Reclaiming Death Acceptance in the Twenty-First Century

CRISTINA MIHAELA BOTÎLCĂ

Affiliation: University of Bucharest, Romania
Doctoral School for Literary and Cultural Studies
E-mail: cristina.botilca@yahoo.com

Abstract

In a modern twenty-first-century Western society that extracts its values from youth culture and the fear of aging, death phobia becomes a real issue that needs to be addressed. This study aims to present some of the reasons why death became a taboo subject, why modern man fears death, and how cultural sensitivity can lead to a state of death acceptance, all while the death positivity movement is gaining traction. Keeping in mind that the complex paradox of today is fear of inevitability, let us try and name some of the roots of this problem and what we can do to ease the interaction with death.

Keywords: death acceptance, death phobia, death anxiety, death positivity movement, twenty-first century.

Introduction

The fear paradox consists of the fact that we are frightened by something inevitable, and yet we do believe that we can somehow avoid it by stalling or burying it deep inside our subconscious. What is this fear that we all have but refuse to acknowledge? The fear of death or death-phobia. This has been a part of man's life since the beginning of time since the first discovered death rituals 95,000 years ago (Doughty, 2015). Naturally, society has been changing ever since, and with it, our relationship with death and death culture. This study aims to discuss death as a taboo in modern Western society, modern man fearing death, and the part cultural sensitivity plays in death acceptance in the context of globalization.

"We begin dying the day we are born" (Doughty, 2015, p. 222), and yet we are never prepared to do so. Death is something that we sweep under the proverbial rug with

extreme nervousness and fear that someday we will have to take that rug away and look at the heap of anxiety collected over the many years of denial. The experience of death "represents the possibility of the impossibility of existence in general" (Agamben, 1991, p. 1). Existence cannot be comprehended outside of it simply because everything physical must have a beginning and an end. This tells us that our representation of death is flawed. Psychologically speaking, we can only see it outside of our existence (Kübler-Ross, 1986, 1997) and the only road we can take is through the night, feeling around for some answers that leave us partly satisfied and accepting of our mortality, with the help of approaches that stem from positive psychology (Compton, 2005; Sheldon & King, 2001), spirituality (Marryatt, 1891), and logotherapy (Frankl, 1985), among many others.

The cultural mindset plays an extremely important role in establishing what type of relationship we want to have with death. Culture is such a complex realm, such an individual experience, that we could not possibly choose one single definition and work within its walls, without trying to look outside of it and find some other perspective that we could use. Burnett Tylor (1920) states that culture is a complex whole that consists of habits, customs, traditions, behaviors, laws, beliefs, and capabilities that man follows within his social frame. The frame of reference here is somewhat traditional, compared to the semiotic concept of culture, presented by Geertz (2014), who argues that man is just an animal suspended in manmade "webs of significance" (p. 14), nearly trapped in them as if they were 'the spider webs' of culture. Of course, we must also take into consideration the psychological dimension, which can be described as consisting of psychological structures that man has to follow so that he can be accepted in a social group (Goodenough, 1961, p. 522). For us to discuss the concept of culture in the twenty-first century, this single paper and ten more would not suffice. All the changes, all the shifts that are happening right now in the world change our perception of culture every single time something moves inside of it, and a great part of those changes occur within the frame of a globalizing movement, a subject tackled in the following sections.

Therefore, death is something that should be avoided, according to our present cultural mindset. However, there appeared a movement (silent in the beginning) that made people from all over the world "push back against that oxymoronic idea" (Booth, 2019) and this is the death positivity movement. Its goal is not to make death obsolete or belittle its cultural importance. "This way of thinking simply argues that cultural censorship of death isn't doing us any favors" (Booth, 2019). On the contrary, it sets us up for a life of subconscious fear and anxiety that will, in the end, dictate our every decision. Death-phobia is above all the child of human nature, but it has recently been adopted by modern society and raised as if it were its own.

Death as a Modern Taboo Subject

In 1955, Gorer expressed what the problem in the twentieth century precisely is in discussions about death and dying. The author notices the taboos of sex in the previous century and how they shifted to become taboos of death in the twentieth:

> The natural process of corruption and decay have become disgusting, as disgusting as the natural processes of birth and copulation were a century ago; preoccupation about such processes is (or was) morbid and unhealthy, to be discouraged in all and punished in the young. (p. 51)

On the one hand, the modern denial of death might have begun in the nineteenth century (Leaney, 1989), but collective death experiences such as World War Two have been the real trigger (Jupp, 2006). On the other hand, some sociologists argue that, after Gorer's article, there appeared a constant proclamation of death as a modern taboo (Walter, 1991), which might have given the subject the popularity that made it anything but a topic that must not be tackled publicly.

As a cultural whole, we create this aura of mystery and misery surrounding death and its 'constituents': dead bodies, death practices, rituals, grieving, and mourning. Consequently, "death avoidance is not an individual failing; it's a cultural one. Facing death is not for the faint-hearted. It is far too challenging to expect that each citizen will do so on his or her own" (Doughty, 2017, p. 232). Death acceptance should not be a mission we have to accomplish alone, but a community practice, even though modern culture seems to offer us no help in this regard. Western societies, globalization, and modern man's immense desire to live forever can make starting a discussion about death impossible in most parts of the world. In Moldavia, for instance, rural communities are more open to discuss what will happen to their bodies after death. The elders build their own caskets and place them in front of their houses (Ceremonialul de înmormântare), to prepare not only themselves but also their loved ones for the moment of death. This practice does not only help them reach a stage of acceptance[1], but also breaks the taboo surrounding death and dying and creates a proper environment for conversation within that community.

Psychologically speaking, the taboo around death is an active part of our lives, kept on an unconscious level. Even if it lurks in the background of our psyche and we do not always feel its presence, it still motivates us in certain aspects:

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[1] In *On Death and Dying*, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross is the first to acknowledge that we go through five stages of death (or grief): denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

Most people would say they do not consciously think about death. However, on an unconscious level, the fear of death influences significant aspects of their lives and motivates many of their actions. People avoid death anxiety in a variety of ways. (R. Firestone & Catlett, 2009, p. 19)

How does this avoidance take place? Doughty (2015) explains that the fear of death is the catalyst that pushes us to build cathedrals and have children, and so understanding how we react to death and why we do so may bring us closer to understanding ourselves and each other. Death is the engine of our every action, conscious or unconscious. This can sometimes be seen as a curse of consciousness, which:

> gives rise to a fear reaction of serious proportions. Indeed, the manner in which an individual handles death anxiety as an evolving being, faced with growing knowledge of existential issues, acts as one of the primary determinants of the course of his or her psychological life. (R. Firestone et al, 2009, p. 185)

But it does not necessarily have to be a curse. It can also be the catalyst that inspires us to live in the moment meaningfully and to live a good life so that we can die a good death. Viktor Frankl, the father of logotherapy, wrote *Man's Search for Meaning* (1985), in which he describes his experience in concentration camps. There, he finally understands that meaning, life, and death go hand in hand. He writes: "Live as if you were living for the second time and had acted as wrongly the first time as you are about to act now" (p. 175). In the camp, death was laughed at, the taboo was shattered using "a grim sense of humor" (p. 34), and this led to him finding "some sense in my death" (p. 69). This sense was found by opening himself up—psychologically, socially, culturally—not only to the—verbalized—thought of dying but also to the prospect of it happening.

Another matter that became taboo is the image of the corpse, not as portrayed by the twenty-first-century media—which encourages the public obsession with the Hollywoodian side of forensic science (Penfold-Mounce, 2016)—but by professionals who work for funeral homes, by doctors and nurses, and by people who encounter death in its raw, unglamorous state. This distinction between the fashioned image of death and the raw and real one is expressed in the following paragraph, in which Doughty, as a young mortician, cannot decide whether the dead body is merely flesh or something much more than this:

> This is just a dead person, I told myself. Rotting meat, Caitlin. An animal carcass. This was not an effective, motivational technique. Byron was far more than rotting meat.

> He was also a noble, magical creature, like a unicorn or a griffin. He was a hybrid of something sacred and profane, stuck with me at this way station between life and eternity. (Doughty, 2015, p. 2)

These two opposing views on dead bodies can also be translated into the oppositions body-as-object versus living body (Ricoeur, 2004) and corpse versus cadaver (Scott, 2008). Is it just "rotting meat" or is it a "magical creature"? Doughty seems to find the via media: "a hybrid of something sacred and profane." Thus, the body becomes both an object of external manipulation—through ritual—and a relic that holds meaning—through belief—and the image of the dead body as a product consumed via mass media, lacking in visible and realistic death images (Hanusch, 2008), disappears and is replaced by this mélange between ritual and belief, which holds meaning for both the individual and the community and helps them approach death from a physical and visual point of view, without any misguidance.

Doughty also discusses her first interaction with death when during her childhood years, witnessing a little girl falling from the balcony of a building onto the pavement. She acknowledges that: "I had seen worse on television, but this was reality" (2015, p. 30). For this reason, the question arises: how are real-life atrocities different from what we see in the media? The answer lies within the question: it is indeed real life. When the media depicts a dead body, usually making a show out of death (Florea & Rabatel, 2011), the screen acts as a protective shield. Likewise, when we see this in a movie that we unconsciously perceive as something fashioned by somebody else, the impact is different, because we are more of an observer than a participant. However, when death occurs in our circle, in our reality that we always believe is locked and shielded from tragedy, we develop "a thick layer of denial" (Doughty, 2015, p. 33) so we can live on. Doughty wonders: "Sometimes I think of how my childhood would have been different if I had been introduced directly to death. Made to sit in his presence, shake his hand. Told that he would be an intimate companion" (2015, p. 33).

Death being introduced to us mostly depends on the culture we contribute to. That is why cultural relativism plays an important part in understanding why some cultures have such different views with regards to what the dead body means to them. For instance, Christianity tells us that the living body holds the spirit, and without it, the body is just a carcass (Geary, 2013). But there are cultures that treat the dead body as if it were still living, as the Torajan people in Indonesia do (Koudounaris, 2015), interacting with their dead even long after the burial has taken place, since they mummify the bodies and preserve them in such a way that the corpses can be exposed to the natural elements

without the fear of decomposition. By interaction, one might understand communication, but in fact, it is a ceremony of remembrance, when the bodies are dressed up, cleaned, and involved in the activities of the living. For the Torajan people, this is a particularly important part of the grieving process (Doughty, 2017) that reminds them there is no taboo in discussing and interacting with death.

Moreover, because culture and taboo also encompass language, it is necessary that we mention the importance of communication in conversations surrounding death. Firstly, language produces thoughts and meanings whose reflections turn into the rituals we create around death and grief (White, 1995). Secondly, the relationship between language and death—beyond the ontological meaning of the end of one's existence being put into words, thus into existence—can be transported into a literary device whose purpose is to ease the coming into contact with the awareness of death. Not translating our pain into words contradicts the relation between the "faculty for language" and "the faculty for death" that only human beings possess (Agamben, 1991, p. xii). Is there a possibility for death to exist outside language? Probably not, considering that there would be no way for it to emerge, to develop, and to linger. Language is what makes it linger, and vice-versa. Without death, language would resonate into an eternal void of nothingness, missing significance and intention. At the end of the twentieth century, there developed a new genre surrounding death-related conversation. Now we might call it contemporary death-acceptance literature. This aims to connect death positivity to the written discourse with the help of creative nonfiction authors[2] who project us into a realm where we can witness our own death way ahead of its time, with nonchalant sadness and humor, forcing us to interact with the uncomfortable in a way that essentially eases the painfully unavoidable impact with death.

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[2] Such books include: *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* (C. Doughty, 2015), *From Here to Eternity* (C. Doughty, 2017), *Wil My Cat Eat My Eyeballs?* (C. Doughty, 2019), *On Grief and Grieving* (E. Kübler-Ross & David Kessler, 2005), *Death: The Final Stage of Growth* (E. Kübler-Ross, 1997), *A Memoir of Living and Dying* (E. Kübler-Ross, 1998), *On Life After Death* (E. Kübler-Ross, 1984), *Questions and Answers on Death and Dying* (E. Kübler-Ross, 1997), *All That Remains* (S. Black, 2019), *The Denial of Death* (E. Becker, 1997), *Arta de a Muri* (M. Eliade, 1993), *Being Mortal: Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End* (A. Gawande, 2015), *Past Mortems: Life and death behind mortuary doors* (C. Valentine, 2018), *Unnatural Causes* (R. Shepherd, 2019), *Death: The End of Self-Improvement* (J. Tollifson, 2019).

Modern Man Fears Death

A study conducted by Chapman University in 2018 shows that the fear of death is among the greatest fears Americans have. The survey tells us that 56.4% of the people interviewed said that they were afraid of people they love having to die (Chapman University, 2018). As we saw in the previous section, most of the conversations about death are taboo, so we may presume that the number of those who admitted to having such fears might be even higher. Consequently, we know some sort of anxiety does exist, but now let us discuss why modern man might dread death.

Our modern world's obsession with being and staying young for our entire lives triggers in us a chain reaction of conscious avoidance, anxiety, and fear (Howarth, 2013). As part of the young generation, I can argue that we have "zero death literacy" (Doughty, 2017, p. 167), but we also do not seem to mind it. Romanian historian Lucian Boia (2000) admits that today we live in the mirage of adolescence, whose values and attitudes seem to have been imposed even upon the elderly. So, it is impossible for someone who lives inside this youth culture not to fear aging and eventually dying.

Modern times involve not fighting the uncomfortable. Young generations—especially in Europe and America—choose not to get involved in the process of burying a loved one (Parkes et al., 1997) not only because they are not connected to rituals anymore but also because death became an industry that keeps you from contributing in any way. For example, Christian traditions say that the body needs to be bathed by the family before it is buried. However, even in rural Eastern Europe, funeral homes insist that they do it, taking away from you the possibility of interacting with the body as part of the grieving process. Doughty draws a harsh conclusion when she writes about the differences between a "now" and a "then": "What is most surprising about this story is not that an eight-year-old witnesses a death, but it took her eight whole years to do so. ... When the first European settlers arrived, all they did was die" (2015, pp. 30-31). Blauner (1966) argues that this difference exists because modern social systems do not miss their dead as much as their pre-modern ancestors since life expectancy is now longer; also, there are larger populations, so the 'vacant positions' in society can be easily filled by someone else. However, the bereaved individual is even more isolated than before. We are asked to both accept death and, at the same time, reject it (Dumont & Foss, 1972): accept it because it is a part of our reality, and deny it because we must go about our lives as if it did not exist. Moreover, the meaning of death has become overwhelmingly scientific (Prior, 1989) and less spiritual. Because of this secularization of death, the modern man has no choice but to follow the already existing path of death phobia.

The irony that we witness is that "the deepest need is to be free of the anxiety of death and annihilation; but it is life itself which awakens it, and so we must shrink from being fully alive" (Becker, 1997, p. 66). Peter Berger (1967) argues that this duality is natural and that death is essential for the human condition because it forces us to find coping mechanisms rather than neglect a universality that constructs man and society.

The choice should be open to conversation, which can contradict a cultural trend that harms us. But perhaps culture can be manipulated. Perhaps culture creates expectations that reality can never meet. Is it not possible for modern culture to be harmful? Doughty argues that "there is something deeply unsettling … about what is happening to our death values", and our culture "has broken so completely with traditional methods of body disposition and beliefs surrounding mortality" (2015, p. 214), that we currently find ourselves inside a "spiritual supernova" (Taylor, 2007, p. 300), i.e., we have a multitude of choices that overwhelm man precisely because of their number.

However, if culture is made of webs of significance, then significance is made of beliefs. Beliefs are transmitted from generation to generation, and some may come out as being wrong—based on the individual's personal definition of right and wrong—whereas others have been around for a long time and proved to work, to heal, and to keep the family and the community together. What happens today is that my generation breaks away from what tradition tells them, away from ritual and meaning/significance, and we do not even know that we are doing so. Unconsciously, we swim forward in the cultural stream dictated by our surroundings—books we read, movies we see, people we meet. Swimming against the current is frowned upon, but clearly not impossible. It is clear that modern culture is somewhat flawed for not focusing more on belief and ritual. Before being part of a culture—a mechanism of significance and meaning—we hold our personal beliefs, and this infallible relationship that we have with our bodies forces us to have a relationship with their mortality, too. You cannot possibly have one without the other, and if you do, the lack of the latter will propel you into a time of shock and despair when you face death, whether your own or somebody else's.

Herder captures terrifically well the essence of modern man, without even knowing what society would be like in the twenty-first century:

> Who would not feel this 'Ah' penetrate through his heart, on hearing a victim of torture writhe and howl, standing before a dying being who cries out, or even before a moaning animal, when the whole living machine suffers … . Horror and pain cut through his bones; his whole nervous system shares the pain and destruction; the sound of death

resonates. This is the chain of this language of nature! (1806, p. 48)

I trust that 'living machine' was an accurate prediction of man expected to behave, to be, to exist in a way that perfectly matches mechanical constraints. When tired, "update" or "uninstall" something from your mind and "restart." Even language stimulates this mechanism, with phrases such as "I am going to recharge my batteries at the weekend" or "I have to reprogram for success." However, this system has feelings and consciousness, and gods. Did man become the ultimate machinery that overturns the very system that created it? Perhaps not yet, as we are still aware of something that only we can be aware of, i.e. death. If that sets us apart from every being is debatable, but one thing is certain: death holds onto us with a grip that cannot (will not) let us forget who and what we are.

By extension, the modern industrialized world plays a great role in changing death practices. Industrialized cremation and embalming are two processes that changed the way we look at death and dead bodies in Western society. Whilst families are rarely present during cremations in the West, in Japan, they are offered a huge part in the ritual: the cremation machine is started by a family member, and close relatives pick the remaining bones during the ritual of kotsuage (Doughty, 2017, p. 165-166). This change translated into a shift of attitude toward scenes of death. Gorer admits that in the twentieth century "there seems to have been an unmarked shift in prudery; whereas copulation has become more and more mentionable, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon societies, death has become more and more unmentionable as a natural process" (1955, p. 50), because the emancipation of man is characterized by an effort to master life. "Death is seen as the terminator of purpose … , the antithesis of the modern celebration of life" (Lee, 2020, p. 91). But what we do not know is that celebrating life also means celebrating death. Going hand in hand, these halves of the same whole cannot be separated, and until we learn that, death will be the enemy of life instead of its companion.

Cultural Sensitivity and Death Acceptance in the Context of Globalization

Cultural sensitivity aims to increase understanding between different cultures and decrease rigid and stereotyped attitudes towards others. But it can also be a source of inspiration, a proverbial window to another cultural realm that treats death differently. In today's constant and irreversible globalization, we have to learn to rediscover these windows and also pay attention to our own culture (Raikhan et al., 2014). Unfortunately, borders between cultures began to disappear and make room for a universalized attitude toward death, which might be destructive (Cowen, 2020), especially for those local cultures that built their death practices on ritual and belief. Walter (2005) argues that

modern death attitudes have less to do with global modernity than with national and local cultures, religion, and history. But what he might fail to see is the connection between the center and the periphery of global culture. The center will always influence the margins, and these margins will whether stray farther from themselves or grow even deeper roots into their own beliefs.

Oftentimes "we invoke belief to denigrate others. … We consider death rituals savage only when they don't match our own" (Doughty, 2017, p. 12). This does not only widen the already existing pit between cultures, but it neither offers help when it comes to finding inspiration for death rituals. A culturally insensitive behavior can never lead to the reformation of the death industry. I agree that there will always be the Other, the non-I, who scares us and seems to somehow threaten to take away something of our own, to change us in some way or another, but perhaps there can be a way of communicating with a different culture while also trying to understand and value the differences that are bound to exist among people. Anthony Appiah agrees that "conversations across boundaries can be fraught, all the more so as the world grows smaller and smaller and the stakes grow larger. It's therefore worth remembering that they can also be a pleasure" (2006, p. xx). This is the choice of cosmopolitanism which involves guarding your own values and being curious about and respectful toward the values of the world (Gunesch, 2004). Cosmopolitanism in the sense of cultural sensitivity might be the answer to our death-denying Western society. Even though it has been associated with a one-world government that would end nationalism (Heater, 1996), it is my belief that a culturally sensitive cosmopolitanism will bring a certain balance between 'I' —curious, unjudgmental—and the Other—willing to let me experience his culture as a source of inspiration for my own. Boia (2000) wonders whether it would be better if the reality of the Other resumed to a dialogue, to a mediation between cultures. Conversation without judgment seems to be the answer to the question of alterity, but although we might believe that the latter disappeared when the twenty-first century began, all is but a new arrangement (Boia, 2000), an arrangement that hides these differences in the deep layer of culture, the one that we never get to see but we all get to feel.

In this sense, globalization seems to have erased all borders between cultures, creating (paradoxically) a bigger resistance to the Other within the said cultures (Lieber & Weisberg, 2002). However, some scholars dismiss the idea that there could ever exist a hegemonic culture taking over, and who insist that those "who blame Western modernity in general for all the ills of the world … usually do not bother to learn about other cultures and languages to begin with" (Huyssen, 2008, p. 4). This is partly right. Not all ills can be traced

back to Western lands. But what happened to death culture could be—consider industrial cremation[3] and chemical embalming[4], which were both tested and advertised first in the Western community, then slowly the rest of the world had to follow—because what is the West if not the center of cultural, economic, and, after all, living world (Appadurai, 1996; Featherstone, 1995)?

To exemplify these changes, Doughty discusses the use of the word 'dignity' in Western death culture:

> The Western funeral home loves the word "dignity". The largest American funeral corporation has even trademarked the word. What dignity translates to, more often than not, is silence, a forced pose, a rigid formality. Wakes last exactly two hours. Processions lead to the cemetery. The family leaves the cemetery before the casket is even lowered into the ground. (2017, p. 102)

Dignity can sometimes prevent us from grieving on our own terms and starting the healing process. Does grieving mean breaking down and bursting into tears in front of a crowd at your mother's funeral? Does that help you ease the pain? If so, you should not feel any sense of guilt. Unfortunately, modern society starts resembling more and more Norbert Elias' société polie: the courtier is a master of self-control, and that is why they appear as the ultimate rational person. However, some questions arise, Elias (2002) says. Passions and tensions will grow stronger and stronger and make the individual fight himself, not the others, as was the case inside war-led societies. This means that the superego will constantly fight the id about manifesting emotion, creating huge tensions for the individual. These contradictions within your psyche—one may also call it "soul"—will subsequently sprout into emotional problems.

The question is: "In our Western culture, where are we held in our grief? Perhaps religious spaces, churches, temples—for those who have faith. But for everyone else, the most vulnerable time in our lives is a gauntlet of awkward obstacles" (Doughty, 2017, p. 232). Religious people perceive death differently because they already possess a 'toolbelt' that helps them confront some of their fears, but not all people are religious or spiritual. And apparently, Western culture offers them no support. Should they refuse religion or spirituality, they cannot even find meaning or relief.

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[3] See Caitlin Doughty's *From Here to Eternity*, pp. 130-133. She tells the story of how Lodovico Brunetti, an anatomy professor, attempted to create the first modern cremation machinery in the late 1800s. In a paper published in 1884, Brunetti describes industrial cremation as "a solemn, magnificent moment, which has a sacred, majestic quality" (p. 132).

[4] See John Troyer's "Embalmed vision", published in *Mortality*, 12:1, pp. 22-47.

It is advised that the grieving process should happen behind closed doors, making sure that no one hears our cries of sorrow, and this perception spreads all over the world, touching all cultures. Thankfully, in this flood of globalization, some small islands arise. In Romania, for instance, the tradition of *bocitoare*—wailing women or professional mourners—can still be found in the northern and western parts of the country. In Maramureș, people sing the following couplet: Dragul maichii, după tine, / Îmi pare și rău, și bine ('The fact that you died, my lad, / makes me both happy and sad'[5]). The belief is that life does not end, that the dead person goes on living in spirit, shedding away the human body, and this helps the entire community come together and heal. No taboo, no fear of being judged by other cultures, no hiding away from death.

So, why is cultural sensitivity so important for death acceptance? The reason is that we all take what we need from the different cultures surrounding us. By witnessing other rituals and practices, we find inspiration and comfort not only in the sense that we can allow ourselves to grieve when we need to but we can also face death with the help of those many interactions and experiences that we had with what makes us uncomfortable and anxious. Buddhist monks find liberation through discomfort[6], staring right into the heart of their fears, finding the strength to break away from it (Doughty, 2015). We are not Buddhist monks, but stepping onto this proverbial bridge between denial and acceptance can change the way we live, and most importantly, die.

Conclusions

Modernity entails some sort of disenchantment (Taylor, 2007), even if "only humans can hallucinate their way out of danger … The ego regresses to a more primitive state of magical thinking in the attempt to restore the safety and security of symbiotic bliss" (Piven, 2004, p. 128). This kind of magical thinking is discouraged nowadays. Looking mortality in the eye becomes an exercise that is too uncomfortable. However, if accepting the existence of death means interacting with it and with our thoughts behind the modern culture's back, the islands that I mentioned will grow bigger. Or they will completely sink under the flood of a forced universalization of culture.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, two great currents seem to collide, and there are many names for them, some carrying political meanings that I do not intend to discuss. These are the same two currents that have been clashing since the dawn of

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[5] Translated into English by the author of the study.

[6] Also called cognitive behavioral therapy, a psychotherapeutic treatment that helps people find coping strategies to help them with their negative thought patterns.

time: the Old and the New. If the New has sometimes been more beneficial to us than the Old, nowadays it seems that the former became a leveling tool that has little to no awareness of what it destroys in the process.

I believe that death positivity is not just the trend of 2020 (Izadi & Rao, 2019), but a life (and death) style that will save many people from the despair of facing death. This study was meant to present a short introduction to what the twenty-first century could achieve in terms of death positivity. The solution is to come into contact with as much information as possible. Authors[7] who openly talk about their own experience with death have been creating the contemporary death acceptance literature, the environment that allows open interaction with raw and real images of death and dying. We only have to show up.

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[7] See the third footnote.

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