

Forged in Suffering: The Birth of Dystopian Imagination in Arabic Literature: Case Studies from *Utopia*, *The Queue*, and *Otared*

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Abstract

This study examines the rise of dystopian imagination in modern Arabic literature through three novels: *Utopia* (Towfik, 2008), *The Queue* (Abdel Aziz, 2016), and *Otared* (Rabie, 2016). Using close textual analysis within a comparative literary framework, it identifies a three-part pattern of suffering, i.e., material deprivation (*Utopia*), temporal suspension (*The Queue*), and bodily collapse (*Otared*). Unlike Western dystopias that focus on technological speculation or ideological control, these works emphasize lived realities, making structural, bureaucratic, and physical suffering central to their aesthetic and political messages. The novels act as testimonies, giving voice to marginalized experiences and transforming everyday suffering into ethical and narrative engagement. The study also suggests expanding the collection of Arabic dystopias, situating them within global and postcolonial debates, and incorporating them into world literature courses. By doing so, it examines how Arabic literature reconfigures the dystopian imagination through representations of human suffering, thereby contesting Eurocentric conceptions of the genre.

1. INTRODUCTION

Dystopian fiction in contemporary Arabic literature is often analyzed as a reflection of post-2011 social and political upheavals, with scholars exploring how suffering and trauma are woven into imaginative narratives. The novels *Utopia*, *The Queue*, and *Otared* are frequently cited as key case studies in this field. A recent study in *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture* by Selma Veseljević and Demir Alihodžić (2023), "The Artistic Representation of Trauma in Arabic Dystopian Literature," examines how the genre serves as a mirror reflecting the injustices and oppression faced by Arabs under authoritarian regimes. The article highlights that these texts permit writers to process personal and collective trauma through allegory, offering readers a space to confront and understand lived realities. Similarly, in a working paper published by MECAM (2022), Teresa Pepe analyzes "Environment and Climate Change in Contemporary Arabic Dystopian Fiction," noting the way in which post-2011 Arabic fiction, including works like *Utopia*, projects a pessimistic view of the future by engaging with both political failure and global challenges like environmental degradation. These scholarly works demonstrate how the genre has evolved into a powerful vehicle for critiquing contemporary Arab societies and their historical legacies.

The evolution of dystopian literature in the Arab world has been profoundly influenced by the region's historical, political, and social challenges. Arab authors have consistently channelled fiction towards exploring the realities of oppression, bureaucracy, social injustice, and political stagnation, transforming collective suffering into rich imaginative narratives. Egyptian literature provides

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compelling examples of this trend, with works such as *Utopia*, *The Queue*, and *Utared* demonstrating how dystopian imagination arises as both a reflection and critique of societal issues. These texts show that dystopian literature in the Arab context is not merely a literary genre but a means of processing collective trauma, envisioning alternative realities, and navigating the tension between oppression and hope.

This study aims to investigate the intricate relationship between Arab suffering and the emergence of dystopian literature. It seeks to analyze key Egyptian works as reflections of societal and political struggles, explore how dystopian narratives transform real-world adversity into imaginative literary forms, and identify recurring themes and techniques used to convey suffering and dystopian visions. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of Arabic dystopian literature as a form of cultural and political commentary.

To guide this investigation, the study asks: How does Arab suffering influence the themes and narratives of dystopian literature? In what ways do Egyptian works such as *Utopia*, *The Queue*, and *Utared* mirror societal, political, and cultural struggles? What literary techniques and motifs are employed to translate real-world adversity into imaginative stories? And how has the dystopian imagination in contemporary Arabic literature evolved in response to historical and current challenges?

The study is based on the hypothesis that the emergence of dystopian literature in the Arab world is directly shaped by collective suffering and social hardship. It suggests that Egyptian dystopian texts serve as imaginative responses to political and social struggles, employing recurring themes, motifs, and literary strategies to critique and creatively transform real hardships.

To accomplish these aims, the study adopts a qualitative, literary-analytical approach. Primary texts, including *Utopia*, *The Queue*, and *Utared*, are examined through close reading and thematic analysis to identify representations of suffering, dystopian motifs, and narrative strategies. Secondary sources, such as critical essays and studies on historical and sociopolitical contexts, offer a necessary background for interpretation. Comparative analysis is used to identify recurring patterns and differences within Arabic dystopian literature, situating the Egyptian texts within the wider landscape of Arab literary tradition production

To guide this investigation, the study poses several research questions: How does Arab suffering influence the themes and narratives of dystopian literature? In what ways do Egyptian works like *Utopia*, *The Queue*, and *Utared* reflect societal, political, and cultural struggles? What literary techniques and motifs are employed to transform real-world adversity into imaginative narratives? And how has the dystopian imagination in modern Arabic literature evolved in response to historical and contemporary challenges?

The study is guided by the hypothesis that the emergence of dystopian literature in the Arab world is directly shaped by collective suffering and social adversity. It posits that Egyptian dystopian texts function as imaginative responses to political and societal challenges, employing recurring themes, motifs, and literary strategies to convey both critique and creative transformation of real-world hardships.

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variations within Arabic dystopian literature, situating the Egyptian texts within the broader landscape of Arab literary production.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary Arabic dystopian fiction, particularly work produced in Egypt during the first decades of the 21st century, attracted increasing scholarly attention for the way it transforms concrete social crises into literary form. The three case studies that ground this study (*Utopia*, *The Queue*, and *Otared*) have become focal points in debates about how suffering operates as a generative force in narrative. Recent scholarship clusters into several overlapping conversations: (1) the embodiment of suffering (the body as index and testimony); (2) the bureaucratization and procedural aesthetics of domination (waiting, paperwork, and administrative suspension); (3) the role of translation and international reception in shaping critical frames; and (4) the emergence of a distinct “Egyptian dystopia” in the 21st century that recombines older social allegories with new neoliberal and securitized realities.

A dominant strand of work treats the body as the primary field through which political injuries are registered and signified. Paniconi’s (2024) article exemplifies this approach by reading Basma ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s novels through corporeal tropes: physical illness, wounds, and bodily exposure operate not simply as metaphors but as narrative technologies that convert systemic humiliation into ethical testimony (Paniconi, 2024). By tracking detailed imagery and the novels’ recurring somatic motifs, such studies show how bodily degeneration becomes the most immediate and persuasive proof of state failure, reproducing suffering in the texture of the sentence and scene. This line of inquiry reframes dystopia away from abstract future scenarios and toward the present-tense politics of pain.

Closely related is a robust literature on bureaucracy and waiting as formal devices of domination. Basma ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s *The Queue* has received sustained analysis precisely because its core symbol, the queue, makes explicit how institutionalized waiting disciplines subjects and suspends political life. Scholars argue that the novel’s procedural diction (forms, Gate procedures, interviews) aestheticizes temporality: waiting becomes a technique of control that erodes subjectivity and agency. Ulmer and colleagues (2022) analyze this temporal suspension as “oppressive liminality,” demonstrating how the protracted postponement of outcomes is itself a mechanism of subjection. Other commentators examine *The Queue*’s tonal economy, its deadpan, administrative voice, which turns administrative banality into moral catastrophe. These interventions collectively demonstrate that in much recent Arabic dystopia, the ordinary mechanics of administration are re-described as the principal machinery of harm.

Utopia (Towfik) and *Otared* (Rabie) extend these concerns in divergent but complementary directions. Towfik’s *Utopia* has been read as a classed allegory in which gated enclaves and their normative lifestyles dramatize socioeconomic exclusion and the erosion of public goods; critics emphasize how the novel anticipates social polarization by showing the built environment (gated communities, privatized leisure) as both symptom and producer of social decay (Pagès-El Karoui, 2015). Such readings situate *Utopia* within urban and spatial studies of contemporary Egypt, arguing that speculative enclosure exposes neoliberal stratification in a way realist narration often cannot.

Scholars treating *Otared*, stress how the novel’s formal intensity, fragmented episodes, and visceral description mimic the destabilization of social frameworks, making personal morbidity a microcosm of national decline.

Complementary scholarship has sought to historicize and categorize “Egyptian dystopia” as a recognizable trend. Bakker’s (2021) survey and subsequent essays emphasize that the first two decades of the 21st century have produced a discernible cluster of dystopian narratives in Egypt, many of which respond to the political and economic conditions surrounding the 2011 revolution and its afterlives. Comparative surveys position these novels within global dystopian lineages; meanwhile, they focus on

their local inflections, bureaucratic opacity, urban fracture, and the privatization of social safety nets. Such work is valuable because it provides genre-level scaffolding and situates individual texts within a national literary movement rather than treating them as idiosyncratic anomalies.

Another vital axis of inquiry is translation and reception. Scholars such as Qutait (2020) and other translation-focused critics argue that the moment of translation is interpretive: translators, publishers, and reviewers play powerful roles in designating certain Arabic novels as “dystopian” and in framing their political messages for anglophone audiences. This literature argues for bilingual, comparative reading strategies that attend to the original Arabic and its English paratexts; such an approach is necessary because translation choices (lexical, paratextual, marketing) influence how suffering and political critique are perceived transnationally. The differences between Arabic-language reception and anglophone reception are thus research sites in themselves, illuminating how global circuits shape local literary reputations.

Finally, recent close readings and comparative essays push the field toward more nuanced typologies of suffering as form. According to Bešková (2022) and others, *The Queue*, *Utopia*, and *Otared* can be read as interlinked dystopian paradigms: the bureaucratic dystopia, defined by protracted waiting and administrative procedures; the spatial or class dystopia, characterized by segregation and enclosure; and the intimate dystopia, which foregrounds domestic violence and the disintegration of kinship structures. These typologies, supported by close textual analysis, explain why suffering recurs across divergent narrative strategies: suffering functions as the raw material authors transform into aesthetic structures — the very grammar of the contemporary Arabic dystopian imaginary.

Taken together, the recent indexed scholarship confirms the study’s central claim: suffering in these novels is formative, not incidental. Whether rendered through the body, the queue, the gated wall, or the shattered household, suffering becomes the specific instrument by which writers diagnose political failure and imagine ethical responses. Future research, particularly intersectional and reception-based work, together with more gendered analyses of bodily suffering, will further refine how these novels articulate dissent and survival in twenty-first-century Egypt.

The reviewed scholarship demonstrates that contemporary Egyptian dystopian fiction has been productively analyzed through the lenses of embodiment, bureaucratic violence, spatial segregation, and translation. Yet these discussions remain largely text-bound, focusing on one novel or on a single theoretical register without fully articulating the comparative architecture of the field. What remains absent is an integrated framework that shows how different registers of suffering — bodily vulnerability in *The Queue*, socioeconomic enclosure in *Utopia*, and intimate social collapse in *Otared* — together forge the grammar of Arabic dystopian imagination. This study addresses that gap by offering a sustained comparative analysis of the three novels, demonstrating how suffering functions not merely as a theme but as a narrative engine. In doing so, it reframes current debates by situating Arabic dystopia within both local sociopolitical realities and global genre formations, underscoring the ethical and aesthetic urgency of reading suffering as the core of dystopian creation.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employs a qualitative, literary-analytical methodology to explore how suffering functions as a structuring force within Arabic dystopian fiction. Through close reading, the analysis attends to narrative form, metaphor, and character construction, while thematic analysis is used to identify recurring patterns of dispossession, hunger, bureaucratic delay, and bodily collapse. These approaches are supplemented by comparative analysis, which highlights both convergences and divergences among the selected texts, thereby tracing how dystopian motifs and narrative strategies emerge within the Egyptian context. Secondary sources—including critical essays, theoretical works in dystopian studies,

and scholarship on the sociopolitical history of contemporary Egypt—provide the necessary conceptual and historical frameworks for interpretation.

The primary corpus of this study consists of three key Egyptian dystopian novels: Ahmed Khaled Towfik's *Utopia* (2008), Basma Abdel Aziz's *The Queue* (2013), and Mohammad Rabie's *Otared* (2014). The study selects these works for their representative role in shaping contemporary Arabic dystopian literature and for their shared engagement with themes of systemic violence, socioeconomic inequality, and existential despair. They are examined alongside a body of secondary literature that situates them within the broader landscape of Arab literary production, thereby allowing for a contextualized reading of their imaginative representations of suffering.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section compares the central dystopian forms in Towfik's *Utopia* (2008), Abdel Aziz's *The Queue* (2013), and Rabie's *Otared* (2014). It highlights how each novel enacts distinct yet interconnected dystopias: socioeconomic and spatial exclusion in *Utopia*, bureaucratic stagnation in *The Queue*, and intimate collapse in *Otared*. These texts reveal the varied ways contemporary Arabic fiction dramatizes suffering, social control, and systemic injustice. (See Table one)

4.1. *Utopia* and the Logic of Socioeconomic Enclosure

Towfik's *Utopia* portrays the stark spatial and class divisions of neoliberal Egypt by envisioning a near future in which the affluent seclude themselves within fortified compounds, and the impoverished are left to survive in barren wastelands. The novel's dystopia is not driven by futuristic technologies or distant possibilities but by an intensification of already existing socioeconomic divides. The suffering depicted here is predominantly collective and structural: deprivation, hunger, and dispossession define the majority, while alienation and moral corruption plague the elite. As Pagès-El Karoui (2015) observes, Towfik's narrative presents "the worst of all worlds" (para. 14), in which inequality is not only entrenched but violently naturalized as the very organizing principle of social life.

The novel repeatedly emphasizes that poverty translates into bodily precarity. Hunger and exposure, while not described with the same graphic intensity as in *Otared* or *The Queue*, still haunt the lives of the dispossessed. The narrator describes the wastelands outside the gated community as a place where "people gnawed at scraps, their bodies skeletons wrapped in skin" (Towfik, 2012, p. 45). Here, the body becomes evidence of structural violence, bearing the marks of economic exclusion. The absence of medical infrastructure or shelter reinforces this precariousness: illness is unnamed but omnipresent, a silent backdrop to daily survival.

For the elite, however, the body becomes the site of another form of suffering: moral decay and the numbing of empathy. The privileged narrator casually notes his anticipation of hunting the poor for sport, describing it as "a thrill more intoxicating than drugs" (Towfik, 2012, p. 63). This articulation of violence as leisure highlights how class enclosure produces not only material deprivation for the poor but also ethical collapse for the wealthy. Suffering in *Utopia* thus extends across classes, though in asymmetrical ways: physical vulnerability defines the marginalized, while existential emptiness and corruption define the elite.

Although *Utopia* does not center on embodied suffering with the same visceral explicitness found in *The Queue* or *Otared*, the body remains a peripheral but revealing site. Hunger, disease, and exposure are constantly evoked as consequences of exclusion from economic security. As Bakker (2021) notes, the novel underscores how "the boundaries of space are also the boundaries of life itself; survival is determined by geography and class" (p. 18). In this sense, *Utopia* provides the socioeconomic foundation upon which bodily suffering in Abdel Aziz and Rabie becomes legible. It highlights that

without access to material resources; the body itself becomes precarious — foreshadowing the corporeal breakdowns witnessed in *The Queue*'s denied medical care and *Otared*'s visceral mutilations.

Towfik's contribution, therefore, lies in foregrounding the systemic structures that create the conditions of suffering later intensified in Abdel Aziz and Rabie. By mapping class apartheid onto space and depicting both the physical precarity of the poor and the moral degeneration of the rich, *Utopia* situates dystopia as a direct extension of neoliberal inequality. The novel's insistence that "the walls of Utopia were more impenetrable than any prison" (Towfik, 2012, p. 11) captures the essence of enclosure: suffering is not accidental but engineered through spatial and economic design.

4.2. *The Queue* and Bureaucratic Temporality

In Basma Abdel Aziz's *The Queue*, suffering is mediated through an endless temporal suspension enforced by an omnipotent, yet faceless authority known only as "the Gate." The Gate never physically opens, but it structures all aspects of life, leaving citizens perpetually waiting for documents, authorizations, and medical approvals that never arrive. This indefinite waiting becomes the central metaphor of the novel, transforming bureaucratic delay into a dystopian instrument of domination. As Ulmer and Salvo Y de León (2022) observe, the story portrays "temporal statelessness" (p. 249), a condition in which individuals are denied closure, mobility, and healing, suspended in an in-between state that erodes both physical well-being and social agency.

The body becomes the primary site where bureaucratic temporality inscribes its violence. The most prominent example is Yehya, a man who is shot during a protest and requires surgery to remove a bullet. His physician, Tarek, refuses to operate without official approval, explaining: "It was impossible to perform the surgery without a signed permit from the Gate" (Abdel Aziz, 2016, p. 84). The bullet lodged in Yehya's body thus becomes a literal embodiment of bureaucratic cruelty: his survival depends not on medical knowledge but on paperwork that will never be issued. As Paniconi (2024) notes, Abdel Aziz constructs "a politics of suspended embodiment" (p. 532), where pain itself testifies to the cruelty of procedural systems designed to defer resolution indefinitely.

This bureaucratic temporality is not restricted to medicine but extends to every aspect of life. Citizens queue endlessly for documents that remain elusive, their identities and rights effectively nullified until sanctioned by the Gate. As Bešková (2022) argues, the queue becomes "a physical and symbolic enactment of authoritarian control" (p. 224), producing a collective experience of waiting that homogenizes citizens into faceless, passive subjects. The queue is less a line of progression than a frozen tableau — a dystopian purgatory where suffering is perpetually prolonged.

Unlike the socioeconomic enclosures of Towfik's *Utopia*, where suffering arises from spatial and class-based inequality, in *The Queue* suffering is deliberately manufactured through temporal deferral. The Gate weaponizes time itself, reducing human lives to suspended processes with no foreseeable end. This prolongation of vulnerability has devastating effects not only on physical bodies but also on psychological states. Characters experience profound despair as days blend into weeks and months of waiting. As Yehya himself laments: "The queue had devoured his life; it was as if time itself had ground to a halt" (Abdel Aziz, 2016, p. 147).

In this way, Abdel Aziz demonstrates how authoritarianism can operate not only through violence or economic deprivation but through bureaucratic temporality — the systematic deferral of resolution. By transforming waiting into a permanent condition, *The Queue* reveals the dystopian potential of paperwork, forms, and procedures. Suffering here is not accidental but meticulously maintained, converting the everyday apparatus of governance into instruments of cruelty.

4.3. *Otared* and Intimate Collapse

Mohamed Rabie's *Otared* (2016) intensifies the focus on physical and emotional disintegration by depicting Cairo under siege in the year 2025, when the city has fallen to foreign occupation and internal betrayal. Violence saturates both public and private life, creating a world where death, mutilation, and despair dominate the narrative landscape. Unlike *Utopia*, where suffering is largely distributed across collective socioeconomic classes, and *The Queue*, where suffering is bureaucratically prolonged, *Otared* situates suffering within the intimate sphere of families, neighborhoods, and individual psyches.

Qutait (2020) describes Rabie's style as a "visceral poetics" (p. 752), marked by graphic depictions of wounds, dismemberment, and decay. The text abounds with bodily images that underscore the immediacy of suffering. For instance, the narrator notes: "The corpses were piled up, decomposing in the heat, their stench seeping into our lungs until it became part of us" (Rabie, 2016, p. 193). Such passages collapse the boundary between body and environment, transforming Cairo itself into a necropolis where life and death intertwine.

This collapse is not only physical but also psychological. The protagonist, Ahmed Otared, a police sniper who turned mercenary, gradually loses his moral bearings as he becomes complicit in escalating brutality. His reflections convey the erosion of intimate human connections under siege: "I no longer knew if the face I shot at belonged to a friend or an enemy. Everyone looked the same through the scope" (Rabie, 2016, p. 112). Here, suffering extends beyond bodily wounds to the annihilation of ethical and relational frameworks, suggesting that authoritarian collapse poisons both public institutions and private consciousness.

Scholars highlight how Rabie dramatizes the saturation of violence in everyday life. AlQutait (2020) argues that *Otared* embodies "the dystopian collapse of affect, where horror ceases to shock because it has become the norm" (p. 753). This perspective emphasizes that suffering in *Otared* is not episodic but ontological: it defines what it means to exist in the post-collapse city.

Unlike the socioeconomic deprivation of *Utopia* or the bureaucratic temporality of *The Queue*, *Otared* renders suffering unavoidable and omnipresent, embedded in the sensory, emotional, and relational dimensions of life. Rabie shows how authoritarian collapse invades not only institutions but also relationships, memories, and private spaces. In this sense, the novel's contribution to the triadic model of Arabic dystopian grammar lies in its insistence that suffering is not external to the self but inhabits the most intimate registers of being.

4.4. Toward a Triadic Grammar of Dystopian Suffering

By placing these three texts in dialogue, we can see how they articulate complementary registers of suffering and, in doing so, construct a distinctly Arabic grammar of dystopia.

Utopia (2008) by Ahmed Khaled Towfik highlights structural inequality and socioeconomic enclosure. The novel depicts a hyper-segregated Egypt where the wealthy elite isolate themselves in fortified compounds, while the rest of the population languishes in conditions of deprivation. The embodied suffering of the poor is expressed through recurring motifs of hunger, untreated illness, and dispossession of dignity (Towfik, 2008/2011). As El-Ariss (2018) argues, Towfik's speculative vision is less a projection of futuristic science than a diagnosis of the social violence already haunting contemporary Egypt.

The Queue (2016) by Basma Abdel Aziz shifts the locus of suffering from socioeconomic materiality to bureaucratic temporality. Here, the state manifests its power not through overt violence but through indefinite suspension. Citizens wait endlessly before an inaccessible authority, with healing and

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resolution permanently deferred. The protagonist, Yehya, requires urgent surgery to remove a bullet, yet his suffering is prolonged because the state denies permission to proceed. This bureaucratic paralysis embodies what Agrama (2012) calls the “indefinite temporality” of authoritarian governance, where time itself becomes a weapon of control.

Otared (2016) by Mohammad Rabie radicalizes this trajectory by dramatizing the collapse of intimacy and the visceral presence of bodily suffering. Unlike the systemic deprivation of *Utopia* or the temporal suspension of *The Queue*, *Otared* situates suffering within the flesh, rendering bodily disintegration unavoidable and inescapable. Rabie’s Cairo is a space of violence where the human body becomes the battlefield for dystopian collapse.

Taken together, these novels propose a triadic grammar of Arabic dystopia, where suffering moves through three interlinked registers: material deprivation (*Utopia*), temporal suspension (*The Queue*), and corporeal collapse (*Otared*). See Figure 1.

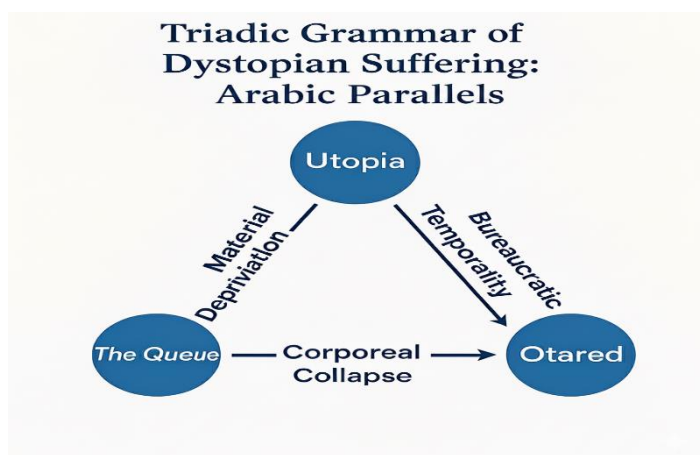


Figure 2 Triadic Grammar of Dystopian Suffering: Mapping Arabic novels *Utopia*, *The Queue*, and *Otared*.

4.5. Comparative Framework: Arabic vs. Western Dystopias

This triadic model contrasts with the dominant trajectories of Western dystopian literature, which often foreground speculative technologies, authoritarian surveillance, or ecological collapse.

In George Orwell’s *1984* (1949), suffering is primarily epistemic and ideological: control is exercised by manipulating truth, memory, and language. The state’s violence is real, but its dystopian genius lies in producing a world where even thought is colonized (Orwell, 1949/1990). This differs from Abdel Aziz’s *The Queue*, where control is less about “thoughtcrime” than about endless bureaucratic suspension, producing suffering not through forced conviction but through immobilization.

In Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), suffering is intimate and gendered, emphasising reproductive control and the reduction of women to biological functions. While this resonates with the bodily horror of Rabie’s *Otared*, Atwood’s framework is closely linked to biopolitics and patriarchal theocracy (Atwood, 1985/2017). In contrast, Rabie universalizes corporeal collapse as a condition of life under authoritarian violence in post-2011 Egypt.

In Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), dystopia emerges not from deprivation but from abundance, a consumerist utopia where pleasure and distraction mask systemic oppression. Towfik’s *Utopia* reverses this dynamic: here, the elite retreat into excessive consumption, while the masses suffer starvation and violence. Rather than pleasure as control, deprivation itself becomes the dystopian mechanism.

Thus, while Western dystopias often speculate on future technologies or ideological systems, Arabic dystopias foreground lived suffering as their primary raw material. They do not project into distant futures but transform ongoing socioeconomic inequality, bureaucratic stasis, and corporeal violence into narrative form (Hassan, 2020).

In this regard, dystopia in contemporary Arabic literature operates as a prediction of the future rather than as a record of present realities. It documents and aestheticizes structural, bureaucratic, and intimate suffering, insisting on its visibility in literary form. By foregrounding the material and embodied realities of oppression, Arabic dystopias remind us that dystopia is not always about the “future we fear” but often about the “present we endure.” See figure 2.

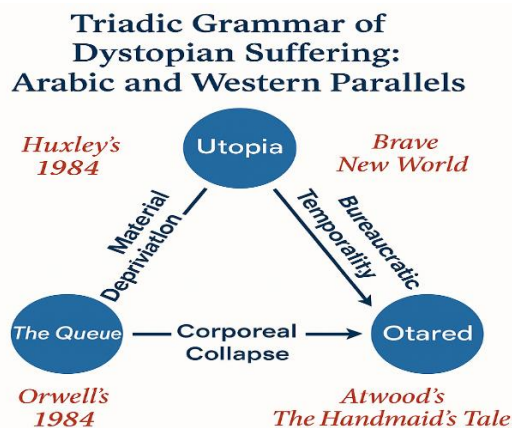


Figure 2 Triadic Grammar of Dystopian Suffering: Mapping Arabic novels *Utopia*, *The Queue*, and *Otared* onto complementary registers of suffering—material deprivation, bureaucratic temporality, and corporeal collapse—alongside their Western parallels.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has explored how contemporary Arabic dystopian fiction articulates human suffering and, in doing so, generates a distinctive literary imagination. It conducted close textual analysis within a comparative literary framework, centering on three representative novels: Towfik’s *Utopia* (2008/2011), Abdel Aziz’s *The Queue* (2016), and Rabie’s *Otared* (2016). By situating these works alongside Western dystopian texts such as Orwell’s 1984, Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and Huxley’s *Brave New World*, the study sought to identify the narrative mechanisms through which Arabic dystopias transform lived suffering into aesthetic and political testimony.

The findings reveal that each novel foregrounds a distinct register of suffering, which together constitutes a triadic grammar of Arabic dystopia. In *Utopia*, structural inequality and socioeconomic confinement constitute forms of embodied deprivation, foregrounding hunger, disease, and dispossession as defining elements of the dystopian experience. *The Queue* shifts the focus to temporal suspension, portraying bureaucratic paralysis as a form of control in which waiting and deferred resolution generate profound human vulnerability. Finally, *Otared* dramatizes intimate collapse, where bodily disintegration and emotional fragility converge, rendering suffering immediate, visceral, and unavoidable. This triadic framework demonstrates that, unlike many Western dystopias, Arabic dystopian literature centers on present, lived realities rather than futuristic speculation or abstract ideological constructs.

By analyzing these complementary registers, the study concludes that Arabic dystopias function as modes of testimony. They transform structural, bureaucratic, and intimate suffering into narrative engines that give voice to experiences often marginalized or silent. In doing so, these texts insist that dystopia is not merely a speculative projection but a lens through which the everyday consequences of inequality, authoritarianism, and social neglect are rendered visible and compelling.

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The study recommends further research to expand the corpus of Arabic dystopian fiction, including works from diverse regions such as the Gulf, Levant, and North Africa, to test the applicability of the triadic model across different contexts. Comparative studies situating Arabic dystopias alongside other postcolonial or global dystopian traditions could also illuminate shared narrative strategies and thematic concerns. Finally, integrating Arabic dystopian literature into world literature curricula can challenge Eurocentric notions of the genre and highlight the role of narrative in transforming lived suffering into aesthetic and political testimony.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that contemporary Arabic dystopian fiction does more than depict oppression; it forges suffering into the imaginative core of the narrative, establishing material deprivation, temporal suspension, and intimate collapse as the defining registers of dystopia. Through these novels, contemporary Arabic literature asserts a dystopian vision that foregrounds the present, giving aesthetic form to lived realities while asserting the ethical and political necessity of bearing witness.

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