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Unravelling Fear of Death Motives in Dark Tourism

Avital Biran and Dorina Maria Buda

Introduction

The relative simplicity of the term ‘dark tourism’, which has achieved a broad if not contested acceptance within academia and industry alike, is in contrast to the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon. Embedded in this complexity is the association dark tourism makes between the presentation and consumption of death in the context of tourism, as well as the complex relationships humans have with death and mortality—as individuals as well as societies. Tourism has been traditionally explored from a hedonistic perspective and, subsequently, has assumed that consumption of tourism products and destinations predominately serve the purpose of experiencing fun and pleasure (Gnoth 1997; Malone et al. 2014). Death, conflict, and atrocity sites which elicit sadness, distress, and an inherent sense of danger have been predominately considered deterring factors for tourists (Biran et al. 2014; Buda 2015a). An important aspect of dark tourism—that of human suffering—has made it difficult to apply traditional tourism motivational theories to its study (Dunkley et al. 2011). Moreover, with the seemingly pleasure-oriented consumption of tourism in places connected to death and tragedy, visits to such

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sites have often been portrayed as immoral, deviant, or as a social pathology (Biran and Poria 2012; Stone and Sharpley 2013; also see Chap. 7).

As such, researchers in the rapidly emerging sub-field of dark tourism have been preoccupied with questions of tourist motivation, sought benefits, and experiences. These include but are not limited to questions such as why are tourists drawn to sites and experiences associated with death? Is it simply morbid curiosity or something else? Are dark tourism motives completely distinct from others, or are they a variety of motives for existing 'conventional' forms of tourism (such as heritage tourism, for example)? Why do tourists seemingly find gratification in visiting sites of horrible events? And, is this a 'normal' and socially accepted activity? Attempts to answer such questions have been frequently criticized as descriptive or as under-theorized and empirically fragile (Dunkley et al. 2011; Jamal and Lelo 2011; Stone 2011). Drawing upon a contemporary sociology of death, dark tourism has been conceptualized as a (post)modern-day practice for confronting death and mortality and, consequently, reducing the potential sense of dreading death (Stone and Sharpley 2008). Although this view has become widely accepted (Biran et al. 2014; Johnston 2013; Kidron 2013), there is limited investigation into the psychological mechanisms that lead people to engage with dark sites and, specifically, the role of fear of death in this.

Therefore, to address this gap in the literature, we adopt psychological theory and respond to several calls for a more critical understanding of the phenomenon of dark tourism. Particularly, Stone (2011) calls for dark tourism research to be grounded in broader (post)disciplinary frameworks that allow for a critical exploration of the phenomenon in a coherent and systematic manner. Meanwhile, Seaton (2009) appeals for enhanced psychological discourse in dark tourism research. More specifically, Buda advocates for more emotional and psychoanalytical explorations through concepts such as the death drive (Buda 2015b), desire (Buda and Shim 2014) and unconsciousness and voyeurism (Buda and McIntosh 2013). Similarly, the aim of this chapter is to adopt a psychological perspective and to discuss various ways fear of death is manifested in engagements with death in tourism. Firstly, this chapter will review the consumption of 'morbid fascination' with death in dark tourism. We then unravel the psychological interrelationships between death fears and dark tourism by drawing upon Terror Management Theory (TMT) which, in turn, provides further important explanatory power to that yielded by macro-sociological understandings of dark tourism. Ultimately, we propose death fears and anxiety shape our everyday life in various ways and, as such, these are manifested in dark tourism consumption as well as in other 'conventional' forms of tourism.

'Normalising' Dark Tourism: From 'Morbid Fascination' to Acceptable Fear of Death

Some earlier works point to dark tourism as possibly driven by 'ghoulish' interest in the macabre or, perhaps, an element of *schadenfreude* on the part of the tourist (Dann 1988; Sharpley 2009). However, more recent studies have contributed towards 'normalising' dark tourism, highlighting the role of death anxiety as a driving force which is socio-culturally accepted. Specifically, Stone and Sharpley (2008) conceptualize the phenomenon of dark tourism in terms of social congruence with how death is treated in (post)modern societies (also see Chap. 8). Their argument is that in modern society, death is sequestered or hidden away behind medical and professional façades, with people growing detached from the process and consequences of death and dying. Traditional social institutions and rituals (for example, religion) which allowed individuals in certain 'Western' societies to give meaning to death and life and to deal with the terror that an awareness of mortality brings have gradually disappeared (also see Chap. 6).

In particular, and drawing upon Emile Durkheim's seminal work, Stone and Sharpley (2008) argue that it is this very absence of death in public discourse that makes people desire information about death. Thus, the presence of death within popular culture (as education, entertainment, or even humour) is a way of bringing death back into social consciousness and making it less threatening. Likewise, dark tourism, by offering repackaged 'Other' death as entertainment, education, memorialization, and moral instruction, allows individuals to contemplate and deal with fears of death and, subsequently, possibly restore ontological security and a sense of mortality meaning in a socially acceptable environment (Stone 2009c, 2012; Stone and Sharpley 2008). This active search (or at least consequent) of confronting death is also explored via the psychoanalytic concept of voyeurism, whereby consumption and performance of dark tourism is driven by a desire to look at something forbidden. Moving beyond a simplistic understanding of dark tourism motivations, Buda and McIntosh (2013) examine the experiential nature of dark tourism and offer a holistic and nuanced perspective of dark tourism motives and drives. Continuing in this psychoanalytic perspective, it is argued that tourists, in their quest for the unusual, whether unusual places or unusual experiences, also mobilize desire for fantasy (Buda and Shim 2014). Thus, they conjure imaginations of dark, forbidden, and possibly dangerous activities and locations. Fantasy supports desire and can be understood in connection to conscious daydreams and to unconscious psychological activities, which Sigmund Freud called 'psychical realities'.

Arguably, therefore, dark tourism is a contemporary socio-cultural, political, and spatial institution (among others) to deal with ontological anxieties, fears, and desires—particularly fear of death, of the unusual, and of the unknown. Accordingly, while earlier discussions of dark tourism consumption focused solely on motivation, these have shifted to considering drives, the actual emotional experiences, as well as consequences and benefits of dark tourism activities. Theorising dark tourism in conjunction with psychoanalysis, emotions, and the sociological condition of death in society, academic divisions evident in earlier works have started to be bridged. Particularly, Stone and Sharpley's thanatological framework, stemming from a sociology of death, has become used widely to explore dark tourism consumption (Biran and Hyde 2013). For instance, Biran et al. (2011) reinterpret previous studies of dark tourism motives in light of Stone and Sharpley's (2008) conceptualization. Their reinterpretation suggests the existence of *leisure-pursuit* motives, similar to those of visiting 'regular' sites along with *mortality-related* motives—including curiosities to understand how atrocities happened, social responsibility, identity construction, empathetic identification, and remembrance and commemoration.

Despite a common acceptance of this thanatological framework, there have been limited attempts to explore further and develop the ideas raised by this framework (Biran and Hyde 2013). As such, it still lacks empirical support, and potential advances of the theory remain incomplete. Moreover, while Stone and Sharpley (2008) emphasize the role of external socio-cultural settings and processes in shaping dark tourism engagement, there is little understanding of the internal psychological mechanisms driving this death-related touristic practice (Buda 2015b; Johnston 2013; Seaton 2009). There is also a surprising unawareness with regard to the role of fear of death and how it shapes and influences people's engagement with dark sites. To address this issue and to further an understanding of dark tourism motives and experiences, as well as their roles in confronting death and dying, we suggest the use of psychological theories, and it is this that the chapter now turns to.

The Psychology of 'Fear of Death' in Dark Tourism

The inevitability of death ensures it is present in every area of our life and human existence. Hence, social scientists have long been captivated by the seemingly 'terrifying' and 'paralysing' experience brought about by humans' awareness of their mortality, together with its cognitive and behavioural consequences (Mikulincer and Florian 2008). In psychology, the study of death

was largely neglected until the mid-1920s (Feifel 1990) but has now gained scholarship. This is because of two key reasons: firstly, the growing prominence of existential psychology with an emphasis on death as a philosophical theme and, secondly, both World Wars and the Holocaust, which raised fundamental questions of meaning, purpose, and the transience of life (Feifel 1990; Kastenbaum 2000).

The relevance of a sociology of death was introduced into dark tourism research by Stone and Sharpley (2008). However, the potential contribution of psychology and, specifically, a psychology of death to this subject field have largely been overlooked thus far. An exception is Buda (2015a, b) who draws on psychoanalysis and the concept of the death drive to explore tourists' experiences of danger zones. Adopting a critical theoretical approach and employing a qualitative epistemology, Buda argues that some tourists seek to be confronted with their own death fears while engaging in danger-zone tourism. Buda also suggests that this confrontation with death fears allows individuals to reshape memories and identities as well as coming to terms with past events. Crucially, therefore, Buda stresses the need to consider the role of fear of death in shaping dark tourism experiences, as well as examining how people negotiate fear of death and dying, and giving meaning to tragic events through encounters with commoditized death. However, psychoanalysis is yet to mature within tourism studies. Indeed, some scholars critique the application of psychoanalysis within tourism research, noting it is a 'fading tradition' with loose and difficult-to-apply concepts (Pearce and Packer 2013, p. 387). Meanwhile, in human geography (Callard 2003; Kingsbury et al. 2014; Sibley 2003) and tourism geography (Buda 2015a; Kingsbury 2005; Kingsbury and Brunn 2004), psychoanalysis as a body of knowledge is employed to interpret various (tourist) experiences, especially those involving fantasy, desire, drives, and the unconscious, amongst others. However, for the purpose of this chapter, we employ the contemporary psychological theory 'Terror Management Theory' (TMT) and explore its potential role and application within dark tourism.

Terror Management Theory and Dark Tourism

Terror Management Theory is amongst the most extensively researched areas in social psychology, with over 300 experiments conducted in 15 different countries which have provided support for its hypotheses (Burke et al. 2010; Pyszczynski et al. 2006). It was developed as a formalization of the theoretical work by Ernest Becker (1971, 1973) who proposed an integrative interdisci-

plinary analysis of human motivation based on the works of philosophers such as Soren Kierkegaard, Otto Rank, Gergory Zilboorg, and Norman Brown. TMT's central proposition is that the juxtaposition between human cognitive ability to realize the inevitability of their mortality and the innate instinct of self-preservation results in paralysing fear (Greenberg et al. 1986; Pysczynski et al. 2006). In the words of Becker (1973, p. xii):

This is the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression – and with all this yet to die.

Thus, human beings are constantly battling existential fears which need to be managed so that one is not in a continuous state of terror (Goldenberg et al. 1999). The same intellectual capacities that give rise to the fear of death have also constructed the means for managing this terror through the creation of (death denying) cultural systems of belief (Goldenberg et al. 1999, 2000). TMT postulates humans cope with the feeling of terror that death induces by striving for *literal immortality* (existence after death in a form transcending the physical body, e.g., belief in the afterlife) and *symbolic immortality* (sense of being part of something greater than oneself and of infinite existence). These are achieved through two anxiety buffering processes. Firstly, the faith in a shared cultural worldview and, secondly, the preservation of one's self esteem, which is attained by living up to one's cultural worldviews (Goldenberg et al. 2000; Pysczynski et al. 2006, 2015).

Cultural worldviews refer to the belief in the correctness and persistence of the cultural norms and values one feels belonging to. Being part of a culture and engaging with its shared values and rituals provide individuals with a sense of symbolic mortality by offering structure, continuity, and meaning to life and death (Goldenberg et al. 2000; Hofer 2013; Rieger et al. 2015). Such systems of belief ease our fear of death by answering fundamental questions such as: How did I get here? How should I live my life? What will happen when I die? Additionally, cultural worldviews provide individuals with principles for meaningful and valuable behaviour (Goldenberg et al. 2000; Goulding et al. 2013). As cultural worldviews function as an anxiety buffer against the uncertain universe, when reminded of death (i.e., our mortality becomes salient), individuals desire to behave in a manner that will reinforce and defend their cultural worldview. Indeed, this notion was supported by a range of empirical studies. It is shown that, after reminders of one's own mortality, individuals react more positively to ideas and people which share or support their worldviews and display negative reactions to those who threaten

it. For example, people show greater interest in and a more positive evaluation of others sharing their religious belief or political values; conversely, people are less interested and negatively evaluate dissimilar others and those who criticize their culture (Burke et al. 2010; Pyszczyński et al. 2006, 2015).

Another way by which we negotiate our fear of death is through maintaining a high sense of self-esteem, namely one's concept of self-worth (Pyszczyński et al. 2006, 2015). Self-esteem is related to our cultural worldviews as it is derived, at least partly, from societal feedback regarding the extent to which one preforms and functions as a member of a certain cultural or social system (Goldenberg et al. 2000). People derive a sense of symbolic immortality by feeling that they meet the cultural standards of their social group and thus, are valuable members of something meaningful and long lasting. This notion of legacy includes leaving reminders of one's own existence such as children, monuments, or anything else tangible (e.g., books, music) or intangible, such as ideas and memories that will persist in perpetuity (Goldenberg et al. 2000; Pyszczyński et al. 2015; Van Marle and Maruna 2010). Moreover, notions of the afterlife that are evident in most cultures (such as Heaven, reincarnations, nirvana) reflect the promise of literal immortality if one lives up to the standards and values prescribed by her/his cultural worldviews (Goldenberg et al. 2000; Van Marle and Maruna 2010). While most studies have focused on exploring the effects of death thoughts on cultural worldview defences (Burke et al. 2010), there is evidence that people also activate their self-esteem to deal with death fears. By way of illustration, Mandel and Heine (1999) suggest that consumers exposed to death-related information favoured purchasing luxury brands (e.g., Rolex, Lexus) over non-luxury brands, as these strengthen consumers' social status in a consumer-driven culture, thus reinforcing positive self-esteem. Death-related thoughts also increase self-esteem striving in the form of risk taking, desire for fame, and preferences for self-esteem enhancing romantic partners (Burke et al. 2010; Pyszczyński et al. 2006).

The problem of death lies beneath consciousness. Hence, the contribution of TMT as a psychological tool is in the exploration of processes which are outside conscious awareness—that is, maintaining worldviews and self-esteem (Goldenberg et al. 2000; Pyszczyński et al. 2006, 2015). These two anxiety-buffer mechanisms are *distal* defences. In other words, they are unconscious, less rational, and have remote connection to the problem of death. These defences are experientially embedded through early life, namely, during childhood where we learn to associate the immersion in symbolic reality convened by parents and other cultural agents, and meeting standards of value and behaviour with a sense of meaning, love, support, safety, and security (Burke et al. 2010; Goldenberg et al. 2000; Pyszczyński et al. 2015). Yet, people also

defend themselves against the fears of death by employing *proximal* defences which are more rational, conscious, and directly related to the threat of death. For example, by denying their vulnerability, pushing the problem of death to the distant future (e.g., I do not smoke that much, I am in great shape) or simply avoiding and suppressing such fearful thoughts (Burke et al. 2010; Goldenberg et al. 2000; Hofer 2013; Pyszczynski et al. 2006). Proximal defences push death further from awareness yet do not negate the fear or the fact that death is inevitable—thereby ensuring such thoughts always linger (Pyszczynski et al. 2006, 2015). The core of the anxiety-buffering system according to TMT are the distal defences which prevent these implicit death-related fears from surfacing into consciousness by requiring people to view themselves as valuable parts of a meaningful world.

Nevertheless, TMT was not developed simply to explain the effects of fear of death on people's behaviour but rather why people are so invested in sustaining their belief systems and protecting their sense of value. Conversely, it illustrates the unique effect of fear of death on our lives, including behaviours which do not carry obvious and immediate relation to the problem of death. Amongst these are issues that may centre on nationalism, social judgments, interpersonal attraction and romantic love, attraction to the physical aspects of sex, charitable giving, stereotyping, health promotion behaviour, legal decision-making, and risk taking (Burke et al. 2010; Pyszczynski et al. 2006, 2015). So, the question is that if we engage with terror management in various areas of our lives, why not in tourism too? Of particular importance in this context is the application of TMT to explaining consumer behaviour which illustrates the role of consumption in dealing with death fears by enhancing one's cultural worldviews and/or sense of self-esteem. For instance, Kasser and Sheldon (2000) report that participants exposed to death reminders planned to dedicate larger sums of money to 'pleasurable spending', including travel, leisure, and entertainment. More recently, studies have considered the role of cultural goods, such as media and entertainment (e.g., music, films, literature) as buffers against fear of death (Goldenberg et al. 1999; Hofer 2013; Kneer and Rieger 2015; Rieger et al. 2015; Taylor 2013). Specifically, media psychology scholars are increasingly intrigued (perhaps similar to dark tourism scholars) with the paradoxical consumption of 'meaningful entertainment', which centres on themes of death, tragedy, violence, moral virtue and may raise mixed emotions (Klimmt 2011; Oliver et al. 2012). The few available empirical studies demonstrate the potential of such types of entertainment in addressing terror management needs (e.g., Kneer and Rieger 2015; Rieger et al. 2015). Following from these studies, we

contend that dark tourism as a form of *meaningful entertainment* consumption equally functions as a psychological buffer against fears of death.

Terror Management Theory and Meaningful Entertainment Through Dark Tourism

Goldenberg et al. (1999) were the first to draw on TMT to explain the paradoxical appeal of tragedy as a form of entertainment (within the form of a tragic novel, *Farewell to Arms*). Subsequently, these authors argued that tragedies may be attractive and enjoyable since they allow people to approach their death fears and reflect on their own mortality in a safe, culturally acceptable, and relevant manner. In particular, Goldenberg et al. (1999) suggest that engaging with entertainment which is focused on death and tragedy poses no risk to the individual as it is someone else (the protagonist) who dies, and thus, the individual is not forced to reflect directly on their own mortality. Indeed, their research findings indicate that death reminders increased the appeal of tragedy, namely participants were more touched by the tragic extract and found a non-tragic book less enjoyable. Although Goldenberg's study focused on a certain form of meaningful entertainment (literature), the findings nonetheless provide some empirical support to Stone's (2011, 2012) argument that death-related tourism provides an opportunity to contemplate death of the Self through gazing upon the Significant Other Dead.

More specifically, meaningful entertainment, which arguably includes death-related tourism or 'dark tourism', often grapples with questions of life's profundities and conveys central values and worldviews (Oliver et al. 2012; Rieger et al. 2015; Stone 2009a, 2012; Stone and Sharpley 2013). Therefore, meaningful entertainment may function, for some—at least for some of the time—as a death anxiety-buffer by activating our cultural worldview defence. For example, for fans of this genre, listening to heavy metal music, which is often associated with themes of death and dying and may be considered a form of (sub)culture, can serve as a cultural buffer against existential anguish and death-related thoughts (Kneer and Rieger 2015). In short, listening to metal music can remind fans of this part of their social identity and enhance their identification with their significant cultural in-group, allowing for a sense of symbolic immortality.

Similarly, dark tourism sites may facilitate cultural worldview defences as they communicate and sustain shared values and one's sense of belonging or identification with a meaningful in-group. Following Stone (2012), it can be argued that dark tourism may activate cultural worldview defences through

narratives of education, memorialization, and moral instructions. This is particularly true in relation to visiting death-related heritage sites or sites occupying the darker end of Stone's (2006) 'dark tourism spectrum' typology, which often function as political or social resources in legitimizing certain worldviews and constructing social identities (Feldman 2002; Poria et al. 2009; Stone 2006). For example, Osbaldiston and Petray (2011) note that collective rituals in Gallipoli in the form of national anthems, poems, and monuments transform the sense of horror, fear, and isolation that death can bring into feelings of patriotism and collective effervescence (and even joy). Previous studies have also noted the importance of learning about and feeling part of one's cultural heritage as a key motivation for visitors who consider these sites as part of their heritage (Biran et al. 2011; Poria et al. 2006). Similarly, we visit sites such as war memorials, battlefields, military cemeteries, and even sites of genocide which commemorate and memorialize those who have defended, fought for, or died in the name of our cultural worldview and the lasting existence of our in-group (e.g., nation, ethnic minority). As Walter (2009, p. 42) aptly notes, 'the modern state creates and recreates sacred ancestors, bestowing immortality on its heroes.' Such sites provide meaning through literal and symbolic immortality of in-group members, the heroes or victims who will be remembered, those who have survived (for instance, genocide and other atrocities) in the face of impossible conditions, and the association of group membership with life and meaningfulness.

Moreover, 'lighter dark' sites (Stone 2006) can also bolster cultural worldviews and address terror management needs. As Stone (2012) suggests, even 'dark fun factories' such as the London Dungeon visitor attraction in the UK include educational elements and offer moral instructions which help shape, reinforce, and validate a person's worldviews and belief system. Indeed, the Dungeon experience prompts visitors to reflect on questions of justice, penal codes, as well as issues of punishment and torture by comparing past and present societal values and practices (Stone 2009a, b, 2012; Stone and Sharpley 2013). In turn, this may allow visitors to affirm the higher moral grounds of (their) modern worldviews which will not accept past (often brutal) practices (Stone 2009b, 2012). Finally, beyond dark tourism, the management of existential fears through cultural worldview anxiety-buffer is also reflected in tourism consumption in general. Consequently, religious or spiritual tourism, secular pilgrimages, visits to cultural and (not death-related) heritage sites, as well as roots/genealogy tourism that allow us to strengthen social bonds and confirm in-group systems of belief might be considered as examples.

At first glance, cultural worldview defences may be more obviously reflected in dark tourism consumption, though self-esteem striving is also manifest in

dark tourism engagement. Indeed, people can derive a sense of self-worth by visiting dark sites which are of relative importance and possess symbolic meaning to their in-group and which represent the group's values and social identity (e.g., battlefields, genocide sites, or memorials). For example, visits to sites such as Gallipoli, Auschwitz, or places of genocide in Rwanda or Cambodia are encouraged, socially rewarded, and even considered obligatory, as they are seen as educational, commemorative, and central to the identity of certain social groups (Biran and Poria 2012; Biran et al. 2011; Feldman 2002; Hyde and Harman 2011; Slade 2003). Particularly, with regard to Holocaust-related sites, different agencies in Israel offer some financial support to youths whose families cannot afford to fund their participation in educative school trips to Poland (and Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum). Hence, as visits to such sites are seen as a standard or highly valued behaviour by one's in-group, visitation affirms our adherence to the cultural worldview and values of our meaningful cultural group and, in turn, can bolster our self-esteem.

TMT studies also suggest that when faced with death fears, people tend to exhibit risky behaviour (e.g., risky driving, drug use, sun bathing, scuba diving, precarious career decision-making) as such behaviours contribute to enhancing one's positive self-esteem (Landau and Greenberg 2006; Miller et al. 2004; Pyszczynski et al. 2015; Routledge et al. 2004, 2008). Likewise, engaging with death-related tourism, which (re)presents horrific sights and atrocities and involves sensations of fear, anguish, and danger (Buda 2015a, b; Nawijn and Fricke 2015), may be seen as a (psychologically) risky behaviour. Arguably, within that context, visitors derive a sense of self-worth from the knowledge that they have faced and 'survived' these horrible events, considering themselves as emotionally strong and courageous. For example, Buda (2015b) indicates that for some tourists in danger-zones, it is all about showing and telling others that 'they were there' during a violent conflict and that it did not really scare them. This is relevant for different types of dark tourism places, even for fun factories which present gory scenes of death and violence and offer a scary and frightful experience (Bristow and Newman 2004; Stone 2009b).

Finally, addressing terror management needs through self-esteem activation takes place within the broader context of tourism and leisure consumption. For example, exploring risk-taking as a behaviour that validates and enhances self-esteem, Miller et al. (2004) found that death reminders led scuba divers with low self-esteem and self-efficacy to display greater willingness to take diving risks. Furthermore, leisure and tourism have long been considered to play a key role in individuals' self-esteem, through mastering skills and

constructing positive self and social identity (e.g., Garst et al. 2001; Page and Connell 2010). Thus, it may be argued that tourism participation, as a whole, can provide opportunities for buffering existential fears through self-esteem enhancement.

Exploring the consumption of dark tourism as a form of *meaningful entertainment* through the lens of TMT suggests the appeal of dark tourism stems from its potential to buffer against death and existential fears. Compared to other sociological, thanatological, and psychoanalytic approaches adopted in dark tourism scholarship thus far, TMT offers a more nuanced understanding of *why* and *how* death-related tourism may mitigate fear of death. In other words, adopting a TMT perspective illuminates the unconscious psychological processes, cultural worldviews, and self-esteem defence mechanisms which underline the effects of fear of death on individual behaviour within the context of tourism. Additionally, the current conceptualization stresses further that fascination with death and the fear of death are embodied and socially accepted parts of the human experience and affect our behaviour in almost all areas of our lives. As such, death-related tourism may be viewed as a diverse, socio-culturally accepted and meaningful behaviour and not as a social pathology. Moreover, beyond understanding dark tourism consumption, TMT raises the need to further consider fundamental interrelationships between death fears and tourism (Buda 2015b). That is, since the ongoing and contentious need to manage the fear and terror that death can bring is manifested in other forms of tourism consumption, in which death is not necessarily the core theme of the tourism product or experience.

Conclusion

Thanatological conceptualizations of dark tourism consumption have contributed to the 'normalization' of dark tourism. Dark tourism is no longer considered only a 'deviant' behaviour of self-gratification 'sought out by necrophilic tourists' (Kidron 2013, p. 177), but can also offer meaningful experiences of contemplating death and life. We claim that dark tourism is a socially acceptable (post)modern practice for dealing with our inherent and shared fear of death. To demonstrate our claim, we draw on psychological theory and elaborate on the underlining psychological mechanisms of negotiating death fears. These fears, we argue, can shape dark tourism consumption and experiences. Within a TMT framework, it is suggested that death-related tourism allows negotiation of death fear since it may function as an anxiety-buffer mechanism by sustaining: firstly, our faith in shared cultural worldviews and,

secondly, one's sense of self-esteem, which is attained by living up to one's own cultural worldview. Consequently, dark tourism facilitates a sense of symbolic and literal immortality, meaning, and continuity by satisfying one's sense of belonging to something bigger, long lasting as well as being a valuable member of a social group. Therefore, the conceptualization we have outlined in this chapter provides for a more nuanced understanding of dark tourism consumption, which considers both socio-cultural processes (as suggested by thanatological conceptualizations based on the sociology of death) and internal, individual process (as suggested here based on the psychology of death). Moreover, we suggest that other forms of tourism, which are not themed around death (e.g., religious tourism, family tourism, adventure tourism), can also be analysed and understood via a TMT conceptual application. Thus, we call for further critical explorations of various ways through which people negotiate existential fears in tourism practices.

The application of TMT, as suggested in this chapter, may advance research into the fundamental connections between death fears and (dark) tourism consumption. Specifically, central to the thanatological perspective of dark tourism consumption is the connection between ontological (in)security and patterns of behaviour (Seaton 2009; Stone and Sharpley 2008). Anxieties about the meaning of the surrounding world and our own mortality are mirrored in the consumption of (death-related) tourism, which allows for a construction of meaning in the face of death and, subsequently, a restoration of ontological security. Yet, the ontological insecurity concept has been critiqued as being too abstract and problematic to reliably operationalize (Tonry 2004; Van Marle and Maruna 2010). Thus, it may be of limited use for empirically examining the assumed role of fear of death within dark tourism experiences. Conversely, the substantial empirical evidence validating TMT (Burke et al. 2010; Pyszczynski et al. 2015) can be used to provide support and explore empirically the notion of ontological insecurity at the individual and psychological level. In this chapter, therefore, we lay the foundations and provide the tools for future research to venture into exploring 'whether dark tourism will invoke a greater or lesser extent of ontological (in)security, and whether packaged-up death provides reassurance or threatens an individuals' life-world' (Stone 2012, p. 1582).

Whilst conceptualising dark tourism within the context of TMT, we also argue that dealing with one's own fears, whether fear of death or any other type of fear, may provide (more) meaning to life. Stone (2011, 2012) similarly argues that dark tourism experiences are not merely about consuming narratives of death but about contemplating life and living in the face of inevitable mortality. Dark tourism sites provoke reflections on hope, health,

and on how one should live morally and by what ethical standards. Within dark tourism experiences, the juxtaposition of death and fear alongside life and providing meaning to life is also argued by Buda (2015a, b) and Kidron (2013). Hence, this juxtaposition highlights the need to recognize the blurred boundaries between life and death and between fear and fun in dark tourism experiences.

However, despite the potential of TMT to advance an understanding of dark tourism consumption and experiences, there are several limitations worthy of note. Firstly, TMT is based on an experimental research design, which is uncommon and may be difficult to implement within tourism research. Therefore, it remains to be ascertained if and how future studies will explore the activation of terror management buffering processes in the real-world context of dark tourism. Moreover, though TMT elaborates on our reactions to psychological encounters with mortality, it is important to note that fear of death is not uni-dimensional. Indeed, there are various types of fears, including but not limited to the loss of self-fulfilment, fear of the physical decomposition of the body, as well as fear of the consequences of death to family and friends (Florian and Kravetz 1983; Mikulincer and Florian 2008). Each may shape dark tourism consumption patterns and experiences in different ways. Finally, the conceptualization in this chapter focuses on the prominent theory of TMT, but the broader field of death psychology may offer various other avenues to further explore the ways in which tourists tackle fears of death and dying.

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