis were being humiliated by the government protection of Arab Muslims in the area – so he massacred dozens of Arab Muslims during Ramadan (Juergensmeyer, 2000).

Another common source of humiliation is extreme poverty and hopelessness relative to other groups, typically referred to as relative deprivation. Vast discrepancies in wealth, opportunity, and standard of living help explain why terrorist resistance has become so prevalent in areas like the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In Jenin, a town known as the "capital of Palestinian martyrdom," an Islamic Jihad intermediary explained, "Look around and see how we live here, then maybe you will understand why there are always volunteers for martyrdom. Every good Muslim understands that it's better to die fighting than to live without hope" (Jacobson, 2001, par. 6).

As an antidote to humiliation, dignity and honor are thematically expressed through the courage to commit violence in defense of one's

social identity. These personal rites of violence are intended to purify the community and overcome the agents of humiliation. On a grander scale, organizations and networks like al Qaeda and the International Islamic Front represent a response to pervasive feelings of humiliation in the Islamic community. Many Muslims around the world have felt a long-standing collective humiliation in the face of Western and Israeli encroachment of Islamic holy territory. According to Mark Juergensmeyer (2000), part of the allure of violent retribution is that it "dehumiliates" a disgraced community by staking claim to a moral high ground (by fighting for 'good') and regaining a lost sense of respect. Hassan Salameh, a Hamas leader responsible for leading one of the groups most deadly suicide bombing campaigns, told Jessica Stern (2003, p. 59),

> "As a Palestinian, I feel that my people and I have been murdered in the soul by the Israeli occupation. This feeling stays with me in every situation. There is a big difference between murder and killing to defend [t]his country – attacks against Israelis, even against Israeli citizens, are the latter kind of killing, not murder."

In his endorsement of killing Israeli citizens, Salameh's description of his "murdered soul" provides valuable insight into the power of collective humiliation. Terrorism may indeed serve as a rite of violence intended to defend a basic identity, overcome humiliation, and restore dignity, honor, and respect.

Even superpowers are vulnerable to the effects of humiliation. Lifton (2003) suggests that for a superpower, the very *realization* of vulnerability is humiliating. The West generally prides itself on being able to solve all problems and withstand any adversity that comes its way, and, unlike other nations, America has mostly been spared from experiences that remind it of its vulnerability—after all, the USA was able emerge from the bloodiest century of human history virtually unharmed as the strongest nation in the world. Thus, having developed a firm sense of invulnerability, described by Lifton as *superpower syndrome*, the destruction and symbolic desecration of our national institutions (i.e., economy, military, and government) during the attacks on September 11, 2001 was an intolerable reminder that we too are vulnerable. Adding to this national and cultural humiliation is the fact that these symbols were not destroyed by an "enemy" nation or crazed lunatics – they were destroyed by 19 educated men with box cutters who attacked America with its own planes. Through the events surrounding the attacks of 9/11, a very clear message was sent: the Western way of life is neither symbolically nor literally robust to death and destruction.

This humiliation of Western vulnerability sparked an intense drive to reclaim a sense of honor and dignity by surging efforts to seal off holes in our lines of defense to restore our feelings of superpower invulnerability. The quest to reestablish a sense of dignity and honor then turned toward the assertion of moral (and military) superiority over the enemy force responsible. Indeed, the American leadership frantically sought to restore the country's dignity through military victory over the first available opponents, but as we know now, not necessarily over those responsible for 9/11. However, according to Ernest Becker (1975, p. 110), the importance of achieving such a victorious military reprisal was "that we experience the power of our lives and the visible decrease of the enemy: it is sort of staging of the whole meaning of a war, the demonstration of the essence of it – which is why the public display, humiliation, and execution of [enemies] is so important. They are weak and die; we are strong and live."

Violent Death Denial

One basic TMT finding is that both explicit and subliminal reminders of mortality increase the accessibility of death-related thoughts anxiety (Arndt, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1997; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Simon, & Breus, 1994). Building on these findings, Landau et al. (2004) found that increasing people's awareness of terrorism significantly increased death awareness. As noted above, and of particular importance to the study of terrorist-counterterrorist violence, the increased awareness of mortality motivates defense of one's cultural identifications and beliefs as a method of denying the prospect of death.

Further, TMT holds that an extreme, yet efficient, form of worldview defense entails the annihilation of the adherents of the threatening worldview. Stemming from this hypothesis, researchers have investigated ways in which death awareness affects the desire to annihilate members of threatening outgroups. Pyszczynski et al. (2006, Study 2) conducted a study that asked American participants to contemplate their own death, the events of 9/11, or a control topic, and then assessed their support for extreme military actions against those who pose a potential challenge to America. These extreme military actions included overwhelming preemptive attacks, the use of nuclear and chemical weapons, and the killing of *thousands* of innocent civilians in exchange for killing or capturing Osama bin Laden. Under control conditions, support for these extreme military solutions was relatively low; however, when reminded of death or terrorism, conservative students significantly increased their support for these extreme solutions.

Extending these findings, Hayes, Schimel, and Williams (2007) split Christian participants into three groups, presenting a third with a neutral-control topic, a third with a real-life threat to their worldview (i.e., the Islamization of Nazareth, the birthplace of Jesus), and a third with this worldview threat and additional information explaining that a plane filled with devout Muslims had crashed on their way to Nazareth with no survivors. The participants in the threat-only condition showed both increased death related thoughts and hostile worldview defense but participants in the Muslims-killed condition and the neutral-control condition *did not* show increased death thought or worldview defense. These findings indicate that although worldview threats typically usher in death thought and prompt hostile worldview defense, observing an outgroup's inability to prevent the ultimate tragedy of death effectively alleviates death anxiety, vicariously boosting confidence that one's own way of life is a viable pathway to symbolic immortality.

Additional evidence for the role of existential threat in promoting violence comes from studies by Hirschberger and Ein-Dor (2006), conducted with Israeli college students and settlers in the Gaza Strip three months prior to the Israeli pullout from Gaza. For many Israeli nationalists and settlers, disengagement from the Gaza Strip symbolized national and religious failures. Therefore, these researchers investigated the impact of death reminders on support for violent resistance to the withdrawal among right-wing Israeli's and Israeli settlers in Gaza who did not believe the withdrawal would actually occur. In these studies, reminders of death increased both perceived legitimacy of violent reactions and the willingness to personally engage in the violent resistance.

In another study examining the likely after-effects of terrorist violence, Vail, Arndt, Motyl, and Pyszczynski (2009) exposed some participants to images of buildings partially reduced to rubble by missiles and bomb blasts, and other participants to images of either similar buildings but with evidence of reconstruction efforts, completely intact buildings, or graphic images of terrorist attacks and bombings. While death awareness remained low for those in the reconstruction-effort and completely-intact conditions, exposure to the rubble and destruction in the wake of violent attacks significantly increased death thought to the level produced by viewing graphic images of terrorism. A second study demonstrated that images of rubble and destruction also boosted militaristic attitudes. These findings suggest that the rubble and debris left behind at sites where bombs or missiles have exploded provide an ongoing death reminder to those who live in the area, which, based on many previous studies might exacerbate intergroup conflict and support for violence. The physical remnants of

bombings may have lingering effects above and beyond the actual loss of life and injuries that they produce.

Consistent with this possibility, Fernandez, Castano, and Singh (2008) conducted a study comparing those living in regions where graphic images of death can be seen on a daily basis to those living in a relatively death-free and peaceful region. They found that whether or not death reminders were made explicit, those working in crematoria in Varanasi, India had higher levels of group attachment and group glorification, a stronger liking for worldview-supportive others and supported harsher punishment for worldview-threatening others. In contrast, those living far from the crematoria showed a heightened ingroup bias only when death was made explicitly salient. These findings indicate that incessant reminders of death may create a chronic heightened need to defend the worldview and validate cultural values. This may be yet another force that perpetuates support for violence in areas where the remnants of past attacks provide a constant reminder of how quickly life can be cut short by both terrorist and military action.

Killing to Justify Killing

Research also has shown that once violent worldview defense and killing has begun, powerful psychological forces encourage its continuation. Martens, Kosloff, Greenberg, Landau, and Schmader (2007) created a model killing-paradigm in which participants played the role of "exterminators" in an insect extermination task and were led to believe they were actually killing insects one-by-one. This study found that after having initially killed a number of insects in a "practice trial," participants significantly increased the number of insects they killed compared to participants who did not partake in the same degree of initial "practice" killing. Interestingly, this self-perpetuating nature of killing was found primarily among participants who viewed insects as being similar to themselves in statements like, "bugs are living too – [they] are part of the same evolutionary process and have similar basic needs, such as shelter, food, to survive, and to protect offspring" (p. 1254). These findings presumably reflect a need to rationalize one's initial killing, which once accomplished, led to further killing to support the rationalization. Once initial killing has taken place, it must be justified through more killing in order to "finish the job." Gromo Alex, a member of the United Nations Humanitarian Team in Kigali described this concept in the context of the Rwandan genocide.

"Sometimes people kill once and then to lessen the impact of that murder they kill again, and then they kill again, and then each murder drives you to kill again, not so much that you forget that you've killed before, but…it just becomes part of you, and you've just got to kill and kill and kill." (Barker & Powell, 2004)

In a related vein, Ernest Becker (1973) called attention to the Nazi practice of *blutkitt* (blood cement): the stationing of low-ranking and reluctant German soldiers and officers at concentration camps in order to solidify their commitment to the Nazi cause. Participating in the atrocities led moderate Nazis to justify their immoral actions, which then obliged them to 'finish the job' as part of their rationalization.

A closely related process is that when community members die for a cause, like-minded others may feel compelled to increase the effort to complete the goals of that cause, to deny the possibility that their comrades had died in vain. The Bush administration's policy of "staying the course" and "surging" in Iraq could be viewed as an example of this process, in which violence is escalated to increase the meaningfulness of the deaths of those who have already died for the cause; a tendency that cost the lives of thousands of additional American troops ("American military casualties", 2008; Vinall, 2003). Considering the Islamic and Jewish tradition of martyrdom that extends as far back as the Crusades and the Roman occupation of Judea can help explain the sense of obligation to continue the tradition of defending the Holy Land at all costs (Atran, 2001). Only by continuing the fight can previous losses be seen as worthwhile.

The Culture of Martyrdom

Societies all over the world bestow their highest honors to those who give their lives for their people. Every day soldiers around the globe are taught that it is their duty to die for their country, and that to die in the line of duty is a sign of vital moral strength indicating victory of the spirit over the flesh. In American culture, we award posthumous medals of honor, erect memorial monuments, and inscribe names on walls to commemorate and glorify those who gave their lives in the struggle to protect our way of life. Such mementos signal that a particular worldview is so virtuous that it is worth people laying down their lives in its defense. Such glorification creates a culture of heroes based on the transformation of death into a welcome sacrifice for the good of the world, sweetened all the more by hints at eternal life.

Like fallen soldiers, suicide terrorists are often glorified as heroes. Groups like al Qaeda, the military wing of Hamas, and the LTTE recruit "living martyrs" to embark on suicide missions by ensuring that a culture of hero worship permeates the martyr's community. Posters, commemorative cards, and martyr-of-the-month calendars bearing the image of the living martyr are common throughout the streets of their communities and in the homes of their fans—an entire genre of pop songs devoted to martyrs has even emerged in some areas. Annual "Martyr Day" holidays are held in some Middle Eastern countries to memorialize significant acts of martyrdom in a manner very similar to the American Memorial Day or Veterans Day (Richardson, 2006). The message sent is that in exchange for self-sacrifice, one receives symbolic immortality, being forever remembered in the history of a culture, in addition to the literal immortality that is also typically promised by religious groups associated with the cause.

Suicide terrorism seems to have taken hold as a subculture, spreading by social contagion. Where there is widespread support for organizations sponsoring suicide terrorism there is also widespread desire to join the immortal ranks of socially sanctified martyrs. Accordingly, it is widely reported that terrorist organizations often get far more volunteers for martyrdom missions than the organization needs (Stern, 2003; Richardson, 2006). For martyrdom-supporting cultures, however, the fact that the victims tend to be innocent civilians appears less important than the fact that their own worldview is valued so highly that its followers will readily sacrifice themselves to defend it. In this way, cultivating a "martyr culture" buffers death-anxiety by validating the community's worldview in much the same way that ordinary citizens worldwide take pride in knowing that their nations' soldiers will gladly lay down their life for their fellow countrymen. In Iran, Pyszczynski et al. (2006, Study 1) studied the link between increased death awareness and support for terrorism by reminding Iranian students of death and having them evaluate two "fellow students" who espoused either *pro*-martyrdom or *anti*-martyrdom attitudes. Results indicated that under neutral control conditions, participants strongly preferred the anti-martyrdom student and indicated they were willing to join the anti-martyrdom cause. In contrast, when participants were reminded of death, they strongly preferred the pro-martyrdom student and indicated willingness to join the pro-martyrdom cause.

Controlling Death

Suicide terrorism is typically implemented by the militarily weaker side in a conflict between dramatically asymmetric powers. For the terrorist martyr, purposefully deciding when and where to die, as well as *why*, may allow a crucial sense of control over the mysterious and random circumstances of death. Dispensing existence, both to oneself and to others, has been viewed as conferring a god-like feeling that one is more than a mere mortal (Lifton, 1986; 1999). In this sense, a person may "own" death. Fritsche, Jonas, and Fankhanel (2008) demonstrated that, compared to abstract awareness of death, thinking about the prospect of a self-determined death (suicide) confers a sense of control that seems to restore perceived generalized control over death and post-death outcomes. For example, the Japanese Kamikaze attacks secured a sense of control over death for the airmen involved. Admiral Takijiro Onishi even described the Kamikaze attacks as an immortal act capable of transcending life and death (Atran, 2001). More recently, Speckhard and Ahkmedova (2006) interviewed contemporary Chechen rebels, reporting one young man's rationale for planning suicide tactics against Russian occupation forces, "I don't want to die like a victim. I would like to die a worthy and heroic death" (p. 464). The late Skeikh Ahmad Yassin, co-founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, lends further insight, explaining "Once we have warplanes and missiles, then we can think of changing our means of legitimate self-defense. But right now, we can only tackle the fire with our bare hands and sacrifice ourselves" (Malka, 2003, par. 3). Thus, the pattern and frequency of suicide attacks, and terrorism itself, may be determined in part by the power-asymmetry of the increasingly globalizing battlefield.

Additionally, some research suggests that increased mortality salience actually has the potential to motivate unhealthy behaviors and risk death as a means of symbolically defending against death. For instance, Taubman - Ben-Ari, Florian, and Mikulincer (1999) report that increased awareness of death led men who believed good driving to be culturally valued to put their lives at risk engaging in reckless and dangerous driving. Other studies have shown that the need to psychologically defend against the awareness of death can lead to potentially lethal behaviors such as avoiding health screening, denying vulnerability to disease, deleterious eating habits and even risk skin cancer in an effort to live up to cultural standards (Arndt, Cook, Goldenberg, & Cox, 2007; Goldenberg, Arndt, Hart, & Brown, 2005; Routledge, Arndt, & Goldenberg, 2004). Such evidence helps shed light on potential processes at work in the

psychological denial of the immediate, physical, and ultimately permanent hazards inherent in the business of martyrdom.

The influence of death awareness on immortality beliefs can add to our understanding of why people are willing to sacrifice their own physical existence. Some early research demonstrated that death reminders substantially increased belief in literal life after death (Osarchuk & Tatz, 1973; Schoenrade, 1989). More recent research has added to this, finding not only that mortality salience prompts people to increase their religiosity but also to strengthen their belief in God and supernatural agents such as gods and spirits, even those associated with religions other than one's own (Norenzayan & Hansen, 2006). The presumed existence of any spiritual being increases confidence in the existence of one's own preferred deity. To be sure, the implications of literal immortality inherent in religious notions of afterlife and supernatural existence can be powerfully motivating. Radical clerics and other leaders, like Abu Shami, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, are notorious for lionizing religious texts to validate the notion of afterlife and encourage their followers to follow through with martyrdom missions, for example, by imploring followers to "think not of those who are slain in the cause of God as dead. Nay, they are live in the presence of the Lord and are granted gifts from Him" (The Holy Qur'an, 3:169).

Laboratory research speaks to the efficacy of such tactics; Dechesne et al. (2003) found that exposure to arguments for the existence of literal afterlife eased death anxiety and prevented striving for or defense of worldly values and halted efforts to achieve a positive personality evaluation. Thus, mixing religious components into real-world conflict can help set the stage for self-sacrificial efforts at grasping an eternal moral stronghold and securing everlasting life. Indeed, religiously based terrorist and martyrdom attacks are associated with more intense killing and more civilian fatalities than the somewhat more discriminating secular terrorism (Juergensmeyer, 2000; Mogahed, Pyszczynski, & Stern, 2007; Silberman, Higgins, & Dweck, 2005; Speckhard & Ahkmedova, 2006; Stern, 2003).

We have so far reviewed the influence of terror management processes on the creation of martyr cultures, the individual support for terrorist acts and military extremism, perceived control over self-determined death, risky and potentially fatal behavioral defenses, and the influence of religious notions of afterlife. But the current evidence still leaves a major question unanswered. Although there is much evidence documenting terror management processes motivating individuals to support the self-sacrificial behavior of *others*, these studies do not address the question of whether an individual will deliberately sacrifice *their own life* in defense

of their culture. Routledge and Arndt (2007) recently conducted research to answer this very question. In this study, when British participants were made aware of death and were led to believe in their community's collective continuity beyond death, they reported significantly greater willingness to self-sacrifice for England. This effect may turn out to be quite robust, as other research reports that mortality salience also motivates increases in the perception of collective continuity as a symbolic defense against cultural finitude (Sani, Herrera, & Bowe, in press). But potentially important for discouraging such self-sacrificial inclinations, Routledge and Arndt found that the self-sacrifice effect was eliminated when participants were instead induced with a perception of the transient nature of their community.

Conclusion

The central tenet of this article is that powerful psychological processes that function to shield humankind from the potential for terror that results from their awareness of the inevitability of death play an important role in provoking and maintaining conflicts between those with different worldviews and that understanding these processes will help us understand many seemingly paradoxical aspects of suicide terrorism and other forms of group-based violence. Whereas research reviewed elsewhere (Niesta, Fritsche, & Jonas, 2008) has uncovered some factors potentially leading to peaceful interactions, the symbolic defenses that people use to ward off death-related anxiety can ironically trigger and perpetuate a cycle of violence that costs a multitude of lives, including those of members of one's own group. Given that deadly encounters with the adherents of alternate worldviews challenge the assumption that one's way of life is the best way to stave off death, a common response is to attempt to annihilate the threat posed by those with challenging worldviews. From the perspective of TMT framework, the deadly plagues of war and global terrorism are rooted in the human need to maintain the integrity and dignity of one's culture.

On a group level, knowing that one's fellow group members are ready and willing to sacrifice themselves in defense of one's culture affirms the righteousness of that way of life. Justifying the sacrifices of those who die for one's culture may prompt the development of "martyr culture," whereby those willing to lay down their lives for the community are revered as heroes. Martyrdom may also restore a lost sense of control over death and secure a literal afterlife. In this way, sacrificing for one's people can be thought of as a strategy of dying in order to defeat death.

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