Future as the Present: Science Fiction **Utopias and Dystopias** from the Muslim World

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Meanings of Utopias/Dystopias

• Utopias are a reflection of a group’s hope and aspirations for how a perfect society will look like.
• Dystopias are a reflection of how the society will look like if things went terribly wrong socially, culturally, environmentally etc.
• The Muslim world is an artificial and real construct spanning 57 countries and three continents.
• Islamicate: Coming from or relating to Islam culturally or coming from the Muslim world.
Al-Farabi’s City of Felicity

- Al-Farabi is considered to be one the greatest of the earlier Muslim Philosophers
- Wrote ārā ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila (The Virtuous City) which is inspired from Plato’s Republic
- Describes a perfect society ruled by enlightened Philosophers ruling on the basis of Islamic Principles
- Also describes recipes for near-perfect societies
- Became the basis of political discourse in the Islamic world for many centuries

Author: Abu Nasr Al Farabi
Year: early 10th Century
Type: Utopia
Theme: Philosophical Utopia
Sultana’s Dream

- Written by Ruqaiya Sakhawat Hussain, a Bengali Muslim woman in 1905
- Considered to be the oldest work of Feminist Science Fiction
- Ruqaiya also founded Anjuman e Khawateen e Islam (Islamic Women's Association) to foster education among Muslim women in Bengal India
- Describes an alternate world where the world is run by women
- A world which is focused on gaining knowledge and improving social conditions
- Society is run on the principles of non-violence, cooperation and war is outlawed
Semavi Ihtiras

- A number of secularist utopias were written in Kemalist Turkey in the 1930s and 1940s
- Semavi İhtiras (The Celestial Passion) is one of the earliest Turkish utopias
- Describes the future of secular and republican Turkey
- The story is about Nobel-prize winning Turkish authors and women who have many more freedoms as compared to the rest of the world including the contemporary West
- The women in the novel have private jets which they use to fly over the world (freedom of mobility)
- Religion has lost its hold over the masses
Al-Bud al-Khamis

• Written by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood while in jail in the late 1960s but was not published until 1987

• A group of people get fed up by the problems and conflicts on Earth and take a rocket to Mars

• The alien society is ruled by just rulers and the system of the planet is very similar to the moral and legal system of Islam

• The utopia envisioned here is a reflection of how the Muslim Brotherhood envisioned a just society

• It take a top down approach to governance but where people have internalized the system so that there is no coercion
Uzay Ciftcileri

- A group of people land on a planet inhabited by people from Earth who come from a Sufi Muslim background
- Imagines a society that is run on Islamic principles of brotherhood and mysticism
- It take a bottom up view of how to govern society
- A perfect society is achieved by inner reflection

Author: Ali Nar
Year: 1988
Type: Utopia
Theme: Religious Utopia
Utopia

• Describes a near future Dystopian Egyptian society marred with deep social and class divisions
• The rich live is Elysian like conditions while the poor are living in forth world conditions
• Middle Eastern economies have collapsed after the invention of a superfuel in the US and Oil reserves become useless
• The Egyptian middle class has disappeared and the poor have degraded into barbarianism
• Extrapolates the downward spiral of Egyptian society in recent decades into the future
• The novel has become popular especially after the failure of the Arab Spring

Author: Ahmad Tawfik
Year: 2011
Type: Dystopia
Theme: Class Divisions
The Queue

• The novel is a reflection on the failure of the Arab Spring
• Set in the aftermath an unspecified event known as the Disgraceful Event
• Marriage of Kafkaesque bureaucracy and Orwellian Government
• People are lined up against a government office (The Gate) to get their pleas heard
• The queue has gowned to be kilometers long
• A whole community springs up around the queue with its own systems of barter and trade
• Phones are given for free to the people in the queue (surveillance)
• There is single paper called *The Truth*
• Laws are arbitrarily handed down by the Gate
Conclusion

• The future is the reflection of the present capturing our hopes, aspirations and fear
• Just the past can be molded to fit one’s agenda so can the future!
• The same is true from Utopias and Dystopias from the Muslim World

*Pride and Prejudice and Robots* by Muhammad Aurangzeb Ahmad and Zaid Ali