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## Satirical Visions of the Future? Egyptian and Ottoman Caricatures on ‘Science Fiction’ and Technology from the Beginning of the 20th Century

### Abstract

The contribution deals with caricatures that depict and thematise ideas about the future and compares examples from Istanbul and Cairo. Both Ottoman-Turkish and Egyptian journals contain manifold examples of caricatures that could be characterised as playing with ‘science fiction’ topics and deal with visions of the future. Examples from a series of 14 depictions by the caricaturist ‘Ali Rifqī in the Egyptian satire journal *al-Fukāha* are compared to individual caricatures from various Ottoman satirical magazines from the first quarter of the 20th century. Similar to the general content of the respective magazines, many of the caricatures to be analysed deal with the modernisation of mobility, which is grotesquely exaggerated (e.g. flying travellers, flying trains). In this context, existing contemporary problems are also addressed to some extent, such as the traffic on the streets of Cairo and Istanbul, which was already challenging at that time. Another thematic strand is the innovations in science, also making reference either to utopian (or dystopian) technologies or to the changes in the world view brought about by modern science. So, what do the caricatures reveal with regard to contemporary concepts and critique of ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’? Beyond all the fictitious and futuristic content, are there elements referring to contemporary society of that time? And do the caricatures really address the future?

**Keywords:** future visions, science, modernisation, Cairo and Istanbul, first quarter of the 20th century

### 1. Introduction

The 19th century was a century characterised by the idea of progress, which went hand in hand with a certain fascination, if not obsession, with new technologies. The invention of steam-powered trains and ships, aeroplanes, and many more machines led people across the globe to dream into a future shaped and mostly bettered by technologies. On the other hand, the social impact of the Industrial Revolution also led writers and illustrators to create more critical, even dystopian outlooks into the future, outlooks fed from their observations in their present time. This ambiguous fascination found its expression in many different domains of cultural practices, such as in theatrical (sometimes variétés-like) shows of Galvanism or science-inspired literature. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*, first published 1818, is often held up as the

first piece of 19th-century science-fiction literature,<sup>1</sup> introducing the figure of the ‘mad scientist.’<sup>2</sup> Authors like Shelley, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells left deep footprints in the genre right in the same period as when the caricatures discussed in this article were published. In this contribution, we will refer to 19th- and early 20th- century science fiction as a genre that left its mark not only on literature but also on popular art, cartoon, and caricature. While the genre developed quickly in Europe, the United States, and South Asia,<sup>3</sup> it seems to have had a slower start in the Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

The London World’s Fair of 1851 marked the beginning of a series of international universal exhibitions that served to showcase the achievements of industrialisation by presenting newly invented machines and devices. The developments continued, with international and national events aiming to make the various countries more competitive in this sector. The international press picked up on these developments and discussions, and emerging national states or countries under direct or indirect colonial influence were equally interested in participating in this field, which was perceived as the motor of modernity. For example, the Ottoman Empire was represented at London World’s fair, and the ‘Egyptian Street’ built several years later for the Paris World’s Fair in 1889 stands witness to this day to the crooked colonial gaze that shaped representations of ‘Oriental’ countries at the time. Despite the inequality baked into approaches, both individuals and political figures from Middle Eastern countries were highly interested in the fairs and travelled to see them.<sup>5</sup> Many of these individual travellers, both from the Ottoman Empire and Egypt, may be characterised as belonging to an emerging new middle layer of society, for which the Egyptian press and literature coined the name *effendiya*.<sup>6</sup> It is the same societal layer that gave birth to journalism, both in daily newspapers and (satirical) magazines in the two regions.<sup>7</sup> In the Ottoman Empire, it was the bureaucratic elite whose interest

- 1 Most thoroughly detailed by Aldiss 1973. We use the broad definition of the science fiction genre proposed by Bruce Sterling, who describes science fiction as ‘a form of fiction that deals principally with the impact of actual or imagined science upon society or individuals.’ He characterises it as a ‘modern genre,’ pointing to the coining of the term ‘science fiction’ by American publisher Hugo Gernsback in the 1920s and further detailing the impact of the Industrial Revolution as a major influence on science fiction writers. See Sterling 2025.
- 2 We do not want to engage in a deeper discussion of the genesis of science fiction as a literary genre. While a part of the scholarly community has identified early forms of science fiction as early as with the Epic of Gilgamesh, many others date the rise of the genre to the 19th century and read 17th- and 18th-century texts such as *New Atlantis* by Bacon 1627 as, in a way, proto-science-fiction texts, especially regarding their engagement with utopian (and dystopian, like Shelley 1826) outlooks on the world as shaped by humankind. Considering the novel, see Cowan 2011, 407–21.
- 3 As studied by our colleague Hans Harder; see, i.a., Harder 2001, 105–19.
- 4 The question as to why the genre did not develop in the Middle East in parallel with this trend cannot yet be answered. Research on this topic is still pending.
- 5 On travelogues from the Middle East to Europe, see Newman and al-Ṭaḥṭāwī 2012; Wagner 2016; Agai and Conermann 2013. On the development of engagement with ‘Western’ technology and lifestyle and the rise of criticism against it, see, e.g., Hourani 1962.
- 6 See Ryzova 2014; Eppel 2009, 535–9.
- 7 See Ryzova 2014; Zdafee 2019, esp. chapter 2.

in magazines in the second half of the 19th century that paved the way for a new era of political newspapers and opinion journalism. Increasing criticism of the government and propaganda for regime change prompted the Ottoman government to tighten its control over the press through laws and regulations, giving rise to the Ottoman press in exile. After the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the suppressed desire for publications erupted in a veritable press boom, especially in Istanbul.<sup>8</sup> Even before the 1908 revolution, the editors of the most important satirical magazines were in opposition to Sultan Abdülhamid's regime. Before they began working for satirical magazines, many of the authors and illustrators had already had careers in the military or as civil servants, and many of them had connections abroad.<sup>9</sup>

Progress and technical innovations were thus, rather unsurprisingly, among the hot topics to which the Ottoman and Egyptian press devoted itself in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The satirical press in particular favoured these kinds of topics. The turn of the century saw a boom in satirical magazines. In particular, the years 1908/9 and the early 1920s in the Ottoman Empire and, shortly thereafter, the late 1920s and 30s in Egypt saw the publication of numerous humorous publications. While many caricatures dedicated to technical progress express astonishment or admiration and play with the sensation of being overwhelmed by technical progress, others combine an admiring gaze at technical innovations with a certain scepticism towards their own country's ability to participate in this progress. This ambiguous stance may be explained by tendencies towards self-orientalisation, that is, the internalisation of Western Orientalist ideas and critique by individuals from the region.<sup>10</sup> A telling example may be found in the first caricature discussed below, which ascribes the incredible amount of new technology presented as the work of an 'American scholar,' thus perpetuating the idea of Western technological superiority. However, in its satirical exaggeration, the self-orientalising aspect of the caricature might also work as an implicit critique of the West.

In this article, we will discuss the question as to whether and in what ways the caricatures of the time reveal threads of societal discourse with regard to contemporary concepts and critique of 'progress' and 'modernity' in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. Veruschka Wagner opens with Ottoman caricatures from the beginning of the 20th century, while Anna Kollatz compares them to Arab caricatures from late-1920s Cairo. Together we start our comparative reading from the hypothesis that, beyond all the fictitious and futuristic content characteristic for science fiction, the caricatures contain elements referring to the contemporary society of that time. Do the caricatures really address the future exclusively? Or is the science fiction content a narrative device for addressing issues in the contemporary, for criticising the society and politics of the day?

8 Baykal 2019, 42.

9 Heinzelmann 1999, 90.

10 For a theoretical approach to the concept, see Tombul and Sarı 2021, especially Chapter 3, by Andrade. Regarding the realm of caricature, orientalising strategies in the context of constructing a national self are discussed by Okyar 2023.

## 2. Caricatures on Technology and Questionable Progress

The topic of technological innovations is addressed in a caricature printed in the satirical magazine *Güleryüz* ('Laughing Face') in October 1921. During the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923), *Güleryüz* was Istanbul's most influential humoristic magazine.<sup>11</sup> In the caricature shown in Figure 1, technological progress and the latest achievements of the rapidly developing 19th century are depicted in their combined function. Several new devices that had entered our world at that time, such as the camera, gramophone, and telephone, are connected in such a way that a burglar is overpowered by them upon breaking into a home. This technological system was intended to protect residents from burglary, as explained in the text underneath the depiction:

After this kind of invention by an American scholar, we will now be able to sit comfortably in our homes. Because as soon as the burglar tampering with your door steps inside, he will be confronted with a new moving system of electrical devices. All at the same time, the hammer will land on his head, the pincer will grab his arm, the camera will take his picture, the water pump will spray him with water, and the gramophone will notify the police by telephone. All these events will happen all at once.

Woe to the thieves from now on!

The scene resembles a gallery of new inventions. Various devices are presented to us taken out of their context. Overwhelmed by so many new developments, the question of the usability of one invention or the other arises. In this caricature, the various devices are not only combined with each other, but are also misused for other purposes, namely to keep burglars away. The caricature mocks the function of the devices and questions technological progress as a whole, while at the same time addressing the problem of burglary, which seems to have been acute at the time.

Figure 2 shows an earlier caricature, which also deals with the innovations in technology.

One of the newest achievements of the time was the discovery of X-rays. This caricature from *Karagöz* ('Dark Eye'), one of the longest-lived and most successful Turkish satirical magazines,<sup>12</sup> shows an X-ray machine in the hands of the two protagonists of the

11 *Güleryüz* was a satirical magazine published between 1921 and 1923 and was characterised by its colourful illustrations, especially on its cover pages. The magazine appeared in Istanbul on a weekly basis with a total of 122 editions. Its publisher and founder, Sedat Simavi (1896–1952), was a Turkish journalist, political caricaturist, writer, and film director. In terms of content, it mainly dealt with the Turkish War of Liberation and supported the national resistance movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk against the Allied occupation after the First World War. As an opposing voice and supporter of the Turkish government (thus in opposition to the independence movement), the politico-humorous journal *Aydede* was founded in 1922. However, *Güleryüz* also devoted attention to other topics, such as social changes, modernisation, and emancipation. For the magazine's role during the War of Independence, see Dümen 2019.

12 *Karagöz* ('Dark Eye') (1908–1955) mainly focused on domestic and foreign policy issues. It was initially published twice a week and later once weekly, each with four pages. It played an important role in conveying political content and shaping public perception. Its main characters are

Figure 1. Protection against burglars (Güteryüz, 17 October 1921, 5). The speech bubble in the top left-hand corner says: 'Hello! Hello! Police!'

After this kind of invention by an American scholar, we will now be able to sit comfortably in our homes. Because as soon as the burglar tampering with your door steps inside, he will be confronted with a new moving system of electrical devices. All at the same time, the hammer will land on his head, the pincer will grab his arm, the camera will take his picture, the water pump will spray him with water, and the gramophone will notify the police by telephone. All these events will happen all at once. Woe to the thieves from now on!

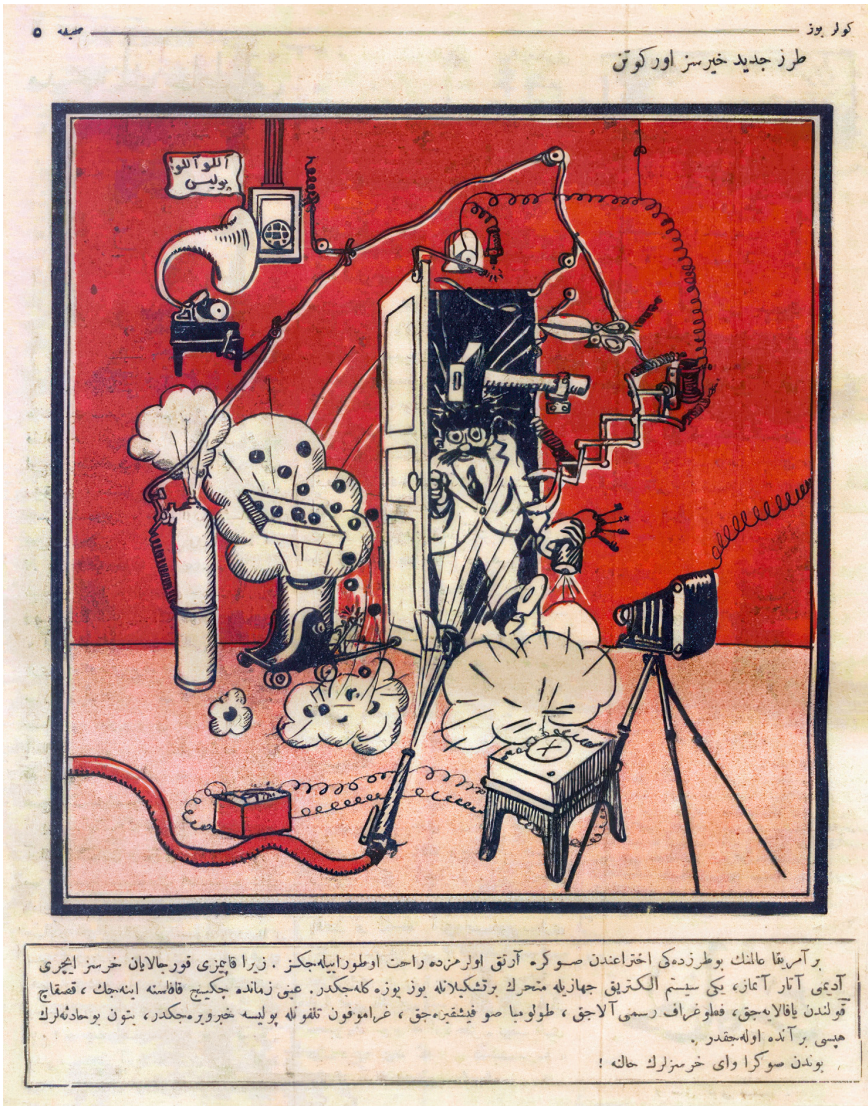
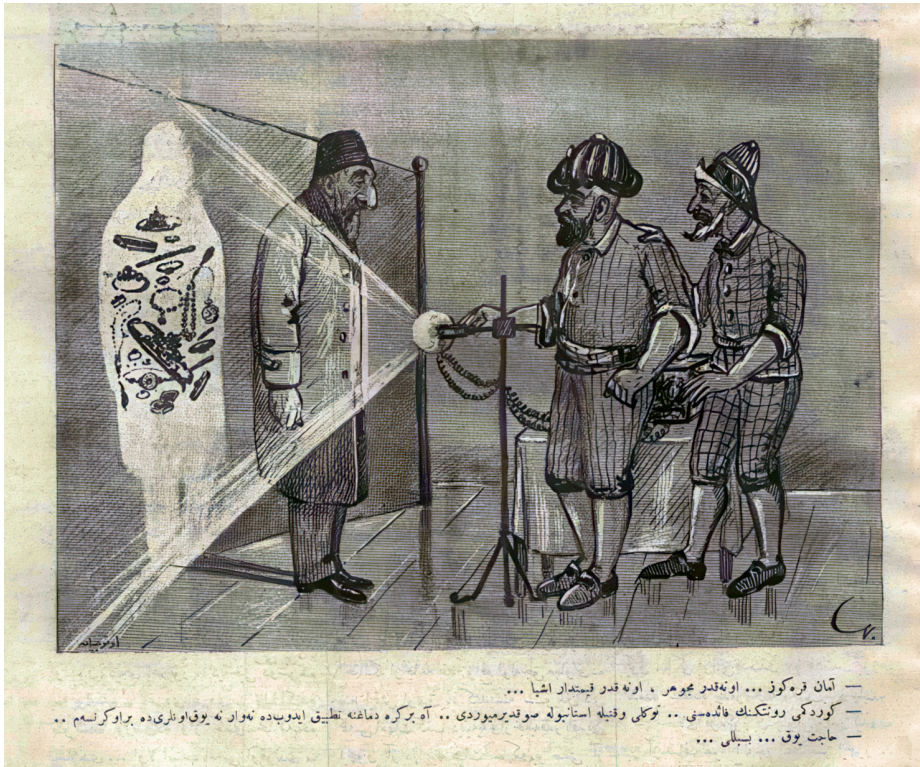


Figure 2. X-rays for better transparency (Karagöz, 12 July 1909).

- ‘ – Oh Karagöz... so many pieces of jewelry... so many valuable items.
- You see the use of X-rays... It’s not for nothing that he didn’t allow them in Istanbul. Oh, if only I could use it on his brain just once to find out what’s going on in there.
- That isn’t necessary... it’s obvious.’



magazine, Karagöz and Hacivat, who are known from traditional Ottoman shadow theatre. They are using the machine to examine Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909). The image projected onto the screen shows numerous pieces of jewelry and precious objects that are hidden inside Abdülhamid’s body.

The dialogue under the illustration between Hacivat and Karagöz reads as follows:

- Oh Karagöz... so many pieces of jewelry... so many valuable items.
- You see the use of X-rays... It’s not for nothing that he didn’t allow them in Istanbul. Oh, if only I could use it on his brain just once to find out what’s going on in there.
- That isn’t necessary... it’s obvious.

Karagöz and Hacivat, two protagonists from traditional Ottoman shadow theatre, who always engage in dialogue about daily life or the current political situation. They appear in the caricatures as observers or participants. See Okyar 2023, esp. 32, and Heinzelmann 1999, esp. 51–67.

In *Karagöz*, the two protagonists usually address everyday issues in dialogues, in which Karagöz explains something to Hacivat.<sup>13</sup> This caricature by Mehmed Baha,<sup>14</sup> refers to an incident shortly after Sultan Abdülhamid II was deposed in 1909. Allegedly, during the search of Sultan's palace after his deposition, nothing of value was found, causing both irritation and amusement at the same time. The circumstances that nothing of value was allegedly found is picked up on in this depiction<sup>15</sup> and linked to a new technological achievement. These kinds of combinations are typical of caricatures, in which two current events or topics are often linked together to create a humorous effect.

The Sultan was taken up as a central figure in many magazines in the Ottoman Empire, as well as in other countries and regions, and appeared in numerous caricatures, especially towards the end of his reign. He is depicted in different ways: sometimes as particularly cruel to his people, but also as a weak ruler ('sick man of Europe'),<sup>16</sup> while he was sometimes also portrayed as a lazy sultan addicted to his desires. His large nose is particularly noticeable in these depictions and was often targeted by caricaturists. This allegedly bothered the Sultan so much that he had the word 'nose' censored.<sup>17</sup>

The Egyptian caricature in was printed in 1927 as part 10 of a science fiction series by the caricaturist 'Alī Rifqī (Ahmet Rifkī).<sup>18</sup> His sci-fi caricature series *Miṣr fī sanat alfayn* ('Egypt in the Year 2000') was published in the first year of *Al-Fukāha*,<sup>19</sup> in the first 14 issues. The caricatures usually were printed on page 9, covering half a page of the magazine. They did not stand in any thematic connection to articles, jokes, or other caricatures around them. The series does not seem to follow any particular thematic order or 'plot.' Instead, caricatures covering a number of topics were published in a seemingly random order, with technology-related content making up the largest part of the series. We find one of Rifqī's favourite topics—'modern'<sup>20</sup> traffic and transportation—along with 'modern'

13 Heinzlmann 1999, 53.

14 Mehmed Baha and Halid Naci were the two main illustrators for the journal at the time when the Karagöz caricatures shown here appeared. Heinzlmann 1999, 60, 67.

15 Atik 2014, 98.

16 Gülbudak 2022, 561–97; Alkan 2018. For further information on the perception of the Ottoman Empire as a sick man within the Orientalism debate, see Aslı Çırakman 2005.

17 Küper-Büsch and Rona 2008.

18 On him, see Eberhard Dziobek's contribution in this volume.

19 The magazine *Al-Fukāha* ('The Joke' or 'Humour') was published weekly in Cairo from 1926–1933 by the publishing house *Dār al-Hilāl* ('Half-moon Press'). This very influential press had been founded by the Lebanese intellectual Jurji Zaidan (1861–1914), a university classmate of Yaqub Sarruf (1852–1927), the founder of the magazine *Al-Muqtataf* ('The Elite', 1876). Jurji came to Cairo in the early 1890s and started publishing the monthly *Al-Hilāl* ('The Crescent'), which exists to this day. After his death in 1914, his sons Emile and Shukri took over both the magazine and the press. Pro-Wafd nationalists like their father, they started to expand the scope of the press in the 1920s by adding more magazines. One of them is the satirical magazine *Al-Fukāha*, for which they hired 'Alī Rifqī as the chief caricaturist.

20 I use 'modern' in this context to indicate the sources' assessment of technologies or developments regarded as relatively new additions to the caricaturist's time that seem to stem from some sort of (questionable, as shall be discussed below) 'progress.'

Figure 3. Al-Fukāha, 2 February 1927, 11.

'Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 10: Necromancy in Criminal Investigation.'



communication technologies of various kinds. Some caricatures also hint at the impact that 'modernisation' may have on daily life or the environment in general. Such influences include totally changed habits in everyday life or the effect that things or habits that appeared totally normal to his 1920s readers may become extraordinary in the future. These factors make the series perfect for a miniature case study on how this individual caricaturist dealt with the great concepts of *tamaddun*, 'progress,' and 'modernity,' in the caricaturist's time and in his imagination of future.<sup>21</sup>

The caricature 'Necromancy in Criminal Investigation' (Fig. 3), which represents a court hearing, shows a use of technology in a way similar to the *Karagöz* caricature above in Figure 2. However, in the Egyptian example, the technology employed resembles a Ouija-board and might thus be described as a rather esoteric form of 'modern' technology. The judges on the left keep their fingers pressed on a contraption that is wired to the floor. This seems to allow them to conjure up the ghost of a victim—probably of a murder case—who points decidedly to the chief judge in the middle of the judge's table. Bystanders in

21 All Egyptian caricatures discussed in this article belong to this series.

the back react with astonishment and shock; even the judges seem stupefied by the ghost's 'statement.' Different interpretations of this rather enigmatic caricature come to mind: at first glance, it seems to showcase a somewhat creepy modern achievement that could be of great assistance in criminal investigations.<sup>22</sup> However, is this 'technology' to be considered reliable? The reaction of the judges and the witnesses in the background may be read as shock, because a seemingly unlikely truth is being revealed, namely that the chief judge is a murderer, or, alternatively, the shocked reaction may point to the absurd statement this form of 'modern technology' produces, similar in its absurdity to some fantasies produced by artificial intelligence programmes in our own times. Could the fact that the chief judge sports a beard also lead one to read the caricature as a critique of the old, religion-based qadi-system? Could the ghost's accusatory pointing finger even stand for a general critique of the judiciary system? The caricature leaves us—and may have also intentionally left its contemporary recipients—with a certain ambiguity regarding the 'modern technology' and the courtroom scene, thereby allowing room for the recipient to engage with both topics. Apart from the thematic side of this caricature, the representation of the courtroom scene in Egypt of the year 2000 deserves our attention. Other than the ghostly apparition, neither the interior or the figures depicted show any difference to the way 'Alī Rifqī and his colleagues would have drawn their contemporary *effendiya* Egyptians and their surroundings.<sup>23</sup> Whether this continuity of appearance from the caricaturist's present to the imagined distant future is a deliberately used stylistic device or just coincidental, we shall keep it in mind as an indication that the caricaturist may have been sceptical about the transformational potential of 'modernity' in terms of social structures.

### 3. Sketches of the Future

Traffic and transportation are a key topic when it comes to visions of the future. Influenced by technical innovations and the increasing number of vehicles, people have to come to terms with new living conditions. Istanbul and Cairo are the focus of the caricatures, which provide similarities in the depictions of the future (or contemporary) traffic situation. However, a certain ambiguity vis-à-vis living conditions in the future can be observed in caricatures dealing with traffic. Imaginations of future (and at times futuristic) traffic in the metropolises of the day, including fantastic means of transportation, often depart from present-day observations and fears. For example, the growing number of motorised vehicles in the cities is often represented as a dangerous and life-threatening change to traditional ways of travel, as well as to everyday life.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, however, the

22 On a side note, let us point to a 1994 murder case in Australia, in which a Ouija board was used to identify the culprit. See Dulaney and Carrick 2018.

23 See, e.g., Ryzova 2014; Zdafee 2019.

24 Such as Rifqī's depictions of car and tram traffic as discussed in Eberhard Dziobek's article in this volume. See also Rifqī's caricatures no. 2 and 4 *Al-Fukāha*, 8 December 1926, 9, and 22 December 1926, 9, from the series *Miṣr fī sanat alfayn*, that show fantastic sci-fi technologies to prevent accidents, such as cars and trams made from rubber or a train able to fly over road crossings.

depiction of the people stands in stark contrast to these future visions of transportation, as they do not change and seem to remain the same in appearance. The contemporary readers thus saw images of themselves transported into a highly technologised, fantastic future. This contrast between the known present and the imagined future creates a certain ambiguity that is typical for these kinds of caricatures. It avoids unambiguous interpretation through its complex composition. Caricatures playing with ambiguity address various aspects in parallel by alluding to them directly or indirectly. In this case, they purport to address the future but are actually dealing with the present.

Figure 4, the scene depicted on the cover of the 27th issue of the second series of the satirical magazine *Geveze* ('Chatterer/chatty'),<sup>25</sup> fills the entire page of the issue and, like almost all caricatures and articles in *Geveze*, is unsigned. The scene shows a chaotic traffic situation in Istanbul's Çemberlitaş district on the European side. The district can be recognised by the column on the right of the caricature, the Çemberlitaş or Constantine Column. On the right, we can see a single pedestrian trying to escape while various vehicles drive in a criss-cross fashion. The caption indicates that this is not a depiction of a current situation, but a vision of the future, where numerous vehicles endanger the lives of pedestrians. The subtitle proclaims:

If cars, automobiles, motorcycles, bicycles, and other means of transportation were to increase in Istanbul, then this would be the order and the comfort of walking and moving around in the streets and avenues.

Means of transportation are portrayed as frightening and viewed very critically. Numerous caricatures depict trams in particular as hazardous to one's life and often compare them to the effects of war.<sup>26</sup> 'If the present is already perceived as so dramatic, what will the future look like?' seems to be a question on people's minds, not only in Istanbul but also in other cities such as Cairo.

The caricature in Figure 5, published as part 8 of the Egyptian sci-fi series, comments on a development in urban traffic culture that 'Alī Rifqī reflected critically in other caricatures as well: in his own time, he observes pedestrians being driven off the roads of Cairo, as a result of aggressive car and tram drivers and the danger they posed.<sup>27</sup> In a future with astonishingly civilised traffic, he imagines the pedestrian to be a rare breed, marvelled upon by his contemporaries and even filmed out of a car, maybe for the local news. The 'normal' of

- 25 *Geveze* appeared in two series in 1908 and 1909, with a total of 115 issues, initially as a daily newspaper and later twice weekly. It was published in Istanbul, with Kırkor Faik as its editor. In addition to news and caricatures, the magazine included various formats such as letters, poems, essays, anecdotes, and advertisements. For more information on form and content of the magazine, see Civalioğlu and Çelik, 2017.
- 26 E.g. Rifqī's depiction of trams getting into conflict with donkey drivers or carriages for *Aydede*, 16 October 1922, 2, and *Al-Fukāha*, 23 March 1927, cover. Both caricatures elaborate upon the same joke, showing the traditional vehicle as obstructing the tram's way. See Kollatz and Wagner 2025, 10–1.
- 27 See above, note 8. The first tramline had opened in Cairo in 1896; the tramway network grew fast. In the late 1920s, when Rifqī worked for *al-Fukāha* magazine, the tram thus was a still relatively new, but normal sight in Cairo.

Figure 4. Geveze, 18 February 1909.

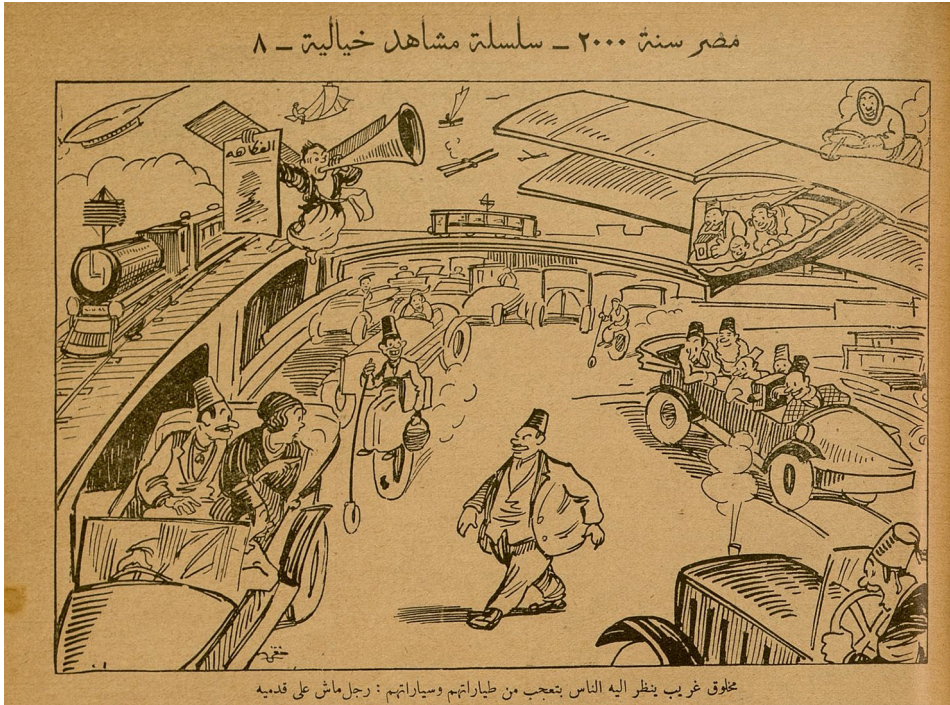
'If cars, automobiles, motorcycles, bicycles, and other means of transportation were to increase in Istanbul, then this would be the order and the comfort of walking and moving around in the streets and avenues.'



the caricaturist's time is expected to become the rare and marvellous in the future. Yet again, most of the cars, as well as the clothing of all the figures, look very 1920s *effendiya*, with the men donning fezzes and either a European suit (marking them as *effendî*) or *gallabîya* attire (marking them as more traditional, yet well-off people from the countryside, or lower-class workers or servants in this picture). The only woman depicted here sports a moderate 1920s outfit with a cap on her shortly cropped hairstyle but wearing a traditional black coat over her (probably European-style) dress. The caricaturist seems to imagine a future in which this urban middle class, to which he himself belongs, as do his editors and the main intended audience of the magazines he publishes in, continues to exist in the same way as in his own present time. While fantastic aviation machines, cars, and trains have changed the traffic considerably, the social reality of Cairo remains stable in his imagination. This does not stop at the clothing; it also includes gender and class relations. The technological fantasies

Figure 5. *Al-Fukāha*, 19 January 1927, 3.

'Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 8: A strange creature that people look at in wonder from their aeroplanes and cars: A pedestrian.'



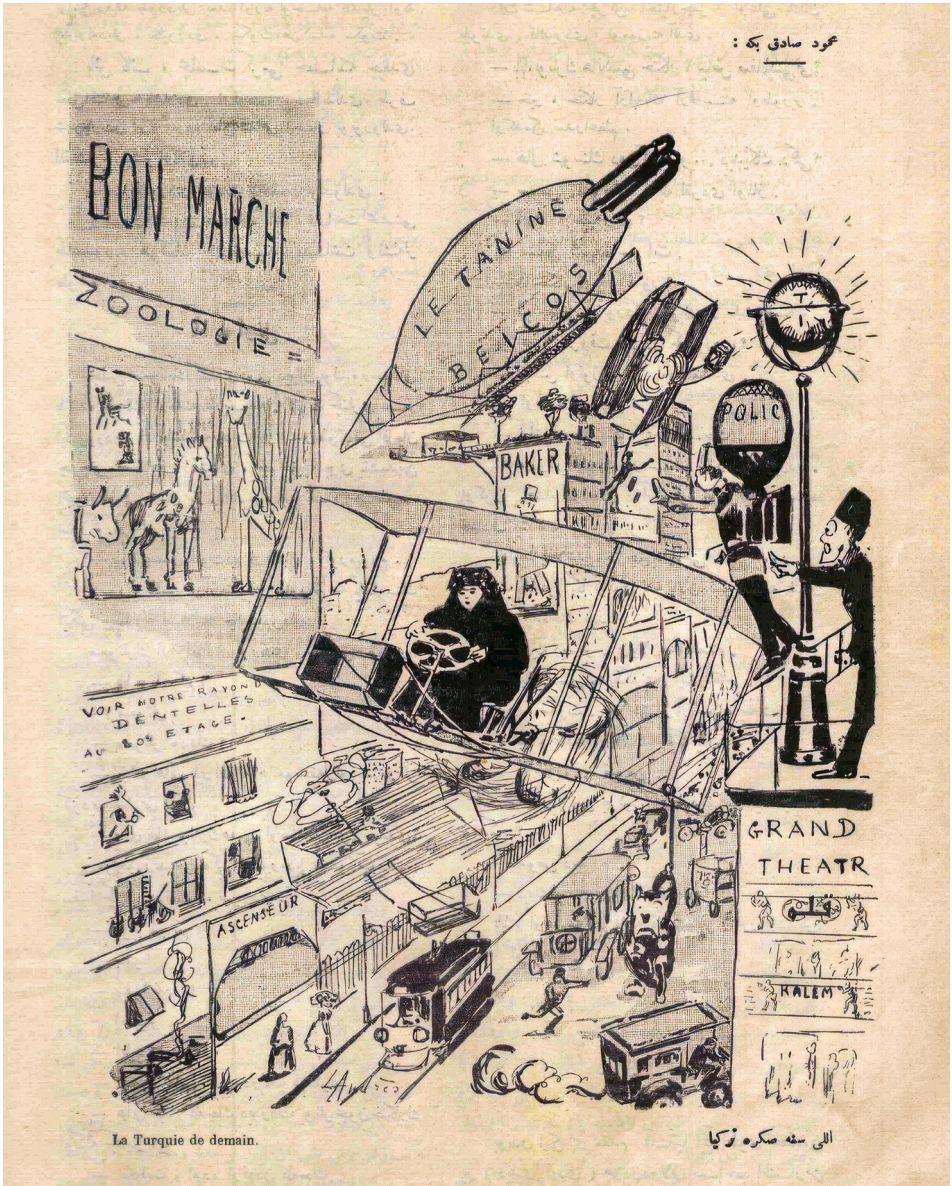
represented by sci-fi motives thus seem to be restricted to the sphere of technology and outward changes in everyday life, while social and societal structures remain unaffected. This strengthens the observation regarding the contemporary clothing of figures made above. On a funny side note, we should acknowledge the flying news agent in the upper left part of the caricature, who is advertising the latest issue of *Al-Fukāha* magazine. The caricaturist expected his satirical magazine to continue into this distant, marvellous future—and on this point he was wrong, for publication of the magazine was stopped, and the publication fused with another of *Dār al-Hilāl's* magazines already in 1930.

Fabulous airborne vehicles that are visibly inspired by light aeroplanes of the time, Zeppelin airships, and the like, can be found in the Ottoman sphere as well.

The caricature published in the bilingual *Kalem* ('Pen') entitled 'Mahmud Sadık Bey'e' ('For Mahmud Sadık Bey') (Fig. 6), a journalist who also wrote for the *Kalem* and many other newspapers and magazines,<sup>28</sup> bears the caption 'Turkey in 50 years' (in Ottoman

28 *Kalem* was published weekly between 1908 and 1911 by Salah Cimcoz and Celal Esad in both Ottoman Turkish and French. The two parts differed in their content. Pseudonyms were used for most of the contributions. Heinzlmann 1999, 68.

Figure 6. Kalem, 1908, 8.  
 'For Mahmud Sadık Bey. Turkey in 50 years.'



Turkish) and 'Turkey of tomorrow' (in French). The magazine *Kalem's* caricatures cover a much broader spectrum than those in *Karagöz*. In addition to 'classic' political caricatures, meaning drawings commenting on a political event or situation, the publication

also included elements such as portrait caricatures and humorous little picture stories, for example. Furthermore, *Kalem*'s caricatures are strongly influenced by European models.<sup>29</sup>

The caricature here shows a typical vision of the future in which air vehicles predominate as a means of transportation. The shopping street depicted may be the busy İstiklal Street in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district, which is lined with high-rise buildings and shops to the left and right and still has today a historic tram that runs up and down. A woman in a chador flies an aeroplane, while other aircraft, such as a Zeppelin, are also on the move. A policeman tries to regulate the air traffic, while a passer-by appears to be waiting for an 'air cab.' The caricature is signed L. Andrès. However, it is not known who is behind the name.<sup>30</sup>

*Kalem* published satirical commentaries on current political and cultural events, in both texts and depictions. This caricature can be interpreted as a criticism of both modernisation and the current traffic situation in the city. The residents are confronted with trams, cars, and other vehicles. The question that these kinds of caricatures deal with is what it will be like in the future if traffic is already overwhelming people at the moment. Ideas about the time to come can appear partly as a solution, but partly as an exacerbation of the current problem. The situation in this caricature here is transferred to what lies ahead, where the problem seems to be an overcrowded airspace instead of traffic congestion on the ground. The fact that all the signage is in French can also be interpreted as a criticism of the Westernisation efforts of the time.

In a way similar to Figure 6, the 14th caricature of the Egyptian series, shown in Figure 7, takes up a theme we might describe as *the future characterised as a world upside-down*. Here, we see the people of the distant future, notably still wearing 1920s clothing. The attire of the fully veiled woman in the front and a lady in the back, wearing just a cap, a fashionably short dress, and high heels are pointing to persisting differences between 'traditional' and 'modern' citizens. But while societal and gender roles stay stable, the zoo illustrates the reversal of norms. In this distant future, people admire a donkey, a horse, and a cow as curiosities, while 'modern technology' not represented in the picture but only in the blurb is said to have become the new normal. In a way, this depiction predicted the idea of farm animal parks quite accurately. However, this must have seemed as ridiculous to the contemporary observer as declaring some 2000s everyday vehicle to be a valuable old-timer may seem to us today.

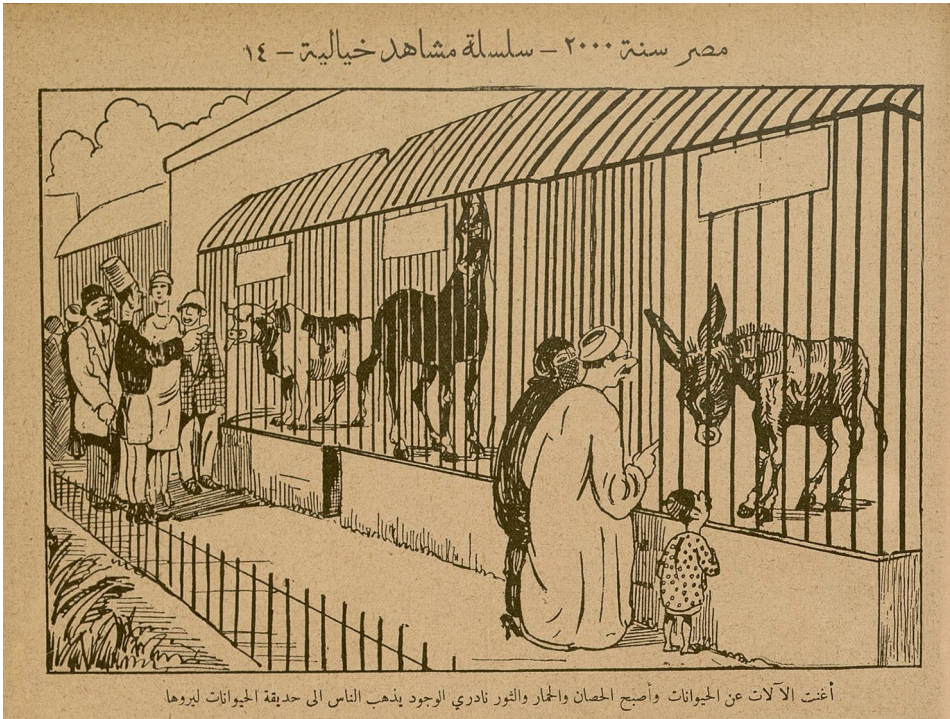
In another Egyptian version of city aerial traffic, shown in Figure 8, 'Alī Rifqī plays with an imagination of future traffic control. The dichotomy between futuristic air traffic and a city, society, and everyday customs of the 1920s becomes even more clear in this caricature. We have a scene of the rooftops of a city, presumably Cairo, that has modern buildings as well as a mosque, while most of the buildings are not decidedly marked as 'modern' or futuristic vs 'traditional.' Many planes are flying around, steered by *effendis*, marked again by their fezzes. Some of the roofs have been equipped with landing cushions, as in

29 Heinzelmänn 1999, 70.

30 The same signature can be found under other drawings, including in other magazines. Reference to this from Okyar 2023, 155; and Heinzelmänn 1999, 74. However, it could also be a pseudonym.

Figure 7. Al-Fukāha, 2 March 1927, 7.

'Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 14: As machines have taken over from the animals and donkeys, horses, and oxen have become rare [and] people go to the zoo to see them.'



the foreground, or even around the mosque's cupola to the right. In the middle, we find an aircraft hospital, which has some sort of landing funnel installed on the roof. Two figures are placed between the roofs of the city and the sky dominated by the different aircraft. Both a policeman giving traffic directions and a person blowing a horn and holding a flag float atop a cluster of balloons. These balloons have nothing in common with a *mongolfière*<sup>31</sup> or a Zeppelin airship. Instead, the balloon floating 'technique' depicted here is clearly a comical way of parodying 'modern' technology, even more clearly making fun of the future technologies than the landing cushions or mattresses on the rooftops.

Similarly, the first caricature of the series *Miṣr fī sanat alfayn* (Fig. 9) shows a monkey man of the future, flying through the streets of Cairo in a MacGyver-style, tattered hot air balloon, singing an old folklore song and showing off his monkey who in turn is kept

31 The first hot air balloon documented in Cairo was flown by the two Frenchmen Nicolas-Jacques Conté and Gaspard Monge over Azbakiyya as early as 1798. As many caricatures since the 1870 show, hot air balloons and Zeppelin airships were well known at the time.

Figure 8. *Al-Fukāha*, 15 December 1926, 9.

'Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 3: Air traffic control.'

The text on the building in the middle reads *mustashfa al-ṭayyārāt* ('aircraft hospital'), the cylinder on top of it is marked as the (emergency) entrance with the note *isqaṭ hunā* ('land/enter here').

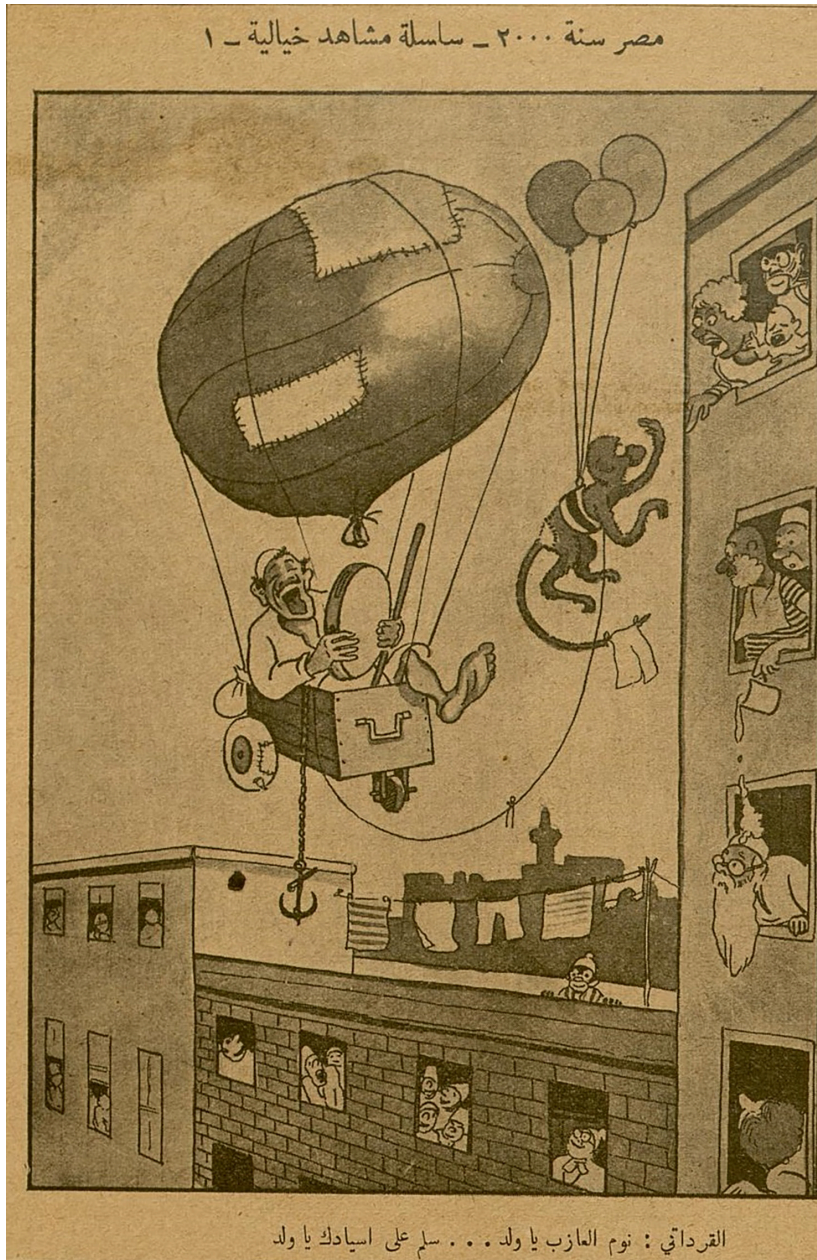


afloat in the air by three balloons. This comical way of depicting flying apparatuses could be read as a parody on 'technological progress' itself, as well as at a specific 'Egyptian' way of trying to achieve it: The lower-class monkey man, similar to the chronically underpaid police officer of the distant future in Figure 8, is imagined to be still lower-class and relying on home-made, probably unreliable solutions.<sup>32</sup> In this way, both the air traffic control and the monkey man caricature add to a characterisation of Egypt that represents it as a country not entirely capable of solving problems in a 'modern,' technologically refined way.<sup>33</sup>

32 The police officer especially is a figure subjected to mockery in Rifqī's and many other caricatures of the time, as shown by, e.g., caricatures for children. See Zdafee forthcoming.

33 A telling example is Rifqī's caricature on the Egyptian way of dealing with street flooding after heavy rain, see *Al-Fukāha*, 22 December 1926, 5, in which the caricaturist mocks the fantastic, yet impractical measures Cairo citizens plan to take to keep themselves safe on a rainy day, due to the fact that they do not trust the city's safety measures.

Figure 9. Al-Fukāha, 1 December 1926, 9.  
 ‘Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 1: The monkey man:  
 Bachelor’s sleep, my boy... greet your elders, my boy!’\*



\* The rhyme is an old traditional song used by monkey men in Egypt.

#### 4. Science Fiction Explicitly Criticising the Present Time

Following the easing of press conditions in the Ottoman Empire after 1908, a new draft for the press law was drawn up in 1911, which was intended to restrict freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Karagöz and Hacivat express their displeasure concerning upcoming repressions in the caricature in Figure 10, as they also do in many others. In the drawing, Karagöz and Hacivat, who are trying to print with the printing press they set up on a flying aeroplane in the skies of Istanbul, are able to keep their distance from the laws 'below.' The aeroplane bears the inscription 'Karagöz matbuası' (Karagöz Printing House). We also see a multitude of pigeons holding copies of the *Karagöz* in their beaks and perhaps distributing them, this reminding one of how leaflets were distributed in wartime. The dialogue underneath reads as follows:

Hacivat, you have to get used to it, brother, you have to get used to it! From now on, not only the military will use aeroplanes. When the new printing law comes into force, we will publish our newspapers here. Go on, put the paper under the roller, go on!...

In the same manner as in both the Egyptian and Ottoman caricatures in this contribution, in this caricature, progress and new technologies are presented as a way out of the current situation. With the help of aeroplanes, the press wants to escape the restrictions they are confronted with. This caricature uses future achievements as an—albeit absurd—solution to current problems. In doing so, it criticises current events and developments in the country. As early as 1877, when censorship was introduced, journalists and publicists addressed the issue and criticised the severe restrictions on caricatures. Some individuals were severely punished for publishing a caricature critical of censorship, such as Teodor Kasap, who was given a prison sentence for publishing Karagöz and Hacivat caricatures mocking censorship.<sup>34</sup>

The satirical magazine *Geveze* focused on the everyday living situation in Istanbul. For example, the magazine criticised the inadequate street cleaning, the operation of streetcars, the regularity of ferry connections, and the handling of financial support for people living in residential areas destroyed by fires.<sup>35</sup> The newspaper was also particularly concerned with transportation and traffic, as we already saw in Figure 4. A particularly large number of caricatures on visions of the future therefore deal with these topics.

According to Brummett, the Ottoman satirists used flying machines as a symbol of modernity par excellence, contrasting the traditional and the old. 'In the cartoon space the flying machine was employed to illustrate the obsolescence of the old ways and the inevitability of a machine-based future.'<sup>36</sup> The caricature in Figure 11 from *Geveze*<sup>37</sup> criticises the current situation, in this case the state of the Galata Bridge, by accessing future

34 Bostancı 2020, 68.

35 Civalıoğlu and Çelik 2017, 28–42.

36 Brummett 2000, 138.

37 *Geveze* ('Chatterer/chatty') was published for the first time on 15 August 1908 in Istanbul. Initially daily, later twice weekly, a total of 115 issues were published until it was discontinued in June 1909. It is one of the many satirical magazines published after 1908.

Figure 10. Karagöz, 15 November 1911.

'Hacivat, you have to get used to it, brother, you have to get used to it! From now on, not only the military will use aeroplanes. When the new printing law comes into force, we will publish our newspapers here. Go on, put the paper under the roller, go on!..'



ideas. 'When the bridge is completely submerged, air transportation will be used,' reads the caption. The Galata Bridge at that time was a wooden structure that connected the two European parts of Istanbul, which are separated by the Golden Horn. It was of enormous importance for traffic and transportation, and its dilapidated condition was widely discussed in the press. The Istanbul administration was accused of not fulfilling its duties and not taking care of the bridge.<sup>38</sup>

As in the previous caricature, a vision of the future is presented as a solution to current problems. Air vehicles are offered as an option that could be used to circumvent problematic conditions on the ground. This strategy is used to express criticism against authorities who make decisions that entail social or cultural restrictions.

38 See footnote in Brummett 2000, 138.

Figure 11. Geveze, 1909.

'When the bridge is completely submerged, air transportation will be used.'



Not only visions of the future, but also visions of the present are addressed in satirical magazines using typical science fiction motifs. 'This is how I imagine Istanbul, since I haven't received a letter for a long time,' reads the caption under the right-hand side of the two panels in Figure 12. Next to the tram, the symbol of modernity, flying objects, the symbols of the future, are depicted in a modern district with tall buildings. The means of transportation include a hot air balloon from which people can travel by cable car to the places they want to go. But there are also fantastic inventions on display, such as seats with a spring underneath that transport people from place to place starting from a 'jumping station' (on the left of the picture). Tables refer to the metro, the post office, the police station, the fire station, and many other places. The caption suggests that this is the imagination of the city and its development of a person who lives abroad and has not been in Istanbul for a long time. The caricature is signed by Ahmet Rıfki, the alias of 'Alî Rifqî, who is believed to have been living in Italy at the time.<sup>39</sup> The idea or presentation of the scenes is very similar to the visions of the future presented in other depictions. Whether imagining the current situation from the perspective of someone abroad or envisioning the future, both variants are directly related to the current situation. The depictions are therefore based on contrasts and comparisons, regardless of whether both parts of contrast or comparison are presented explicitly or not.

39 For Rıfki/Rifqî see Çeviker, 1997, 64–70, as well as the contribution by Eberhard Dziobek in this issue.

Figure 12. Zümrüdüanka, 12 November 1923, 1. Caricaturist: Rifqi.

Right side: ‘This is how I imagine Istanbul, since I haven’t received a letter for a long time.’  
 Left side: ‘Since I received letters and newspapers this week, I learned about the real situation.’



In Figure 12, the two elements to be compared or contrasted are juxtaposed. Below the second panel on the left we read: ‘Since I received letters and newspapers this week, I learned about the real situation.’ The panel shows an impoverished district with crumbling wooden houses and holes in the ground. The people in the picture are poorly dressed. The paperboy is hawking the two daily newspapers *İkdam* and *Akşam*. There are no aeroplanes or futuristic objects flying in the air, only birds and classic kites. While in the right-hand panel a person arriving by cable car is distributing the pension (‘Hasan Efendi, I’ve brought your December salary, please reach out’), the elderly gentleman leaning out of the window in the left-hand picture asks the paperboy whether the payments have arrived yet. The lack of payment is an indication and criticism of the economic state in which the country and society find themselves.

The fictional narrator imagines Istanbul as a wealthy and prosperous city that has gained progress through technology. However, the given reality provides a completely different picture, with an impoverished population in poor living conditions.

Addressing ‘modern’ technologies as a transformative influence on the earth, this last caricature from Rifqi’s Egyptian Sci-fi Series (Fig. 13) seems almost prophetic from today’s point of view. With its relatively reduced visual language, this caricature at first

Figure 13. *Al-Fukāha*, 16 February 1927, 5.

'Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 12: Cairo's skyscraper buildings disrupted the earth's balance, tilting it and changing its axis of rotation.'



glance opens a space of ambiguity that is only narrowed by the blurb. It brings the insanity, or unpredictability, of 'modernity' and 'progress' to the readers of *Al-Fukāha* in a cosmic allegory that first seems to ask the question as to whether Cairo, the *umm al-dunya* ('mother of the world,' a common epithet of the city till today), is the transformative power changing the world. Or has this transformation been brought about by the skyscrapers, the architectural emblems of 'modernity'? Once the earth is unhinged as a whole, would this apply to the many small 'orbits' of life existing on it? Would that mean that, from Rifqī's perspective, all the changes he and his contemporaries are witnessing, would necessarily lead to making a complete mess of the earth by the year 2000? Or could there be a pinch of positivity in the caricature as well: The old ways having been overcome, a new order is established, with Cairo being a deciding factor in the world's development? *Al-Qāhira umm al-dunya*, Cairo as the centre of progress or development, be it towards a brighter future or into a gloomy soulless 'modernity'? Read together with the blurb, the caricature once again betrays Rifqī's scepticism vis-à-vis the booming belief in 'progress towards modernity' that dominated many discourses of the time, both in Egypt and the

(post)-Ottoman world and globally. Using the skyscrapers as a *pars pro toto*, it suggests that ‘modern’ achievements will certainly change the way of life in Egypt and beyond to a great extent, disrupting the time-honoured balance of the planet, which stands, as it were, as a *toto pro pars* for the issues that moved Rifqī’s and his contemporaries’ thoughts. Both the drawing of the planet drifting out of its orbit and the blurb that describes the effect of the ‘modern’ buildings as ‘disruptive’ (*fa-akhtala*) reinforce a certain negative stance towards progress on a larger scale. The benefits of the quick changes already being induced by technology and ‘modernisation’ or being propagated by the progressive middle classes (like the *effendīya* in Egypt) during the 1920s are thus questioned by foretelling their long-term effects on the planet.

## 5. Conclusion

The common themes presented in Ottoman and Egyptian caricatures on visions of the future and science fiction motifs are notable. The similarities in the depiction of future vehicles are particularly remarkable, as both in the Ottoman and in the Egyptian caricatures, and both on the ground and in the air, vehicles known at the time are intermingled with fantastic contraptions. It should not go unmentioned that the Istanbul and Cairo caricature scenes were not at all developing separately or unaware of each other. Notably, the caricaturist Rifqī, who published the Cairo ‘sci-fi’ series analysed in this article, had his roots in the Istanbul scene and published in *Güteryüz*, among other publications, before he left Istanbul after the end of the Ottoman sultanate.<sup>40</sup>

However, a certain ambiguity can be seen in the contrast between the depiction of people and that of vehicles. While the vehicles appear utopian in some cases and are subject to major changes over time, the people shown in the depictions of the future do not differ from those in the present in either the Ottoman and the Egyptian examples. In terms of their outward appearance, their behaviour and tasks, people in the depictions of the future are similar to everyday life as it would have been experienced by our caricaturists. While technology changes in their visions of the future, everything else seems to remain the same. On the one hand, the caricatures poke fun at technological achievements and question their function and benefits. On the other hand, they provide visions of the future that stand in contrast to the people depicted, who remain in their 1920s social behaviour. This can also be interpreted as a criticism of current society and living conditions. In the everyday reality of the caricaturists’ lives, technology promoted progress and modernity. Rapid development gave people the feeling that the world was turning faster than they were. Technologies of the future therefore also served as markers of progress and change in the caricatures. On the other hand, the fantastic exaggeration of specific elements of technology was also used to criticise change and question the benefits of innovations and progress.

The question is to what extent the caricatures were actually targeting the future versus addressing the current situation of the caricaturists and their audiences. The traffic problem seems to have been of great concern to the residents of the metropolises Istan-

40 See contribution by Dziobek in this volume.

bul and Cairo. The exaggerated comparison between caricaturists' present situation and their imagination of future transformations clearly illustrates their criticism of the present and, at least in the Egyptian case, betrays elements of self-orientalisation when doubting the capability of Egyptian society to fully embrace technologisation (as in the air traffic and monkey man examples). However, especially the Ottoman caricatures in this article also show that the topic of technology or traffic was often combined with some second, unrelated topic of the time. One example is the combination of the achievement of X-ray technology with a critique of the situation under the reign of Abdülhamid II. Other cases would be the first caricature on new technology and the burglary problem in Istanbul and the one on press censorship in *Karagöz*. This unexpected combination of topics seems to be a technique used to astonish people, instill laughter, and criticise the current times all at once, thus constituting a technique to enhance the function of caricatures.

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