

The Chronotope in the Ahmed Khalid Tawfiq's Dystopian Novel *Utopia*

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Abstract:

A study of the history of Western dystopian fiction in the twentieth-century reveals that it is the product of a long process of economic, and social transformations resulting from the political crises Europe witnessed in the first half of that century. Dystopian narrative, is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century being a century of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive lower side of the utopian narrative. Consequently, the dystopian genre is* determined by the political and social reality of that time, and characterized by a powerful sense of mistrust and insecurity toward the future as well as a mistrust of the utopian genre.

In the light of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives recounting stories of manipulation and dehumanization of human beings by destructive societies, this paper explores metaphors of time-space as a distinct feature of the apocalyptic dystopian world of Ahmad Khalid Tawfik's novel *Utopia* (2008). Belonging to negative utopian or dystopian fiction, the novel represents a dystopia indicating a demarcation between "two peoples", namely, the people of the city of Utopia and the Others residing in Shubra, Cairo, in the year 2023, respectively. Guided by Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, this study attempts to reveal the generic and socio-political significance of this novel, as well as the nature of the characters. The paper also attempts an application of Yuri Lotman's model of the semiosphere and the related conception of boundary as metaphorical space that is "the res and the condition for the development of culture" to *Utopia* (Lotman *The Semiosphere* 125). As such, the argument is that the representation of a heterogeneous space, and the fusion of time and space are valid concerns of Tawfiq's *Utopia* that perform both the semiotic, and epistemological functions of shaping the narrative, and rendering it semantically significant by highlighting certain world-views.

Key words: chronotope; boundary; dystopia

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Introduction

A study of the history of Western dystopian fiction in the twentieth-century reveals that it is the product of a long process of economic, and social transformations resulting from the political crises Europe witnessed in the first half of that century. “Dystopian narrative”, Tom Molyan writes, “is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century” being a century of “exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination” (xi). According to Villanueva Mir, the origin of the dystopian novel is referred to such novels as *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932) or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell, 1949) which were considered a new literary genre when they were first published (40). The dystopian genre is determined by the political and social reality of that time, and characterized by a powerful sense of mistrust and insecurity toward the future as well as a mistrust of the utopian genre. It also treated themes of dehumanization and alienation either in a desolated or overpopulated background lacking acceptable social or ethical values (Mir 40).

In the light of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives recounting stories of manipulation and dehumanization of human beings by destructive societies, this paper explores metaphors of time-space as a distinct feature of the apocalyptic dystopian world of Ahmad Khalid Tawfik’s novel *Utopia* (2008). Belonging to negative utopian or dystopian fiction, the novel represents a dystopia indicating a demarcation between “two peoples”, namely, the people of the city of Utopia in the north coast, and the Others residing in Shubra, Cairo in the year 2023, respectively. (Sargent “Three faces” 2,37). Guided by Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope, this study attempts to reveal the generic and socio-political significance of this novel, as well as the nature of the characters. The paper also attempts an application of Yuri Lotman’s model of the semiosphere and the related conception of boundary as metaphorical space that is “the res and the condition for the development of culture” to *Utopia* (Lotman *The Semiosphere* 125). As such, the argument is that the representation of a heterogeneous space, and the fusion of time and space are valid concerns of Tawfiq’s *Utopia* that perform both the semiotic, and epistemological functions of shaping the narrative, and rendering it semantically significant by highlighting certain world-views.

1.Utopia and Dystopia

The roots of the concept of an ideal society, or a utopia (and its antonym, dystopia) can be traced back to Christianity: “It invites us to consider the parallel religious pre-histories of both concepts, which in the Christian tradition are dominated by ideas of Eden and Heaven, on the one

hand, and Hell on the other” (Clayes "News from somewhere"6). According to this argument, “‘Utopia’ has been defined in a bewildering variety of ways, and there is little interdisciplinary consensus on how (indeed even whether) we should link its literary, communal and ideological components ”(Clayes 146). This renders the concept of utopia/ dystopia applicable to various fictional prose works, irrespective of whether such literary texts are set against a Western social setting or not, as this paper argues is the case of Tawfiq's *Utopia*.

Etymologically, the word “utopia” indicates the semantic relevance of the word to time and space. According to the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* the meaning of the word “utopia” is “an imaginary place or state in which everything is perfect”. The origin of the word utopia comes from the Greek *ou* ‘not’ + *topos* ‘place’. On the other hand, Its antonym, “dystopia”, means an imaginary place or state in which everything is extremely bad or unpleasant. Indeed, the literal meaning of both words is closely connected to the idea of space , and whether the moral affiliation of such space is good or bad (Vieira4). In fact, the word “utopia” was coined by Thomas More's seminal work *Utopia* (1516). Fatima Vieira explains the etymology of More's coinage of the word “utopia” as follows: “In order to create his neologism, More resorted to two Greek words – *ouk* (that means not and was reduced to *u*) and *topos* (place), to which he added the suffix *ia*, indicating a place” (4). The prefix *u* which is added at the beginning of the word *topos*, however, implies its negation. As Gregory Claeys and Lyman Sargent state, “the primary characteristic of the utopia is its nonexistence combined with a *topos* – a location in time and space – to give verisimilitude (1). Similarly, Vieira affirms the close relationship of the utopian genre with reality which projects ideas for future social change (9).

Tracing the history of the word “utopia” and its usage in different fields of study, Vieira points out that “Utopia ... began its life as a neologism, its meaning changed many times, and it has been adopted by authors and researchers from6 different fields of study, with divergent interest and conflicting aims. Its history can be seen as a moment when a clear semantic renewal of the word occurred” (3). She concludes that “Utopia is then to be seen as a matter of attitude, as a kind of reaction to an undesirable present and the aspiration to overcome all difficulties by the imagination of possible alternatives” (7). Douwe Fokkema maintains that in *Utopia* (1516), Thomas More describes a perfect state and a rational world of scientific research, and calls for the toleration of different, or opposite views (“From Rational Eutopia 49). Later in the nineteenth century, H. G. Wells' dystopian novel, *The Time Machine* juxtaposes “ two species, namely, the Eloi, frail little creatures with the intellect of a /child who live above ground, with the ape-like Morlocks, who live in a subterranean world” “(H. G. Wells and the Modern Utopia”289,290). Similar to the *The Time Machine*, a “ class conflict turns into Brute violence” in Tawfiq's novel , *Utopia* (Fokkema “H. G. Wells and the Modern Utopia” 290).

In “In Defense of Utopia”, Laymen Sargent defines dystopian society in literature as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived”(15). Although these definitions apply principally to Western dystopian literature resulting from the political opposition to prevalent social and political conditions in the second half of the twentieth century, and the interdisciplinary studies of science fiction, they are, relatively speaking, relevant to present-day Egyptian society and literature. Peter G. Stillman further explains that the persistence of the sub-genre of utopian fiction known as the dystopian novel throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century in Western literature as follows:

The twenty-first century, like the twentieth, has seen a flourishing of dystopian novels in which human actions and institutions have created powerful and destructive societies that control and manipulate human beings. Perhaps even more than the twentieth century, the twenty-first has seen an outburst of post-apocalyptic narratives that tell the story of what human life on earth is like after cataclysmic events that wipe out many people and institutions.(56)

Like the dystopian narratives of Zamyatin, Huxely, Orwell, and H.G. Wells, Tawfiq’s narrative is a response to socio-political transformations occurring in the course of the last 70 years in Egypt. As a matter of fact, Tawfiq’s dystopian narrative predicts an apocalyptic future of a country as a result of the open-market economic policy implemented by both Anwar El-sadat, and later on by Hosni Mubarak’s regime in the final ten years of his office as the third president of Egypt in the era of post 1952 revolution. On the other hand, the distinguishing feature of the “dystopian genre” and of “dystopia itself” is “the dialectics established with the concept of utopia, as a reflection of the contradictory nature of the Enlightenment project. Close to the dialectics of Horkheimer and Adorno (1969), dystopia traces a direct, almost causal, bond between utopian thinking and the totalitarian and inhuman reality erected by the human being.” (Mir 41)The “social structures question the ideal, producing a dialectical operation that inverts the utopian one, opposing the concept of utopia in both its senses: utopia as “good place”, since the present would express itself in terms of “catastrophe” or “barbarism”; and utopia as “no place”, since dystopia points out precisely the material existence of injustice and oppression within the society” (Mir 41,42) In short, the literal meanings of both utopia and dystopia point out their imaginary status whether in space or in time, a status which finds itself in consensus with the generic nature of the dystopian novel as offering a warning of an undesirable present and a possibly threatening future in hope of envisaging a better alternative in the narrative work.

2. The Chronotope as a Literary Configuration of Textual Meaning

In "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel", Mikhail Bakhtin defines the chronotope as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships...in literature" (250). The term chronotope is used in physics in connection to Einstein's theory of relativity. Accordingly, Bakhtin considers time, the fourth dimension of space, and as inseparable from space in the novel. He adds that the chronotope is "the organizing center for the fundamental events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative" (Bakhtin 250). In other words, the chronotope, or the time-space fusion is responsible for the formation of the meaning that gives shape to the narrative.

In fact, Bakhtin borrows from Kant the idea that time and space are in essence categories through which human beings perceive and structure the surrounding world in the narrative, and hence, are "indispensable forms of cognition" (Bemong al et 4). In other words, the time-space category is a metaphor, or a tool of configuring the surrounding world, and creating "a particular fictional world" in literature (Bemong al et 4). Furthermore, textual chronotopes interact in a dialogic manner. As Bakhtin puts it, time and space are "mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships" (252). He concludes that the dialogue of chronotopes "enters the world of the author, of the performer, and the world of the listeners and readers. And all these worlds are chronotopic as well" (Bakhtin 252).

Basically, the chronotope is the "force giving body to the entire novel. All the novel's abstract elements – philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect – gravitate toward the chronotope" (Bakhtin 250). It also possesses the semiotic function of "giving flesh and blood" to "dry information and communicated facts" (Bakhtin 250). In addition, "the concept of the chronotope has helped us to understand more profoundly and more completely the concepts of "dialogism" and "heteroglossia" by connecting literary communication with concrete imaginative units and generic patterns. Literature, then, is not merely an "ideational phenomenon, but has to be considered as a unique epistemological instrument that concerns intellectual, imaginative and emotional attitudes" (Bemong .al et 111). As such, the chronotope performs an epistemological function in the novel since it serves as a category for perceiving the characters and the meanings in the text (Steinby 107).

The relevance of the chronotope as a category which characterizes dystopian narratives in general and Ahmed Khalid Towfiq's novel *Utopia*, in particular becomes evident in Bakhtin's assertion that the chronotope functions as a determiner of social values: "In literature and art itself,

temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from each other, and always colored by emotions and values”, and hence, “the chronotope in a work always contains within it an evaluating aspect” (Bakhtin 243) In this sense, the chronotope is not only the organizing principle of the narrative, and its unity, but it is also a category which evaluates the meaning in the narrative. Furthermore, it is a category which forms models of human beings i.e., characters in the text: In Bakhtin’s words: “The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic” (285). As stated previously, Bakhtin describes the role the chronotope plays in shaping the characteristics of a genre, or mode of discourse. In this sense, dystopia is conceptualized as a certain way of constructing the represented world, and the ideologies or perceptions as well as the characters in the literary text. Such fictional world of the text is the dystopian world in the case of Tawfiq’s *Utopia* (Blaim “Introductory Remarks” 8). As Bakhtin puts it, the category of time-space constitutes “forms of the most immediate reality” (85). Such fictional world is the dystopian world of Tawfiq’s dystopian narrative *Utopia*, where meaning “takes on the form of a sign, or a temporal-spatial expression that is audible and visible to us” (Crichfield 27). In addition, specific chronotopes correspond to specific genres, or modes of discourse in any language or culture, which themselves represent particular ideologies (Bakhtin 425). This implies that the present and future Egyptian social reality is configured by the time-space category in the dystopian fictional world of Tawfiq’s *Utopia*.

In “The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art”, Bakhtin proposes that poetics should take into consideration the interrelation of content, material, and form in verbal art. (266,267). Thus, the concrete world of a specific time-space in the literary text materializes the representation locating the plot (time) in a specific setting (space). Bakhtin adds: “Any and every literary image is chronotopic. Language, as a treasure-house of images is fundamentally chronotopic” (251). Thus, an image acquires a concrete representational quality when presented in the course of events of a story. According to Robert T. Tally Jr., the chronotope as a constitutive category of the novel “brings space, time, and genre together in a conceptually integrated way” (56) He adds that “at times the chronotope primarily appears to be defined by its respective genre, such as the chronotope of the ancient Greek romance, while in other moments it seems to refer to a particular spatiotemporal figure within a work or genre, such as “the road” as distinctive chronotope” (57). In his definition of the chronotope, Bakhtin focuses on its function as an organizing category of plot, setting, character, and the ideology of the literary text. Considering the chronotope as a structuring principle of the text, Bakhtin emphasizes its role as a category interrelated with social reality although it is not an exact

representation of such reality (Tally 58). Analysis of *Utopia* proceeds by an application of Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope as a "cognitive concept as much as a narrative feature of texts" (Morris 246). Therefore, the lives of both the Utopians as the powerful minority on the one hand, and the Others as the powerless majority on the other in *Utopia* are set in a binary opposition of "two poles and two peoples" (*Utopia* 85).

3. The Binary Opposition between the Private and the Public

The main theme of *Utopia* is the individual's struggle against an oppressive social system and the sharp class stratification which divides the people of Egypt in the year 2023 into two distinctive and asymmetrical social classes of a rich oligarchy constituted of extremely rich business men, and a poor majority indicating a sharp contrast on the economic, social, and political levels. The hypothetically imaginary time-space of *Utopia* is not totally imaginary since the novelist's anticipation of a nightmarish dystopian future relies on factual data in the present time. Such fusion of the imaginary and the real is evident at the beginning of the novel as the author himself assures the reader of the imaginary status of "Utopia" and that any resemblance between them and the real Egypt in the present is coincidental. In fact, the fusion of the imaginary and the real is found in the factual statistics and research data Tawfiq employs in *Utopia* to depict the social state of two conflicting classes in Egypt of the near future. Hence, the novel includes parts of a report by Dr. Ahmed Uquasha about the rate of drug addiction as well as a report about violence against women in Egypt by (FDHRD) Forum of Dialogue and Human Rights Development. Thus, Tawfik puts together pieces of the puzzle, warning of an invisible apocalyptic future of the Egyptian society (Ibrahim n.p.). As for the main conflict in the novel, it is the social and economic tension between the city of Utopia and its inhabitants on the one hand, and the "Others" occupying the district of Shubra in the dilapidated city of Cairo on the other hand. This conflict is focused on the struggle between the two characters of the "Utopian" young man and Gaber of the "Others", respectively.

The dystopian novel, in general, and Tawfik's *Utopia* in particular, display an intricate relationship to time-space by representing the binary opposition between the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the destitute, the private and the public, the mind and the body, the central and the peripheral, the past and the present. As for, the binary opposition between the powerful and the powerless, and the rich and the poor, it is manifested initially in the eponymous city of Utopia, walled off and guarded by squads of former US marines being a time-space motif of entitlement to aggression (such as the right of violence and aggression against the Others), and a life style of extreme abundance and luxury. On the other hand, the Others live in Shubra ,Cairo, in a dilapidated state. Thus, the time-

space category is one of absolute absence of any and all human rights, and a lifestyle of extreme poverty, dire need, and filth.

Social reality is represented in *Utopia* by setting the two disparate social classes, or two peoples in binary opposition to each other in the chronotope of the novel. This finds expression in *Utopia* in the following lines adopted from one of Abdel Rahman el-Abnoudi's well-known poems entitled "A'hzan A'dia" or "Ordinary Sorrows":

We are two peoples...two peoples...two peoples
 Look where the first is, and where's the other
 Draw the lines between them, brother

The "two peoples" drawn in the novel represent a pessimistic foresight of Egyptian social reality in the near future (*Utopia* 85). In Part Four of the novel entitled "The Prey", a brief analysis of how the two social "poles" were formed is given: outlining the decimation of the middle-class:

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, ...,there were thirty-five million Egyptians living below the poverty line.Unemployment, ..., stood at ten million. Note that 78 percent of those committing rape were unemployed: that is to say, the crime of rape is really a crime by an entire class of society. Not to mention, of course, the dissolution of the middle class that, in any society, plays the role of graphite rods in nuclear reactors: ...and, if it weren't for them, the reactor would explode. (85)

Tawfiq's unusual novel travels to Egypt in the near future, exactly to the year 2023, analyzing the incidents from a socio-political perspective based on the total disappearance of the Egyptian middle-class leaving only two social classes, the impoverished Others and the extremely wealthy "Utopians". This is directly caused by the unprecedented local and international increase of capitalist economic monopolies making the rich richer and the poor poorer (Abdel Hannan).The narrator even states Marx was wrong to assume that the poor would revolt against their exploiters once they completely lose their purchasing power.In Part one of the novel entitled "The Hunter", the theme of the private versus the public, or to put it differently, the conflict between the individual and society is apparent. Indeed, the conflict between the individual and society, or the private and the communal is a recurrent theme in dystopian narratives expressing itself in terms of specific spatial motifs related to the private as opposed to the public space. In general, dystopian society prevents all forms of social interaction leading to privacy or individualism. In fact, the opposition between the private and the public establishes the idea of the violation of boundaries existing between the two previous spaces in *Utopia*.

Even though, the transgression of the private or the individual realm by the state, usually found in dystopian novels, does not exist in Tawfiq's *Utopia*, there is a tension between the middle-aged Gaber of the Others on the one hand, and the oppressive elitist social order represented by the Utopians on the other. Indeed, the Utopians not only exercise total monopoly on the economy, but also on education preventing the Others from obtaining one. At the same time, knowledge is Gaber's passion. In spite of a life of want and a lack of all means of essential human necessities, Gaber is an avid reader and a self-educated person. Through his wide reading, he is able to retain a memory of the history of Cairo. Such memory serves as a means of preserving the individual's consciousness of his own cultural and historical heritage.

Another dimension of the opposition between the private and the public in *Utopia* is represented in the disintegration of family ties and the dissolution of the institution of marriage among the Others as well as the Utopians. Gaber, the irredeemably poor, deformed, but highly-cultured man of the Others is unable to have a wife and children as the social institution of marriage has been eroded as a result of being economically impossible for the Others to maintain family lives. Instead, he has short-lived affairs with destitute women like himself. For the Others, marriage has lost its social significance of a private family life with children and a spouse. In fact, the communal struggle is not only over food and drugs, but is also over women and extra-marital sexual relationships, indicating the dissolution of middle-class moral values. It is during one of these conflicts that Gaber loses an eye; the jealous, raging Serag cuts through Gaber's eye with a knife for the sake of the woman both desire. Consequently, the eradication of private space causes the dissolution of family life, moral values, and personal relationships among individuals. Such loss of the human values associated with family and intimacy is materialized in the dilapidated conditions of the ruined, filthy, easily-penetrable shack-like houses⁰ in which the Others reside.

A similar erosion of family ties and values is represented in the personal relationships among the Utopians. As a matter of fact, the Utopian young man is involved in numerous sexual relationships merely to alleviate his sense of boredom, while his mother and father live separate lives which manifest the failure of their marriage. As such, both of them are unable to perform their parental roles toward their son. Even the incident in which the two intruders, namely, the Utopian boy and his girlfriend are attacked by a gang in Shubra after they kill one of the Others, and are subsequently taken by Gaber to his shack for refuge, attests to the fact that the private space of the powerless is intruded upon and trespassed by the powerful. At the same time, the intrusion of any person belonging to the Others into the city of Utopia results into their immediate extermination by the US marine guards.

Consequently, the shifting of boundaries between spaces, and the spaces themselves become tropes of the ideologies represented in the novel.

4. The Powerful versus the Powerless

In *Utopia* the binary opposition between the rich and the destitute, or the powerful and the powerless is emphasized through the plot structure. Such binary opposition is represented by the two characters of Gaber of the Others, and his antagonist, the Utopian boy as well as their respective locals. The young Utopian boy's life in the extremely rich "Utopia" settlement is described as follows:

In Utopia, where death retreats behind barbed wires and becomes nothing but a game that adolescents dream of ...Sixteen years old, and you don't belong anywhere except Utopia. You're a Utopian resident, softened by a life of luxury and boredom. You end up unable to tell an American from an Egyptian from an Israeli. You end up unable to tell yourself apart from other people. (Utopia 10)

Structurally, the novel consists of five parts alternating between two anonymous narrators—three out of these five parts are in part narrated by the Utopian boy, and bear the title "Predator", while the two remaining parts are in part narrated by Gaber, and are entitled "Prey". The conflicting interests as well as the wide social gap between the two peoples emphasize the theme of social inequality. In spite of the vast social and economic differences between the Utopians and the Others, the events suggest a parallelism between the former and the latter; the city of Utopia is far from an ideal world. In fact, both peoples exist in dystopian spaces where ethical and humane values have already disappeared (Daraj n.p.) .

Utopia opens with a scene of an intruder from the Others being chased by the marines' helicopter in the desert as he tries to steal his way into the forbidden territory of Utopia in the North coast. Totally exhausted and drained out of life because of hunger and thirst, the intruder is, eventually, shot dead. This incident sets the binary opposition, on the metaphorical level, between the residents of Utopia and the Others in the duality of the ruthlessly powerful and the utterly powerless, respectively. In the following chapters of the novel, the Utopian young man is presented as Gaber's antagonist, outlining the extremities of the Utopians' luxurious life style as the possessors of economic power on the one hand, and the powerless, Others leading a dehumanizing life. The Others are represented as zombie – like human beings who fight over inedible filthy food and women, and drink ethanol alcohol whereas the Utopians enjoy all the pleasures of life to the extent that boredom and abnormal dispositions and inhuman activities are pursued by them.

In fact, the economic status and the life style of the residents of Utopia separate them from the Others, and set the latter as external to the former on the metaphorical and the spatial levels as the semiosphere's actual territorial details (Lotman *The Semiosphere* 140).⁵ In *Gazing in Useless Wonder: English Utopian Fictions: 1516-1800*, Arthur Blaim conceives of singular spatial constructs, such as boundaries, private, and public spaces, gardens and the natural world as possessing an axiological relationship to utopian or ideal space. He argues that the construction of the standard paradigm of the ideal state is not possible without the implied existence of its counterpart, its direct opposite. Even though the ideal world is not always described, its "ontological status within the fictional universe is identical to that of the utopian world" (Blaim 231). The world of the city of Utopia is far from an ideal space, yet it has luxurious, expensive and clean houses, airport and shopping malls. Thus, it is in direct opposition to the filthy spaces, and ruined shacks occupied by the others, covered in human excretion, and carts selling rotten meats of rats and dogs. However, the absence of a detailed description of the structures of buildings, especially in the city of "Utopia" is noticed in the novel, Whereas the residents of Utopia live in their settlement which is comfortable, well-established, and heavily guarded by former U S marines soldiers, the "Others" are located in a dilapidated Cairo, and reside in ruined huts lacking electricity, water, and all sanitary conditions of life. In this sense, a spatial boundary is located between Utopia in the center occupied by the rich, the powerful, and the well-educated on the one hand, and the zombie-like Others living in the slum suburbs of Cairo in the periphery, or the boundary places occupied by the poor, sluggish and ignorant. The decadent life of the Utopians leads to boredom, and drives them to very bizarre and abnormal practices, such as human hunting for pleasure, and even the practice of necrophilia. As for the Others, they lead a miserable life of squalor, and crime. However, the absence of a state law that regulates life and controls the action of the people is a common trait that both the Others and the Utopians share.

The narrative structure of the novel is obviously influenced by the wide usage of the unreliable narrator trope in modern literature, distinguishing the novel as a postmodernist work. The 'predator-prey' motif used in combination with the trope of the unreliable narrator in *Utopia* could be borrowed from postmodernist literature J. Fowles' *The Collector* (Khayrutdinov 8,9). This technique accentuates the social inequality theme in the novel, on the one hand, while allowing the author to maintain the position of a neutral observer, on the other (Khayrutdinov 191). Some important themes of the novel are borrowed from European existential/postmodernist literature of the twentieth-century. Among these themes is the dichotomy between violence/cruelty, and the moral stance, both of which are supposed to be inherent in human nature. In fact, not only the people of "Utopia", but also the "Others" display extremely violent behavior in their dealings with their fellows and the Others. Other themes in the

novel, such as the degeneration of consumerist society, the meaninglessness of the individual's existence in society, and his slow transformation into an animal are not new to world literature. However, what is obviously innovative is the manner Tawfik adapts these themes to the present-day Arabic cultural environment, Egypt of the future being a clear allegory of today's Egypt. Furthermore, *Utopia* is considered an important example of the New Wave of science fiction in Arabic literature. For instance, the petrol synthesis "biroil", or the often-mentioned synthetic drugs such as "Ophlogistine" and "Libidafro", is a motif similar to the one used in A. Huxley's *Brave New World* (Khayrutdinov 191).

Another dimension of the conflict between the individual and the hegemonic social and political order, is the semiotization of the boundary separating intimate and shared spaces highlighting the significance of other, related boundaries, among which the most crucial is the one separating the inner, mental and the outer, bodily space. In this sense, the thematic preoccupation with the body, common in dystopian narratives, can be seen as a corollary of the semiotic importance of the tension between the private and public spheres (Terentowicz-Fotyga 17,18)

As a dystopian novel of the twenty-first century, *Utopia* is an arena displaying contemporary "neoliberal" economic policies. Stillman writes that the tools and aims of "neoliberalism" apparent in the twenty-first century dystopias act as a model of the exercise of political power and social relations on the precepts of market economy (Stillman 60). Therefore, "everyday life in the new dystopias is still observed, ruled, and controlled; but now it is also reified, exploited, and commodified". (Moylan 135,136). In dystopian narratives, the body is often portrayed as the area where the conflict between the individual and the state is waged. The state attempts to manipulate the human body, while the individual tries to protect it as a space maintaining personal liberty. Thus, Utopians not only control the pharmaceutical industry, and the fuel industry, but also the consumption and distribution of food. In addition, the most popular game among young Utopians is human hunting in the territories of the Others to obtain body parts as trophies of such games.

In the city of Utopia, the masters' social and economic dominance over the Others is demonstrated by their sexual exploitation of the bodies of their female domestic servants, highlighting the fact the bodies of the latter have become the property of the former. Thereupon, the private space of the Others' human body becomes a public arena to be exploited and invaded by the Utopians. In addition, prostitution is a common, totally acceptable method of earning one's living among the women of the Others emphasizing their loss of agency. As a matter of fact, Gaber is the only one among the Others who is capable of preserving his humanity as he rejects any form of sexual violation

of his sister's body in the novel, thus, demonstrating the boundary between the inner, mental and the outer, bodily space. In addition, the world of the Others is an opposite world indicating the "open negation of the narrator's world" (Blaim 242). The space occupied by the Others functions as a reversed paradigm of the utopian idealization of space associated with the city of Utopia, and the reader is expected to take a critical position through a dialectic movement between these two worlds. As mentioned previously, the world of Utopia in Tawfiq's novel is not a "utopian idealization" for several reasons, one of which is that its settlers use the imaginary drug of "flugestine" extensively and abuse all the pleasures of life including food and physical relationships. As such, the city of Utopia, and its reversed paradigm, Shubra, are both unidealistic worlds or spaces.

5. The Asymmetry between the Center and the Periphery

The disappearance of the Egyptian middle class, that is to say, the equalizing force representing the majority of the Egyptian society, widens the gap between the upper and the lower classes, and isolates the rich in their city of Utopia and its likes from the "Others" occupying the rest of Egypt. In spite of the great asymmetrical divisions between the former and the latter, boundaries and spaces between both of them intersect. The representation of the relation between the rich and the destitute becomes obvious through marked differences between the center and the periphery. Any semiosphere, Yury Lotman argues in *Universe of the Mind*, is marked by the asymmetry between the center, where "the most developed and structurally organized languages" are formed, and the periphery, which is "the field of tension where new languages come into being" (127, 134).

Lotman maintains that the concept of the semiosphere identifies itself with what is known as assimilated "cultural", or semiotic space. Related to the semiosphere is the notion of boundary which acts as the "unifying factor" of semiotic space, or the semiosphere. The boundary divides and separates the interior of the semiosphere from its exterior. According to Lotman, culture is defined in terms of the boundary dividing it from what is not. In *The Universe of the Mind*, he describes the semiosphere as "[one] of the primary mechanisms of semiotic individuation" (131). Any semiosphere, he maintains in the same work, is marked by the asymmetry between the center, where "the most developed and structurally organized languages" are formed, and the periphery, which is "the field of tension where new languages come into being" (127, 134). Whereas the center is associated with power and semiotic closure, the periphery is the space of dissidence and semiotic dynamism (Lotman *The Universe* 134). Furthermore, "[this] space is 'ours', 'my own', it is 'cultured', 'safe', 'harmoniously organized', and so on. By contrast 'their space' is 'other', 'hostile', 'dangerous', 'chaotic'" (Lotman *The Universe* 131). Hence, a boundary articulates an internal space in opposition to an external one.

It is at the level of understanding the function of the semiosphere that the division of the “self” from the “other” takes place. As Winfried Noth puts it in “The Topography of Yuri Lotman’s Semiosphere”, the semiosphere could be a real geographical space or a metaphorical space “whose topology consists of characters of a plot space...” (12). Noth adds that the terms “semiosphere”, “semiotic space”, and “culture” are overlapping terms on the semantic level (12). As Winfried Nöth explains, “fundamental ideological values of social, cultural or religious life are projected” onto these dichotomies (of the “self” and the “other”, the “interior” and the “exterior”, the “center” and the “periphery”) in “the form of semantic opposites” to present “general models of social and cultural life” metaphorically (13, 14). Thereupon, spatial relations in the text demonstrate different, or opposite world views.

According to Lotman, the concept of the boundary performs the structural function of filtering and “adapting the external into the internal” (The Semiosphere 140). This function is accomplished on several semantic levels. As the semiosphere separates what is “one’s own” from what is “someone else’s”, external spaces are “constructed” (The Semiosphere 140). Spatial metaphors in this theory are mental images represented by means of verbal signs (Noth 250). The verbal signs representing of the relation between the ruling and the ruled classes in *Utopia* can be portrayed through marked differences between the center and the periphery. Lotman argues in *Universe of the Mind*, that there exists asymmetry between the center as a space of power and semiotic closure inflexibility and lack of development on the one hand, and the periphery as the space of discord and semiotic dynamism. In the center, “the most developed and structurally organized languages” are formed, whereas the periphery is “the field of tension where new languages come into being” (The Semiosphere 127, 134). The vertical high walls surrounding the city of Utopia in the north coast fence it off from the intrusion of the Others who live in the external semiosphere of Shubra away from that city. Even when one of the Others attempts to enter “Utopia” stealthily after along exhausting walk in the scorching heat of the desert, he is hunted down and shot dead by helicopters hovering over him in the opening pages of the novel.

A spatial boundary is located between the city of Utopia as the “center”, and the dangerous slums of the district of Shubra as the “periphery” or “the boundary places”. Also, the interior (i.e., the center) reproduces the exterior world while the periphery is a chaotic space. According to Lotman “If the inner world reproduces the cosmos, then what is on the other side represents chaos, the anti-world, unstructured chthonic space” (The Semiosphere 140). The center, therefore, produces the social norm of accepted behavior and language, whereas the periphery produces the anti-norm of social behavior and language. Thus, the name the Utopians assign to the drug they use is “flugestin”. More importantly, the

proper nouns they use for human names are distinct from those used by the Others. While the former use foreign names as Germinal and Larine, the Others use Arabic Egyptian names as Gaber and Bataa. Such binary opposition represents two opposite but intersecting pictures of the cultural spaces represented in the novel—and thus creates intersecting boundaries that generate a world view of textual reality. Besides, the opposition between these two languages exemplifies Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia which is the presence in language of a variety of "points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values" (Bakhtin 291). In other words, the various types of languages existing in the same language employed in the text is a reflection of the heteroglot nature of language.

6. The Spatial Category and The Formation of Characters

The spatial category, does not only determine relations of social and economic power, but it also shapes the nature of the fictional characters according to Bakhtin. Being a counter narrative that mirrors Utopian reality, dystopian narrative employs counter techniques of character depiction and development.; dystopian techniques highlight the individualization of the protagonist rather than their "thematicity", hence excluding them from "the negative context" of dystopia and emphasizing their "other-worldly potential" (Blaim- Gruszevska " On Utopia" 11). In *Utopia*, both Gaber, the protagonist, and the Utopian young man, the antagonist, stand in a binary opposition to each other in terms of economic and social power as well as in their social awareness. Even though both are very class-conscious characters, Gaber is a self-educated person whose awareness of social history functions as an element that preserves his humanity. On the other hand, the Utopian young boy's knowledge and wide readings have no impact on his social convictions; he is convinced of the superiority of his own people and the inferiority of the Others.

Gaber represents a noticeable point of connection to as well as of separation between two hostile and opposite cultural spaces: the dilapidated, filthy Shubra of the present and Cairo of the past where Gaber, as one of the Others, used to live in the old flourishing, civilized city of the twentieth century which he remembers from the days of his early childhood and his wide readings (Gruszevska-Blaim "Spectres of Eutopia" 179). Compared to the Utopians, Gaber is a man of culture and learning like his antagonist, the young "Utopia" man. Additionally, Gaber's knowledge heightens his political and social awareness of the status quo, whereas the Utopian young man's wide readings is only a means of alleviating his feeling of boredom from which all Utopians suffer. At the same time, Gaber is one of the Others, but unlike them, he is able to retain his humanity.

7. Vertical and Horizontal Structures as Representation of Power Relationships

Another significant semiotic binary opposition in the dystopian narrative of *Utopia* is the one evident in the contrast between top and bottom spaces since “heightened semantics of the extreme points on the vertical axis” constitute the relationship between both the dominant or the powerful and the dominated or the powerless social classes in dystopian films (Gruszevska -Blaim “Spectres of Eutopia” 171). Similarly, the verticality of the high walls enclosing the city of “Utopia” represents a symbolic structure of the economic and social dominance of the Utopians as opposed to the horizontal layout of the ruined, rotten shacks of the dominated Others spreading all over the city of Cairo.

The hierarchical separation between the two opposite spaces of the dystopian semiosphere and the dominance of the rules of the powerful in the center (i.e., the city of Utopia) is achieved by a specific spatial arrangement in Tawfiq’s novel. A notable boundary is detected between the vertical and the horizontal structures in *Utopia*. In her essay “Spectres of eutopia: (Re)app-ropriated spaces in filmic dystopias”, Ludmila Gruszevska-Blaim argues that the “rigidness of spatial arrangement, underlined by both vertical and horizontal compartmentalization, clearly marked centers, borders, and peripheries, repetitiveness of forms, etc. is often accompanied by the neatness and/or uniformity of colour codes or precisely defined trajectories of movement” (174).

In fact, the architectural structures of both the city of Utopia, and Shubra of the Others are not graphically described in the novel. Nevertheless, Marie-Laure Ryan argues, “all narratives imply a world with spatial extension, even when spatial information is withheld” (420). Therefore, the powerful Utopians are distinguished from the powerless Others in the dystopian chronotope of the novel by the giant vertical walls of Utopia that not only insulate them from the chaotic spaces outside their city, but also set them higher in the social hierarchy as the dominant class. The Utopians also possess the huge, modern shopping malls, the luxurious mansions, modern systems of surveillance, their contrasting language (their foreign names), food and clothes. In the city of “Utopia”, the residents also have their own airport for safe aviation, and their vehicles are fueled by the latest expensive and inaccessible to the Others. On the other hand, the Others shacks lie horizontally over open spaces of Cairo which are insecure and easy to penetrate by strangers signifying that they are dominated by the ruling class of the Utopians. Also, the Others can only commute by means of old run-down vehicles that use petrol as fuel. Nevertheless, both the Utopians and the Others are dehumanized by this socio-political order; whereas the former develop abnormal dispositions and activities such as necrophilia, the latter turn into zombie – like human beings who fight over inedible filthy, food and women, and drink ethanol alcohol.

Meanwhile, the actions and life of the Utopians separate them from the Others, and set the latter as external to the former. Furthermore, the representation of the relation between the ruling and the ruled is demonstrated through the impenetrable, highly secured spatial structures of those in the center (i.e., the Utopians) in opposition to the open, insecure and easily penetrated spatial structures of those in the periphery (i.e., the Others). The semiotic tension between the ruthlessly powerful and the desperately powerless is also set at the beginning of *Utopia* as it opens with an intruder from the Others trying to gain entrance to the city of Utopia, being chased and shot dead by a US marines' helicopter in the desert. In the following chapters, the Utopian young man is introduced as Gaber's antagonist. The Utopian, anonymous young man accompanied by his girl-friend, Germinal venture outside the city of Utopia into the district of Shubra in Cairo, i.e., the residential area of the Others, transgressing the spatial boundary between the former and the latter spaces, and violating Gaber's realm. Such an opposition between the individual and the oppressive social order and the transgression of spaces emphasizes the social inequality between the Utopians and the Others, and hence, illuminates the dystopian vision of a total lack of social justice represented in the novel. This accounts for the binary opposition that exists between Gaber and the young Utopian boy indicating two intersecting pictures of the represented reality or cultural space in the novel –and thus creating a boundary between the “center” and the “periphery”. Such boundary generates a world view of textual reality highlighting two social poles or two different peoples inhabiting the same country.

8. The Heterochronic Conflict between the Past and The Present

Bakhtin deems time and space inseparable from each other in the novel as a literary genre. Thereupon, time is considered a determining category of parts of the meaning of the spatial reference. Bakhtin writes, “It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time” (85). Considering the primacy of time in the time-space configuration of a text, the significance of heterochrony becomes evident. Heterochrony is “the spatiotemporal equivalent of linguistic heteroglossia” (Bemong al et 112) “The interplay of different chronotopes” or the conflict of “spatiotemporal configuration in the text” creates “a heterochronic conflict” between the past and the present in the narrative, which in turn, “provides the ground for the dialogic inter-illumination of world-views” (Bemong al et 112). Through this heterochronic conflict between the past and the present the temporal category performs a major function in *Utopia* since Gaber's Shubra in Cairo is depicted as an utterly ruined space inhabited by a brutal, dehumanized group of slouchers, and thieves, namely the Others. That is why Gaber is nostalgic as he recalls “a wide street that was located here and cars running up and down the street ... I had this sort of bet with him that there was once a movie theatre here”. The narrator continues: “There was

someone who gathered the good-for-nothings, the sluggish, the bums, and those lacking ambition from the ends of the earth into one national homeland –Egypt” (52). Gaber also blames the Others for their predicament : “I told you about the theories of Malthus and Gamal Hamdan and the prophecies of Orwell and H.G. Wells. But all you do is get high on cheap liquor and pass out. Now I swing between sadness over your condition, which is my condition as well, and curses, because only now do you realise” (*Utopia* 53). Through the dialectical relationship between the past and the present in the novel Gaber’s worldview as becomes evident because it to stand in opposition to that of his fellow Others.

The memory of a better past of Cairo provides a narrative of resistance to a predominantly ruthless, oligarchic capitalist social order, despite the absence of an explicit totalitarian political regime in *Utopia*. As Erika Gottlieb argues, “one of the most typical ‘messages’ of dystopian fiction is that access to the records of the past is vital to the mental health of any society. [...] a past the totalitarian regime would like to distort or deny completely” (Gottlieb 12). In *Utopia*, the old enclosed space of the metro stations of late twentieth century Cairo is Gaber, the protagonist and some of his fellow Others’ space. It is not only their meeting point, which represents a hiding place, but it is also is the space in which Gaber is able to establish a meaningful contact with the semiotic space of his memory.

In this semiosphere (i.e., assimilated cultural space), Gaber remembers and meditates on better times of Cairo and Egypt in the past. In fact, most of his memories are of better times when the Egyptians were a civilized, cultured, and an economically better off people. Besides, the opposition between the past and the present represents a conflict between Egypt’s past and its present which highlights the idea that Gaber is, in a sense, a preserver of the memory of the nation, which is vital to his own mental health. In addition, such memory indicates a nostalgia to Egypt of the past.

Conclusion

Finally, the concept of the chronotope as a determining category of narrative structure, generic characteristics, and meaning of the dystopian novel in particular, and of the novel , in general, provides a better comprehension of the Bakhtinian concepts of “dialogism” and “heteroglossia” by connecting literature with a unique knowledge of cultural context , imaginative and emotional stances. The time-space fusion is also interwoven with ideology in *Utopia* since it performs the structural function of a metaphor in *Utopia* that signifies several themes all of which emphasize conflicts and the prevalence of social injustice. In addition , the concept of the semiosphere (i.e., assimilated cultural space) and its relevant conception of the boundary as an articulation of difference further accentuate the binary opposition between the private and the public spaces, the individual and society, and the past and the present in *Utopia*. As such, both the concepts of cultural space and the chronotope

perform the structural function of a metaphor in *Utopia* displaying the conflict between the high and the low, the powerful and the powerless, and the rich and the destitute, and the private and the public as well as some of the generic features of the dystopian novel. Moreover, the time-space category is interwoven with ideology in the dystopian novel of *Utopia* as is a metaphor of the total lack of social justice in *Utopia*.

Beyond the structural approach to the novel, the dystopian type of fiction raises moral and philosophical questions about human nature, and the moral choice humans face between evil and good. Such issues are evident in the moral decision Gaber makes when he helps the Utopian boy and girl flee the Others's gangs to their utopian haven in the north coast. Indeed, this moral choice sets him apart from both the dehumanized Others as well as from the Utopians. Another significant question that *Utopia* raises is whether Gaber's reservoir of a cultural memory of better times in Egypt's history, is a preserving factor of the nation's identity. Given that Ahmed Khallid Tawfiq's works mainly address a reading public of young people he is motivated to end the novel with a final optimistic note that holds the possibility of future change of the status quo.

المستخلص

الإطار الزمني المكاني في رواية أحمد خالد توفيق يونوبيا

ناهد عصام محمد

تظهر الدراسات التي تتناول تاريخ روايات الديستوبيا الغربية أنها نتاج عملية تغيير اقتصادي واجتماعي يرجع الى الأزمات السياسية التي شهدتها أوروبا خلال النصف الأول من القرن العشرين. تبت روايات الديستوبيا نتيجة لم شاهده القرن العشرون من حروب وصراعات وقمع سياسي ومذابح و أوبئة ومجاعات وكساد اقتصادي و انتقاص مستمر من القيم الانسانية مما مهد الطريق لانتاج أدبي مضاد لروايات اليوتوبيا. و يحدد الواقع السياسي والاجتماعي في تلك الحقبة أهم سمات رواية الديستوبيا وهي أحساس عدم الشعور بالأمان والشك الشديدين في المستقبل وكذلك الشك

في رواية اليوتوبيا كنوع أدبي

في ضوء روايات التنبؤ بمستقبل مظلم ومخيف تفقد فيه الشعوب انسانيتها تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية الإطار الزمني المكاني لرواية يونوبيا (2008) للكاتب أحمد خالد توفيق المنتمية الى نوع الديستوبيا . و يمكن تصنيف هذه الرواية على أنها تنتمي الى النوع الأدبي المعروف باسم اليوتوبيا السلبية أو الديستوبيا لأنها تفصل بين "شعبين" وهما سكان مدينة يونوبيا و الآخرون الذين يسكنون حي شبرا في القاهرة في عام 2023 . تبين الدراسة أن تطبيق مفهوم الإطار الزمني المكاني لميكايل باختين ومفهوم الفضاء السيميوطيقي وكذلك مفهوم الحدود المتعلق به ليوري لوتمان يظهر المعنى الاجتماعي والسياسي للرواية كما يوضح طبيعة الشخصيات في الرواية . وعلى ذلك فإن تقديم الرواية لفضاء غير متجانس واندماج الزمان والمكان يؤديان وظيفة سيميوطيقية و معرفية توضح أيديولوجيات معينة فيها.

الكلمات الدالة: الإطار الزمني- المكاني ، الحدود، الحدود، النوع الأدبي

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