

## MULOSIGE Modules:

### Science, Literature and Development in the MENA Region

#### **Course Description:**

This is a course about the relationship between science, literature and development – the role science fiction can play as a spur (or inhibitor) for Third World development through its imaginings of a better future and the power of scientific and technological anticipation. The role of science and technology proper is touched on as well, since the business of technological advance is not a straightforward as once thought. The geographical focus is the MENA region, Middle East and North Africa, but with a generic introduction to the nature of science fiction itself and the role it has played, good and bad, in Western history. The reading materials are listed below, with an emphasis on countries and key themes investigated. There is no set texts as such but the best books by far are: *Space Science and the Arab World: Astronauts, Observatories and Nationalism in the Middle East* (2018) by Jörg Matthias Determann, *An Introduction to Science and Technology Studies* (2004) by Sergio Sismondo, and the non-fiction essays in *Gold: The Final Science Fiction Collection* (1995) by Isaac Asimov. (They are referred to in abbreviated form in the reading lists below).

This syllabus developed out of two courses that Emad El-Din Aysha had taught at the American University in Cairo (AUC) – “Scientific Thinking” (SCI-120, taught from 2001 to 2009), “Selected Topics in Sociology: Science Literature and ‘Revolutionary’ Development” (SOC 400, taught in the Fall of 2011). Since joining the Egyptian Society for Science Fiction (ESSF), Emad El-Din Aysha has come across the work of Jörg Matthias Determann documenting Arabic scientific history and Zahra Jannessari-Ladani on Iranian science fiction. Hence, their role in this syllabus.

#### **Course contributors:**

Emad El-Din Aysha, was formerly an adjunct assistant professor at the American University in Cairo, British University in Egypt and Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development,

and is a member of the Egyptian Society for Science Fiction and a published sci-fi author and literary translator.

Zahra Jannessari-Ladani, an Assistant Professor of English Language and Literature, Faculty Member of the English Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Isfahan, member of the Science Fiction Research Association (<http://www.sfra.org/>) and Iran Fantasy Academy (<http://www.fantasy.ir/>).

Jörg Matthias Determann, a faculty member in the Liberal Arts & Sciences program at Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, Associate Editor, Arabian Peninsula, of the Review of Middle East Studies, and previously had worked at the Zentrum Moderner Orient, Freie Universität Berlin, SOAS.

### [Week 1: Dilemmas and Definitions](#)

These are foundational texts for this course, dealing with the ever tricky issue of defining the genre of science fiction from mere fantasy and speculation, and introducing us to the pertinence and central function that SF can play in the development of a nation, not least the Arab and Muslim nations. At the same time, however, nations in the Third World need to be mindful of the downside of life in the First World. Science fiction helps highlight the contradictions implicit in modernity – what is the point of becoming ‘developed’, whatever that means, if being developed means giving up your individual autonomy. Hence, the readings by Enzensberger, the last of the Frankfurt school, and Erich Fromm, the great social-psychologist.

#### *Readings*

James Gunn, “The Worldview of Science Fiction”, from *The Science of Science-Fiction Writing*, 2000, <http://www.sfcenter.ku.edu/sfview.htm>.

Rebecca Hankins, “The Case for Fictional Islam” *Critical Muslim*, Issue #15: Educational Reform, July-August 2015, pp. 111-119.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “In Praise of Illiteracy”, *Grand Street*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Summer 1986, pp. 88-96.

Erich Fromm, “Automaton Conformity”, *Escape from Freedom*, 1941, pp. 158-177.

Philip K. Dick, “On the Definition of SF”, *philipKdickFans.com*, 3 September 1975, <http://www.philipkdickfans.com/frank/sf-letter.htm>.

Raymond Williams, “Realism and the Contemporary Novel,” *Universities & Left Review* 4, Summer 1958, pp. 22–25.

## Week 2: Anticipation, in Theory and Practice

These are another set of foundational texts that highlight how the progress of science and technology is not as clear cut a thing as many imagine, even in the industrialised world. Firstly, science and technology rarely progress in a linear fashion as resistance to new knowledge and the business cycle (among other factors) interfere in the path towards progress. Secondly, science and technology are not one and the same thing; the culture and dynamics as well as definition of science and technology are very different, and how they interact with, reinforce or hold back each other is also underappreciated. The main thing science and technology have in common, however, is art. Not just science fiction but the broader function of art and the imagination as drivers for scientific discovery and technological innovation, and how art helps articulate future visions of society and the role of human agency.

### *Readings*

Sismondo, "Chapter 8: Actor-Network Theory", pp. 81-92.

Amr Shaarawi, "Science and Technology", [ppt presentation]

Selections from Manuel Castells, "The Crisis of Industrial Statism and the Collapse of the Soviet Union" (from Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture – Volume III, End of Millennium*, 2010), pp. 5-37, [https://www.academia.edu/36764959/Castells\\_III\\_End\\_of\\_Millennium\\_The\\_Information\\_Age](https://www.academia.edu/36764959/Castells_III_End_of_Millennium_The_Information_Age)

Ali Shariati, "Art Awaiting the Saviour", <http://www.shariati.com/english/savior.html>.

Asimov, "The Influence of Science Fiction", "The Science Fiction Blowgun", "Religion and Science Fiction".

## Week 3: Science, SF and the Arab Awakening

Arabic history is a history of time lapses, a once great past in the area of scientific discovery followed by a period of stagnation, decline and selective amnesia. The modern Arab desire to make up for lost time and revive the accomplishments of the past (the Arab Awakening or Nahda) is more diverse and divisive than most know, and science fiction was part of this programme for progress, and suffered much the same cultural resistance as science did. The modern Arab contribution to science, astronomy and the space programme, is also much more commendable and in-depth than many acknowledge.

### *Readings*

Determann, "CHAPTER 2: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism", pp. 17-48.

Johannes Stephan, "Reconsidering Transcendence/Immanence. Modernity's Modes of Narration in Nineteenth-Century Arabic Literary Tradition", in Florian Zemmin, Colin Jager and Guido Vanheeswijck (Ed.s), *Working with A Secular Age: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Charles Taylor's Master Narrative*, 2016, pp. 349-368,

<https://boris.unibe.ch/80288/1/Stephan%20-%20Reconsidering%20Transcendence%20C%20Immanence.pdf>.

Raphael Akhmedov, "Voyage to Tomorrow: Modern Arabic Science Fiction", *Arabic Language, Literature & Culture*. Volume 3, Issue 3, September 2018, pp. 37-42.

Emad El-Din Aysha, "Better Late than Never: The Transmutations of Egyptian SF in the Work of Hosam El-Zembely", *Foundation*, Volume 47.3, number 131, Winter 2018: 6-14.

#### [Week 4: Turkey and Iran in Comparison](#)

An entire course could be taught on Turkish and Iranian science fiction alone, especially since they pre-date Arabic science fiction, in addition to the fact that early Arab sci-fi was influenced by Turkish SF. Nonetheless, finding English-language materials on Turkish and Iranian SF is much harder, and the dynamics and extended history of Turkish and Iranian SF is different from the Arab experience, so the bulk of this course is on Arabic science fiction. The relationship between scientific advance and nation-building in Turkish and Iranian SF is also different from the Arabic experience, all the more reason for their histories to be juxtaposed to Arabic literary and scientific history.

#### *Readings*

Müge Işıklar Koçak and Elif Aydın, "Science Fiction in Turkey: Survival of a Genre through Retranslations and Reprints", *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi*, Volume 4, Number 1, 2017, pp. 31-42.

Basak Agin Donmez, "A Turkish Posthumanist Perspective in Science Fiction: Özlem Ada's Embryogenesis", *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*, Volume 3, Issue 2, 2012, pp. 122-134.

Zahra Jannessari-Ladani, "Eco-Heroines and Saviors in Iraj Fazel Bakhsheshi's Men and Supertowers and The Sun's Sons", [forthcoming publication]

Parviz Tarikhi, "Iran's space programme: Riding high for peace and pride," *Space Policy* 25, no. 3, 2009, pp. 160-73.

Hassan Delbari and Esmail Foroozankia, "Picaresque Novel and its Status in Contemporary Iranian Science Fiction", *Journal of Applied Environmental and Biological Sciences*, Volume 5, Number 4S, 2015, pp. 72-77.

Maryam Jalali, Narges Bagheri and Masoomah Mahmoodi, "Travel Writing in Children and Adolescent's Literature in Iran", *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, Volume 7, Number 2, April 2016, pp. 1-6.

### [Week 5: The Arab West, Past and Present](#)

Most of the MENA region is made-up of the Arab world, but the Arab world itself can be split right down the middle, with the Arab East (Egypt, Gulf Arab states, the Levant) and Arab West (from Morocco to Libya) that have their own set of literary dynamics, while being influenced by each other and their external influences. How the Arab West perceives technological progress is quite different too, both in the early days of Arab SF and in the contemporary world.

#### *Readings*

Ian Campbell, "Science Fiction and Social Criticism in Morocco of the 1970s: Muḥammad `Azīz Laḥbābī's The Elixir of Life", *Science Fiction Studies*, Volume 42, Part 1 (#125), March 2015, pp. 42-55.

Kawthar Ayed, "Panorama of Tunisian SF", *News & Press from The Future*, 27 November 2017, <http://press.futurefire.net/2017/11/science-fiction-in-tunisia.html>.

Nadia Ghanem, "Safia Ketou: The First Algerian Sci-fi Novelist of Post-independence Algeria", *Arab Literature (in English) Blog*, 13 August 2018, <https://arablit.org/2018/08/13/safia-ketou-the-first-algerian-sci-fi-novelist-of-post-indpendence-algeria/>.

Nasrin Qader, "Fictional Testimonies or Testimonial Fictions: Moussa Ould Ebnou's Barzakh", *Research in African Literatures*. Volume 33, Number 3, Fall 2002, pp. 14-31.

### [Week 6: Arab Spring, Utopia-Dystopia](#)

Both in the run up to the Arab Spring revolutions of late 2010 and early 2011, and the aftermath, involve an intimate relationship between science fiction and the publishing industry at large with politics and socio-economic struggles, good and bad. Prior to 2010-11 SF helped prophesize what would take place and since then it has become a barometer for where society is headed. How scientific research has fared in this period is another key issue that is seldom recognised.

## *Readings*

Asimov, “Nowhere!”, “Golden Age Ahead”.

Determann, “CHAPTER 4: Stars of Science”, pp. 85-115.

Nathaniel Greenberg, “Ahmed Khaled Towfik: Days of Rage and Horror in Arabic Science Fiction”, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Volume 60, Number 2, 2018, pp. 1-10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2018.1494130>.

Amalia A. Mokrushina, “Reality and Fiction in Mohammad Rabie’s novel, *Otared*”, *Vestnik SPbSU. Asian and African Studies*, Volume 10, Number 1, 2018, pp. 68–74, <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu13.2018.106>.

Carmen Maria Machado, “‘The Queue’ Carries on a Dystopian Lineage”, *National Public Radio*, 5 May 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/05/05/476048221/the-queue-carries-on-a-dystopian-lineage>

Emad El-Din Aysha, “In Memoriam: Ahmed Khalid Tawfik, the Man and the Mission”, *Arab Literature (in English) Blog*, 21 November 2018, <https://arablit.org/2018/11/21/in-memoriam-ahmed-khalid-tawfik-the-man-and-the-mission/>

Emad El-Din Aysha, “BOOK REVIEW – Apocalyptic Aftermath: Ahmed Al-Mahdi’s *Malaaz* (2017) takes on The Road Warrior, and Beats Him!”, *The Levant*, 13 February 2018, <http://the-levant.com/book-review-apocalyptic-aftermath-ahmed-al-mahdis-malaaz-2017-takes-on-the-road-warrior-and-beats-him/>

## Week 7: The Curious Case of Israel

Jewish contributions to sci-fi and fantasy are legendary, extending from the Golum myth (proto-SF) to the likes of SF giants like Isaac Asimov and Harlan Ellison. SF in Israel itself, however, is another matter entirely. There are many distinguished novels and writers in Israeli SF but the genre as a whole is not adequately represented in the literary establishment and the publishing industry. There are many reasons for this, such as nation-building and the overemphasis on realism, problems afflicting Hebrew as a language compared to Yiddish, among others. You will notice that two of the listed items here aren’t actually about Israeli SF at all, while written by Israeli authors, projecting local problems (and solutions) onto the historical experiences of other peoples, including the Arabs.

### *Readings*

Lavie Tidhar, "Science Fiction, Globalization, and the People's Republic of China", *The Science Fact & Science Fiction Concatenation*, 4 April 2015, <http://www.concatenation.org/articles/sf~china.html>.

Nachman Ben-Yehuda and R.M.P., "Sociological Reflections on the History of Science Fiction in Israel", *Science Fiction Studies*, Volume 13, Number 1, March 1986, pp. 64-78.

Rachel Cordasco, "Speculative Fiction in Translation: Israel", *Book Riot*, 19 June 2017, <https://bookriot.com/2017/06/19/speculative-fiction-translation-israel/>

Eisam Asaqli, "Science Fiction in Arabic Literature: History, Growth, Development and Position", *International Journal of Advanced Research*, Volume 5, Number 2, 2017, pp. 1441-51.

### Week 8: New Challenges on the Horizon

Arabic and Muslim science fiction now has gone global. There are expatriate Muslims and converts writing in the genre and translations of local SF reaching an international audience, and the relationship between domestic antagonisms and international power politics and literary representations of this are more pertinent than ever. Scientific advance is one way out and with that a vested interest in promoting positive depiction of Arabs and Muslims in internationally recognised works of science fiction. The prospects for cooperation and pooling resources between Arabs and Muslims in the realm of genre literature are also opening up like never before.

### *Readings*

Haris Durrani, "The Failure of Post-9/11 Science Fiction", *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, September 2012, Volume 25, Number 289, <https://engspurdishabic.wordpress.com/academic-articles/823-2/>.

Determann, "CHAPTER 6: The Arabs' Final Frontier", pp. 148-174.

Emad El-Din Aysha, "In Protest: The Sci-Fi Contribution to Arabic Resistance Literature", [forthcoming publication].

SF in Iran-full text, [Interview of Farzin Souri, editor in chief of *3feed.ir*] [https://www.academia.edu/38634884/SF\\_in\\_Iran\\_full\\_text](https://www.academia.edu/38634884/SF_in_Iran_full_text).

Mina Talebli, "Role of women in Iranian science fiction and fantasy", *The Dissident Blog*, 29 November 2018, <https://www.dissidentblog.org/en/articles/role-women-iranian-science-fiction-and-fantasy>.

“Science Fiction Genre in Iran! Is there the Sci-Fi screenwriters or filmmakers in Iran?”, *Animation World Network*, 30 January 2018, <http://www.awn.com/forum/thread/1044628>.

“Media Reviews – Star Trek Beyond”, *Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA) Review*, 319, Winter 2017, pp. 20-22, <http://www.sfra.org/resources/Pictures/SFRA%20319.pdf>.

Emad El-Din Aysha, “BOOK REVIEW – Back to the Future: Ahmed Al-Mahdi Charts a Course through the Arabic Winter of Discontent!”, *The Levant*, 25 February 2018, <http://the-levant.com/back-to-the-future-ahmed-al-mahdi-charts-a-course-through-the-arabic-winter-of-discontent/>

A final note. In addition to the listed readings there are also a set of key audio-video materials, mainly documentaries on science fiction and on science, culture and politics:

*The Commodore Story* (2018)

*Fight for Space* (2016)

Adam Curtis, “HyperNormalisation” (2016)

“A Virtual Introduction to Science Fiction: History of Science Fiction Session 2 – The Rise of the Pulps, Dr. Zahra Jannessari-Ladani, University of Isfahan”, (2012), [http://virtual-sf.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/53-563\\_jannessari-ladani\\_2012-04-17\\_18-22.mp4](http://virtual-sf.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/53-563_jannessari-ladani_2012-04-17_18-22.mp4)

“Prophets of Science Fiction episode 4 – Arthur C. Clarke” (2012)

“Prophets of Science Fiction episode 6 – Jules Verne” (2012)

Adam Curtis, “All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace episode 1 – Love and Power” (2011)

*What the Ancients Did for Us* – episode 1, The Islamic World (2005)

Adam Curtis, “The Trap episode 1 – ‘F\*\*k You Buddy’” (2007)

Adam Curtis, “Pandora’s Box, episode 1 – ‘The Engineers’ Plot’” (1992)

Adam Curtis, “Pandora’s Box, episode 2 – ‘To The Brink of Eternity’” (1992)

Adam Curtis, “Pandora’s Box, episode 5 – ‘Black Power’” (1992)

“The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam – Part I”, *Alternative Information Network*, (1987),

“The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam – Part II”, *Alternative Information Network*, (1987),

[https://archive.org/details/AV\\_316\\_317-THE\\_PERFECT\\_WAR-TECHNOWAR\\_IN\\_VIETNAM](https://archive.org/details/AV_316_317-THE_PERFECT_WAR-TECHNOWAR_IN_VIETNAM)

*Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, episode 3 – “Harmony of Worlds” (1980)

*Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, episode 5 – “Blues for a Red Planet” (1980)

*Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, episode 7 – “The Backbone of Night” (1980)

*Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, episode 8 – “Journeys in Space and Time” (1980)

These are not supplementary materials but critical to the course and are used in each and every week, in the form of selected clips.