



Navigating Dystopia: Necropolitical Temporality and Resistance in Mohammed Rabie's *Otared*

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Abstract

This paper argues that contemporary authoritarian regimes dominate not only by controlling life and death but also by colonising temporal experience itself. While Achille Mbembe's necropolitics elucidates sovereign power through death-worlds, this study demonstrates that such sovereignty operates fundamentally through the manipulation of memory, agency, and futurity. Analysing Mohammed Rabie's dystopian novel *Otared*, the paper identifies three interlocking mechanisms of temporal control: historical erasure (revolutionary narratives reframed, symbolic spaces removed from official discourse), present immobilisation (perpetual emergency, surveillance, normalised violence), and future foreclosure (hope pathologised as destabilising). Yet the novel also reveals fragile yet ethically significant acts of temporal resistance: counter-memory, embodied trauma, and material pledges of futurity. Drawing on Foucault's governmentality and Mbembe's necropolitics, the paper positions *Otared* as diagnostic fiction that illuminates how temporal manipulation functions as a technology of authoritarian power. Time emerges not as a backdrop but as the primary terrain of political struggle.

Keywords: Necropolitical temporality; temporal resistance; dystopian fiction; Egyptian authoritarianism; time as power

1. Introduction

Mohammed Rabie's *Otared* (2016), set in a dystopian Cairo of 2025, does more than speculate on political collapse; it anatomises the temporal logics through which authoritarian regimes render change itself unthinkable. The novel's fractured chronology, oscillating between the revolutionary energies of 2011 and a future defined by terror, paralysis, and routinised violence, exposes time not as background but as a constitutive medium of necropolitical domination (Mbembe, 2019). While Mbembe elucidates sovereignty over death and Foucault biopolitics over life, neither fully theorises temporal manipulation as fundamental to control (Foucault, 2003). This study terms that gap 'necropolitical temporality': the systematic colonisation of memory, agency, and futurity, configuring time as a closed circuit of domination.

Existing temporality scholarship provides essential but incomplete tools. Koselleck's widening gap between "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation," Hartog's diagnosis of contemporary presentism as "the tyranny of the instant and the treadmill of an unending now," and Adam's insistence that "all time is social time" collectively foreground temporality as constitutive of social order – yet none addresses how authoritarian regimes actively weaponise temporal experience to produce death-worlds (Adam, 1990, pp. 14-16, 42-45; Hartog, 2015, p. xv; Koselleck, 2004, pp. 255-275). Adébisi's (2022, p. 2) chronopolitics and Sharma's (2014, pp. 138-140) 'power-chronography' – the differential calibration of subjects to regimes of waiting, speeding up, and slowing down – extend this framework into decolonial and everyday registers. Crucially, Sharma defines power-chronography as "a corrective, a balanced space-time approach to understanding differential temporalities under global capitalism," emphasising that "power-chronography is not an argument that points out the multiple, different, many, or plural times within some epochal condition, phase, or stage, of modernity" (Sharma, 2014, p. 14). This distinction is essential: necropolitical temporality does not merely catalogue temporal differences but analyses how authoritarian regimes actively structure differential access to memory, agency, and futurity as instruments of domination.

The novel encodes three interlocking mechanisms of temporal control: *historical erasure* (the 2011 revolution retroactively reframed as foreign-sponsored chaos; Tahrir Square cartographically deleted); *present immobilisation* (perpetual emergency, drone surveillance, and normalised disappearance confining action to reactive survival); and *future foreclosure* (hope pathologised as madness, delegitimising political imagination as such). Against this architecture, *Otared* inscribes fragile but ethically significant acts of resistance: Otared's involuntary flashbacks to Tahrir preserve counter-memory against official erasure; Zahra's sealed mouth functions as a corporeal archive where what cannot be spoken persists as embodied truth; and the burial of a rifle at Cairo Tower enacts a material wager on futurity. These acts do not romanticise resistance; they underscore its precarity while insisting that individuals retain the capacity to contest the regime's temporal order.

Situating *Otared* alongside documented practices of post-2011 Egyptian authoritarianism – where the revolution is coded as sedition, commemoration is criminalised, and surveillance is normalised – this study treats the novel as *diagnostic fiction* rather than mere speculation. *Otared* participates in a broader post-2011 Arabic literary turn toward fragmented, non-linear temporalities, but pushes it further by making temporality itself the object of explicit theorisation (Alhashmi, 2023; Elmeli, 2021). This paper advances three interrelated arguments: first, it develops necropolitical temporality as a distinct dimension of authoritarian power; second, it demonstrates how the three mechanisms above are encoded in the novel's narrative structure, affective economies, and spatial imaginaries; and third, it proposes a reflexive methodology for reading Arabic dystopian fiction as diagnostic of authoritarian temporalities while maintaining a clear distinction between literary representation and empirical evidence.

2. Methodology/Approach

This study combines close textual analysis of Mohammed Rabie's *Otared* (2016) with critical theoretical insights from Achille Mbembe's necropolitics (2019) and Michel Foucault's biopolitics and governmentality (Foucault, 2003). The novel's non-linear chronology, shifting between 2011, 2025, and 455 AH, is interpreted as a formal enactment of temporal disintegration under authoritarian violence. Through three key figures (Otared's paralysis and flashbacks, Zahra's sealed lips, and the morgue attendant's erasure), the analysis traces how temporal control operates at the narrative, psychological, and symbolic levels. This is

supplemented through a comparative political lens, aligning the novel's depictions with documented authoritarian practices in post-2011 Egypt.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Achille Mbembe's necropolitics extends Michel Foucault's biopolitics by shifting analytical focus from the optimisation of life to sovereignty's power over death. Where Foucault describes how modern states regulate populations through techniques that "make live" while allowing some to "die" (Foucault, 2003, p. 247), Mbembe contends that contemporary power, particularly in postcolonial contexts, operates through "death-worlds": spaces where populations are exposed to conditions rendering them socially and politically dead while remaining biologically alive (Mbembe, 2019, pp. 21-23). Henao Castro (2023) further extends this framework by tracing necropolitics' colonial genealogy through racial capitalism and necroresistance, where subjects reclaim political existence through alternative engagements with death. Yet, as Thomas Lemke clarifies, biopower and sovereign violence coexist in hybrid configurations rather than in neat succession (Lemke, 2011, p. 80). More critically for this study, neither framework adequately theorises the systematic manipulation of temporal experience as a foundational technology of authoritarian control. Drawing on Sylvia Wynter's analysis of how sovereignty colonises entire modes of being human (Wynter, 2003), this paper argues that such colonisation is fundamentally temporal, operating through the manipulation of memory, agency, and futurity.

Contemporary states increasingly govern through "crisis rationality," where emergencies become the normative condition for suspending rights and intensifying control (Mbembe, 2019). Within this framework, *Otared* reveals three interlocking mechanisms of temporal control: historical memory erased, the present immobilised through perpetual surveillance, and the future rendered unimaginable. This tripartite manipulation constitutes *necropolitical temporality* – a mode of governance that transforms Mbembe's "living death" into a temporal ontology in which subjects are trapped in a timeless present, unable to mourn, act, or imagine otherwise (Mbembe, 2019, p. 40). Koselleck's (2004, pp. 255-275) conceptualisation of the widening gap between a "space of experience" (*Erfahrungsraum*) and a "horizon of expectation" (*Erwartungshorizont*) illuminates this dynamic precisely: by severing collective memory of 2011 and deleting Tahrir from the cartographic and discursive record, the regime collapses the space of experience; by pathologising hope, it narrows the horizon of expectation to nothing. Foucault's concept of governmentality completes this picture: subjects come to perceive the regime's temporal order – amnesiac past, surveilled present, foreclosed future – as natural and inevitable (Foucault, 2003), internalising domination without coercion. Adam offers the ontological premise that time is socially constituted; necropolitical temporality specifies how authoritarian regimes seize that constitution as an instrument of domination (Adam, 1990, pp. 14, 42-45).

Sarah Sharma's concept of "power-chronography" deepens this framework by revealing how power operates through the differential calibration of subjects to temporal regimes of waiting, speeding up, and slowing down – distributing temporal labour and rest unevenly so that certain populations must continually recalibrate their lives to fit institutional expectations, intensifying existing social inequalities (Sharma, 2014, pp. 18-19, 31-32, 138-140). *Otared*'s drones, curfews, and routinised states of emergency function as precisely such an authoritarian power-chronography: they allocate waiting and exposure unevenly, forcing subjects to recalibrate their time around the regime's algorithmically enforced temporal order. Under necropolitical rule, such recalibration no longer merely organises inequality; it manages who is rendered existentially disposable within the death-world.

The analysis concentrates on three scene-clusters that crystallise these mechanisms: the deletion and reframing of Tahrir Square (historical erasure); the sniper-watching sequence structured by drone surveillance (present immobilisation); and the pathologisation of hope as “karbon”¹ in scenes of interrogation and social breakdown (future foreclosure). These scenes were selected because they concentrate the novel’s temporal logic in heightened narrative form, correspond to documented strategies of authoritarian governance in post-2011 Egypt, and allow close textual analysis of how narrative form enacts temporal politics. They are not exhaustive of *Otared*’s world but comprise analytically dense sites where temporal erasure, suspension, and foreclosure are explicitly thematised across narrative, affective, and spatial registers.

This study treats *Otared* as *diagnostic fiction*: following Adam’s (1990, p. 7) insight that attending to time “helps us to see the invisible,” the novel’s dystopian exaggeration functions not as prediction but as analytical intensification, rendering legible the mechanisms by which memory, agency, and futurity are colonised. The criteria for aligning fictional motifs with documented practices are: structural homology (the fictional mechanism operates according to similar logics as documented practices); thematic resonance (scholars, journalists, or activists identify comparable temporal strategies empirically); and narrative function (the fictional representation illuminates dimensions of power that empirical description alone may obscure). As Adam (1990, p. 8) argues, taking time seriously “forces an approach which transcends perspectives” – a transdisciplinary stance this study adopts throughout, while maintaining a clear distinction between literary representation and empirical evidence.

2.2 Comparative Analysis

To ground this framework, the study situates the novel’s temporal mechanisms within documented authoritarian practices in post-2011 Egypt. This reading draws on curfews, media blackouts, mass incarceration, and the symbolic reconfiguration of public space, yet it does not claim that *Otared* offers a documentary account. Rather, the novel functions as diagnostic fiction: it intensifies and condenses real temporal logics into narrative form, allowing us to perceive their structural operation. The comparative move is thus delimited to illuminating how fictional motifs resonate with, rather than directly represent, empirical practices. Experiences of temporal control vary significantly across class, gender, geography, and political affiliation within Egypt; this analysis focuses on the regime’s temporal strategies as depicted in the novel and their structural parallels in authoritarian governance, not on the heterogeneous lived experiences of Egyptian citizens.

The novel recasts the 2011 revolution as “troubles” (Rabie, 2016, pp. 72-73), paralleling Egypt’s post-2013 authoritarian restoration. The interim government declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation and systematically repressed its supporters; Egyptian human rights organisations estimate that the majority of the 60,000+ political prisoners held since 2013 are Brotherhood-affiliated – approximately ten times higher than during Mubarak’s final years (Boserup et al., 2019, p. 6). By reframing 2011 as “chaos,” the regime pathologised dissent as a security threat, converting revolutionary agency into state criminality.

Otared’s drone-enforced curfews and sniper-occupied rooftops (Rabie, 2016, pp. 112–113) correspond to Egypt’s documented expansion of its security apparatus: the security services blocked up to 400 websites ahead of the 2018 presidential elections and invested approximately 4 billion Egyptian pounds in creating the state-controlled DMC TV network (Boserup et al.,

¹ The novel’s pathologisation of hope as “karbon”, a pseudo-clinical label derived from the English “carbon” and used in the Arabic text to evoke toxicity and contamination, maps onto post-2013 Egyptian authoritarianism, where dissent was reframed as destabilising.

2019, p. 6). Amnesty International (2018) further documented prolonged pre-trial detention, torture, and enforced disappearance, producing what Mbembe theorises as a death-world in which subjects are exposed to perpetual violence and temporal suspension. Drones intensify this logic as a distinctly necropolitical temporal technology: unlike heterogeneous traditional surveillance, they embody “algorithmic temporality” – time parcelled into discrete units and bureaucratically allocated. In *Otared*, this crystallises in a scene where the protagonist recalls: “By dawn, I’d sobered up... My companions were waiting for the next drone to show up with the day’s orders, but it never came. The twenty-four hours was now up and we were free to start shooting” (Rabie, 2016, p. 113). Humans no longer control the rhythm of their own death-dealing; machines do – reducing even perpetrators of violence to apparatus subjects, and rendering drones temporal sovereigns that determine what time permits and forbids.

Guy Debord identifies spectacle as the reduction of life to staged performance wherein subjects become passive consumers of their own domination, internalising alienation as inevitable (Debord, 2021). Rabie extends this logic temporally: by rendering violence a perpetual spectacle, the regime ensures citizens cease anticipating a future when violence might end, experiencing instead an eternal present of watching. The Corniche watchers who observe bombardment “with an extraordinary lack of emotion, as though it were some imaginary city being bombarded in sound and light on a movie screen” embody this exhaustion (Rabie, 2016, pp. 112-113). They no longer resist; they endure. Spectacularisation thus renders resistance temporally inconceivable not through prohibition but through the slow erosion of imaginative futurity.

The pathologisation of hope as “karbon” maps onto post-2013 Egyptian authoritarianism, where dissent was reframed as destabilising; Sakhr al-Khazarji codifies this directly: “hope is your torment” (Rabie, 2016, p. 213). The 2013 Protest Law criminalised assembly while authorities arrested 113 for “peacefully expressing critical opinions” and 35 for unauthorised protests (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 2), ensuring citizens internalised protest as ontologically impossible. The novel’s childlessness deepens this foreclosure: by rendering reproduction materially unviable and existentially unthinkable, the regime eliminates the most fundamental form of futurity – the intergenerational relay through which subjects invest in tomorrow (Edelman, 2004; Said, 2021). The future is colonised so thoroughly that even the biological desire to create new life is extinguished, representing the ultimate victory of temporal foreclosure.

Otared’s burial of his rifle – “dug a little rectangular hole into which [he] laid the gun,” certain he “was sure to return” (Rabie, 2016, pp. 24-25) – wagers on futurity by preserving revolutionary memory underground. This resonates with the post-2013 suppression of revolutionary actors – Ultras, 6th April activists, human rights defenders – who were forced underground through travel bans, prosecution, and imprisonment (Boserup et al., 2019, p. 7). Through revisionism, surveillance, and the criminalisation of futurity, buried weapons become counter-memory that refuses official amnesia, insisting that the dead and disappeared remain politically alive.

3. Findings/Results

The application of necropolitical temporality to *Otared* (2016) reveals a sophisticated architecture of temporal domination functioning as a constitutive mechanism of sovereign power. Far from a passive backdrop, time is weaponised to colonise memory, paralyse agency, and foreclose futurity. Through three interlocking operations – historical erasure, present immobilisation, and future foreclosure – the novel depicts a dystopian order in which citizens are rendered existentially dispossessed, trapped in a chronotope of chronic violence where resistance appears temporally inconceivable (Mbembe, 2019, p. 40). Yet Rabie also inscribes

fragile but ethically significant acts of temporal resistance – mourning, naming, and symbolic defiance – that expose the cracks in the necropolitical edifice and affirm that even within a death-world, time remains a contested terrain (Mbembe, 2019, p. 40). These mechanisms are analytically distinct but mutually constitutive, aligning with Adam’s insistence that time’s dimensions be grasped in relation rather than as dualisms (Adam, 1990, pp. 16-20).

3.1 Historical Erasure: The Past as a Void

At the core of the regime’s necropolitical temporality is its systematic erasure of the revolutionary past. In *Otared*, the 2011 uprising is not merely forgotten but actively reconfigured as foreign subversion: “Brothers, people called what happened a ‘revolution’... Thank God they woke up in the end and changed the term to ‘troubles’” (Rabie, 2016, p. 72). This erasure operates not through overt falsification but through a deeper evacuation of memory itself, reflecting real-world strategies of historical revisionism in post-2011 Egypt.

The trial scene epitomises this as institutional practice. Despite confessing “more than fifty times in the sessions that followed” (Rabie, 2016, p. 9), the accused is repeatedly confronted with the judge’s ritual question, “Did you kill them?” (Rabie, 2016, p. 8). Compulsive repetition collapses juridical time into theatre – sovereign power performing itself without any genuine pursuit of truth. The accused appears “like the living dead, heedless of what went on around him,” showing “no distress in the way he conducted himself – no feelings at all, in fact” (Rabie, 2016, p. 9). Disposability has hardened into ontology.

The morgue attendant embodies this epistemic collapse. His memory becomes a palimpsest of indistinct faces until “his memory now held a single image made up of many images, of thousands: a neutral face with no clear features... Unchanging at last. One face. But of whom the attendant didn’t know” (Rabie, 2016, pp. 220-221). When individuality is erased, so too is the possibility of narrative, mourning, or political meaning.

This void is actively produced. Memory is not lost but withheld and weaponised: “Our memories are dead to us, but closer to the end we shall recall all that we have lived through. Remembering is our true torment, not what is happening to us right now” (Rabie, 2016, pp. 327–328). The condition culminates in cognitive disintegration – “I knew that I was nothingness... I had forgotten language and memory” (Rabie, 2016, p. 133) – so that even the desire to remember persists without vessel. Zahra’s confession crystallises this: “Just imagine: I remember nothing but my torment... This is what occupies my thoughts, and nothing else besides” (Rabie, 2016, p. 295). The past is present, but reduced to pure affect – trauma without context, pain without origin – metabolised into the very structure of suffering rather than available as a resource for resistance.

In post-2013 Egypt, this discursive inversion manifested materially: Ultras, 6th April Movement activists, and human rights defenders faced travel bans, prosecution, and imprisonment, retroactively reframing the revolution as chaos and converting emancipatory agency into legal liability (Boserup et al., 2019, p. 7). Following Maphosa and Makama’s (2025) framework, such postcolonial regimes weaponise temporal autonomy itself: in *Otared*, the deletion of Tahrir Square from official maps enacts precisely this temporal-spatial violence, rendering the revolutionary epicentre ontologically unthinkable and severing citizens from the mnemonic infrastructure of resistance.

Zahra’s sealed mouth – “the skin on her face had spread and was growing over her lips... sealing up the mouth” (Rabie, 2016, p. 228) – embodies both the psychological toll and the gendered dimension of this erasure. Interpreted here as a corporeal archive, her body preserves memory yet renders it incommunicable, illustrating how necropolitical violence inscribes historical repression into flesh itself (Mbembe, 2019, p. 21). Interpreted here as a corporeal

archive, her body preserves memory yet renders it incommunicable, illustrating how necropolitical violence inscribes historical repression into flesh itself (Mbembe, 2019, p. 21). Zahra's sealed mouth thus exemplifies what Sharma conceptualises as temporal labour: "the experience of laboring within a temporal infrastructure while being cast outside it" (Sharma, 2014, p. 57). She labours to sustain intergenerational memory – the regime's temporal infrastructure depends on women's reproductive and mnemonic work – yet she is structurally excluded from the official temporality that would legitimise her testimony. Her body becomes a site where the regime's demand for silence and the subject's impulse to remember collide, rendering her both essential to and disposable within the necropolitical order. Women bear disproportionate burdens of temporal control, structurally responsible for intergenerational memory transmission yet systematically prevented from actualising it: Zahra becomes a living archive of unspeakable history. In Sharma's terms, Zahra's sealed body exemplifies gendered temporal labour that simultaneously sustains and strains the regime's temporal order, embedding vulnerability while preserving resistant memory (Sharma, 2014, pp. 31-32, 139-140). This dynamic manifests in documented practice – in October 2018, Egyptian authorities arrested human rights defender Hada Abdelmoniem for supporting families of the disappeared, holding her incommunicado for 21 days; in September 2018, Amal Fathy was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for speaking out against harassment on Facebook (Amnesty International, 2018). Both cases exemplify the state weaponisation of gender through temporal disruption, silencing women's organising through disappearance and detention. Together, discursive revisionism, cartographic deletion, bureaucratic anonymisation, and corporeal silencing constitute a totalising strategy of historical nullification: the regime forecloses the past not as a record of what happened, but as a horizon of what might yet be reclaimed. To read women's sealed bodies, as feminist temporal resistance insists, is to recover time the regime sought to destroy.

3.2 Present Immobilisation: Perpetual Emergency and the Suspension of Agency

The immobilisation of the present is a central component of necropolitical temporality in *Otared*. The regime maintains control not only through physical violence but by ensuring that the present remains a state of perpetual emergency in which time ceases to flow and existence is reduced to bare survival. Hartog's (2015, pp. xv-xvi) concept of presentism – a regime of historicity in which the present absorbs both past and future (pp. 15-17) – resonates precisely with this depiction, wherein the regime sustains power by collapsing temporal horizons into an immobilised now. Otared's experience as a sniper embodies this directly. Surveilling East Cairo, he reflects: "I watched East Cairo through my scope, looking for just one soldier, a single officer, to bring down. The rifle was steady in my hands, but I was not" (Rabie, 2016, p. 113). His steady physicality contrasts sharply with his psychological fragmentation, revealing how the violence of the present is internalised: his body remains poised while his mind drifts in a timeless numbness, a prisoner to a now that holds no promise of change. His violence is no longer political but mechanical, automatic, and devoid of meaning – every day the same, waking, watching, shooting, as if there were no before or after (Rabie, 2016, pp. 112-113). This temporal collapse exemplifies what Sharma terms recalibration: "the multiple ways in which individuals and social groups synchronize their body clocks, their senses of the future or the present, to an exterior relation – be it another person, pace, technology, chronometer, institution, or ideology" (Sharma, 2014, p. 18). Under necropolitical rule, however, recalibration is not voluntary adaptation but coerced synchronization: subjects must align their temporal rhythms to the regime's algorithmic enforcement of curfew, surveillance cycles, and emergency decree, or face elimination.

This temporal collapse extends beyond the individual. Citizens trek "down to the Corniche for a reprise of the previous day's scenes... waiting to be shot at" (Rabie, 2016, p. 114) – days

indistinguishable, violence routine. Through militarised urban space, totalising surveillance, and the normalisation of arbitrary death, the regime extends what Mbembe (2019, p. 40) calls the death-world into everyday life, evacuating agency systematically. As Otared reflects: “Stability had ended years ago and it wasn’t coming back... from a little prison to a larger prison, and there is nothing else but this. Our stability is a prison – yet we prefer it because, unlike a maze, it’s simple” (Rabie, 2016, pp. 113-114). The illusion of order becomes preferable to the chaos of freedom, revealing how necropolitical rule internalises its own logic.

This paralysis is also collective. After the indiscriminate massacre, the regime’s control over temporal experience crystallises in a shared numbness: “East Cairo was sound asleep. Not the troubled sleep of a city traumatized by the many bodies that had fallen that day, but an indifferent slumber. The hundreds of corpses scattered before us were testimony to the lethargy and brutishness that afflicted the place” (Rabie, 2016, pp. 113-114). The population has “lost the ability to keep going and had turned into speechless lumps... as though we were paralysed or dead” (Rabie, 2016, p. 137). This desensitisation is not simple apathy but a survival strategy – a psychological adaptation to a world where violence is omnipresent yet meaningless. The regime need not hide its brutality; it weaponises spectacle as a temporal technology, ensuring that death becomes background noise and resistance loses its moral urgency, absorbed into the rhythm of daily horror.

This paralysis culminates in Otared’s internal monologue. His violence is no longer driven by conviction but by habit, and his continued participation stems not from belief but from a hollow calculus of futility: “I didn’t much care. I was bored of being up here. Every day, I’d weigh the benefits of what I was doing and then I’d go back to thinking that there was no other way” (Rabie, 2016, p. 108). This statement reveals necropolitical temporality’s ultimate success: it does not merely restrict action but extinguishes the very impulse to imagine alternatives. “No other way” is not a description of material constraint but a symptom of internalised determinism – hope has not been defeated; it has been rendered unthinkable. In this light, time is not just repetitive; it is inescapable, a closed loop in which reflection leads not to change but to reaffirmation of the status quo. This is the psychological core of the death-world: not terror, but boredom; not rebellion, but weary compliance. The regime no longer needs to coerce when its subjects have already concluded that resistance is ontologically impossible.

3.3 Future Foreclosure: Pathologising Hope and Delegitimising Imagination

In *Otared*, the regime’s domination culminates not in physical annihilation alone but in the systematic foreclosure of the future – a temporal erasure so total that even the capacity to imagine alternatives is pathologised, punished, and rendered unbearable. This foreclosure operates through a dual mechanism: the erasure of generational continuity and the theological condemnation of hope itself, producing a society in which futurity is not merely absent but actively experienced as torment.

Zahra’s assertion that “hell is not a place but an endless time” (Rabie, 2016, p. 295) reframes damnation as a temporal condition rather than a spatial destination – a frozen continuity in which nothing changes, nothing ends, and nothing new can begin. Survival, in this death-world, is not resistance but the final stage of subjugation, in which the very desire for a different time is extinguished. Otared’s later vision radicalises this foreclosure into metaphysical certainty: “And I saw that hell was eternal and unbroken, changeless and undying; and that in the end, all other things would pass away and nothing besides remain. And I knew that I was in hell forevermore, and that I belonged here” (Rabie, 2016, p. 341). Hell ceases to be an external threat and becomes a temporal condition claimed as one’s proper place – not merely the loss of a future but the internalisation of eternal condemnation as the only imaginable horizon.

The most visceral manifestation of this foreclosure is the absence of children. The novel's Cairo is eerily childless – no schools, no playgrounds, no new births. Without children, there is no tomorrow to fight for, no lineage to protect, and no future to imagine; society becomes a terminal population existing only to endure its own extinction, a direct manifestation of Mbembe's death-world in which life is stripped of reproductive futurity and reduced to bare survival in an eternal present (Mbembe, 2003). This collapse is compounded by the medicalisation of hope as a mental illness: rebranded as "karbon," hope is recoded as a dangerous pathology, ensuring that even the impulse towards futurity is internalised as weakness or madness, rendering citizens psychologically impotent to act on the belief that change is possible.

The regime's anti-hope ideology reaches its most devastating expression in the theological discourse of Sakhr al-Khazarji, whose prison sermons frame hope not as a virtue but as an original deception: "You were not, nor did you live. You are the sons of guile. You lived in hope, and hope there is none" (Rabie, 2016, p. 208). The refrain returns as a liturgy of damnation – "You are they who ruined all, and hoped, and hope there is none" (Rabie, 2016, p. 208) – transforming hope into a collective sin that justifies the population's eternal condemnation. Sakhr intensifies this logic: "Hope shall be set in your hearts, and hope there is none, and hope is your torment... And the mindful among you are those who see that your hope is false" (Rabie, 2016, p. 214). Regime legitimacy is secured not by promising a better future but by retroactively condemning all who ever believed in one.

This anti-hope ideology reaches its existential apex in the prison's hierarchy of suffering: "They might go deaf and not suffer what the rest could hear or go blind and be spared the sight of what went on around them. Or they might be paralysed and unable to feel anything at all... Madness was a complete deliverance, a way out of hell, although no one truly left" (Rabie, 2016, p. 246). Deafness, blindness, and paralysis register as gradations of mercy, each dimming a sensory channel through which suffering enters. Sanity is hellish precisely because it preserves the ability to imagine beyond the present; madness offers deliverance only by abolishing that capacity. The narrator confirms the lived dimension of this condition: "People here were born afraid, lived afraid, and died in terror, and hope only appeared toward the end" (Rabie, 2016, p. 245) – hope not as catalyst for resistance but as terminal symptom, a flicker that arrives too late to inspire action. The only available "justice" is the uniform distribution of suffering: "The equal distribution of injustice is the very pinnacle of justice" (Rabie, 2016, p. 245), a perverse equity that forecloses redemption entirely.

Together, these passages reveal that the regime's control over the future operates not through silence but through discursive saturation: hope is not banned but demonised, medicalised, and aestheticised as suffering. This constitutes necropolitical temporality's ultimate triumph – when the subject not only accepts that there is no future but comes to believe that desiring one is a form of self-violence. Resistance, as the next section shows, cannot begin with hope as conventionally conceived; it must begin with the reclamation of time itself – through memory, mourning, and meaning as ends in themselves.

3.4 Acts of Temporal Resistance: Reclaiming Time

Despite the overwhelming forces of necropolitical control, *Otared* reveals the persistent, if fragile, potential for temporal resistance – subtle practices through which characters reclaim their relationship to time. These acts are not grand uprisings but intimate gestures of remembrance, mourning, and defiance that refuse the regime's claim to totalise the death-world (Mbembe, 2019, p. 40). Drawing on Freeman's (2010) notion of queer temporalities, such acts disrupt authoritarian time by asserting alternative rhythms: memory against erasure, mourning against silence, and futurity against closure.

The most fundamental act of temporal resistance is memory's persistence. Despite demands for faceless efficiency, Otared's consciousness involuntarily retains what should be forgotten: "Even mine – and I'm a professional – retains images of people I shot and whose identities I can't recall... that tableau of the three bodies heaped up... will stay fixed in my mind – it will never be erased until the day I die" (Rabie, 2016, p. 16). This involuntary retention becomes defiance: the regime demands that killing be mechanised and erased, yet the mind refuses. Images persist, transforming each victim into a permanent fixture of interior time – a temporal archive no apparatus can fully dismantle. In the trial scene, the scarab beetle episode enacts this refusal in miniature. Otared tips what appears to be a dead scarab onto the floor and it begins to move: "A dead scarab... It started to move. So, not dead" (Rabie, 2016, p. 10). In Egyptian cosmology, the scarab represents renewal and cyclical return; its reanimation disrupts the regime's fixed boundary between life and death, refusing the finality of the terminal state.

Naming resists erasure. In Otared's imagined newspaper, he envisions an ethical rupture: "Wife – Abir Abdel Haqq, 37; Daughter – Farida, 11; Daughter – Sally, 4. And my picture with them: Captain Ahmed Otared. Husband. Father" (Rabie, 2016, p. 4). Though the article contains only "black lines beneath the pictures," assigning ages and relational identities resists the regime's dehumanising logic. In a death-world that reduces lives to statistical erasure, naming restores temporal specificity and insists that each life has duration and irreducible particularity. This extends to Zahra's body as embodied archive: her corporeal sealing – "on her face... sealing up the mouth" (Rabie, 2016, p. 228) – paradoxically preserves rather than erases, her body becoming a vault where memories persist inaccessibly yet securely. When "her mouth had closed completely... Zahra began to mewl... The sound escaped her nose" (Rabie, 2016, p. 229), her voice discovers alternative pathways. The regime demands silence; the body invents new languages.

Perhaps the most potent act of temporal resistance is Otared's burial of his rifle at Cairo Tower – transforming an instrument of death into an anchor for futurity: "Selecting a spot next to the biggest tree outside the tower, I dug a little rectangular hole into which I laid the gun... One day I was sure to return, and when I did my gun had to be ready to go" (Rabie, 2016, p. 25). This burial preserves rather than surrenders the weapon, tying the present moment to a future return. By refusing both regime confiscation and immediate use, Otared asserts that the present remains pregnant with possibility – what Bloch (1986) calls a "concrete utopia," not naive optimism but a structured demand that another world remains possible.

In the regime's systematic destruction of hope, its very emergence becomes defiant. After the Maltese withdrawal, "For that week, people walked the streets full of hope. Smiles returned to faces" (Rabie, 2016, p. 219) – a temporal rupture in the regime's affective order. Yet Otared cannot bear witness: "He was no longer able to bear the sight of those faces; no longer able to avoid imagining their fates" (Rabie, 2016, p. 219). His foresight underscores hope's fragility, yet its very appearance proves futurity is not extinct, only suppressed. A tea boy's remark confirms hope as practice rather than ideology: "That's a cup of coffee with hope stirred in. Hope is important" (Rabie, 2016, p. 16). Made in intimate spaces and ordinary exchanges, hope persists despite the regime's pathologisation of it as madness.

Acts of temporal resistance carry profound psychological costs. Otared's metal mask epitomises this paradox: "I would lay it aside and would feel as though I were standing naked before millions... For months on end, I would do this. And then the madness reached its peak, and for a full six weeks I slept with it on" (Rabie, 2016, p. 59). Resistance through dissimulation becomes indistinguishable from complicity; yet alienation itself becomes resistance – the mask preserving a gap between the regime's demanded self and the self that refuses total subjection. Counter-memory erupts similarly unbidden: "I tried to remember the last time I'd felt so secure,

but it was so very long ago, so obscured by time I could scarcely recall it” (Rabie, 2016, p. 25). Memory persists not as coherent tool but as wound that will not close – affective rupture testifying to its precariousness within the death-world. As Freeman (2010) reminds us, alternative temporal rhythms prove exhausting when lived within dominant regimes; these acts do not promise liberation but insist on the right to remember, mourn, and imagine otherwise (Freeman, 2010; Wynter, 2003).

These modest, private gestures constitute profound challenges to necropolitical temporality, redefining resistance not as seizure of power but as reclamation of temporal sovereignty. This critique carries broader resonance across Arabic dystopian fiction: Alhashmi (2023, p. 150) notes that *Otared*’s temporal analysis transcends individual resistance to identify authoritarian chronopolitics across the genre, while Elmeligi (2021) argues that Rabie’s dyschronotopic cycles render time a political battleground of eternal hell. Bodies testify. Weapons are buried as pledges to unrealised futures. Hope stirs in coffee. These temporal reclamations do not promise liberation but refuse the regime’s total claim to temporality – unsettling, even under conditions of radical disposability, domination’s seeming inevitability.

4. Conclusion/Implications/Recommendations

Mohammed Rabie’s *Otared* (2016) offers more than a dystopian allegory; it provides a diagnostic anatomy of contemporary authoritarianism through the lens of necropolitical temporality, a form of power that governs not only bodies but time itself. This study has demonstrated that the regime in *Otared* secures domination through three interlocking temporal operations: the erasure of the revolutionary past, the immobilisation of the present in a state of perpetual emergency, and the foreclosure of the future through the pathologisation of hope. Together, these mechanisms produce what Achille Mbembe terms a “death-world,” where life persists only as exposure to chronic violence and existential uncertainty (Mbembe, 2003).

Rabie’s narrative form itself enacts this necropolitical temporality. Fragmented, non-linear chapters, abrupt shifts, and unresolved flashbacks mirror the characters’ disorientation and deny the reader any catharsis beyond mechanical recurrence. *Otared*’s rooftop vision of mass death and cannibalism culminates in epistemological rupture: “All this I saw and I understood nothing” (Rabie, 2016, p. 5). The scene crystallises necropolitical time as a regime in which violence is rendered unintelligible and resistance becomes ontologically unthinkable.

Historical erasure, exemplified by the removal of Tahrir Square from official maps and the reframing of the 2011 revolution as chaos, severs citizens from collective memory, depriving resistance of its historical grounding. The present is frozen through militarised surveillance, drone-enforced curfews, and normalised mass death, rendering agency inert. Most insidiously, the future is rendered unthinkable: hope is not merely discouraged but criminalised as “karbon”, a mental illness that ensures even the desire for change is internalised as delusion (Rabie, 2016).

Yet *Otared* refuses total despair. Within this suffocating order, acts of temporal resistance persist, fragile but ethically potent. *Otared*’s flashbacks to Tahrir, his imagined naming of his murdered family, and his burial of the rifle at Cairo Tower are not revolutionary gestures but ethical reassertions of temporal sovereignty. They reclaim memory, mourning, and futurity as sites of agency, however provisional. In a world where time is weaponised, to remember is to resist; to bury a weapon for “tomorrow” is to insist that the present is not eternal (Freeman, 2010; Wynter, 2003).

4.1 Implications for Understanding Contemporary Authoritarianism

These dynamics are not confined to fiction. Post-2011 Egypt exemplifies necropolitical temporality in practice: the revolution is officially narrated as foreign-backed chaos, commemoration is criminalised, surveillance is normalised, and dissent is framed as destabilising fantasy. Globally, similar logics operate in carceral states, occupied territories, and regimes of racialised abandonment, where populations are managed not through inclusion but through temporal disempowerment. The true violence of such systems lies not only in who is killed but in who is denied a future (Mbembe, 2019).

Attending to necropolitical temporality clarifies not only how contemporary regimes organise death-worlds but also how they erode the conditions of lived time that make political resistance imaginable. Recognising these temporal structures is therefore a necessary step in contesting the hierarchies of disposability that Mbembe theorises.

4.2 Recommendations for Future Research

To extend this framework, several avenues merit further enquiry:

1. **Comparative Literary Analysis:** Examining *Otared* alongside post-Arab Spring dystopias such as Basma Abdel Aziz's *The Queue* or *Iraq +100* could reveal shared strategies of temporal control and resistance across regional contexts.
2. **Gendered Temporalities:** Future scholarship should investigate how women's bodies become sites of temporal regulation through enforced silence, reproductive control, or erasure from revolutionary memory.
3. **Transnational Applications:** Necropolitical temporality could illuminate carceral time in U.S. prisons, settler colonial erasure in Palestine, or climate-induced displacement, highlighting intersections of temporal violence across scales and geographies.
4. **Media and Narrative Studies:** Analysis of how popular media and social narratives encode, resist, or complicate necropolitical temporality would deepen understanding of temporal power's cultural dimensions.

This study asserts that time is not a neutral or passive dimension of human existence but a contested terrain of power and resistance. The analysis of *Otared* reveals how necropolitical temporality transforms Mbembe's concept of "death-worlds" into lived temporalities – where history, presence, and futurity become sites of struggle. Reclaiming temporal sovereignty, even within death-worlds, emerges as one of the most profound modes of ethical and political resistance available under contemporary authoritarian regimes.

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