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Hope, destruction, and rebirth: acts of recovery in gender separatist feminist utopian literature

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Hope, Destruction, and Rebirth:
Acts of Recovery in Gender Separatist Feminist Utopian Literature

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Introduction: Gender separatism in feminist utopian literature

While writing my Master's thesis in Istanbul, I had a considerably long commute to reach the campus where the twice-weekly evening lectures and symposia were being held. Due to the contested zoning regulations and lack of available space in the center of the metropolitan city, the Humanities and Social Sciences graduate campus had to be placed in an industrial zone in the middle of an uncanny neighborhood with a high rate of street crime. Some other woman classmates and I would always plan to travel together like a pack so that we could protect each other from possible predators at night, which was not an unlikely situation at the time in that part of the city at that hour of the night. When we entered our campus, however, our fears would be replaced by a sense of safety, albeit temporary. The garden around the campus had high walls, soothing green grass, tall trees, a rich library, large warm halls full of students and faculty rushing to their classrooms, and security guards at the main gates of the campus. It was genuinely a sanctuary in the middle of dangerous surroundings. It is no surprise that I was drawn to studying utopian literature in this setting of my graduate training where the context outside the text matched the textual content I was planning to work on. Raised as a feminist with activist roots from an early age, I was quickly fascinated by any sample of feminist utopian worlds I could lay my hands on at the campus library.

At the time, one of the first examples of feminist utopian literature to which I also culturally related was the short text titled *Sultana's Dream* from the late Bengali author Begum Rokeya, who was an important feminist writer, professor, and women's education activist living in what we today know as Bangladesh. *Sultana's Dream* was written and published in 1905 in *The Indian Ladies Magazine*, a periodical publication that included opinion pieces, poems,

stories, drawings, and photographs, among other works of art and literature.[1] Published in 1908 also in book format, *Sultana's Dream* is presented within the narrative framework of a dream tale in an attempt to share possibly controversial ideas in a safer framing of retelling a dream: "I am not sure whether I dozed off or not. But, as far as I remember, I was wide awake," says the narrator at the beginning and then ends the story by saying "And on opening my eyes, I found myself in my own bedroom still lounging in the easy-chair!"[2] In this framing, the author has more freedom to express her opinions because formally everything is part of a dream over which one does not have any conscious control.[3] The short story itself depicts a feminist utopian space called Ladyland, in which women are in charge of all social and political aspects of life with significant emphasis on the education of girls and the cessation of forced, underaged, and/or arranged marriages. We observe a stark contrast when it comes to men. Due to the gender role reversal in place in the author's contemporary society, in the story men are forced into seclusion, also known as *purdah*/*mardana* in Bengali culture, where women (*purdah*) or men (*mardana*) are separated based on their gender. Around the publication time of this short story, *purdah* was the established traditional practice in the Bengali historical context of the early 1900s. However, in *Sultana's Dream*, the men are in *mardana*, isolated and withdrawn from the daily sphere of sociopolitical life. The familiar utopian stock character of the "native guide" introduces the matriarchal utopian land to the visiting woman character who is initially afraid to walk on the street: "You need not be afraid of coming across a man here. This is Ladyland, free from sin and

[1] JSTOR has an extensive collection of issues from this specific magazine; see https://www.jstor.org/site/south-asia-open-archives/ saoa/indian-ladies-magazine-26318859/

[2] Rokeya, *Sultana's Dream*. I accessed this short text from the digital library of University of Pennsylvania; therefore, there are no page numbers to cite: https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/sultana/dream/dream.html The text was reprinted as "Sultana's dream; and Padmarag: two feminist utopias by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain," (India: Penguin, 2005).

[3] This is a common trope from medieval times, where the narrator becomes (un)reliable as writers distance themselves from the storyline and have the characters indirectly discuss what the writer would actually like to discuss directly. Works of Geoffrey Chaucer and other medieval poetry such as "The Dream of the Rood" are examples of this literary technique. See also Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University Press, 1983) for more insights on the unreliable narrator.

harm. […] We shut our men indoors." As we can see, the framing of dream tale helps the author image such contextually controversial scenarios.

The gender separatist feminist utopian culture of the fictional world of Ladyland assumes biological essentialism as the norm and focuses on the idea that all men are responsible for all crimes; therefore, "since the *mardana* system has been established, there has been no more crime or sin," and the society does not even need to employ the police force in the absence of any criminal and misdemeanor activity. In the short story, there is simply no crime observed when men are not allowed to participate in society. This short story is a sharp and witty criticism of the patriarchal Bengali society of the early 1900s, which relates strongly to how I felt walking alone in Istanbul at night, trying to reach my campus for the evening lessons during which, in ironic contrast to the reality outside the gates, I got the opportunity to have in-depth discussions on feminism with my peers. Our campus was not gender-separated; however, it gave a sense of security from the outside world which fueled my curiosity for human-made and gated safe(r) spaces and utopianism as an eternal draft for a better life.[4]

Anthologies of science fiction literature were where I embarked upon my research on feminist utopianism. Science fiction and feminism are compatible literary companions owing to the reality-shifting creative freedom that exists within the realm of science fiction. The utopian mindset put forth by German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, who also happens to be one of the most influential thinkers in the field of utopian theory, revolves mostly around the ubiquity of utopian thought in all aspects of life. Given its implications for everyday life, the Blochian spirit of utopianism permeates both science fiction and feminist theory. Fortunately, science fiction and "its metaphors of space and time travel, of parallel universes, of contradictions co-existing, of black holes and event horizons," as the Scottish feminist, academic, and science fiction author

[4] For more extensive and recent research on non-Western culture of utopianism, see Alireza Omid Bakhsh, "The Virtuous City: The Iranian and Islamic Heritage of Utopianism," *Utopian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2013): 41-51, and Emrah Atasoy, "Utopia's Turkish Translations and Utopianism in Turkish Literature," *Utopian Studies* 27, no. 3 (2016): 558-568.

Sarah LeFanu lays out, provide endless possibilities to interrogate life in all its facets and challenge the foundational pillars of society by presenting other versions of reality.[5] The literary genre of science fiction and its countless subgenres can, for example, make use of a certain location – whether existent or completely fictional – in combination with a certain time frame – whether in the future or in the past – to create a version of present time in which notions of governance, security, war, economy, and sociopolitical relations can be extrapolated in various settings and backgrounds. On this foundation of creation and interrogation of patriarchal institutions, there is also ample space for challenging social norms and roles among people. As LeFanu argues "[t]he unities of 'self', whether in terms of bourgeois individualism or biological reductionism, can be 'subverted' in science fiction.[6] In this sense, science fiction engages with individual, societal, and sociopolitical structures in a given contemporary reality. Combining both perspectives, feminist science fiction plays with these subversions frequently and profoundly, showing the readers how different the world would have been, or could be, if gender roles were interrogated, reversed, or eliminated altogether. As such, as a didactic tool of representation, one of the most compelling aspects of science fiction is its capacity to provide an alterable, explorable, and visionary space of endless speculative and narrative possibilities.[7]

Furthermore, science fiction functions as a versatile literary platform that is open to interventions from different genres and to subversions of space, time, ideology, and self – a trait that makes this literary genre a crucial and valuable space for exploring stories and theories of feminist utopianism. In addition to providing this generic space for criticizing and denouncing contemporary sociopolitical formulations and notions, the narrative possibilities of science

[5] Sarah LeFanu, *Feminism and Science Fiction*, 96.
[6] Ibid, 99.
[7] In addition to LeFanu's work, Marleen Barr, *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); and Jane Donawerth, *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997) further explore the history, practice, and theory related to emancipatory feminist science fiction.

fiction may reveal the inner workings of the fictional (but likely inspired by reality) society itself and project it onto the reader and their present time.

Such core mechanics of the science fiction genre apply to both mainstream science fiction and several of its subgenres, where more diverse subject matters can be further examined, such as feminist science fiction with works from the mastermind Mary Shelley to Ursula K. Le Guin, the LGBTQ+ science fiction of Joanna Russ and Sarah Waters, and Afrofuturist fiction such as the works of Nalo Hopkinson and Octavia E. Butler.[8] The representation and projection of alternative realities bear the potential of giving voice to the underprivileged and the marginalized. The writers of the works produced by and about such marginalized communities seize the opportunity to imagine and create new worlds in which the oppression, injustice, and abuse experienced in the present time can also be interrogated, subverted, and eliminated. The subgenres predominantly chosen by these communities such as utopias, dystopias, and alternative history narratives can also act as political tools to bring awareness to sociopolitical and societal issues experienced by these communities in real life.[9]

In this dissertation, my focus will be on a specific subgenre at the intersection of feminist science fiction and feminist utopian fiction: gender separatist utopian fiction. Different from its feminist utopian sisters, gender separatist utopian literature involves a clear spatial separation of genders and engages with communities that are populated with only woman residents. These women-only communities are not only considered feminist utopias but also gender separatist

[8] Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is widely accepted as the first science fiction novel ever published. In *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Walker and Company, 1969), Ursula K. Le Guin explores a world where the concept of gender is eliminated and has become largely irrelevant. Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (New York: Bantam, 1975) presents parallel universes to compare and contrast sociopolitical and cultural gender relations. Octavia E. Butler's novel series *Parable of the Sower* (London: Headline, 1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (London: Headline,1998) depicts a post-apocalyptic dystopian world through the critical lens of ecofeminism in terms of climate change. *Brown Girl in the Ring* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1998) written by Nalo Hopkinson is built upon African aribbean culture in a post-apocalyptic setting. These are only some of the many diverse examples of feminist science fiction from different angles.

[9] For an overview of the undeniable connections between science fiction and utopian fiction, see Raymond Williams, "Utopia and Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Studies* 5, no. 16, ser. 3 (1978) 203-214 and Gerry Canavan, "Science Fiction and Utopia in the Anthropocene," *American Literature* 93, no. 2 (June 2021): 255-282.

utopias in that there are no male residents living within these communities. The males are either outcasts living in separate districts in culturally and socially isolated groups, killed in wars and/or upheavals, or enslaved for various purposes such as reproduction, security, or servitude. Furthermore, this deliberately created or consequentially occurring separatism brings about issues of conflict in the realms of gender politics, reproduction, and socialization between women and men. These so-called Amazonian novels, eluding to the race of powerful warrior women from Greek mythology, make use of a narrative cycle that provides valuable material for critically examining the concept of separation and how this cycle can relate to emancipatory utopian feminism. This subgenre carries great potential for the interrogation of the supposedly biologically inherent differences between women and men, and also among women in the same-gender groups.

In the spirit of designing a better life, hope and struggle in relation to utopianism are inherent to feminist political theory. I concentrate on a corpus of gender separatist utopian novels and on the cycle of hope, destruction, and rebirth embedded within the plots of these novels. The works of literature in this subgenre show a pattern of starting out with the complete destruction of the current state of affairs of their respective worlds in order to achieve a state of tabula rasa.[10] From that point on, the idea of rebirth without history and the belief in the reeducation and rehabilitation of human beings become the hope for the salvation of the evolving eutopia. In almost all cases, the destruction of patriarchy does not succeed in fulfilling the hopes of a better life for women because the act of destruction itself constitutes a hindrance to the healthy and peaceful evolution of the new society. The feminist utopian changes implemented are usually presented in the context of an authoritarian society that fails to bring basic fulfillment and happiness, even to women who are in positions of power. Thus, following the destruction, the

[10] While I would normally choose to italicize Latin phrases in writing (such as tabula rasa, tabula ficta and tabula fixate that will be relevant later on), I decided not to italicize tabula rasa due to its frequency of usage in this dissertation.

described societies become disillusioned with the utopian project and the new hope that gender separatism may have promised to bring. I therefore analyze this narrative cycle of hope, destruction, and rebirth in the context of gender separatist utopianism to understand why this narrative pattern necessarily ends in disillusionment instead of a happy and peaceful utopia which fulfills its obligations according to the expectations of its creators and fulfills the hopeful projections that have initiated the utopian cause. Afterward, I question whether this stage of disillusionment leads to a perceived failure of the utopian ideal or not, and take a look at where it may lead instead. In the end, with this step-by-step inquiry, I aim to explore this narrative cycle and its broader influence on feminist utopianism. Consequently, I argue that feminist utopianism can also be located in feminist dystopian narratives, and that we can find optimism in narratives of destruction.

The gender separatist utopian narrative cycle generally holds an optimistic perspective. The narrative action begins with hope and then leads to the destruction of the existing reality, which subsequently inspires rebirth on the basis of a state of tabula rasa and often continues with hope for an even better-designed utopia which would again require some form of destruction to be reshaped. I primarily question how this specific narrative cycle interacts with the traditions of utopian literature, feminist utopian literature, and also the relevant feminist literary and sociopolitical theory. I argue that the interrelations between social reality and fiction are exposed by the form of the novels and its narrative characteristics, just as much as the fictional content that informs us of its utopian features. Consequently, I investigate how style and themes in this subgenre correspond to feminist utopian literary theory and see if this analysis allows for a diverse understanding of how the mechanisms of feminist history and utopian literary thought intersect. I then concentrate on the specificity and diversity of feminist utopian thought in relation to gender separatist utopian literature, and ask whether this narrative cycle and the specific subgenre should be seen as anti-utopian and whether this might be a self-reflexive way

for feminist utopian theory to critique itself. Furthermore, I interrogate how this narrative cycle reflects and comments on utopian thought and its seemingly endless struggle to reach perfection.

After posing these transhistorical questions, taking an overall look at the characteristics of the subgenre, I ask how women's subjectivity in the novels relates to the problem of history and how the "female subject" sees her role in relation to her sociopolitical context. Do the literary works in the corpus of this dissertation attempt to situate women in an alternative history? Do these novels criticize what is considered to be history? More and more unpublished or unresearched feminist utopian works are being recovered from the archives of literary history, such as some medieval sources that have never been considered utopias. These overlooked works of literature have been forgotten because they were written by women and because the publication rights and opportunities of woman authors have historically differed drastically from those of male authors. The concept and scope of feminist utopian literary history have been evolving to include these acts of recovery on two separate levels: the literary work itself being recovered and then women's utopian literary history recovered, even if it is at a fictional level. This too I consider a crucial part of utopian thought, as the fictional creation of a utopian world can facilitate real-life movement and change. By choosing works of literature that pay homage to this rich tradition of feminist utopian literature, I argue that there is a lot more than what meets the eye, especially when we look outside the traditional utopian canon.

Theoretical framework, corpus scope, and limitations

My theoretical angle brings together two approaches that also relate to each other: *utopia as intention*, offered by Fredric Jameson to suggest that the fact that a utopia is being represented matters more for the greater utopian cause than the content that is presented, and *utopia as method*, where Ruth Levitas distills the formation and evolution of utopia as a method instead of concentrating on the outcome, taking a critical stance on the impossibility of perfection. Both

approaches emphasize the practical and conceptual value of utopian dreaming and designing. In this dissertation, I will show that my approach has the same intention.

North American Marxist political and literary theorist Fredric Jameson is known for his work on science fiction and utopianism in addition to, and hand in hand with, his critique of capitalism and postmodernity. In his 1984 article "Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?" he argues that the barrier between us and utopia is "our constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself, and this, not owing to any individual failure of imagination but as the result of the systemic, cultural, and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners."[11] Here he criticizes the sociopolitical confines that do not allow communities and societies to genuinely imagine utopia from a place without political indoctrination, thereby stigmatizing the probability of imagining utopia and isolating it to the realm of the politically engaged, as if utopia could not exist outside of the realm of political indoctrination. Another important layer of Jameson's argument concerns the conflation of utopia and politics. In his more recent article, "The Politics of Utopia," Jameson argues that the concept of utopia has become directly associated with communism and various left-wing tendencies, while at the same time the execution of utopia is still largely associated with totalitarianism. Through this opening, he criticizes the conflation of literary utopia and politics:

> a politics which wishes to change the system radically will be designated as utopian - with the right-wing undertone that the system (now grasped as the free market) is part of human nature; that any attempt to change it will be accompanied by violence; and that efforts to maintain the changes (against human nature) will require dictatorship.[12]

[11] Fredric Jameson, "Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?," 153.
[12] Fredric Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia," 35.

His criticism highlights the entanglement of utopian scenarios and politics related to the execution of the utopia in question. If the patriarchal capitalist system is accepted as the norm based on a supposedly universal concept of human nature, the actualization of the utopia is assumed to resort to totalitarianism. As a consequence, perhaps, citizens would not be so resistant to leaving patriarchal capitalism behind. Jameson thereby argues for the separation, or at least the critical analysis, of utopia and politics outside of their current entanglement.

The other approach, *utopia as method*, comes from the work of another utopian scholar and sociologist, Ruth Levitas, who is a professor of sociology, known for her work in the field of utopian theory embedded within the context of social sciences. My preference for her work derives not only from its intellectual potency but also its importance in highlighting the works of women authors and academics in the field. Her first essential work, *The Concept of Utopia* (1990), examines how the concept of utopianism has been used as rationale for diverse motivations by different sociopolitical theorists. She followed this book with *Utopia as Method* (2013), in which she argues that utopia should be taken as a method instead of the ultimate goal of perfection. She argues that human survival strictly depends on alternative ways of living due to the peril presented by the fast and large-scale global destruction of social and economic systems.[13] Therefore, the necessity and likelihood of deep changes to people's ways of being and living is already expected in literature and real life. The crucial, transcendental point becomes the method and execution for bringing about these changes. "Finding hope in hopeless times", a chapter written by gender and criminology expert Lynne Copson from the recent volume *Utopian Thinking in Law, Politics, Architecture and Technology*, also focuses on Levitas' inspirationally utopian work in the translation of utopian desire to tangible and workable plans,

[13] Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*, xii.

or as Levitas states, “a mixture of evidence, deduction, and imagination, representing as a whole something of which only fragments are actually available”.[14]

In her book, Levitas emphasizes that Bloch considers the utopian impulse to be an inherent part of human nature.[15] Even though this perspective may necessitate the existence of a universal idea of human nature, Bloch’s message of the ubiquity of utopia comes across. Levitas then argues that this ubiquity allows utopia to exist in a wider range of daily life instead of requiring worlds to be deconstructed and reconstructed from scratch. Her analysis shows the more pragmatic side of Bloch as opposed to the abstract. Analogous to Jameson, she mentions that the most common objections to utopia concern the idea that this urge to reach perfection necessitates totalitarianism. In her work *Utopia as Method*, she aims to

> […] replace the idea of ‘a utopia’ as something fixed, a form to be fleshed out, with the idea of ‘the utopian’ as an *approach toward*, a movement beyond set limits into the realm of the not-yet-set. At the same time, I want to counter the notion of the utopia as unreal with the proposition that the utopian is powerfully real in the sense that hope and desire (and even fantasies) are real, never ‘merely’ fantasy. It is a force that moves and shapes history.[16]

Levitas intends to subvert and expand the definitional category of utopia from a product to a process-based endeavor. In this way, the rigidity around its commonly accepted definitions would dissolve or soften. The historical, theoretical, cultural, and literary legacy of utopianism can be more accessible to wider explorations. For her, reminiscent of Bloch, the mere existence

[14] Lynne Copson, “Chapter 2: Finding hope in hopeless times”, *Utopian Thinking in Law, Politics, Architecture and Technology*, (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022) accessed Nov 18, 2023, https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803921402.00007
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid, 108.

of hope and desire would prove that utopian creation is successful in reaching its goals and realizing its principles. The motivating force and the underlying change created by that force can be as substantial, transgressive, and transformative as the actual blueprint of that utopia itself.

Utopian thinking and reflections in literature can help conceptualize and formalize this search and yearning for new and improved utopian spaces. In my dissertation, while interrogating the content to reveal the inner mechanisms of the literary works, I also address the common narratological traditions within the subgenre and observe how these traditions reflect on and shape the cycle of hope and destruction in the storylines. As Levitas puts it, a desire-based definition of utopia would not be descriptive but analytic, which creates a primarily hermeneutic method. With this method, Levitas argues, the focus changes from the aesthetic to the sociocultural as authorial intent becomes a part of the discussion.[17] Consequently, she argues that utopia has three modes: archaeological, ontological, and architectural.

The archaeological mode explores the underpinning model of the good society that exists within the political and social paradigm.[18] Here, Levitas argues that "[a]rchaeology undertakes excavations and reconstructions of both artifacts or cultures, based on a mixture of evidence, deduction, and imagination, representing as whole something of which only shards and fragments remain."[19] This mode concerns the unearthing and critiquing of utopian impulses in the political and social spheres at a conceptual level. The recovery of women-authored forgotten works of literature also falls within this archaeological mode. Moving on, the ontological mode is comprised of the human paradigm of utopianism, engaging with both the social arrangements and assumptions about what is biased but universally considered to be within the scope of human nature. Last but not least, the architectural mode Levitas mentions corresponds to the actual building of utopia, whether in real life or fiction.

[17] Ibid, xiii.
[18] Ibid, 153.
[19] Ibid, 154.

Levitas argues that these modes are three aspects of the same method.[20] In this dissertation, I take up on this idea of the three aspects and take utopia to be a method, instead of a perfect solution. I argue that there is a strong correlation between her archaeological, ontological, and architectural modes explained above and my analysis of the narrative cycle in gender separatist utopian literature. The archaeological mode is where all the impressions and expressions of the status quo are gathered and evaluated, a testimony of the urge to build a better life. This is the stage I call 'Hope' in Chapter I, where the hope for a better life becomes the catalyst for change. Levitas' ontological mode concerns the human element, where due to the assumptions about a gender-essentialist human nature, destruction needs to take place, which I go further into in Chapter II under the heading of, indeed, 'Destruction'. The stage of world-building is the main subject of Chapter III, which I call 'Tabula rasa' because it concerns the foundation of the new world. Levitas relates her methodology towards utopianism as an encouragement and a mode of thought practice. "Utopia as method is not and cannot be blueprint. Utopian envisioning is necessarily provisional, reflexive and dialogic."[21] Similarly, my corpus is a reflection and critique of the social reality of their respective times.

Gathering the corpus for this project was a challenge. I accessed some of the primary sources included in my dissertation on various library catalogs and websites. I found some of the primary sources as references and resources mentioned in the works of utopian scholars such as Darby Lewes,[22] Lucy Sargisson,[23] and Sarah LeFanu.[24] Some of the works come from list entries on Wikipedia[25] whereas some others come from online feminist zines that are no longer accessible (last checked in 2023). Throughout the years, I have also gathered some titles from

[20] Ibid, 153.
[21] Ibid, 220.
[22] See Darby Lewes, "Gynotopia: A Checklist of Nineteenth-century Utopias by American Women," *Legacy* 6, no. 2 (1989): 29-41.
[23] See Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*, London: Taylor & Francis, 1996.
[24] See Sarah LeFanu, *Feminism and Science Fiction*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.
[25] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single-gender_world

my supervisors, other interested professors, and colleagues from the field. Some separatist feminist online groups mentioned in secondary sources have long vanished. In the end, compiling a feminist and gender separatist reading list in a genre dominated by male authors turned out to be an emotional act of recovery by itself. Therefore, my corpus selection has come down to every title I could get my hands on online and every actual book I could find in online bookstores and local libraries. Most of the works in my dissertation are published in English. This linguistic bias is mostly due to the assumed spotlight on research and canonization of works written and published in English. While works in other languages are more challenging to locate in traditional sources, I have found and included in my dissertation translated works that were published in medieval French, Dutch, German, Brabantian form of Middle Dutch, and English from British India (Bengali). I tried to reflect on the diversity of women-authored utopian material throughout history; however, the prevalence of English language material in my dissertation is indisputable.

While the feminist utopian corpus is much richer, I narrowed my scope down to gender separatist utopian novels with a clear separation of genders in their communal space. I selected books that share enough details explicitly about how women manage their communities and how gender relations are handled in the context of the gender separatism in place. If the novel does not give enough indication of the fundamental formulation of the utopia, then I removed those novels in favor of those that focus more explicitly on the context I wanted to research and highlight.[26]

The most significant limitation of this study is accessing the information related to the existence of the resources. The novels in my study do not rank high on the most read or advertised utopian novel lists, nor are they commonly included in the canon or syllabi within the field of utopian studies. Some of them are harder to find due to publication issues and I am sure

[26] See Appendix 1 for a full list of my initial reading list.

there are many more novels I have not yet discovered. What fell outside my scope are the novels that step away from the gender binary and create genderless or genderfluid worlds, such as Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). These novels explore the endless possibilities of a future without gender. The conclusion of this dissertation aims to touch upon this paradigm while there is room for more research on utopian spaces that explore outside the cisgender binary. At this point, I want to take a step back and give a general introduction to the utopian and feminist theories that relate to my study. In the following sections, I examine some of the most relevant theoretical precepts and question certain notions from the history of literary theory, utopian theory, and feminism. While these precepts and notions may appear to be unrelated at first glance, they constitute aspects of the main themes and principles of gender separatist feminist utopian literature. Through this examination, I intend to lay the groundwork for the arguments presented in my dissertation.

Reconstruction of the present: A working definition of utopianisms

It is indisputable that utopian thought has been a fascinating subject for thinkers, authors, and readers as far as written literature dates back. In my impressions of utopianism, I follow in the footsteps of Ernst Bloch whose utopian thought has established an emancipatory approach towards a mainstream acceptance of utopianism. Based on his notions of ubiquitous utopian performativity, one can argue that the utopian impulse must have existed since the dawn of time because the utopian desire to improve one's current situation is considered to be based in human nature. Nevertheless, the essence of these improvements can be completely biased and privileged depending on who is dreaming the utopian cause into reality. A man of higher status enjoying a heteronormative and politically unchallenged life in any given society may portray a different utopian projection compared to a gender non-conforming man of lower status in terms of wealth and societal expectations of heteronormativity and gender performance, for example. The gap

between the different dispositions of utopian dreaming would get wider as the examples drift further away from the author archetypes which hold a privileged position in society, such as is the case with women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and others identifying outside the norms of the heteronormative gender binary.

The duality in the nature of creative utopian practices is foreshadowed in the etymology of the terminology. The word itself is subject to constant controversy, owing to the famously playful and allegorical pun made by Thomas More in his influential work *Utopia* published in 1516. In its Greek roots, the word carries a double meaning: both a "good place" and a "no place." The significance of the term oscillates between a welfare state and a state that cannot remain utopian, which also underlines the notion that a good place can never be fully realized or maintained. What counts, in a Blochian sense, is the constant state of struggle and striving towards perfection, or more accurately, betterment of the current situation. Consequently, utopia denies closure and perfection, which is alluring in a sense. English feminist utopian scholar Lucy Sargisson argues that this duality is what makes utopianism compelling and intriguing: "[U]topia is the shadow that we chase, the dream that we pursue and yet – and also – it lies always over the horizon, around the corner, over the hill, out of reach and (usually) out of sight."[27] The goal of reaching a good place while knowing it is always out of reach, and seeing that the utopian present is also a dystopian one, contributes to the cyclical nature of utopia and the duality hidden in its name.

Before I go further into the main questions of my dissertation, I aim to explicate some working definitions and my choice of preferred terminology. I will start by going over the famous classification set forth by political scientist and utopian studies scholar Lyman Tower Sargent, who is one of the most prominent researchers in the field of contemporary utopian

[27] Lucy Sargisson, *Fool's Gold: Utopianism in the Twenty-First Century*, 7.

thought. In his influential article "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," Sargent provides a concise list of definitions relevant to utopian literature:

> *Utopianism* – social dreaming
>
> *Utopia* – a nonexistent society described in detail and normally located in time and space
>
> *Eutopia or positive utopia* – a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which the reader lived
>
> *Dystopia or negative utopia* – a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived
>
> *Utopian satire* – a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of the existing society
>
> *Anti*-utopia – a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia
>
> *Critical utopia* – a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve, and which takes a critical view of the utopian genre.[28]

As Sargent states, there are many facets of utopias in literature. While "utopia" is the all-encompassing terminology to be used for any depiction of an imaginary society in detail, "eutopia" becomes the version of a utopia that is described through a positive lens and portrayed as a better version of contemporary reality. Dystopia, however, portrays a negative version of

[28] Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," 9.

utopia, expanding on how certain societal aspects can take a wrong turn. While Sargent defines "utopian satire" and "critical utopia" as separate categories, I believe that a satirical disposition of utopia can exist within both "eutopian" and "dystopian" representations. "Anti-utopia," at last, undeniably criticizes utopianism and the methods of blueprinting and societal control that often come with the creation and preservation of utopias.[29]

With the exception of anti-utopianism, all other types of utopias explained above can be defined as precursory methods of dreaming of societal betterment. In her work, *Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression*, Lucy Sargisson develops a concept she calls 'transgressive utopianism' which does not present a blueprint but an idealistic and pragmatic approach to utopianism. In a statement that provides a general overview of utopianism, Sargisson argues that utopias have a diagnostic function of identifying core issues in the contemporary existence of society.[30] The nature of this diagnostic process, as I address in the coming sections, depends on who is dreaming the utopia into existence. In his recent work, *Dystopia: A Natural History*, historian and utopian scholar Gregory Claeys argues that such classifications as above are based on the assumptions surrounding either authorial intention or reader reception. In relation to utopias, he observes a presumption that readers share the same status, values, principles, and life experiences as the author.[31] In other words, what is one person's eutopia can be another's dystopia, which is a dichotomy that challenges the classification of utopian impulse and reception. If the categorization of *eu* or *dys* is based on positive or negative representation, then the integrity of the classification stays ambiguous and rests upon the author and the reader.

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[29] See Peter Fitting, "A Short History of Utopian Studies," *Science Fiction Studies* 107, no. 36, ser. 1 (2009): 121-131 for a brief overview of utopian studies (even though this article has overlooked many woman-authored utopian works), and Northrop Frye, "Varieties of Literary Utopias," *Daedalus* 94, no. 2 (1965): 323-347 for the distinctions made between different types of literary utopias. See the research of Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) and "The Ends of Utopia," *New Literary History* 41, no. 3 (2010): 549-69. For an extended overview of anti-utopianism, see Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000) and *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[30] Lucy Sargisson, *Fool's Gold: Utopianism in the Twenty-First Century*, 8.

[31] Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History*, 280.

However, for the sake of clarity and to place my argument in the realm of existing utopian scholarship, in this dissertation, I am making use of the distinction of "eutopia/dystopia" when referring to positive versus negative depictions of utopian projections while keeping "utopia" as the terminology to refer to the overall utopian representation, based on the classification made by Sargent above. Even though I find the terminology limiting in a binary approach, it is practical to use them to differentiate between various notions surrounding these terms and corresponding literary trends.

The first known utopias are located in myths and religious texts in which the utopian projections have been labeled with phrases such as "golden ages, Arcadias, earthly paradises, fortunate isles, isles of the blest" and, as mentioned by Sargent, these elusive imaginary paradises were reserved for the most worthy.[32] Some of these places offer equality among people in general and a life of leisure away from daily struggles, thus eliminating pain and suffering altogether. Nonetheless, utopianism is at times easily and critically dismissed due to the idea that a perfect society is unattainable, thus making the preliminary efforts pointless. However, Sargent suggests that this stems from the misuse of the intersecting concepts of utopianism and perfection.[33] Many utopian works present plans that they argue to be perfect; however, it is the process of always striving and changing for a better society that creates an evolving utopian space. Since perfection cannot be multifaceted, it is likely to disappoint one perspective or the other; it cannot be the aim of the whole enterprise. The lack of closure, thus the lack of perfection, is what keeps utopian efforts alive.

Dystopian narratives, on the other hand, show a worse version of society even though it originates from utopian sociopolitical dreaming that is meant to bring positive change. In dystopian works of literature, it is possible to see some of the harshest repercussions of the real-

[32] Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2.
[33] Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," 6.

world applications of wishful thinking. Just as eutopian literature is influenced by arcadian imagery, dystopian literature is fueled by real situations and events that take place all around the world, as the Irish American utopian scholar Tom Moylan puts forward: various harsh living conditions have allowed for the increase of dreadful circumstances the likes of which can evidently be observed in many dystopian novels of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries,[34] such as *The Drowned World* (1962) written by J. G. Ballard, which is a post-apocalyptic global warming story, and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), which builds on the contemporary plight of women's reproductive rights all around the world. Thus, it is possible to portray and represent the current predicament of institutions and society in dystopian novels as criticisms of systemic problems of the period they reflect. In general, in these novels, societal problems are created by the state, not its citizens, and one of the most common facets of dystopian literature is the portrayal of the evils in which society exists as a systemic part of the governing body. This can also be reflected within a setting that turns the characters into didactic narrative tools as opposed to being more fully developed characters.

Predominantly taking place in non-existent places, dystopian novels make use of a storyline that offers a considerable amount of remoteness, which allows for observation and reflection of criticized realities and insights. These plaguing predictions of a dark future are usually conveyed through a protagonist who refuses to obey the system, and the reader ventures into the realm of this imagined existence through the perspective of this character. The struggles of such protagonists to overturn the system reflect the authoritative issues that are largely left unrecognized and ignored by many of the other characters in the novel. In their pursuit of truth and freedom, these characters may succeed in bringing awareness to their communities. As Moylan states, being a type of open-ended and critical utopia, the "dystopian text does not

[34] Tom Moylan*, Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, xi.

guarantee a creative and critical position that is implicitly militant or resigned."[35] In dystopian novels, the reader can observe the depiction of imperfect societies or those with unlivable conditions, which commonly reflects on a contemporaneously growing fear of technology, biopolitics, severe limitations on personal freedom, and the interference of these issues with the citizens through relentless measures to secure authoritarian regimes. Dystopias become harbingers of evils that may befall societies and deliver warnings that concern a range of topics such as governance, economy, law and order, religion, education, childbearing and rearing, and ecology.[36]

Anti-utopianism is oppositional to both eutopias and dystopias because it resists and sometimes rejects utopian thinking. The anti-utopian drive comes from, among other reasons, the fear of totalitarianism, argued to be at the core of utopianism, and the criticism of perfectionism, due to the notion that it is neither reachable nor desirable. Levitas argues that anti-utopianism limits utopia to the world that we can possibly create, thus limiting the possibilities of hope and focusing on feasibility.[37] This is where utopian literature deviates from science fiction literature, which does not need to relate to reality and could encompass alternative realities that may or may not happen in our plane of existence. The possibility of that utopian space depends on the optimistic attachment that is put into imagining it: "But even here, utopia does not need to *be* practically possible; it merely needs to be believed to be so to mobilize people to political action."[38] Perfection connotes a final condition, which is a static state because it is the condition to be reached. However, utopias are rarely static, despite aiming at perfection based on their blueprints or notions of the ideal version of the world.

[35] Ibid, xiii.
[36] For a comprehensive look at the intersection between biopolitics and utopianism, see Patricia Stapleton and Andrew Byers, *Biopolitics and Utopia an Interdisciplinary Reader*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
[37] Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 220.
[38] Ibid, 220.

An autonomous existence: The nuances of feminist utopianism

As I briefly referred to in the previous section, the exact nature of the diagnostics and eutopian creation process depends on the dreamer. Since the majority of canonical utopian works of literature were written by male authors, their re-imagined societies did not necessarily reflect the betterment of the status of women in society. This may be an anachronistic perspective on their work; nonetheless, they did not use the creative opportunity to imagine a world of gender equality. In anthologies and readers, "the women issue" ends up being mentioned as a special interest subject while the utopian blueprint assumes that the default citizen is supposed to be male. Feminist utopianism is essentially driven by this lack of revolutionary and emancipatory change that would focus on women's issues and move forward toward a larger concept of gender equality in mainstream utopian literature.

Within the field of feminist utopianism, neither the urge nor the actions to create a eutopia are universal. In other words, there is no type of utopia that will be eutopian for all people, let alone all women. On this point, Levitas argues that the utopian impulse does not inherently stem from human nature. She finds the connection of utopian dreaming with innate human desires for utopian projection an essentialist notion based on various contextual markers. Instead, she emphasizes the role of the scarcity gap (between limited resources and unlimited desires) in triggering the utopian impulse for the betterment of contemporary conditions:

> [U]topia is a social construct which arises not from a 'natural' impulse subject to social mediation, but as a socially constructed response to an *equally* socially constructed gap between the needs and wants generated by a particular society and the satisfactions available to and distributed by it. *All* aspects of the scarcity

> gap are social constructs, including the propensity to imagine it away by some means or other.[39]

While utopias written by women that relate to the issues of women were written at least as far back as the Middle Ages, based on the published records present, utopian literature in mainstream media continued to foster the image of patriarchal utopianism, which situates men as the locus of their emphasis and ignores the issues of people of other gender expressions and orientations. Levitas argues that the socially constructed scarcities and inequities generate socially constructed means of battling these shortcomings. These constructed mechanisms may bring about the motivation for improvement; however, Levitas does not consider these necessarily a part of so-called human nature. Feminist utopianism, nonetheless, aims at challenging essentialist gender assumptions in a multitude of ways whether the conditions before or after reflect a universal human nature.[40]

As feminist critics and writers took on the task of interrogating utopian and dystopian literature and unearthing forgotten feminist utopian and dystopian works of literature, the possibilities offered by utopian and dystopian genres to feminist projections have opened up new spaces for discussion and also subversion. "[A] strong feminist desire for social dreaming" sets the tone for the original motives of feminist utopianism as a literary subgenre.[41] This focus on unearthing and redefining what feminist utopian literature entails has also led to the rewriting of the literary history of utopianism. For example, even though Thomas More is considered to have formalized the utopian genre in 1516 with his work *Utopia*, it is now clearly acknowledged that Christine de Pizan wrote her utopian work *The Book of the City of Ladies* in 1404, more than a

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[39] Ibid, 210.

[40] For a critique of the notion of human nature in utopian literature, see Lyman Tower Sargent, "A Note on the Other Side of Human Nature in the Utopian Novel," *Political Theory* 3, no. 1 (1975): 88-97 and Jon Wagner, "Coming Home: The Evolutionary Roots of Utopia," *Utopian Studies* 20, no. 2 (2009): 299-320.

[41] Tatiana Teslenko, *Feminist Utopian Novels of the 1970s: Joanna Russ & Dorothy Bryant*, 34.

hundred years before More's. If it was not for the efforts of the French medievalist Suzanne Solente, modern readers might not have known about de Pizan and her feminist medieval utopian space.[42] Representations of feminist utopias from the medieval period are among the various works of literature that have been recovered in the last decades from the unpublished archives of a gender-biased literary history and canonization that have failed to mention and appreciate these works in their own periods.[43]

Despite the vast diversity in feminist utopian literature, the themes addressed in the novels intersect with one another due to the fact that all aspects of race, socioeconomic factors, and medico-political interventions affect women inherently within the experience of having a female cisgender identity. Many feminist utopian projections contain a communal and ecological worldview in that women are self-sufficient, independent, resourceful, and respectful towards nature. Production of basic goods remains local while the economy runs on the exchange of goods and services. Technology does not end up ruling society; in some novels, digital and electrical technology are nowhere to be found. Instances of violence are mostly nowhere to be seen, except for incidents in the past - such as natural catastrophes and wars - that created their utopian lands in the first place.

In its essence, feminist utopian literature moves away from the notion of blueprint utopias towards the concept of dynamic and open-ended utopias. This approach resonates more with the fluidity and multiplicity of adjusting to the evolving needs of women in society within different contexts. Many imperfect worlds exist within the framework of feminist utopianism, and as Lucy Sargisson also states, "[t]hese worlds play speculative, meditative or critical roles rather than

[42] See Karen Green, "Isabeau De Bavière and the Political Philosophy of Christine De Pizan," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 32.2 (2006): 247-72.

[43] For an analysis of de Pizan's work through the lens of Ernst Bloch's notion of utopia as a principle of hope, see the doctoral dissertation of Bernadette Wan-ying Tchen, "Christine de Pizan's Allegories: A Dialectic of Hope and Utopia as Means of Social and Individual Transformation," PhD diss., (University of Southern California, 1994).

instructing to the creation of a perfect world."[44] This aspect of feminist utopianism is closely connected to the nature of feminist theory in that they both have a certain theoretical resistance to closure. "Feminist utopian dreaming, which is not fixed but fluid, never realized or complete, but always revolutionary" strives to disrupt and subvert the status quo with the use of open-ended narratives, self-reflexivity, and satire, among many other literary devices that help to speculate further on definitive solutions for social, political, and personal issues women face.[45]

Feminist utopian literature concerns itself not only with imagining a brand new world from scratch but also with liberating women from patriarchal oppression and making sure this newly created world can continue to uphold the new values of society. Consequently, feminist utopias tend to challenge the essentialist division of labor through role reversal practices, gender separatism, and other literary mechanisms such as frame tales and destruction myths. Within the diversity of feminist utopian works of literature, I chose to concentrate on these specific women-only utopias. In the following section, I comment on the core concepts of this subgenre.[46]

Feminist world-building: The characteristics of gender separatist utopianism

Women's need for a separate space for themselves is neither a new concept nor only a literary one. They have always had arranged spaces of their own, whether they themselves or others have arranged these spaces. Here, we can think of harem culture in the Ottoman Empire or the Ōoku culture in Edo period Japan. In more contemporary times, women's shelters are a good example of a gender-separated safe space, where women fleeing domestic violence can be hosted until

[44] Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*, 21.

[45] Tatiana Teslenko, *Feminist Utopian Novels of the 1970s*, 169.

[46] For the distinction between critical feminist utopias and others, see Annette Keinhorst, "Emancipatory projection: An introduction to women's critical utopias," *Women's Studies* 14, no. 2 (1987): 91-99; for a review of how women are treated in traditional utopias, see Lyman Tower Sargent, "Women in Utopia," *Comparative Literature Studies* 10, no. 4 (1973): 302-16; for a quick look at some utopias to observe the differences between abstract and concrete feminist utopias, see Anne K. Mellor, "On feminist utopias," *Women's Studies* 9, no. 3 (1982): 241-262; for some motivations for writing feminist utopias, see Carol Pearson, "Women's Fantasies and Feminist Utopias," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2, no. 3 (1977): 50-61; and for a discussion on feminist utopian citizenship models and theory, see Robin Silbergleid, "Women, Utopia, and Narrative: Toward a Postmodern Feminist Citizenship," *Hypatia* 12, no. 4 (1997): 156-77.

they find their footing; feminist health centers and abortion clinics where women can receive emergency or routine reproductive or general medical support; community centers which in certain areas can become a much-needed gathering place for local women; women's colleges, finishing schools and sorority houses where women can study and prepare for life ahead without the presence of men; and even contemporary gyms which facilitate separate spaces for women's comfort and sense of safety. Perhaps one of the least traditional examples of a gender-separated utopian space I can share from my Turkish background would be the *altın günü*[47] where the women of the neighborhood meet to discuss daily life struggles and good news, remove their headscarves with the comfort of being solely among other women, and save money by giving the rotating host collectively-purchased gold coins. Even in the midst of hectic daily lives and a mostly conservative atmosphere in sociocultural contexts, women still plan to get together and support each other in this small and fleeting time and space.

As can be deducted from the real-life examples above, gender separatist feminism is a form of feminism most often associated with the branch of radical feminism which holds the belief that opposition to patriarchy is best done by focusing exclusively on women without the presence of men and by separating women from the burdens and privileges of a heterosexual life. In connection to separatist feminism, the literary subgenre of gender separatist utopianism concerns itself with utopian worlds where women and men exist in separate living spaces. Sometimes it is a wall that separates them, sometimes it is geographical features or natural disasters, but in either case, the separation is caused by the consequences of the actions of ruling men within their society in the novels. The events that cause the separation can be natural, mystical, military, biological, or political in essence. Politically, women's space in these societies is unavoidably matriarchal due to the constitutional and social absence of men. A sustainable, green, and peaceful feminist worldview and governance in the fields of science,

[47] "Gold day" would be the literal translation of this phrasing in Turkish.

agriculture, industry, and daily politics is adopted while patriarchal traditions are eliminated or allowed to continue within the realms of men, away from the realms of women but still maintained and governed, or at least strictly monitored, by the ruling women.

From a literary genre point of view, gender separatist utopian literature occupies a transgeneric space because the story arc can reflect a positive utopia, dystopia, critical utopia, or an anti-utopia. The separatist aspect of the subgenre does not necessarily define whether it will be eutopian or dystopian. Separatism only emphasizes that the genders are separated and the sociopolitical foundations of that society are overturned. In other words, just because a utopia is gender-separated, it does not necessarily mean that it is a eutopia or dystopia. This subgenre provides a gender-subverted space where women are in power and men have succumbed to the circumstances that pushed them out of power. In this separated sociopolitical space, gender relations can be challenged and interrogated within a territory that resembles a controlled experiment: What would be different if women lived undisturbed by the presence and influence of men? There are some common themes within this subgenre. The notions of the compulsory heterosexual nuclear family, along with the mechanisms of reproduction, and motherhood, are some of the most accentuated and challenged aspects of patriarchal life in gender separatist utopian literature.

The heterosexual nuclear family is the core institution that is abolished in gender separatist utopian literature due to the latter's main tenet of gender separation. This foundational and eliminative approach towards the heterosexual nuclear family urges me to question the reasons why societies would need or tend to form nuclear families. Renowned Polish-British anthropologist and ethnologist Bronisław Malinowski, who has worked extensively on family structures in different cultures, rationalizes the notion of forming a family unit from a biological standpoint. The fact that the human infant needs parental support for much longer than other mammals plays a significant role in his interpretation. Therefore, he argues that:

> [n]o culture could endure in which the act of reproduction, that is, mating, pregnancy, and childbirth, was not linked up with the fact of legally-founded parenthood, that is, a relationship in which the father and mother have to look after the children for a long period, and, in turn, derive certain benefits from the care and trouble taken.[48]

According to Malinowski, human infants' need for care and protection gives the mother and the father a reason and a necessity to stay together as a unit for mutual benefit. This cohabitation, however, did not foreclose a distinct distribution of roles. While the woman takes care of the infant, the man could provide shelter and food. At the same time, the woman makes sure the living conditions are taken care of and the food is prepared. Such assumptions or limited observations of the division of labor rests on biological essentialism because women give birth and men are assumed to be stronger and faster than women. This division of labor, while being commended for providing safety and care for the women and children in the community, also imprisons women to the household and the private sphere of life.

To expand on the foundational notion of family, the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss argues that the concept of family cannot be reduced to its basic tenets:

> No society, or humanity itself, could exist if women did not give birth to children, if they did not enjoy a man's protection during their pregnancy and if they did not feed and raise their offspring. However, it would be a mistake to seek to reduce

[48] Bronisław Malinowski, quoted in Michelle Z. Rosaldo Collier and Sylvia Yanagisako. "Is There a Family? New Anthropological Views," *The Gender/sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*, 32.

> the family to this natural foundation. The family appears in very different guises in all human societies.[49]

Here Lévi-Strauss interprets the findings and observations from a point of view that values the leniency of the connection. The emotional and physical instincts that are commonly preferred to strengthen the position of monogamy and heteronormative nuclear family do not have to be the norm. He signals that there are other family dynamics as well, which is confirmed in the examples of gender separatist utopian literature I examine in this dissertation.

Even though the works of Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss are considered to be foundational studies in the field of social anthropology, there is an undeniable sociocultural and gendered bias in any research project, unless the researchers are intentionally and formally working with awareness of their male gaze. I argue that their unacknowledged male gaze creates a gendered bias for not only providing but also perpetuating an incomplete narrative of the history of the nuclear family. A good example of this gendered bias can be found in the account of the American anthropologist Annette Weiner, who studied women's place in the socioeconomy of Trobriand society, revisiting Malinowski's Kula Exchange study. She emphasizes the importance of women's place in the production of commodities, not necessarily only the exchange, which had been overlooked in Malinowski's work.[50] She criticizes the male gaze in the interpretation of findings from an androcentric point of view. In short, ideas that were thought to be universal truths coming from scientific projects have been subject to the critical reconsideration of the gaze, and perceived notions of gender have been challenged with the re-interpretation and revisiting of past studies.

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[49] André Burguière, *A History of the Family*, 4.

[50] The dissertation was published in 1976 by University of Texas Press under the title: *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange*.

With this in mind, it is no surprise that the heterosexual nuclear family is one of the first concepts that get eradicated in gender separatist feminist utopias, as my analyses will also show. Within the bounds of gender separatist utopian literature, this entity is interrogated because the concept of family subdues women into the household. Being a housewife is most often a position of unpaid emotional and physical labor. The unfair division of labor at home contributes to the suppression of women in the public sphere. Following in the footsteps of the French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, who famously wrote "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," feminist research and interpretation of the nuclear family and its obligations focuses on the sociocultural aspect of gender, rather than the biological aspect.[51] It is not that girls are born with the instinct and the urge to become wives and mothers; however, within the paradigms of "compulsory heterosexuality" and the assumed gender norm of patriarchy, the nuclear family teaches and trains girls to act in certain roles in the family and then in society.[52] Both women and men are socialized and brought up in ways that are based on gender stereotypes that they learn from observing family structures in their sociocultural environment. One could say that both feminine and masculine roles entrap people into acting in certain ways for fear of not being socially accepted nor allowed to lead their lives according to different configurations. In this sense, the heteronormative nuclear family has been seen as a microcosm of patriarchal values. Therefore, the concept of nuclear family is one of the most common aspects of the heteronormative patriarchal society that gets abolished in gender separatist feminist utopian literature. Creating unconventional families, or a lack thereof, remains one of the basic building blocks of this subgenre, which draws my interest to this representation in theory and in literature.

[51] See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949.
[52] See Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5 (1980): 631-660.

In terms of the obligations relating to the concept of the nuclear family, women's work in the household goes unpaid and has been referred to as domestic slavery.[53] This domestic labor that goes unpaid contributes to the family economy and supports the male in his economic endeavors, thereby supporting the inner mechanism of patriarchy. However, women's lack of financial freedom also means that women are not able to easily leave abusive domestic contexts as financially independent individuals would have been able. As women joined the workforce outside the house more and more, they became faced with the multifaceted responsibility of taking care of the household logistically but also taking care of the children and their husbands emotionally on top of working full-time to financially support the family. In the end, it is patriarchy and capitalism that continuously benefit from the paid and unpaid work of women within the structure of the nuclear family.

In terms of the personal rights of women, the concept of a traditional nuclear family has continued to be a confining and limiting space. In many cultures traditionally, a father figure hands the woman to the husband figure in modern settings, such as wedding celebrations, where a dowry or other financial attributes are traded in exchange for the actual or symbolic ownership of the woman. Even when some societies abolished this tradition, they would preserve other institutional norms such as tracing lineage over surname, transferring the name of the father, and building family structures at municipal records based on registering the father as the head of the family. Even when women have equal legal rights in some countries, they cannot always exercise their rights due to the emotional labor of the family on their shoulders or the lack of equal opportunities outside the house in general. In the end, the nuclear family continues to facilitate all these shortcomings as the norm and the children raised within this structure continue to learn this as the societally expected norm.

[53] For an insightful contemporary look at the concept of gender-based unpaid labor and domestic slavery, see Norene Pupo, and Ann Duffy. "Unpaid Work, Capital and Coercion." *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation 6*, no. 1 (2012): 27-47. https://doi.org/10.13169/workorgalaboglob.6.1.0027.

North American activist and acclaimed science fiction author Marge Piercy argues that the nuclear family does not function well, with divorces that leave women and children poor and helpless. She also argues in favor of finding new and different ways of reproductive socialization in order to save women and children from their burdens.[54] For these and many other reasons, diverse family units are observed in gender separatist utopian novels as a way to present a myriad of options for alternative family systems. In the various chapters of this dissertation, I will go into these and explore their critical difference as well as their specific pitfalls. The traditional heteronormative family in history unavoidably brings about the issue of reproduction and the fact that it has been biologically linked to women's bodies. This is how the nuclear family continues to perpetuate the oppression of women under patriarchy, which is why it is one of the main concepts to be overturned in gender separatist utopian novels.

Many radical feminist thinkers such as Adrienne Rich, Mary Daly, and Shulamith Firestone have argued for the distancing of the burden of reproduction from women's bodies in order to eliminate the need to socialize with men. While in theory, reproduction still remains one of the physical functions of women, in feminist utopian literature many alternatives have been tried: psychic reproduction in Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (on which I elaborate on in Chapter II); parthenogenesis, that is virgin birth, where the egg develops without being fertilized by sperm, in Mary Lane's *Mizora*; asexual reproduction in Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* where women only need to visualize babies into existence, and so on and so forth. The type of reproduction is also portrayed as bringing positive change. In Joanna Russ' *The Female Man*, for example, babies are far happier, they do not cry or need much intervention. The community believes that this is due to the fact that they are not around men and they are collectively taken care of and loved by only women who all act as mothers. In this novel, the emphasis lies on taking reproduction out of the male paradigm, severing the dependence from them and thereby

[54] Marge Piercy, "Love and Sex in the Year 300," 136.

eliminating men's parenthood. As the works of literature chosen in this dissertation engage in reproduction and parenthood in various manners, with the common denominator being the elimination of men, I find it valuable to examine these notions and practices that relate to my corpus.

Dismantling the nuclear family structure and removing the processes of reproduction from women's bodies also brings the notion of motherhood into question. Biological mothers are often seen as the primary caregivers of children. Even when fathers are helpful and attentive, mothering is more often than not a role that is societally expected to be fulfilled by women. Many sociologists, including the North American sociologist Nancy Chodorow, whose research concentrates on psychoanalytical theory and motherhood, argue that mothering is one of the few universal and unchanging factors in the sexual division of labor.[55] Even when there is more pregnancy and labor support available for the more privileged class of women in countries with high quality of life, the physical and biological responsibilities of bearing and rearing a child still directly affect the person carrying the child to term regardless of the country of residence or the laws and regulations in place. Chodorow also argues that women's maternal function has had a profound impact on the ideology surrounding genders and the reproduction of masculinity and femininity.[56] Women's mothering is a largely societal situation rather than a biological one, which is why it easily comes into question when the world is turned upside down. The novels in my research of gender separatist utopian literature portray motherhood as a privileged position and an opportunity for the communal re-education of the population. This aspect stresses the idea that bearing a child is largely different from mothering a child which also inevitably includes education of a new society.

[55] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, 3.
[56] Ibid, 11.

As my dissertation makes clear, various works of gender separatist utopian literature examine the concept of compulsory childbearing and childrearing by showing its negative effects on women or coming up with new methods that would eliminate the responsibilities of individual motherhood altogether and turn this task into a communal act of nurture and care. Mothering does not only concern physically bearing the children but also "mothering" them.

I will demonstrate that gender separatist utopias provide flexible criticism by interrogating the concept of utopia in the context of gender separatism without providing a certain solution or closure, which makes them critical of society and the utopian genre at large. The criticism in gender separatist literature is directed first at patriarchal institutions, and then against the established idea that men are the major cause of the current plight of women. The alternative offered by these texts is that patriarchal institutions, established by and for the sake of men, are to be abolished. Through the examination of the narrative cycle of hope, destruction, and rebirth, I aim to demonstrate the optimistic aspects of all this destruction, elimination, separation, and other dystopian elements in this subgenre. While these may appear to be anti-utopian, I argue and aim to demonstrate that there is more to uncover and learn from these gender separatist feminist utopian works of literature.

Chapter outline

This study is concerned with gender separatist utopian novels and the narrative, historical, and literary characteristics these novels carry. The narrative cycles of these works remain the main focus of the dissertation while I simultaneously take a closer look at their representation of gender relations and utopian world-building practices.

Chapter I, titled *Hope as theme and incentive for the creation of feminist utopian spaces*, engages with hope as an incentive for the creation of feminist utopian spaces, following the ideology of Ernst Bloch and his concept of ubiquitous utopian thought. Considering feminism as

a transformative and ever-evolving politics of hope, I examine the relationships between feminist theory, practice, and fiction and the various projections and implementations of a possibly better world for women. As feminism is an inherently utopian line of thought, gender separatist feminist utopianism provides generous opportunities and space for the development of improved imaginary worlds. Throughout the chapter, I focus on the expression of hope in the gender separatist utopian novels in my study and examine how this hope is articulated in these separatist fiction novels, and how this hope motivates certain actions in the plots. In my search for hope in gender separatist utopian novels, I turn to medieval women authors from the Low Lands, Germany, and the Rhineland. With these examples, among possibly many others that are buried deeper, I try to situate a women-authored utopian tradition existing before Thomas More's renowned *Utopia*. In subsequent sections, I concentrate on the intersection of hope and the alleged death of utopia to bring hope and optimism to this narrative of death. Then I present alternative genres of feminist utopianism to show that feminist utopian thought can also exist in contexts other than the traditional utopian novel. Finally, I question the problem of hope and utopian impulse in separatist utopian novels and examine the intersection with critical utopian literature.[57]

In Chapter II, titled *Destruction as a utopian cleansing mechanism*, I concentrate on what motivates the motif of destruction, which takes place at the start of the rebuilding of gender separatist utopian novels before a new world could be built. Through the use of the destruction motif, the current state of affairs is destroyed prior to the attempt to create a better world for women. Thus, the motif acts as a way of cleansing the world of what ails women at that time. With this examination, I argue that destruction allows women to break free from long-established

[57] There is considerable research on reclaimed utopian works of literature written by women. See Stinson, Pamela Talley. *Uncovering a Tradition: Female Utopias before Herland*, 1997; Verini, Alexandra Cassatt, "A New Kingdom of Femininity": *Women's Utopias in Early English Culture and Imagination (1405-1666)*. UCLA, 2018; and Brewer, Lisa K. *Paradise Negotiated: Early Modern Women Writing Utopia 1640-1760*. West Virginia University Libraries, 2005.

sociopolitical, judicial, and economic structures and societal norms. The concept of utopian hope, which is the main subject of Chapter I, acts as the motivation for this phase of destruction that prepares the space for the rebuilding of a new world. This radical act of destruction of patriarchy and all that it represents sets the stage for the exploration of a new sociopolitical order without the tainting traces of the previous structure. The destruction motif in separatist feminist utopian novels may start with a *deus ex machina* in the form of a natural disaster or (wo)manmade plot device that destroys an existing world. The plot consequently continues with the remaining women who create and uphold a new sociopolitical order that prioritizes the well-being of women citizens. In all cases, the concept of destruction is an attempt to break away from the present, and the past that contributed to how the present has taken shape. In the subsections, I focus on the necessity of the destruction motif in gender separatist feminist utopian novels, then the motivation behind this particular type of destruction, and the hopeful utopian potential in the notion of destruction.

Chapter III, titled *Tabula rasa as a clean slate – or uncleanable slate*, is about the concept of tabula rasa as the state of achieving a clean slate prior to building a new utopian space. The concept of tabula rasa prior to world-building in utopian literature is used often in gender separatist utopian novels due to the space of exploration and extrapolation before the world-building processes are started. A new eutopian condition can only be formed from the ashes of the previous world that was destroyed due to being beyond salvation in terms of the needs and rights of women. In this chapter, I question some fundamental motivations behind the concept of tabula rasa: historiography, reclaiming history, and writing herstory. Then I move on to exploring the history and theory of matriarchal societies in gender separatist utopian novels, which are based on the sociopolitical structure formed on the foundation of tabula rasa right after a form of destruction takes place. After that, I argue that tabula rasa in the context of gender separatist utopian novels acts as an uncleanable slate on which the signs of the past and the

atrocities of the destruction motif still linger. Moreover, these signs make eutopian projections unattainable and create frustrations that cause the denouement in the plots, which generates crisis, chaos, disillusionment, and perhaps forthcoming ideas for a better eutopia in the future. There is some variety in how gender separatist utopian novels express the motif of tabula rasa. In either case, the plots have one starting point in common: the tabula rasa phase in which the communities examine and reconcile their ideas of birth without history.

The conclusion presents an overall view of the narrative cycle of hope, destruction, and rebirth, and returns to the questions I set out to ask. It collects the various insights gained in the project and reflects on their significance for feminist utopianism and utopian (literary) theory at large. This dissertation itself is a quasi-utopian project in my interpretation, in which I put women-authored women-only utopian societies in literature from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century under the much-deserved spotlight, showing that there is a more inclusive way of conducting utopian studies.

I want to end the introduction by highlighting a fascinating recent feminist work that I read while finishing this dissertation. Published in 2015, *The Feminist Utopia Project* harbors essays, stories, poems, and assorted artwork created by women simply imagining a better world.[58] Each of them contributes to a larger network of feminist utopianism. Creating a utopia emphasizes the idea that our psyches are so tainted by patriarchy that it is not possible to dream of a free world without destroying the one we have and dreaming of it in multitudinous ways ourselves. As the editors underline in the introduction of the book: "The collection of pieces in this book does not draw a blueprint for a single cohesive utopia. Indeed, you'll find that some of the contributions contradict each other."[59] With its focus on intersectional diversity, feminist utopianism thrives on a transgressive and collective world-building practice, even if its building

[58] See Alexandra Brodsky and Rachel Kauder-Nalebuff, *The Feminist Utopia Project : Fifty-Seven Visions of a Wildly Better Future*. Feminist Press 2015.
[59] Ibid, 9.

blocks come from very different and at times conflicting directions. It is this complexity and intersectionality that light our way as we search for a better world.

1. Hope as theme and incentive for the creation of feminist utopian spaces

With its persistent and transformative utopianism, feminism is a politics of hope. Whether feminist thoughts and actions aim at policymaking, consciousness-raising, or subtle personal acts of resistance, feminist theory and practice are based on projections and possible implementations of a better future for society regardless of the gender of its citizens but aiming specifically to support women. Just like feminism, utopianism is in itself a wide spectrum of political thought, which provides ample opportunities for fruitful speculation and holds space for gender separatist feminist utopianism. In my research, I focus on studying one literary expression of feminist utopianism while giving contextual attention to feminist utopianism outside of the realm of fiction. Following the ideas of Ernst Bloch on utopian thinking as an instance of the not-yet, feminist utopian scholar Frances Bartkowski states that "[f]eminist fiction and feminist theory are fundamentally utopian in that they declare that which is not-yet as the basis for a feminist practice, textual, political, or otherwise."[60] In line with Bartkowski, I consider progressive feminist acts utopian in and of themselves, and I claim that separatist feminist utopian fiction is an expression of these feminist and implicitly utopian acts.

In this chapter, I examine the expressions of feminist utopian *hope* in gender separatist utopian literature as a motivation and starting point for the creation of new (e)utopian worlds. I follow the practical definition of literary utopias provided by the influential utopian scholar Lyman Tower Sargent, in whose formulation hope plays an important part:

> Literary utopias have at least six purposes, although they are not necessarily separable. A utopia can be simply a fantasy, it can be a description of a desirable or an undesirable society, an extrapolation, a warning, an alternative to the

[60] Bartkowski, *Feminist Utopias*, 12.

> present, or a model to be achieved. And the intentional community as utopia adds a seventh purpose, to demonstrate that living a better life is possible in the here and now. The utopian views humanity and its future with either hope or alarm. If viewed with hope, the result is usually a utopia. If viewed with alarm, the result is usually a dystopia. But basically, utopianism is a philosophy of hope, and it is characterized by the transformation of generalized hope into a description of a non-existent society.[61]

The major distinction that Sargent makes, here, between hope and alarm, is strongly but not uniquely related to the genres of utopia or dystopia. Sargent underscores, moreover, that hopeful theorization and conception molds the utopian principles into a tangible definition and description of a new and hopefully improved society which need not be a society of the future: "a better life is possible in the here and now."[62] As we will see, I will contend that hope and alarm in dystopias and eutopias can exist simultaneously. My argument is that it is possible to observe an underlying utopian hope in dystopian settings despite the warnings and alarms inherent in such dystopias, while it is also possible to observe the dangers and lessons to be learned in eutopian spaces that are built on positive hope. Nonetheless, I contend that hope as an overarching concept is one of the foundational elements of feminist utopianism and of feminist separatist literature in particular.

Premodern utopias, such as *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405) by Christine de Pizan, *Utopia* (1516) by Thomas More, or *The City of the Sun* (1602) by Tommaso Campanella, mostly projected blueprints of perfection in imagined ideal societies – even if these societies were dealt

[61] Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*, 8.
[62] Ibid.

with satirically, as some interpretations of More's *Utopia* contend.[63] Feminist utopian literature, or those utopias written by women authors and focusing on the problems that directly concern women at the time the texts were written, have often followed the pattern of *critical* utopias. Sargent's definition of critical utopia is a useful place to start situating my argument within this realm:

> Critical Utopia - a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view of the Utopian genre.[64]

By taking a critical approach towards the utopian genre, critical utopias hold space for the co-existence of both eutopian and dystopian elements of the societies in the literary works, showing both sides of the mirror and its myriad reflections. The societies depicted are not always ideal societies such as the ones portrayed in blueprint utopian narratives. Rather, this type of utopian literature resists closure and is open to evolving with the changes and momentum of the society in question. The undesirable parts of the plot are to be seen as warnings, and the methods with which the community tries to solve the problems of society within the narrative world constitute the critique of society in reality and exhibit suggestions to overcome these problems.

Traditionally, a fictional utopian society is expected to be geographically and/or chronologically separate from the society to which it is contrasted. In this way, the utopian space

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[63] For a more detailed look at the satirical aspect of utopianism, see Heiserman, A. R. "Satire in the utopia." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA),* vol. 78, no. 3, 1963, pp. 163–174, https://doi.org/10.2307/460858.

[64] Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," 9.

is showcased via the efforts of a protagonist who discovers and explores this new location and implicitly and/or explicitly compares this utopia with the undesirable condition of their present world. This specific tradition can be observed in several blueprint utopias, such as Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1916). Novels like these show utopian literature's liminal position at the edge of travel literature, in which voyages of discovery are glorified, and are examples of metafiction in that the text is self-conscious of its constructed nature. This narrow definition and practice of blueprint utopias also played a role in the exclusion of utopian projections that fall outside the perimeters of the utopian imaginations in the main canon, which is especially the case for feminist utopian literature and other non-mainstream utopias. Consequently, through the research efforts of utopian scholars, the unearthing of the works of women authors within the utopian genre, such as Annie Denton Cridge, Christine de Pizan, Mary E. Bradley Lane, and Sarah Scott, has brought new and contrasting examples to the field of utopian literature.

It remains important to examine why the unearthing of the works of these women authors of utopias was necessary in the first place. No scholarly debate on utopianism starts without mentioning Thomas More's *Utopia*. However, while it is true that he coined the term *utopia*, one could also honor, for instance, the medieval women's literature that preceded More's work. Christine de Pizan (1364-1430), for one, wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies* in 1405, which is a good example to examine and locate a history of, or the herstory of, feminist utopian literature. In this utopian work, de Pizan builds an allegorical city of ladies by using famous women, such as Mary Magdalene, Helen of Troy, and Medea, as paradigms in her speculative and didactic fiction. De Pizan, however, is not one of the first names that come to mind or that get mentioned in publications that set out to provide an overview of utopian literature.[65] Both the act of

[65] A quick search and comparison of number of publications about Christne de Pizan against Thomas More in the records of JSTOR (https://www.jstor.org/) shows that while More has been mentioned in item titles and/or abstracts 4.108 times, de Pizan has been mentioned only 372 times (date of access: September 2022).

imagining or dreaming of a new world from scratch and the privilege of constructing the canons and curricula about such utopian worlds have often been worked out in the domain of the rich and the powerful, who usually happened to be men of political, racial, and financial privilege, especially during the pre-modern periods of literature. When the question is posed whether there is hope within and towards achieving a eutopian world, the politics of historical equity and privilege concerning women's position in society as well as in the literary profession make it necessary to look further than the traditionally presented dominant canon and examine alternative genres and traditions within utopian literature and also eutopian practice.

While exploring the concept of hope within the context of feminist utopian literature, I can situate my position better within the utopian theory of Bloch, who is known for his generously broad definition of utopianism as an overarching concept, as opposed to a fixed blueprint definition. In her analysis of Bloch's work, utopian scholar of sociology Ruth Levitas mentions that Bloch's work has been considered a principal defense of utopianism.[66] This defense is particularly instrumental in examining feminist utopianism. The urge to define utopianism broadly is especially constructive in the case of feminist thought and literature precisely because sociopolitical restrictions have limited the publication of women's work, or have limited the study of existing works.

Bloch sees utopian thought in diverse types of genres and works of both fiction and non-fiction. He defines any attempt motivated to move beyond the constraints of a current situation as utopian, due to the inherent wish to change the world for the better. This is part of what he refers to as wishful thinking, which is not to be understood in its common meaning of having no relation to reality; on the contrary, utopianism for Bloch is both a wish for and a promise of possibilities, a progressive mentality that produces new routes for possible solutions to societal problems. As Bloch lays out his ideas on the concept of utopia in his seminal work *The Principle*

[66] Levitas, "Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia," 13.

of Hope, he asks some significant questions about the Marxian desire for a classless society: "Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What are we waiting for? What awaits us?"[67] With questions so comprehensive in scope, the clues of utopianism can be observed everywhere around us.

To give just one example of a eutopian practice that asks us to step out of the confines of dominant canons and libraries, The Sisters of the Valley, also known casually as the Weed Nuns, demonstrate a different way of building a eutopian existence that falls outside of fiction but is nonetheless valuable for unconventional definitional purposes. On a mission to "heal the world" via medicinal marijuana, Weed Nuns consider themselves heirs to the medieval Beguines. The Beguines were members of an identically-named Christian spiritual order of semi-monastic groups that lead pious lives, living together as a self-sustaining commune, but without any formal vows.[68] Founded in 2014 in the United States with ten core members, The Sisters of the Valley consider themselves Beguine revivalists due to their devotion and self-proclaimed spiritual bond with the Beguines. As the first organized nurses in Europe, Beguines are believed to have used hemp and other herbal remedies to help sick people who could not receive proper relief from existing medical interventions. In the context of contemporary Weed Nuns, this practice refers to the use of medicinal cannabis for chronic pain and anxiety management.[69] This group of women is an example of a consciously created community, formed on a voluntary basis, centered around shared principles and responsibilities. While this community is not fictional, its conceptual foundation is relevant to women's experience of utopianism, and it is a practical expression of hope and the wish to create a better-confined space in a group effort.

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[67] Bloch, *The Principle of Hope, Volume 1*, 3.

[68] For more information on the history of beguines, see De Cant, Geneviève, Pascal Majérus, Christiane Verougstraete, Régine De Hemptinne, and Eléonore Grislis, *A World of Independent Women: From the 12th Century to the Present Day : the Flemish Beguinages*. Riverside: Hervé van Caloen foundation, 2003.

[69] For more information, see https://www.sistersofthevalley.org/our-story

Weed Nuns are but one example of how utopian creations can materialize anywhere and, in any shape, only if the contemporary definitions of and expectations from utopias can be expanded to be more inclusive ones. In my analysis of hope in gender separatist utopian novels, I trace a genealogy of hope in women-authored utopian works of literature. This genealogy reaches back in time to Christine de Pizan's already mentioned *The Book of the City of Ladies* (fifteenth century) in which a metaphorical and didactic utopian city is built, further back in time in works of medieval authors such as Hildegard of Bingen (twelfth century) and Hadewijch of Brabant (thirteenth century), and closer to the contemporary period in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* trilogy (twentieth century), in which the separatist world-building practices revolve around a colonial allegory. It is valuable to scrutinize these gender separatist utopian works of literature in that they simultaneously present the peaks of hope and also the depths of hopelessness. In a way, there is always hope for the future that gets its motivation and inspiration from the hopelessness of the present.

If my going back in history shows that gender separatist eutopias had their hopeful beginnings centuries ago, the genealogy also shows the contemporary demise of the genre, as when scholars speak about 'the death of utopia.' This 'death' would be manifest in a political context, but can also be felt where the production of feminist eutopian novels has recently decreased compared to earlier publications in the twentieth century. As publication houses observe the rise of feminist dystopian literature – a paradigmatic case is Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* – it becomes a challenge to posit feminist eutopian literature within the context of the traditional utopian novel. I presume that many readers will already be aware of the focus and the strength of the feminist message in *The Handmaid's Tale*, I will nonetheless give a brief summary to emphasize my argument. The novel takes place in a Christian totalitarian and white supremacist military dictatorship. The narrator is one of the handmaids who are women that are forced to become reproductive slaves. The main exposition of the novel underlines the lack of

agency for women's bodily autonomy. Aside from losing their bodily rights, women also become the lowest caste of the class and lose, in the process, many financial and legal rights. The Republic of Gilead came to power in a revolution and it likely lost power in a revolution as well, since this historical period is referred to as the Gileadean period, emphasizing that the period has passed. Published in 1985, the novel did not attract so much political interest. However, in our current political climate in the global west, especially in the United States, we can observe the rampant attack on women's reproductive rights. Unfortunately, the cautionary tale of Atwood does not seem very distant anymore, which is also a strong reason why women's utopian dreams reflect a more dystopian reality.[70]

One specific question thus arises: Is there still hope for women authors of utopian tradition to imagine a better world through projections and representations of eutopia or has a dystopian mentality become dominant after all? While the utopian intention is still present and strong, what I want to call the precarious aspect of hope demonstrates that representations of eutopian imagination may not result in outcomes as positive as it is hoped and expected to be.[71]

In the following sections, I concentrate first on protofeminist eutopian sources of hope. The phrase 'source of hope' is a double one: it indicates both that the texts under consideration express a certain hope, but also that the texts themselves can be considered as sources of hope in a history that for a long time has been neglected, and that needed and still needs uncovering. To that order, I diverge from the utopian canon and touch upon alternative genres of feminist utopianism. Genres are largely affected by ideologies of the period in which they arise and become popular. It is sometimes the case that women engage in different types of utopian representations and may make use of alternative genealogies of feminist utopian thought. In

[70] For more in-depth analyses of Atwood's dystopia, see Harold Bloom, *Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale (Modern Critical Interpretations)* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2004).
[71] For a critical look at the concept of death of utopia from an apocalyptic standpoint, see John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

order to share diverse spaces of utopian imagination, I go back in time to find examples from the works of Christine de Pizan, Hadewijch of Brabant, and Hildegard of Bingen, but also look closer to home in spacetime when considering a groundbreaking text by Donna Haraway as eutopian. In the second section, I focus on the intersection of hope and the alleged contemporary death of utopia. Hope creates and fosters the idea that there is an attainable goal that may act as an improvement of the current situation. The question is what happens when a genre that embodies hope and is motivated by hope, seems to disappear as a viable genre in light of the rise of its counter-genre: dystopia. In the last section, I focus on my corpus in order to consider the utopian impulse in feminist dystopias. I argue that a utopian impulse can still exist in dystopian and critical utopian novels because these pieces of literature show dystopias as warnings instead of blueprints or methods. This is to say that critical utopias, with their resistance towards closure, can still advocate a utopian projection. In that sense, feminist dystopias are simultaneously expressions of feminist utopian despair and hope. As will become clear through my reading, feminist utopias are not dead at all. Even if dystopias seem to suggest the death of utopia, they imply nevertheless forms of hope, albeit expressed in warnings of catastrophes. In its essence, the politics of hope necessitates the community to go through the stage of imagining, designing, and possibly failing.

Recovering hope: protofeminist utopias before and after More's utopia

Utopia presents itself as a transhistorical genre, with diverse works from different cultures and consisting of different subgenres that resist exhaustive definitions. Because More's work has been such a dominant point of reference to all definitions of utopianism, I aim to unravel the central position of More's *Utopia* in relation to what came before and after. Taking a look at some of the core secondary literature on utopian fiction reveals how women's utopian literature has been cast aside and overlooked, even in studies that are critical of More's centrality. For

instance, one of the most published scholars of utopian thought and literature, Lyman Tower Sargent, published an article in 1976, in which he contended that most utopian studies focus on canonical works while there are various other valuable works in the periphery.[72] Sargent explains further that he would rather concentrate on works that are on the peripheries, and this could have included women's utopian writing. However, I did not come across references towards, for instance, Christine de Pizan or Margaret Cavendish in this article which at its core suggests decentering the bibliography of utopian literature. Sargent does touch upon, as he puts it, the "woman question" but he does so briefly and as an isolated matter:

> The "woman question" still exercises many writers, but they had little to add to the debate. And the other themes of the earlier period, reason, religion, science and technology, also continue. The only significant addition to the patterns involved is in the numbers of anti-utopian novels that are produced.[73]

I find it problematic that gender issues are almost dismissed as "the woman question" in such a brief mention without getting into the works of some of the women authors that are systematically overlooked. The statement "they had little to add to the debate" is one that is left unexplained by Sargent. Instead of bringing the overlooked into the picture, then, Sargent's article rather also requires an awareness and vigilance for the genealogy of women's utopian literature as those that are in the periphery.

To trace the genealogy of utopian literary histories, in this case women's utopian literature before More, it makes sense to start with consulting one of the fundamental works in the field of utopian literature: *The Utopia Reader* compiled by Sargent and Gregory Claeys, first

[72] Sargent, "Themes in Utopian Fiction in English Before Wells," 275.
[73] Ibid, 279.

published in 1999 and last updated in 2017. This core secondary source does not mention de Pizan or other women authors of utopias. In this reader, early utopias can be found in Hesiod's golden age, in Greek and Roman myths, in Vergil's *Fourth Eclogue*, in Saturnalia, the Feast of Fools, Carnival, and Cockaigne. Plato's *The Republic* is presented as the most cited early Western example of utopia. In my research of core secondary sources on utopian literature, it looks as if these important reference works are reciting the same authors and books after another, also in recent editions, concentrating on which author got published first or which author coined the term. Utopian works before More by women authors are easily neglected out of what seems to be an academic habit. To give an example:

> In 1516 Thomas More invented the genre to which these works are precursors. Though the propensity to social dreaming existed well before there was any utopian genre, from that point on utopian literature began to have the formal characteristics specified in the definitions above.[74]

Even though Claeys and Sargent accept that More had precursors, they do not mention any women authors who had written utopias prior to 1516. For a fundamental research compilation of the genre, such as *The Utopia Reader*, this feels inadequate and non-inclusive.

Likewise, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, edited by Claeys in 2010, has two categories listed in its index: "History" and "Literature." In the latter part, there is a chapter titled "Feminism and Utopianism." This section witnesses the first mention of de Pizan, which also demonstrates that, as an important author, she has not been mentioned in the previous sections despite having written a utopian work before More's *Utopia*. The *Companion* treats literature written by women as a special interest group so much so that important utopian

[74] Sargent and Claeys, *The Utopia Reader*, 3.

scholars refrain from mentioning these authors during their survey of the literature and add them separately as a minor detail. Apparently, also in the field of utopian studies, being a woman is a part of the secondary human experience whereas being a man is taken as the default human experience. This internal gender-biased aspect of both publications and research can also be observed in how utopian works of literature are perceived. This has been noticed by North American professor Alessa Johns, an expert on British literary and cultural history of the eighteenth century, who is the author of the section "Feminism and Utopianism." There, she argues that More's utopia could not have been considered a utopia for women:

> Women in particular have fared poorly in traditional blueprint utopias, where they have been forced to labour endlessly and bow to humourless patriarchs. Consequently feminist utopian authors and critics have generally sidestepped the blueprint form to privilege instead a 'process' or 'reproductive' or 'critical' model. What is surprising, and what will be explored here, is that this form of process-oriented feminist utopianism is not new. I will argue that it is not merely the product of what is called the first-, second and third-wave femnism of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Instead, process-oriented utopianism characterizes a large part of feminist utopian writing beginning in the late middle ages and continuing to today – from Christine de Pizan to Sarah Scott to Ursula K. Le Guin – and it appears emphatically in Enlightenment Britain: that is, before what is considered the modern women's movement.[75]

As Johns points out, in traditional utopias laid out by male authors, women have been assigned domestic roles or slave positions. Consequently, if feminist historians were writing the history of

[75] Johns, "Feminism and Utopianism," *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, 174.

feminist utopianism, they should not start from More's work since the utopian blueprint in his work does not provide betterment for women's rights and sociopolitical conditions. Johns argues this is also why women authors have moved away from blueprint utopias toward critical utopias in which the lack of closure of the text provides for a more free space to speculate different futures.

For now, what remains surprising in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* is that de Pizan is mentioned in one of the chapters within the context of feminism only, so it may be self-evident that non-blueprint or process utopias existed before More. Nowhere is de Pizan's work mentioned in the sections that give an overall survey of the utopian genre. This also holds for another frequently consulted secondary source: Sargent's *Utopianism* from the *A Very Short Introduction* series of the Oxford University Press. Again, de Pizan, who created a eutopian space in *The Book of the City of Ladies* as early as the fifteenth century, is not mentioned anywhere in this book either. This act of excluding the works of pre-modern women authors contributes to the cycle of overlooking and silencing utopias written by women and therefore feminist utopian voices. This not only perpetuates the idea that utopian literature is a genre dominated by male authors, but it also implies a certain blurring out or destruction of alternative histories of hope for everyone.

The strongest reason why women's literature has had to be unearthed is that genres, just as canons, are political constructs of the status quo and reflections of the power structures of their time. In eras when women were considered unfit to write, vote, or rule, their access to financial freedom, freedom of expression, and opportunities for publication were also limited, if not restricted to different degrees. As can be observed in the examples from the popular secondary core literature in the field, genres are largely affected by the prevalent ideologies of the authors, of literary critics, and of the period in which published works arise and find popularity among popular and academic audiences. There are many cases, however, of women

practicing and producing different expressions of, or subgenres of, utopian representations. Here I want to highlight some women authors of utopias that were published before and after More and at points did, but more often did not, find an appropriate place in the utopian canon. Furthermore, I want to highlight some utopian practitioners who may perhaps not have published utopias but actualized them in practice.

One medieval example of women's utopianism has already been mentioned in the previous section: the 'order' of Beguines. Beguines were not a religious or institutionalized order or movement. They did not follow a ruler; however, they did have a common way of living, dedication to chastity, humility, and godly commitment. They lived in beguinages "which could be single houses for as few as a handful of beguines or, as in Brugge, walled-in rows of houses enclosing a central court with a chapel where over a thousand beguines might live - a village of women within a medieval town or city."[76] It is by itself a feminist utopian act, albeit defined as such anachronistically, to survive in a medieval society ruled by men and under unchallenged patriarchy, and to form self-sufficient (monastic) communities of women. These communities have usually existed on lands with medium to low economic value but on lands where the women could work the soil and benefit from the harvest, thus leading a self-sustaining life. While some women lived alone in a house of their own within the community, others lived in some form of a dormitory. These micro-utopias welcomed several studious Beguines. According to a recent publication on beguinages, the historian Walter Simons explains that while the movement attracted many women from different walks of life for various durations, the pejorative connotation of the meaning behind the term used for these women ensued.[77] As a testament to their strong will, it is also in the records that some of these women left their

[76] Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines: The Forgotten Story*, 2. More practical information on beguinages can also be found on the UNESCO World Heritage entry: https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/855/
[77] The word "beguine" has some negative connotations, as can be seen here: https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=beguine

husbands, parents, children, and other relatives to start another life in these informal communities of women.[78]

One such Beguine was Hadewijch of Brabant from the thirteenth century, who wrote extensively and whose writings are considered among medieval masterpieces today. On her several works – unpublished at the time – Belgian medievalist Veerle Fraeters notes:

> In contrast to the works of the few other female religious authors of her era and region whose writings we know today (Hellgardt; Poor; Bollmann), Hadewijch seems not to have attempted publication of her work during her lifetime, nor to have trespassed against the limits prescribed for women: they could assume the role of religious leader within their community but could not preach, and so spread their thoughts in the public domain, without explicit authorization from the Church. […] Hadewijch seems not to have found, and probably did not even seek, the clerical support needed for promotion in the public sphere as a spiritual authority who had produced a book in the sense of an authoritative sacred text.[79]

Even if these humble Beguine authors wished to be published, as can be seen above, it was not easy or even possible for them to be published without approval from religious authorities. This limitation is one reason why the knowledge and the rich heritage concerning the utopian works of these women authors have reached the readers much later than they could have. At the time, one would have to formally ask for an endorsement from their beguinage and then permission from the pope, which is not an easy route for publication.[80]

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[78] Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries*, 12-1565, 35.
[79] Fraeters, "Hadewijch of Brabant and the Beguine Movement," *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages*, 51.
[80] Ibid.

In a period when women's writing, publication, or dissemination was not encouraged, exaltations of More as the formal initiator of the genre dominated literary scholarship. Literature professor and medievalist Karma Lochrie writes in this respect about "unmooring," that is, eliminating the notion that More's *Utopia* is where utopianism in literature has started:

> Reading forward, counter-historically perhaps, from some of the medieval experiments in utopian imagining, has the advantage of unmooring More's work from the insularity of its conception—that is, of reading it as if it were not the very first text in English literature to imagine an ideal commonwealth, because it is not. In addition, this reverse historicism has the potential to render the category of utopianism more capacious and flexible than it currently is under More's umbra.[81]

Lochrie's reading against chronological and canonical literary history may overturn the still untouchable superiority of More's utopia as one of the foundational texts, alongside Plato's *The Republic*, and gives the utopias of women authors a chance to be academically acclaimed and appreciated for their visionary, deconstructing, and eye-opening qualities. She suggests that reverse historicism can widen the category of utopianism so as to include more variations. She recommends, consequently, a more flexible and fluid understanding of utopianism:

> Instead of beginning our inquiry with the text of Thomas More's *Utopia* and all the presumptions about what constitutes utopianism derived from that text, what if we consider utopianism as a project that takes more than one literary form, incorporates more than a single philosophical perspective, spans religious and

[81] Lochrie, *Nowhere in the Middle Ages*, 183.

> secular realms, and even anticipates some of the quirks as well as the characteristic features of More's own utopia? In other words, what if we begin with a more capacious understanding of utopianism within which we might plot More's work, but in addition, many other texts that might *or might not* resemble it?[82]

Lochrie's notion invites inclusivity that contributes to the optimism of utopianism. Historically, women have engaged in different subject matters as well as (sub)genres compared to utopias authored by male authors. On the one hand, it is usually the case that utopias written by women authors focus more on the aspects of the private sphere such as the education of the children (as in Gilman's *Herland* series), the re-distribution of household tasks (as in Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*), reproduction (as in, among many others, Russ' *The Female Man*), and responsibilities concerning the family (as in Lessing's *The Cleft*). Environmental and ecological awareness is also one of the frequently emphasized aspects of utopian literature written by women (as in Gearheart's *The Wanderground*), though that is mostly because women are traditionally associated with a motherly and nurturing nature figure, which also leaves breadcrumbs for the relevance between the global climate crisis and utopian women authors' common choices for sustainable futures. On the other hand, utopias written by male authors take all facets of public life into account without much emphasis or radical change in the circumstances surrounding the private sphere, children, family relations, gender-based division of household responsibilities, or the issues that women face in life even though they comprise at least half the utopian population. With respect to this, utopian scholar Jane Donawerth states in her work on women's utopian fiction that while More focused on a journey outward, feminist

[82] Ibid, 6.

narratives concentrated on the journey and the life inward.[83] This pattern can be observed in various feminist utopian and dystopian works of literature from different eras, as also mentioned in this chapter.

In principle, feminist utopias concentrate on education, especially because historically women have had limited access to education. Education is thus seen as a method of liberation and gaining back power from women's immediate and structural oppressors. I see this as a legacy of Mary Wollstonecraft who was a pioneer advocate of women's educational rights. It is also one of the fundamental methods of forming a new sociopolitical structure. One such woman author who concentrated on the education of women was, as I previously mentioned in this chapter, Christine de Pizan, the fourteenth-century Italian author and poet in the French court, the first woman author on record to earn her living solely through her writing. Her eutopian work, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, is of great importance in the sense that it is a utopian literary work that shows positive examples of women in written literature in a period when these examples were not easily observed or consciously evoked in published literary works. In other words, women did not use to be the protagonists of literary works. It is also of importance to my argument that this is not a novel with a traditional narrative style that would conveniently fit the definition of More's utopia. This biographical catalog contains famous women from the past, using them as allegorical building blocks for the city of ladies. Christine is also a character in her own writing and works together with the personified virtues of Reason, Rectitude, and Justice. After they create the city together, Christine announces it as a safe haven for all women, asserting the solidarity of women and how they can be self-sufficient in educating and protecting one another.

Below is a conversation between Christine as the protagonist and the virtue personified as Reason:

[83] Donawerth, *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*, 6.

> "My lady, according to what I understand from you, woman is a most noble creature. But even so, Cicero says that a man should never serve any woman and that he who does so debases himself, for no man should ever serve anyone lower than him."
>
> She replied, "The man or the woman in whom resides greater virtue is the higher; neither the loftiness nor the lowliness of a person lies in the body according to the sex, but in the perfection of conduct and virtues."[84]

Breaking the prescribed and essentialist notions concerning gendered superiority, Reason provides the perspective that virtuous conduct is not gender-based, thus creating the grounds for equity within society. De Pizan's work was published in 1405, almost a century before More's work. As has been stated several times now, the book is still not generally known as one of the first utopian works of literature.

If I now move to utopias by women authors after More, one prominent example of utopian women's writing is from Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), the Duchess of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, who published numerous essays, plays, and poetry in the seventeenth century at a time when women writers and philosophers had a challenging time being accepted equally as their male peers. She was the first woman who was allowed to attend the meetings of The Royal Society, which is an academic society that caters to the advancement of scientific activity in its fields of expertise. This was centuries before the Society officially started allowing women to become candidate members, namely in 1945. Cavendish's intellect was appreciated, that is, centuries before the achievements of woman scholars were officially recognized in that academic context. Her proto-science fiction work *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing-*

[84] De Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 24 (ed. Earl J. Richards, 1982).

World from 1666 is the depiction of a utopian kingdom in another world that is divided into three parts: romancical,[85] philosophical, and fantastical. In these three parts, Cavendish lays out how a woman becomes the Empress of this world and how she (and by implication Cavendish) questions the seventeenth-century male-dominated fields of inquiry such as science, politics, and gender dynamics. Cavendish has a Hobbesian approach to government in that she is also a proponent of monarchy, believing that entrusting the agency and power of the whole society to one entity would be the right step in solving issues of societal inequity en masse.[86] She encompasses the distinct genre-based approaches of both satire and science fiction in her work, which became the subject of numerous academic studies comparing *The Blazing World* to More's *Utopia*.[87]

The book starts with a traveling merchant falling in love with a noblewoman who would not marry him due to his lower status. This mismatch in socioeconomic position between them urges the merchant to abduct the woman by ship. However, a *deus ex machina* storm kills everyone on board but for the abducted woman. The ship moves further towards the North Pole as if the winds are pulling it there, and then enters a parallel world populated with animl-like creatures that walk on two legs and speak an unfamiliar language. The woman is taken by the bear-like inhabitants to their city which is made up of underground caves. While being taken to the court of the Emperor of this world, she gets to see fox-like creatures, goose-like bird creatures, satyrs, and green-colored people as well. These people who speak the same language and live in what seems to be a harmonious co-existence are also very well equipped

[85] Here the word "romancical" refers to romance literature which concentrates on stories of chivalry, adventure and glory.
[86] See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* (1651) for Hobbes' illustration of his model of the social contract theory which essentially concerns the relationship of authority between the state and the individual.
[87] For more information on the life of Cavendish, see Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First: A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623-1673* (1957)

intellectually: they are philosophers, astronomers, politicians, chemists, and architects, among other professions and expertise.

In this book, absolute monarchy is chosen as the uniting force and the sacrifice for a hopeful eutopian future. This notion of monarchy is presented as the element that caters to the peaceful harmony of their world: "[…] nor no more but one Emperor, to whom they all submitted with the greatest duty and obedience, which made them live in a continued Peace and Happiness."[88] Upon meeting the woman, the Emperor "made her his Wife, and gave her an absolute power to rule and govern all that World as she pleased."[89] As a side note, no details are provided in the text about how this marriage took place or whether it was consensual. I interpret this choice as Cavendish taking and giving absolute governing power to her woman protagonist, regardless of the price she has to pay. It is also telling that the Empress actually receives so much governing power and the involvement of the Emperor in the text becomes less and less. Therefore, here we see two male characters, the merchant and the Emperor, trying to possess a woman while their actions only lead to giving her more and more power to design and create her own utopia. This turn of events also emphasizes that utopian hope shows up in unexpected places.

After her rise to power, the Empress then goes on to discuss the natural sciences with all the different groups of animal-like creatures and share her knowledge from her own world. In the end, the Empress observes that these people have no knowledge of Christianity or the Christian deity. Consequently, she builds churches and converts everyone to Christianity. Furthermore, the Empress goes into lengthy philosophical dialogues with the spirits about heaven, Adam and Eve, and the meaning of life. These spirits offer to send her a scribe spirit for her studies but the Empress has to choose a body for this spirit to fill in. After her suggestions of many influential

[88] Newcastle, Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, 130.
[89] Ibid.

male philosophers from history, the spirits advise her to pick a simple woman who would not mind working under a woman, like the "Duchess of Newcastle." The fact that men would be too proud or too misogynistic to work under her as a scribe, as contemplated by the spirits, shows that Cavendish had to put her hopes in a woman, or *any* woman, due to the fact that in her real life, she had to struggle among men to prove her intellect because of her gender and lack of formal education. In this context, it is important to remember that "Duchess of Newcastle" is Cavendish's title in real life.

Through the metafictional framing of this character, Cavendish finds a safe way to express her frustrations with the gender politics of her time. Together with the Duchess, the Empress decides to create a "celestial" world, seeing the impossibility of creating a sustainable eutopia as a "terrestrial" world. This move from designing an actual utopia to a fantasy utopia underlines the Blochian notion that utopian thinking itself is very crucial also for the creation of utopian worlds. To stress her utopian creative process even stronger, this is how Cavendish starts her book:

> The end of reason, is truth; the end of fancy, is fiction: but mistake me not, when I distinguish *fancy* from *reason*; I mean not as if fancy were not made by the rational parts of matter; but by *reason* I understand a rational search and enquiry into the causes of natural effects; and by *fancy* a voluntary creation or production of the mind, both being effects, or rather actions of the rational parts of matter; of which, as that is a more profitable and useful study than this, so it is also more laborious and difficult, and requires sometimes the help of fancy, to recreate the mind, and withdraw it from its more serious contemplations. And this is the

> reason, why I added this piece of fancy to my philosophical observations, and joined them as two worlds at the ends of their poles.[90]

Their celestial utopia is called Blazing World, which makes the book a metanarrative on the process of Cavendish writing a utopian book. Together they create many worlds that they deem to have failed because they will not be perfect for everyone. Even though Cavendish seems to favor absolute monarchy in her utopian thinking, she still sees the pitfalls it can create in the creation of a conflict-free eutopia. Consequently, in this protofeminist book, utopian hope is found and also recovered in a parallel world where the leader/author decides that the perfect utopia only exists in fantasies.

Here I will move on from philosophical visions to a real-life community in another protofeminist utopian work of literature. As a member of the Bluestockings, a women's suffragette society of education in eighteenth-century England, Sarah Scott (1720-1795) led a life plagued by disease, isolation, and poverty. After the dissolution of her marriage, she dedicated her life to social work, helping poor and abandoned women and children, which hints at her interest in imagining a eutopian society where women and children received nourishment and support by default. After the publication of her book, she left her husband to devote herself to the formation of separatist women's communities.

Written in 1762, Scott's *A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent*, or with its full title *A Description Of Millenium Hall And The Country Adjacent. Together With The Characters Of The Inhabitants And Such Historical Anecdotes And Reflections As May Excite In The Reader Proper Sentiments Of Humanity, And Lead The Mind To The Love Of Virtue. By 'A Gentleman On His Travels'*, is formulated as an epistolary frame tale. It is narrated by a male character, named Sir George Ellison, who happens to discover the utopian space referred to as

[90] Ibid, 124.

the Millenium Hall and afterward decides to create his own utopia. Each section engages in the life story of one of the inhabitants of the Millenium Hall.

Millenium Hall portrays a community led by women of high social standing who work together to enhance the lives of those around them. They establish a rug factory providing employment to the less fortunate, enhance the environment by creating parks and gardens, advocate for the ethical treatment of animals, establish schools for local children, offer employment opportunities to the disabled, and arrange care for the sick. These initiatives can be easily characterized as utopian acts, reflecting an idealistic vision for societal improvement. Amid descriptions of their community endeavors, the narrative includes the women's poignant life stories, detailing their challenging pasts and underscoring their earlier suffering as victims before finding refuge in Millenium Hall. As in various narratives of women's utopias, the societal emphasis is first and foremost on education. Their society is centered around a devout religious life and women's companionship, which emphasizes the influence of the beguinage movement mentioned above.[91] All the sexual acts in the novel are in the spectrum of rape or another sin and there is no romantic love but only non-sexual and pious friendship.

The narrator Sir George Ellison, during a journey to his northern retreat, unexpectedly stumbles upon a delightful society known as Millenium Hall after his transport breaks down – a common colonial discovery narrative trope. This society is comprised of exceptional women who are actively involved in various intellectual and artistic pursuits. The narrator is deeply impressed by their talents, manners, and the overall harmony that defines their lives. Despite the unforeseen circumstance, the ladies warmly welcome this stranger man and his companion, urging them to stay until their transport is repaired. Their first evening there unfolds with a family concert that showcases the musical talents of the ladies and other performers. The narrator

[91] See Ana M. Acosta "Transparency and the Enlightenment Body: Utopian Space in Sarah Scott's Millenium Hall and Sade's The 120 Days of Sodom," edited by Brenda Tooley and Nicole Pohl. *Gender and Utopia in the Eighteenth Century Essays in English and French Utopian Writing*. Taylor and Francis, 2016, 107-119.

is entranced by the unique atmosphere of Millenium Hall and expresses a desire to extend his stay in the company of these extraordinary ladies. The narrative accentuates the virtues, talents, and benevolence of the ladies and offers a detailed glimpse into their daily lives and the enchanting surroundings of Millenium Hall.

The next morning when Sir George Ellison wakes up, he sees an old woman and asks her for more information about this commune and she responds:

> There are twelve of us that live here. We have every one a house of two rooms, as you may see, beside other conveniences, and each a little garden, but though we are separate, we agree as well, perhaps better, than if we lived together, and all help one another. Now, there is neighbour Susan, and neighbour Rachel; Susan is lame, so she spins clothes for Rachel; and Rachel cleans Susan's house, and does such things for her as she cannot do for herself. The ladies settled all these matters at first, and told us, that as they, to please God, assisted us, we must in order to please him serve others; and that to make us happy they would put us in a way, poor as we are, to do good to many. Thus neighbour Jane who, poor woman, is almost stone deaf, they thought would have a melancholy life if she was to be always spinning and knitting, seeing other people around her talking, and not be able to hear a word they said, so the ladies busy her in making broths and caudles and such things, for all the sick poor in this and the next parish, and two of us are fixed upon to carry what they have made to those that want them; to visit them often, and spend more or less time with them every day according as they have, or have not relations to take care of them.[92]

[92] Scott, *A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent*, 17.

In this description, it is possible to envisage a beguinage formation a with communal cohabitation plan and an architectural layout. The ways in which these women support each other physically, financially, and emotionally underline the compassionate utopian tradition that the author follows. The main formulation is still monastic, that one should serve and help others as a religious way of living; however, this reasoning becomes a very strong hope for the community. The citizens do everything they can to make sure their utopia stays eutopian for the sake of going to heaven one day, arguably the most popular utopian narrative of all.

Here I will give one last example of hope in pre-modern feminist utopian literature. Annie Denton Cridge (1825-1875) was an English suffragist who moved to the United States where she became a lecturer and author, and published also with her husband. Her satirical work *Man's Rights; or, How Would You Like It?: Comprising Dreams*, written in 1870, is a narrative of dreams taking place in a society where traditional gender roles are reversed.

In this role reversal narrative that favors the rights of women, the emphasis is on gender equity, improving the conditions of women, and showing men the conditions of women through the framing of role reversal. Each dream illustrates a specific characteristic of gender politics and relationships. In some dreams, gender equality is prominent, while in others, there is a complete role reversal, depicting a scenario where men experience oppression. In one of the dreams, for example, the men have lives directly mirroring those of the stereotypical roles of overworked and underappreciated working class women. These characters not only encompass the traditional gender-based responsibilities associated with women but also the emotional labor that often befalls women traditionally. This gender-mirroring role reversal acts as a tool to enable the readers to witness and reflect on the daily experiences of most women in that society. Furhermore, in one other dream, we encounter a lecture that addresses the urgency and necessity for the rights of men:

> Let men be educated as liberally as woman; let him be made to feel the value of a sound mind, and that the brightest ornament to man, as well as woman, is intellect: then, and not until then, will he stand forth in all his beauty. We frequently hear that woman's mind is superior to man's, and therefore he ought not to have equal educational facilities. If, as is stated by the opponents of man's rights, men are naturally and necessarily inferior to women, it must follow that they should have superior opportunities for mental culture.[93]

In succeeding dreams, the main character keeps exploring men's rights in different time periods as women slowly lose political power, thus the gender roles are again reversed. The lecture on men's rights sounds as if a woman of that period could have written this for her gender-biased conditions. Lack of equal access to education, belittlement, and infantilization based on a perceived notion of women being of lesser intellect, receiving attention and glorification only for their external beauty, and rampant declaration of their mental and physical inferiority were very common in the period during which these protofeminist authors wrote their works.

At this point, I want to ask once more why it is important who named the genre. Why is the convention of naming, based on More's work, more important to mention than the women authors who wrote utopian narratives before or after More? Searching for the answer to these questions in secondary sources, I want to underline the first sentence of Sargent's book on utopianism: "The word 'utopia' was coined by Thomas More (1478-1535) as the name of the imaginary country he described in his short 1516 book written in Latin and published as Libellus vere aureus nec minus salutaris […]."[94] From a critical postcolonial lens, following the discovery of a land, naming, thereby christening, a newly discovered land is one of the most evident acts of

[93] Cridge, *Man's Rights; or, How Would You Like It?: Comprising Dreams*, 22.
[94] Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2.

claiming that territory for oneself. In a way, the object of desire is baptized and defined in relation to and in comparison with the one who does the naming. Resembling baptism in this sense, South African postcolonial scholar Anne McClintock interprets Luce Irigaray's ideas on naming a child and attributes the idea of baptizing a child to naming an allegedly newly discovered land. As quoted by McClintock, Irigaray argues that not having a womb is the most unbearable shortcoming of men, as a man's contribution to reproduction is thus disputable.[95] To remedy this loss, McClintock argues, men reduce women's contribution to the process of reproduction and mothering: "Hence the imperial fixation on naming, on acts of 'discovery,' baptismal scenes and male birthing rituals."[96] In Christian baptism rituals, McClintock retells that the child is named by a male figure after the father, thus aiming to diminish the influence of the mother. She likens this to the discovery of inhabited lands as a redundant act: "During these extravagant acts of discovery, imperial men reinvent a moment of pure (male) origin and mark it visibly with one of Europe's fetishes: a flag, a name on a map, a stone, or later perhaps, a monument."[97] Not unlike naming a land, naming a genre is also setting its rules and defining its perimeter; what it includes, and what it excludes. As I had mentioned before, imagining and defining new worlds have been first and foremost within the scope of the privileged. Therefore, it is safe to argue that the worlds imagined by women may not have resembled the utopias of male authors of the pre- and early modern eras.

This gender-based double standard has for a long period stood in the way of dreaming, creating, producing, and sharing feminist utopias of diversity and autonomy. These restrictions are reflected in the availability and abundance of utopian literature written by women authors. The pervasive metanarrative of Plato's *The Republic* and More's *Utopia* being the earliest and greatest works of utopian literature has also been a theoretical restriction; syllabi, dissertations,

[95] Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 23.
[96] McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, 29.
[97] Ibid, 30.

citations, teaching, and research efforts are based on such metanarratives. This limited scope leads to neglecting the works of women authors from medieval eras, pre- and early modern pieces of literature, authors who diverged from the traditional genre of utopia proper, and from women authors who thought outside the box in their respective eras. If Bloch's definition of utopia is taken as the starting point, however, women's medieval or early-modern utopianism would more easily be considered among the foundational examples of utopian literature. The fiction and non-fiction works of women could be considered utopian, that is to say, if the definition of utopian literature would be wider – and not only in medieval or early modern times.

For instance, Donna Haraway's work "A Cyborg Manifesto" from 1985 can be considered a utopian work despite being located within a completely different field of critical theory, far removed from traditional utopian literature. Haraway bases her arguments on the concept of the cyborg and criticizes traditional notions of gender politics through this analysis of the cyborg:

> This chapter is an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction. It is also an effort to contribute to socialist-feminist culture and theory in a postmodernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end.[98]

Haraway starts the exposition of her critical manifesto by announcing the utopian aspects of her work. She imagines a post-gender world in a utopian sense, one that does not have an origin or an end, which runs counter to the classical idea of a utopia as a viable end goal. As Sarah Jones noted above, feminist utopias tend to be more process-oriented as the product is unreachable.

[98] Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 150.

For Haraway as well, the described utopia is not something of the future but something that relates to the present, where the hope is that a feminist utopian existence can be established by means of political solidarity:

> I do not know of any other time in history when there was greater need for political unity to confront effectively the dominations of 'race', 'gender', 'sexuality', and 'class'. I also do not know of any other time when the kind of unity we might help build could have been possible.[99]

Haraway calls for a utopian momentum of intersectionality that would challenge the singular unities of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Since humanity is historically entangled in these dominant metanarratives, Haraway's subversive utopian vision is post-humanist, post-gender, and post-race, even though "A Cyborg Manifesto" is not a utopian work of fiction based on the definitions of blueprint utopian narratives.[100]

In "The Critical Manifesto: Marx and Engels, Haraway, and Utopian Politics," gender studies professor Kathi Weeks argues that manifestos can be considered utopian "as exercises in thinking collective life and imagining futurity."[101] The manifesto genre occupies a space between fiction and non-fiction:

> The manifesto form in particular demonstrates that utopian hope can be elicited as much from the analytical arsenal and stylistic practices of a text as from its specific claims and explicit purposes. More elusive yet, slipping through the

[99] Ibid, 157.
[100] See Stephanie Peebles Tavera. "Utopia, Inc.: A Manifesto for the Cyborg Corporation." *Science Fiction Studies* 44, no. 1, 2017, p. 21 for an environmental ethics perspective towards Haraway's cyborgs in the context of utopianism.
[101] Weeks, "The Critical Manifesto: Marx and Engels, Haraway, and Utopian Politics," 217.

> cracks of the boundaries of any specific form or genre, utopian expressions may also contain in the affective texture of a text—in, for example, the joyful rhetoric of Nietzsche philosophizing with a hammer but also in the dizzying creativity that generates and can be generated from Haraway's conceptual innovation and theoretical pastiche. Instead of the more typical manifesto's authoritative certainty and aggressive drawing of lines in the sand, Haraway persuades or even seduces the reader through her analytical agility and unexpected syntheses of ideas.[102]

Weeks argues that the poetics of manifesto writing can contain more utopian hope than the poesis. In this example, the form also conveys the function. Haraway's perspective on manifesto and utopianism joins the manifesto genre to utopianism while also delivering a more flexible and fluid analysis of the manifesto genre, blurring the lines between the two genres. This alternative approach to utopian thinking and formulation through manifesto writing is a transgeneric example of utopian writing. However, again, "A Cyborg Manifesto" is rarely considered among utopian writings. This work is one among many examples where the narrow definition of utopia plays a role in excluding women's various utopian narratives and creative endeavors from the scope of utopian literature, utopian theory, and utopianism as a whole.

Looking beyond the metanarratives of how the utopian genre should be defined, one may continue to see more and more feminist utopias in the past and in contemporary literature. This scholarly endeavor is relevant because it can provide us with a genealogy of feminist hope that could in turn function as a source of hope. This source has become more relevant in times when the light of feminist utopias seems to have been darkened by a growing number of dystopias. This growing number raised the question of whether the genre of utopianism in contemporary times should not be considered 'dead.'

[102] Ibid, 221.

The so-called death of a utopian literary imagination and the rise of anti-utopianism

The very idea of the death of utopia is understandable in a period where a rise in dystopian literature can be observed in mainstream media.[103] Utopian scholars, such as Thomas Moylan, Krishan Kumar, M. Keith Booker, and Lyman Tower Sargent, consider this development relevant in relation to the rise of late-stage capitalism, and the consequent oppressive politics and conditions throughout the world.[104] Thomas Moylan phrases it as follows:

> Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile grounds for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination.[105]

Moylan is explicit about the causes of death of utopia, that all find their ground in the twentieth century. There is a definite shift from eutopian prose describing paradise to dystopian prose describing hell on earth. Choosing to construct a dystopian setting instead of a eutopian one signals a lack of confidence in the eutopian thought's "capacity to be effective, as well perhaps as a failure of the utopian imagination."[106]

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[103] See Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History* (2016) for a comprehensive overview of dystopia: a theoretical and prehistorical account, the impact of centuries of totalitarianism in different spaces and contexts, and the reflection of the historical and political tensions in literature.

[104] See Thomas Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (2000) for an analysis of the modern dystopian impulse in fiction. See also Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia in Modern Times* (1987) for a genealogy of anti-utopian thought in dystopian contexts. See also M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* (1994) for expanded analyses on utopian fiction as social critique. See also *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* by Lyman Tower Sargent, Roland Schaer and Gregory Claeys (eds) (2000).

[105] Moylan, *Scraps of Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, xi.

[106] Kumar, "The Ends of Utopia," 550.

Tales of catastrophe can be more alluring and effective in garnering more attention toward the conditions being critiqued, or it can be seen as a critical mode of resisting a status quo that has a dystopian quality. The question remains, then, what to do with Bloch's idea of wishful thinking as a continuous effort in the pursuit of a better life. For him, the spirit of hope and utopia is pervasive, regardless of whether this spirit is reflected in the form of novel or urban architecture, or lullabies.[107] In agreement with Bloch's line of thought, considering the utopian project a failure because the plot ends up transforming into a dystopian setting, in the end, implies the loss of the utopian hope that created the utopian project in the first place.

Apart from the supposed death of utopia, strong arguments have recently been brought forward against utopianism and utopian hope, such as those of the North American musicologist Richard Taruskin in his compilation of anti-utopian essays:

> But what utopians envision is not a better world. It is a perfect world - or in Kant's two-centuries-old formulation, "a perfectly constituted state" - that utopians wish to bring about. And that is what makes them dangerous, because if perfection is the aim, and compromise taboo, there will always be a shortfall to correct - a human shortfall. There will always be those whose presence mars your idea of perfection or mine, and if you or I really believe that we have the means of perfecting the world, you may feel justified in doing away with me, or I with you. When communism "fell," the intellectual world divided into two camps: those who said it was time to go back to the drawing board and those who said it was time to get rid of drawing boards. I am utterly of the latter persuasion, and have been devoting myself wholly - both as scholar and as journalist - to the destruction

[107] The ubiquity of utopias has become a contemporary topic and revived interest in Bloch's perspective on it. See Cooper, Davina. *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces*. Duke University Press, 2014 and Balasopoulos Antonis. "Factories Utopias Decoration and Upholstery: On Utopia Modernism and Everyday Life." *Utopian Studies* 2014 pp. 268–298.

> of drawing boards, that is, the hubristic fantasy that people can design a perfect world and then, at whatever cost, bring it into being.[108]

Taruskin argues that utopians aim at perfection, not just betterment. The theorization of a perfect state and then supporting this state with establishments that would fix the state of perfection are the main building blocks of blueprint utopian literature. Taruskin finds this dangerous in the sense that there is not much room for compromise, let alone failure. For him, imperfection is an essential aspect of life and human nature. This resistance against the notion of utopian perfectionism rests on the idea that everybody's version of a perfect world will be different in either larger concepts or only in details. Taruskin finds such authors and scholars arrogant in their belief that perfection is attainable and fixable. And indeed, literary history has shown time and again that utopian projection tends to fail when perfection is the main goal. This is, however, largely a facet of blueprint utopianism whereas utopias written that focus on the improvement of women's rights and conditions steer away from close-ended eutopias and lean towards open-ended, critical utopias, which may even be dystopias. Perhaps the most important aspect of utopianism to which scholars object is the perspectivism that is inherent in blueprint utopianism. One person's utopia is theoretically another person or group's dystopia, which has been a considerable factor in the downfall of both eutopian and dystopian worlds in literature.

The supposedly natural "human shortfall" that Taruskin mentions above, which implies there can never be a perfect world, resonates with scholarly analyses of people striving for alternative worlds under one banner. In her work "Academic Feminisms: Between Disidentification, Messy Everyday Utopianism, and Cruel Optimism," Swedish gender studies professor Nina Lykke consults Judith Butler's ideas on political disidentification as a negative factor in group relations:

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[108] Taruskin, *The Danger of Music And Other Anti-Utopian Essays*, xii.

> Butler discusses how imagined political communities gathering under the banner of a unifying category (e.g. 'woman' or 'queer') must always fail to establish the unity which the signifier seems to promise. The performative political signifier can never capture the complex web of intersectional social relations in which the community's participants are always already embedded. According to Butler, participants will always be socioculturally more diverse than the singular category under which they organize. Some dimensions of the participants' diversity will always be excluded by the unifying signifier. [109]

In the gender separatist utopian novels I examine in this dissertation, the unifying category would most commonly be cisgender women. Choosing to separate from the rest of society and become self-sufficient in the absence of men is the fundamental act that initiates the eutopian projects of these women. However, without considering the intersectionality and nuances of sociopolitical factors of their condition, separating merely based on assigned sex ends up producing a failed utopia where people of all sexes experience disappointment and disillusionment from the eutopian mechanism. Apparently, homogeneity, one unifying category, or sharing one identity in this regard is not a feasible foundation on which to build a eutopia. This is one aspect of why gender separatist utopian novels do not have happy endings even though the need for a separate safe space is well-founded and the space itself is still maintained as it was intended.

Another anti-utopian resistance against blueprint utopias would be the totalitarianism that is inherent in the application of such top-down metanarrative projects. Without individual or

[109] Lykke, "Academic Feminisms: Between Disidentification, Messy Everyday Utopianism, and Cruel Optimism," 3.

group opposition, separatist utopias in the corpus I have found are totalitarian in their political regimes, as can be observed in various examples from literature, such as in Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* where breaking the rules of their community results in exile or as in Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* which presents a parallel universe where some men who do not exhibit characteristics traditionally deemed masculine are surgically reassigned as women. Blueprints come with obligations to exercise the plans regardless of personal opinions and preferences within that group, which creates friction in the diegetic society, rendering the blueprint inapplicable in the long run.

Utopian scholar Jorge Bastos da Silva quotes Joseph Conrad writing to H. G. Wells, on the "fundamental difference in the impulse or temperament that drives" eutopian and dystopia imagination: "The difference between us is fundamental. You don't care for humanity but think they are to be improved. I love humanity but know they are not."[110] This quote emphasizes the importance of intention behind the motivation to portray a different and better way of life. In eutopias, the mechanisms of the narrative are beyond the time and space in which readers find themselves. That is, the readers are neither at the beginning nor the end of the existence and development stages of these eutopias. In this sense, they can never be conceived of as active participants in the establishment and improvement processes of a given eutopia. However, when dystopias are portrayed, there is more active motivation and proactive imagination in the plot to change the dystopia into a eutopia. Dystopias provoke the impulse toward the improvement of humankind, thus making use of hope in a more indirect, but perhaps also more constructive way. That is to say: even though dystopia is considered to be a negative approach to world-building, I believe there is more space and appreciation for hope in the darkness of dystopias than in the already established and perfectionist norms of blueprint eutopias.

[110] Silva, *The Epistemology of Utopia: Rhetoric, Theory and Imagination*, 555.

If utopianism is considered from a Blochian standpoint, the genre of utopia cannot be dead as ubiquitous wishful thinking is embedded everywhere in history and in contemporary culture. Hope resides in political theories, in social state government services, and in personal practices of improvement. Hope and the possibility of improving upon the human condition are supposed to be always present. In the gender separatist utopias I examine, the women, either collectively as a society or only within smaller councils, desire and implement a society without men in the hope this will improve their lives. Their fantasy of a good life concerns avoiding certain characteristics that have been traditionally attributed to men in their respective historical and sociopolitical contexts. As these texts also show, their notion of biological essentialism is defied by the impossibility of gender-based homogeneity across the society depicted. The fact that women's societies in these novels are motivated by the hope of creating a good place that is free from physical and emotional threats of violence, might make them seem an expression of what North American philosopher and cultural theorist Lauren Berlant defined as "cruel optimism," an optimism marked by the limits of the benefits of hope:

> A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.[111]

[111] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1.

In my corpus, biologically essentialist utopias, as the product of a desire for self-preservation, do not bring about non-violence, not even overall societal contentment. This is not the effect of hope blocking or impeding improvement, however. It is rather a matter of failing. If there is cruel optimism involved, it is when both women and men in the described societies suffer due to the decisions and actions that come with the cruel optimism of the gender separatist utopian mentality followed by the leaders in these novels.

As opposed to cruel optimism and as opposed to the idea that hope should always be expressed by and embodied in positive wishful thinking, Berlant proposes the following distinction:

> Utopia conventionally depends on stimulating desire and hope in order to inspire and motivate change. Dystopias, by contrast, aim to stimulate action in order to resist or halt what is feared to be emerging. Dystopic narratives assume change, that the world is not a static or stable place but moving toward, indeed in some cases already enacting, its own ruin.[112]

Berlant's distinction is inherently helpful in my dealing with eutopias that more often than not turn into dystopias. Even though positive utopian thought still exists, some aspects of utopianism itself may create false hope by suggesting that perfection is achievable, sustainable, or even desirable. While betterment rather than perfection is the more attainable goal and eutopias more often than not are mirror images of dystopias, the perception that dystopian representations are on the rise can be a sign of the failure in trusting eutopian imaginations or positive visualizations of the future. To announce the death of utopia, whether feminist, gender separatist, or otherwise, may be necessary precisely to open up the possibility of action, of resistance implied in

[112] Ibid, 31.

dystopias. In what follows I will argue that the tendency of considering dystopian narratives as a stance *against* utopian thought devalues their potential in providing opportunities for utopian change.

Feminist utopian hope in seemingly hopeless dystopias

The conflation of content, context, and intent in utopian literature is common. What I mean to say is that we, as readers, make positive or negative attributions of the input we receive. At times we do not fully know or estimate what the author intended to convey implicitly or explicitly. To decide whether an intentional space is meant as eutopia or dystopia is dependent also on our own context and the lens we are reading the text with. All factors considered, the concept of hope to be found in eutopias and dystopias alike is what I aim to examine in this section.

If the 1980s brought a dystopian shift in utopian literature, this shift seemed to imply a historical fissure. A classic utopian example of hope is Mary Bradley Lane's novel *Mizora: A Prophecy*, published in 1880. In this novel, Bradley Lane, a North American feminist science fiction author and also teacher, depicts a feminist utopian setting where women maintain their communities by reproducing via parthenogenesis and practicing eugenics. The history of this imagined land includes a military government that falls and brings chaos to the country. An all-woman sociopolitical order replaces the military rule of the past while the remaining men are ambiguously eliminated. In the novel, a Russian aristocrat and author called Vera stumbles upon Mizora during her travels after a shipwreck. After living with the Esquimaux for a while, she then sails into the open sea to find her footing. When she asks for the land she sees ahead, she is told that "'[a]cross that no white man's foot has ever stepped," and soon after she launches herself to the open sea with the boat the community constructed for her.[113] First, with every strong wave, she is moving with hope. Then, however, things get worse:

[113] Bradley Lane, *Mizora: A Prophecy*, 9.

> On and on, and on I rowed until the shore and my late companions were lost in the gloomy distance. On and on, until fatigued almost to exhaustion; and still, no land. A feeling of uncontrollable lonesomeness took possession of me. Silence reigned supreme. No sound greeted me save the swirl of the gently undulating waters against the boat, and the melancholy dip of the oars. Overhead, the familiar eyes of the night were all that pierced the gloom that seemed to hedge me in. My feeling of distress increased when I discovered that my boat had struck a current and was beyond my control. Visions of a cataract and inevitable death instantly shot across my mind. Made passive by intense despair, I laid down in the bottom of the boat, to let myself drift into whatever fate was awaiting me.[114]

Vera's account of the events starts hopefully and melodically as if she is singing a rowing shanty. Her hope slowly and gradually wears out as melancholy fills its place. In the end, she accepts her unfortunate fate and submits to the violent sea, awaiting death. It is exactly after this turn of events from hope to despair that she awakes to find her boat ashore in the land of women, Mizora. Her hopeful endeavor and perseverance have brought her to a newfound utopia.

The shift to the prevalence of dystopian literature in the 1980s shows that eutopias are not the only expression of the positive utopian impulse that drives the imaginary community towards a better society and sustainable communal growth. Eutopian ideas continue to be practiced and challenged in dystopian as well as critical utopian novels. These dystopian novels, such as Tepper, *The Gate to Women's Country* or *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, do not present blueprint eutopias that imply utopianism as method; rather, they reflect on the utopian ideas via a warning for what could befall the community if they are not careful. While eutopias present

[114] Ibid, 10.

society from a positive and enlightened perspective in which perfection is being achieved by following the utopian blueprint, dystopias portray this impression from the other way around where the blueprint has failed and precarious misery has overcome the society. In the former, one can see the positive projections and blueprints while in the latter the negative events can be taken as warnings. Critical utopias diverge from this axis in that they portray societies that set out to be better than contemporary society but with problems that are left open-ended in the course of the narrative progression. Russ' *The Female Man* is a great example of this with a narrative twist. Because the novel presents four intersecting plots in separate timelines, the reader gets to see warning signs between different worlds: one that looks like ours, one that looks like the Great Depression never ended, one that is a separatist feminist utopian paradise, and one that is the ultimate dystopia where women and men are at war. By employing this narrative technique, Russ was able to put critical attention to various sides of the feminist utopian project.

With regard to both critical utopias and dystopias, I argue that the feminist utopian impulse is technically not dead but precisely lives on in feminist critical utopias that can also be examples of dystopian literature. There is much to be said in defense of dystopias, as utopian scholar Keith M. Booker explains:

> If the main value of literature in general is its ability to make us see the world in new ways, to make us capable of entertaining new and different perspectives on reality, then dystopian fiction is not a marginal genre. It lies at the very heart of the literary project. […] Dystopian thought does not disable utopian thought, but merely acts as a healthy opposing voice that helps prevent utopian thought from going stale.[115]

[115] Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*, 176.

On the surface, the dystopian genre exhibits an undesirable turn of events; however, the interpretation and function of these negative fictional events can serve other purposes that simply portray a gloom of despair. For one, the tension between eutopias and dystopias may connote the tension between hopeful utopian thought as expressed in the novels and the dystopian reality of the worlds within which these novels appear. The "healthy opposing voice" challenges stagnant ways of being, and may motivate people to notice ways to improve. In Booker's words:

> In the final analysis, the most important contribution of dystopian thought may be to provide opposing voices that challenge utopian ideals, thus keeping those ideals fresh and viable and preventing them from degenerating into dogma. By taking dystopian fiction seriously and by using the dystopian impulse as a focal point for polyphonic confrontations among literature, popular culture, and social criticism we as readers can contribute to this challenge, which is ultimately a positive one. Indeed, it may be that dystopian warnings of impending nightmares are ultimately necessary to preserve any possible dream of a better future.[116]

For Booker, the most important aspect of dystopian thought towards a eutopian future is providing opposing voices that show the parts of the dystopia that can become dogma and, by implication, oppression and the parts that need opportunities for change and growth. Dystopian thought urges the reader and the critic to step outside the fictional narrative, observe the outside world, and bring healthy criticism to the contemporary status quo. Therefore, challenging utopian ideals with a dystopian voice can argumentatively contribute to the utopian impulse of betterment.

[116] Ibid, 177.

In arguments against utopian thought, utopianism is considered to be aiming at perfection and perfection alone. However, as utopian theory has evolved over the centuries of theory and literature, and more subgenres have developed without utopian thought, it has become evident that perfection is unattainable because of one decisive characteristic: it assumes closure. *Aiming* at perfection is the real utopian act; not *achieving* perfection and fixing a society forever at this stable point in time. Where there is closure, there is decay because the citizens of that utopia will continue to evolve while the blueprint becomes outdated every second. Constant betterment based on utopian hope and principles, as opposed to aiming at reaching perfection, may be ways to achieve a eutopia that fulfills its citizens' desires.

Aspects of utopianism that are not focused on blueprints for perfection can be traced in critical and open-ended utopias. This is the point where traditional utopian fiction establishes a connection with subversive speculative fiction, as the British utopian scholar Lucy Sargisson argues:

> [t]hey are openended texts that let go of the notion of perfection. By so doing, they escape the finality of utopias of perfection. Their content tends to be marked by various manifestations of discontent or wariness towards the concept of perfection. Rather than waxing lyrical about the nature of the perfect society that is imagined, these texts tend to focus instead on satire, on speculation, on ridiculing past universals.[117]

The notion of perfection in utopian literature necessitates the fixation on communal principles and requires homogeneity within the community, which hinders and debilitates the ongoing nature of continuous utopian improvement. Manifestations of discontent, which are expressed by

[117] Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*, 20.

protagonists in utopian novels when they realize the disillusionment they feel within their community, are necessary emotional evaluations for the maintenance of truly utopian spaces, that is to say, open-ended spaces. Open-ended utopias without a fixed closure are especially crucial for the case of feminist utopianism due to the evolving and varying needs of women; needs that cannot be homogenized.[118]

A recent title, *Utopian Thinking in Law, Politics, Architecture and Technology*, with the subtitle *Hope in a Hopeless World*, interrogates the ubiquitous utopian thinking. In this book, Marta Soniewicka, professor of law and legal ethics, argues for the value and necessity of social imagination in connection with the concept of hope:

> Hope should neither be confused with optimism, nor with a mere expectation or prediction. Hope is rather a special kind of virtue – an attitude of trust in the unknown future, faithfulness in the hour of darkness in the source of inspiration and direct participation in the process of creation of the better world to come. […] Having hope does not mean denying the reality with all its atrocities; however, it is a refusal to accept the hopelessness of one's own situation or the world's situation. [119]

In the end, the problematization of hope focuses on whether that hope reflects empty optimism or whether it motivates action. Feminist critical and dystopian novels reject predetermined conclusions and closures and establish spaces that encourage the free exploration of a different life. Utopian hope, in this context, is obscured beneath the warnings pertaining to the past. I

[118] For further research on human nature in the context of utopian literature, see Gorman Beauchamp, "Imperfect Men in Perfect Societies: Human Nature in Utopia." *Philosophy and Literature* 31 no. 2, 2007, p. 280-293; and Nivedita Bagchi. *A Perfect World for Imperfect People?: Theories of Human Nature in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction*. BiblioBazaar, 2009.
[119] Bart van Klink, Marta Soniewicka and Leon van den Broeke, "Introduction: A return to utopia," *Utopian Thinking in Law, Politics, Architecture and Technology* (2022): 8.

would like to argue here that the hope discovered beneath the warnings is just as valid and fruitful as the perceived and at times biased positivity found in blueprint eutopias.

Conclusion: Unearthing optimistic feminist utopianism

In this chapter, I have argued against the notion that utopia, or utopian hope, is dead or that utopianism is an endeavor in vain. More importantly, I have argued that despite the abundance of feminist dystopias, feminist utopianism is not dead. It rather finds life in dystopias, even when the eutopian intention gets expressed through the expression of failed blueprint utopias. Italian utopian scholar Raffaella Baccolini's words resonate well with my perspective in this chapter: "Utopia is maintained in dystopia, traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with no space for hope in the story, only outside the story: only by considering dystopia as a warning can we as readers hope to escape such a dark future."[120] As mentioned, the 1980s brought a dystopian shift in utopian literature. Since then, open-ended critical utopias have been favored over blueprint utopianism. Resisting a fixed ending and closure, such feminist critical and dystopian novels create space that allows for a multitude of ideas to be conceived and explored. Utopian hope is buried under layers of catastrophic warnings. Or, so I want to argue, the hope that is found in dystopias is just as legitimate as the ones found in eutopias.

As mentioned before, the death of utopia as a concept mainly reflects the idea that the number of published eutopian novels has decreased. Likewise, feminist utopian literature seems to be on the decline when searched for within the confined context of the traditional utopian novel. Utopian wishful thinking, however, is still present even when it is manifested in different ways. Beneath the surface, women authors have found diverse ways of portraying utopian impulses in genres other than the novel such as the works mentioned in this chapter. In the various examples that I have shared so far, I find that gender separatist feminist utopian novels

[120] Baccolini, "The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction," 520.

merge the idea of eutopia and dystopia together, presenting a fictional world that operates on the border between fantasy and reality. The novels thus provoke the question of agency, as is also expressed when Berlant discusses the friction between fantasy and reality that stands at the center of her study:

> At the center of the project, though, is that moral – intimate - economic thing called "the good life." Why do people stay attached to conventional good-life fantasies - say, of enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work - when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear cost abounds? Fantasy is the means by which people hoard idealizing theories and tableaux about how they and the world "add up to something." What happens when those fantasies start to fray - depression, dissociation, pragmatism, cynicism, optimism, activism, or an incoherent mash?[121]

The "fantasies that start to fray" very well resemble the dystopias that constitute my corpus. Protagonists who are discontent with the eutopia they supposedly have are the clues to observing how the utopian fantasies start to fray and become dystopias, resembling "an incoherent mash" of disappointment, helplessness, hopelessness, crisis, and fallout.

However, utopian hope still has value in that even feminist dystopian novels question the patriarchal status quo that subjugates women. In a sense the novels perform a struggle that does not so much concern the impossibility of a perfect other society, but the imperfectness of the world in which the novels operate. Here, dystopian narratives are utopian in principle. With respect to this, Baccolini notes:

[121] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2.

> […] the presence of Utopian hope does not necessarily mean a happy ending. Rather, awareness and responsibility are the conditions of the critical dystopia's citizens. A sense of sadness accompanies the awareness and knowledge that the protagonist has attained. Instead of providing some compensatory and comforting conclusion, the critical dystopia's open ending leaves its characters to deal with their choices and responsibilities. It is in the acceptance of responsibility and accountability, often worked through memory and the recovery of the past, that we bring the past into a living relation with the present and may thus begin to lay the foundations for Utopian change.[122]

Just as Baccolini states, awareness and responsibility are the building blocks of the continued betterment of dystopian conditions, thus leading to a never-fully attainable but also progressing eutopian condition. The ongoing process that Bacolini describes is in itself optimistic and meaningful because it implies change. Here, Baccolini's perspective is more optimistic than Berlant's, and I am on the more optimistic side as well. While I argue that all feminist acts and imaginings are eutopian in essence, the project of building a eutopia can still fail and become an example of what Berlant refers to as cruel optimism. This I unpack in the last chapter of this dissertation. First, we will have to discuss how the opening up of a better society implies the destruction of an existing one.

[122] Baccolini, "The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction," 521.

2. Destruction as a utopian cleansing mechanism

In the previous chapter, I argued that the notion of hope is inherent in the anticipation, theorization, and production of gender separatist feminist utopian literature. This is the case even, so I contended, when the ways in which the plot progresses do not directly reflect and present any hope. Moylan's focus on the concept and aspects of critical utopias proved to be useful here in that the genre of critical utopia creates a literary connection between dystopia and eutopia; a connection I consider to hold a strong hopeful potential. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, while eutopian narratives focus on emphasizing the qualities of a good space and society, dystopian narratives make use of negative events to make their point, and critical utopian narratives have elements of both, without the necessary requirement of closure or finality. Now I concentrate in this chapter on the destruction motif, which acts as a didactic tool for rebuilding these utopian societies in gender separatist utopian literature. The works in my corpus take a specifically uncompromising and seemingly pessimistic approach at the beginning of their project of reform: the destruction of the existing world. In this subgenre, which is also referred to as *gynotopia*, the destruction of the previous mixed-sex existence appears to be a narrative prerequisite for starting over and creating a new and supposedly improved world.[123] In my study of the subgenre, I highlight some specific parallelisms between the revolutionary influence of various radical feminist thinkers from the '60s and '70s and the theme of destruction within the novels in my corpus.

Already at the beginning of my research into gender separatist feminist utopianism, I noticed the common tendency in the plots to destroy the existent status quo. This destruction functions as an intervention prior to the attempt to create a better world for women where

[123] See Darby Lewes, "Gynotopia: A Checklist of Nineteenth-Century Utopias by American Women." *Legacy* 6, no. 2, 1989, pp. 29-41.

women's rights are being respected. In order to create this eutopian space, the women in the novels from this subgenre first have to obtain the freedom to express what needs to be expressed. In that regard, the first prerequisite for achieving a gender separatist community is to break free from the established sociopolitical, judicial, and economic system. This creative freedom almost always immediately comes after, or coincides with, an act of destruction.

In this space of rupture, utopian hope rests in the act of formulating or defining the very structure of eutopia itself. This implies that hope need not only be the expression of a future state of affairs but can also act as the motivation behind an act of destruction. Hope does not only concern the end result of a realized eutopia, it motivates the beginning of its realization. For Moylan, the interrogation and reassessment of the present and the conception of an improved future hold critical significance. This significance rises beyond whether a text is to be considered eutopian or dystopian in perceived intention.[124] This is also the stance I take in the exploration of the destruction motif in the gender separatist literature in my corpus. Exploring and demonstrating why the motif of destruction has become a common narrative element in the subgenre of gender separatist utopian literature has the potential to show why destruction is needed in the first place before the creation of a eutopian space.

At this point, utopian fiction's close connection with science fiction creates a flexible and fruitful ground for imaginative attempts to realize destruction and world-building. The instances of destruction and creation of a different kind of world fall within the context of science fiction due to its ability to leave the restraints of realism behind. The endless possibilities within the genre of science fiction provide feminist authors with unbridled space in which they can reimagine new worlds with renewed sociopolitical power structures that favor women over men. The narrative potential of science fiction was one object of study by Scottish feminist scholar, author, and teacher Sarah LeFanu, who worked predominantly on the intersection between

[124] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, 12.

feminism and science fiction. In her 1989 study *Feminism and Science Fiction*, LeFanu asserts that feminist writers took up the challenge of radical feminists and imagined many feminist utopian worlds in the 1970s.[125] They used the science fiction form to explore the sexual politics of their period.[126] If radical feminism and political lesbianism have been part of the more general women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the novels from the 1980s that I am studying fit within the same range of thought, advocating for radical change and restructuring of the world. The novels in this subgenre are historically influenced, that is, by the social movements of the era, and they can be considered as an exploratory narrative practice of the theory. "What would happen if we imagined a different reality?" is one of the questions that initiated utopian thinking and literary imagination in this context.

LeFanu's research on several women authors of utopias (works of authors such as James Tiptree Jr., Ursula K. Le Guin, Suzy McKee Charnas, Joanna Russ) shows how certain aspects of science fiction can support the elimination of the existing reality and the birth of new scenarios:

> By borrowing from other literary forms it lets writers defamiliarise the familiar, and make familiar the new and strange. These twin possibilities, apparently contradictory (but SF is full of contradictions), offer enormous scope to women writers who are thus released from the constraints of realism. The social and sexual hierarchies of the contemporary world can be examined through the process of "estrangement," thus challenging normative ideas of gender roles, and visions of different worlds can be created and made familiar to the reader through the process of narrative. SF narrative can be used to break down or to build up.[127]

[125] The study published under this title appeared a year earlier as *In the Chink of the World Machine*, 1988.
[126] LeFanu, *Feminism and Science Fiction*, 71.
[127] Ibid, 22.

By defamiliarizing the familiar, just as science fiction authors do, authors of separatist feminist fiction can subvert conventional masculine frameworks and traditions and show the readers different possibilities under different communal structures. Vice versa, the new and strange can be made familiar through the grand narratives of political power, as happens when councils of women lead the post-apocalyptic communities, for instance in Gilman's *Herland*; as happens when men are used as reproductive slaves as in Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women*; and as happens when men are brainwashed into being warriors as in Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*. The dynamic between estrangement and familiarity encourages and emphasizes the understanding that the novel takes place in a perhaps completely different but also recognizable world where gender roles are reversed and/or exaggerated. In other words, the definitions, assumptions, and power relations regarding the status of women and men are subverted but still remembered for reasons of comparison. That said, when authors rely on defamiliarization in the utopian construction of new realities, they often also choose to destroy the familiar current existence; a destruction needed for the creation of a new one.[128] In this way, the reader is distanced from the present, and the destruction is supposed to cleanse the familiar that existed prior to the destruction. But again, the defamiliarizing effect makes the execution and acceptance of the new society easier to adapt to and makes the readers more easily familiar with the new situation.[129]

The novels that I discuss in this chapter are gender separatist utopias written in the 1980s United States. Apart from a short description of Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1986), I focus especially on two novels to guide my research of the destruction motif: *The Shore of Women* by Pamela Sargent (1986) and *The Gate to Women's Country* by Sheri S. Tepper (1988). I left out

[128] On the relationship between feminism and science fiction, see Jane Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten's *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*, 1994 and Jane Donawerth's *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction*, 1997.

[129] For an extensive analysis of patterns of violence in this feminist utopian novel, see Elizabeth Anne Maxwell. "The Problem of Violence in Sheri S. Tepper's Feminist Utopia, *The Gate to Women's Country*." *Hecate* 37, no. 2, Nov. 2011, pp. 110.

Suzy McKee Charnas' *Holdfast Chronicles* tetralogy (1981) and Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* (1986) because there is neither not enough emphasis on nor mention of how the pre-utopian destruction took place and how the destruction affected the aftermath. While the main focus will be on the two novels from the '80s, there will be examples from other eras where relevant. In the following subsections, I subsequently focus on the theoretical context of the destruction motif in gender separatist feminist utopian novels; after that, I focus on the possible motivation behind this particular type of destruction; and finally on the hopeful utopian potential in the concept of destruction.

My discussion is limited to the phenomenon of feminist utopian separatism. Even though there is a rich history of Afrofuturism and Black utopian literature, the works in my corpus are not written by authors of color.[130] In my research, and in contrast with the theoretical and political context of the novels studied, I did not come across novels written by women authors of color where the plot had a clear separation of physical spaces and governance based on gender. Historically, people of color had to experience segregation on a large scale, which perhaps may have affected their choices not to opt for separatist plot elements. The intersecting and conflicting forms of oppression across diverse issues concerning race, gender, and economic class – among other aspects – are an undeniable force in the establishment of new frameworks for questioning and subverting intersecting oppressions.[131] Here, the concept of intersectionality can be observed and extrapolated practically in different kinds of utopian worlds, including non-separatist critical utopian frameworks next to the paradigm of gender separation. However, just as utopias written by women have been understudied for a long time and had to be discovered

[130] See Jayna Brown's *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds*, 2021.

[131] For an overview on intersectionality, see Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,' *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140:139-167, 1989.

and put under the spotlight, Black feminist separatist utopian fiction may also need unearthing and newfound appreciation.[132] This would be the subject of another research project.

In the following sections, I aim to position these gender separatist novels within their sociopolitical and historical context by showing that these novels were influenced by the movements that took place in the United States during the 1960s and ’70s. Even though gender separatist feminist utopian literature existed in the centuries prior to the ’60s and ’70s, taking a closer look at the sociopolitical atmosphere of the period in the United States can help illuminate one of the foundational elements of the subgenre: radical change. This was a period when the features of the subgenre became more concrete, likely in harmony with the foundations of radical feminism. I aim to historically situate, then, the theoretical and sociopolitical roots of gender separatist feminism by arguing that the gender separatist novels written in the 1980s were influenced by sociopolitical movements that took place in the United States during the ’60s and ’70s. The theoretical, emancipatory debates of that period inspire the theme of destruction in these gender separatist utopian novels and draw critical attention towards the interaction between feminist utopian literature and feminist theory. I aim to explore this interaction by demonstrating the relevant parallelisms between theoretical developments and the novels chosen for this chapter.

The theoretical origins of the destruction motif

In his research, Moylan explores the concept of critical utopia, analyzes the decline in positive utopian thought, and examines the possible influence of contemporary sociopolitical events on the impressions of literary imagination within utopian literature:

[132] For a more in-depth look at Black feminist utopianism, see Megha Patel’s dissertation *Black Feminist Utopianism and Gloria Naylor’s* Mama Day.

> Inspired by the movements of the 1960s and finding new imagery in the alternatives being explored in the 1970s, the critical utopia is part of the political practice and visions shared by a variety of autonomous oppositional movements that reject the domination of the emerging system of transnational corporations and post-industrial production and ideological structures.[133]

The overall political climate of the period, as mentioned above, also applies to the revolutionary feminist ideology of the period. The literary works in question are both products of societal influences and critically subvert ideological assumptions. These works experiment with existing structures and/or create completely new structures inspired by ongoing contemporary events. Here, Moylan's concept of critical utopianism allows the reader to uncover both eutopian and dystopian aspects of the proposed utopia, and provides ample opportunities for the exploration of various dimensions of world-building practices.

As I mentioned before, the '60s and '70s were powerful and fruitful decades for critical cultural studies and feminism. The second wave of feminism during this period in the United States and other countries of the global West set the stage for the radical feminist movement which was largely influenced by the vigorous and revolutionary spirit of the civil rights movement and the student movement of the period.[134] The core principles of this participatory movement were also deeply ingrained in the leftist movement of the time. However, even within the leftist movement, women were left at the margins. As women's history scholar Alice Echols underlines in her archival study of radical feminism, *Daring to Be Bad*, even when the leftist movement of the period was socialist, anti-militarist, and anti-capitalist, women within the

[133] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, 11.
[134] Since my novels are written by North American authors, here I concentrate on the events that took place in the United States.

movement had to persevere in fighting for their space. This was especially the case in leadership and decision-making positions. In this context, women had to fight multiple battles against male supremacy both inside and outside the movement.[135]

One of the main driving notions of radical feminism was the idea that women formed a sex-based class and this served as the basis of their oppression. Radical feminists emphasized the systematic oppression that caused gender inequality. This concept aimed to address and challenge the systemic issues in the context of gender politics. At the time, the notion of women's separateness operated above racial and economic differences; it was ubiquitous. These political practices would later be criticized, among other initiatives, "by a group of women's liberationists from Detroit (including Barbara Burris, Kathleen Barry, and Joanne Parrent)" in their manifesto titled *The Fourth World Manifesto* where they question the hierarchy of privileges within the ranks of radical feminism.[136] Nonetheless, radical feminists facilitated the earliest initiatives for challenging and changing the grand metanarratives around the dominant tradition of the nuclear family, of compulsory heterosexuality, and of patriarchal oppression at the level of family, individuality, and the professional lives of women.[137] Consciousness-raising meetings, protests against abortion and rape laws, and critiques of how the tenets of patriarchy affected the sociopolitical lives of women were among the basic building blocks of radical

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[135] Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*, 3.

[136] Ibid, 245.

[137] See Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) for her thoughts on the sexual class dynamics; Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (1970) for her arguments on the role of male-dominated society and patriarchy in women's subjugation; Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) for her perspective of challenging heteronormativity and bringing lesbian feminism to the forefront; Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (1980) for her intersectional Marxist analysis of subjugation of women of all ethnic backgrounds; Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983) for her stance on the systemic suppression of women's authorship and publication avenues; Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (1983) for her thoughts on sexism as a distinct form of oppression; bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) for her intersectional approach that encompasses gender, class, and race; Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1987) for comprehensive look at the institution of patriarchy; Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political" (2006) for the argument that the issues faced by housewives and mothers, such as problems in childbearing, childrearing, and division of household tasks, are not private but political matters that need consciousness-raising and solutions in the public sphere; Barbara J. Love, *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975* (2006) for an extended account of the works of feminist activists such as Kathie Sarachild, Marilyn Webb, and Gloria Steinem.

feminism.[138] Women's sexual and reproductive liberation was at the forefront of radical feminism in the theoretical arena through consciousness-raising and encouragement of legislative adjustments.

The rejection of the liberalist wing of the leftist movement brought about ideas of reform that aimed to bring momentum to the radical feminist movement. Radical feminists did not believe that reform within a corrupt and unjust sociopolitical system would bring lasting change. Therefore, as Echols demonstrates, the movement prioritized forms of participatory democracy and decentralization of power:

> The radicalism of the '60s was less concerned with reforming society than with developing forms that would prefigure the utopian community of the future. Thus there was little enthusiasm for electoral politics and enormous interest in creating political processes that would maximize individual participation and equalize power.[139]

While earlier liberal movements aimed at working towards gender equality and support within the existing political structure, radical feminism questioned the root causes of oppression which stemmed from how the state and society were structured throughout history. As Echols mentions, in its revolutionary essence, radical feminism is a utopian ideology as, from a Blochian standpoint, the movement hopes and aims to create a better world. Since radical feminism considers gender as a class within hierarchical power structures, it follows an abolitionist ideology which, in this context, indicates the complete uprooting of the current system. This

[138] Some foundational feminist groups within the movement were New York Radical Women, Redstockings, Cell 16 and The Feminists. Please see Echols above for a detailed account of the differences and common goals among these groups.
[139] Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 16.

intention is also reflected in the terminology itself: The etymology of the word *radical* comes "from Latin *radicalis* 'of or having roots,' from Latin *radix* (genitive *radicis*) 'root' (from PIE root **wrād*- 'branch, root')." Thus, moving away from temporary solutions, looking to find the root causes of oppression, and aiming to uproot the system are integral parts and aspirations of this movement.[140]

Just as gender separatist feminist utopian literature has its conflicting issues, radical feminism has its shortcomings in certain contexts. As a movement, radical feminism was led by white women and criticized for the whiteness of the problems that were raised, which concentrated specifically on the challenges white women faced in their lives.[141] For example, while white women were fighting for their right to work outside the house, black women had a long history of working as slaves in a variety of fields that had not been radically changed after the abolition of slavery. Women of color faced sharply different challenges on top of the challenges faced by white women. Excluded from leadership positions and having their voices unheard and ignored within the mainstream radical feminist organizations, black feminists started to regroup and highlight their own specific struggles and contexts.

Feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins provides a comprehensive history of Black feminism in her work *Black Feminist Thought*. The lack of solidarity within the radical feminist organizations is evident in the resources provided:

> Ironically, Western feminisms have also suppressed Black women's ideas (duCille 1996, 81-119). Even though Black women intellectuals have long expressed a distinctive African-influenced and feminist sensibility about how race and class intersect in structuring gender, historically we have not been full

[140] For the extended etymology of the word *radical*, see https://www.etymonline.com/word/radical
[141] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 5.

> participants in White feminist organizations (Giddings 1984; Zinn et al. 1986; Caraway 1991). As a result, African-American, Latino, Native American, and Asian-American women have criticized Western feminisms for being racist and overly concerned with White, middle-class women's issues (Moraga and Anzaldua 1981; Smith 1982a; Dill 1983; Davis 1989).[142]

The quote itself is abundant with references to feminist activists and scholars which would fill a whole dissertation by themselves, if not multiples. Since the subject matter is larger than the confines of utopianism itself (or not so much in a Blochian sense), I will briefly go over some of the relevant references in-text instead of in the footnotes, as I prefer not to put the references to these scholars solely in footnotes. Instead, I'd like to express a respectful acknowledgment of their contributions to emancipatory justice, albeit briefly. As referenced by Collins in her influential anthology, Black feminist theorist and African American literature scholar Ann duCille challenges the internalized racial and gender stereotypes in the United States in her book titled *Skin Trade* (1996). Paula J. Giddings is a historian, civil rights activist, and the author of *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (1984), which underscores the often overlooked impact that African American women have had on the race and women's movements throughout the course of American history. North American sociologist Maxine Baca Zinn examines the lived experiences of women of color within the intersecting realms of race, class, and gender, and her article (together with Lynn Weber Cannon, Elizabeth Higginbotham, Bonnie Thornton Dill) titled, "The Costs of Exclusionary Practices in Women's Studies" (1986), examines how the revolutionary movement of the '60s and the '70s continued into the academia, their current struggles and goals for change. Nancie Ellen Caraway was the former First Lady of Hawai but also a political scientist, feminist scholar, and activist at

[142] Ibid.

the local university. Her work *Segregated Sisterhood: Racism and the Politics of American Feminism* (1991) looks into how Black and white feminisms interact. The reference that says "Moraga and Anzaldua 1981" is a quintessential anthology on intersectional feminism (African American civil rights activist and critical race theory scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw expanded on this concept in 1989[143]). Edited by the African American lesbian feminist activist and scholar Barbara Smith in 1982, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* is another crucial feminist anthology that engages the intersection of race and gender. African American feminist scholar Bonnie Thornton Dill published an article titled "Race, Class, and Gender: Prospects for an All-Inclusive Sisterhood" in 1983 which concentrated on solutions to the situation that the sisterhood was not as powerful between women of color and white feminists. Last but not least, African American feminist political activist and scholar Angela Davis focuses on the contemporary political and social challenges in an intersectional manner in her work *Women, Culture, and Politics* (1989).

As analyzed and debated by many activists and scholars above, the sociopolitical and academic exclusion gave speed to the cause of Black women to form their own coalitions and face their own challenges. In this context, Black feminism supports the idea that Black women are just as worthy of emancipation and equality as white women and underlines the fact that Black women in society are oppressed in fundamentally different ways than white women. Consequently, Black feminist activists formed their own organizations: first and foremost, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) which took on issues specific to the oppression of Black women as well as those issues that were overlooked in the grand narratives of white radical feminists.

Simultaneously, more and more feminist utopian ideals could be observed in radical feminist lesbian circles. Within the ranks of white feminists and Black feminists, radical feminist

[143] See Kimberlé Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality Essential Writings*, (New York: New Press 2022).

lesbians were also searching for their own places. The assumed compulsory heterosexuality within the left-wing feminist movements created the need for a radical lesbian space in politics.[144] In particular, Black feminist lesbians needed their own space due to being excluded from both Black leftist movements and the radical feminist movement in general. As an outcome of this urgent need, The Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist socialist lesbian organization, published a statement that became one of the foundational texts in Black feminism. The members of the collective aimed to create and fill that lesbian feminist space with their call for intersectionality. While the radical feminist movement is predominantly abolitionist and revolutionary, the statement from the Collective is fundamentally utopian, also in its explicit mentioning of the necessity of the destruction of the status quo:

> We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources.[145]

The passage starts with an explicit reference to the necessity of destruction: the necessary destruction of the existing system. The rebuilding process would collectively benefit the people and not the state or those who serve the interests of the state. The way the new world is envisioned is in line with the world-building practices of the novels in my corpus in which

[144] See Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 5 (4): 631–660, 1980.
[145] The Combahee River Collective Statement can be read here: https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977/

destruction is followed by a socialist division of labor. In this way, the manifesto of the Collective runs parallel to the motifs and plots of gender separatist utopias.

In contemporary feminist literature, then, the notion of a single-sexed world provides a free space for exploring gender politics and relations away from the confines and conflicts of patriarchy in the absence of men. The belief that women had to physically and unconditionally separate from men in order to achieve their goals of feminist emancipation was at the center of the concept of single-sexed worlds. These gender separatist worlds portray sexuality in a heterosexual, homosexual, and asexual way, if not a mixture of all these elements. Nonetheless, separating from males and patriarchal structures was the focal point of these literary narratives and political radical lesbianism at large – not specifically the influence of sexuality within the plots or political movements. Before I move on to consider the destruction motif in more detail, I provide some paradigms or radical feminist thinking by representative radical feminist authors, that placed the destruction motif at the heart of radical feminist theory. Here, I observe possible interactions between the ideas developed in feminist theory and gender separatist feminist utopian literature both from within the same period and beyond.

Figures of influence: theory and literature in parallel

In this subsection, I try to do justice to the rich herstory of radical and separatist feminism by highlighting influential figures from the period and consulting them to gain a better understanding of my corpus. With a writing career spanning from the ’60s to the ’90s, Monique Wittig (1935-2003) was one of the strongest voices of French feminism. Her work was influential for questioning heterosexuality as an oppressive political structure and an integral aspect of patriarchy. As a member of the radical lesbian group *Féministes Révolutionnaires*, she argued that lesbians were not women because the concept of woman was identified in relation to the concept of man. Since lesbians were not associated with any social relation to men,

lesbianism was seen as a legitimate way of escaping the dominant patriarchal metanarrative. In the passage below, she argues in favor of the destruction of the systems that subjugate women:

> We [lesbians] are escapees from our class in the same way as the American runaway slaves were when escaping slavery and becoming free. For us this is an absolute necessity; our survival demands that we contribute all our strength to the destruction of the class of women within which men appropriate women. This can be accomplished only by the destruction of heterosexuality as a social system which is based on the oppression of women by men and which produces the doctrine of the difference between the sexes to justify this oppression.[146]

When Wittig calls for an escape from "our class," she means for lesbians to renounce identifying as women so that the restrictions on the existing class will no longer apply to them. Thus, in her line of thinking, the escape from and the destruction of compulsory heterosexuality is mandatory for ending the oppression of women. For her, becoming lesbian is the key to freedom. Only then can women be free from the gender binary and gender-based oppression.

The novels in my study likewise start by not only destroying the existing world order but also by eradicating the system of patriarchy, heterosexuality, and therefore heteronormativity. Even when sexuality is not part of the individual or communal practices in radical lesbian feminist groups, the communities in gender separatist utopian novels are largely radical lesbians due to their decision and dedication to live together as communities of women away from men. Here, Wittig's message of escape from compulsory heteronormativity matches the basic principles of gender separatist feminist utopianism.

[146] Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman," *The Straight Mind*, 30.

Jewish Canadian radical feminist author and activist Shulamith Firestone (1945-2012), who worked in the United States, was another central figure of radical feminism, and one of the founding members of radical feminist groups New York Radical Women, Redstockings, and New York Radical Feminists. In *The Dialectic of Sex*: *The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Firestone lays the theoretical foundations that fuel her activism. She observes the central aim of radical feminism as such:

> In the radical feminist view, the new feminism is not just the revival of a serious political movement for social equality. It is the second wave of the most important revolution in history. Its aim. overthrow of the oldest, most rigid class/caste system in existence, the class system based on sex - a system consolidated over thousands of years, lending the archetypal male and female roles an undeserved legitimacy and seeming permanence. In this perspective, the pioneer Western feminist movement was only the first onslaught, the fifty-year ridicule that followed it only a first counteroffensive - the dawn of a long struggle to break free from the oppressive power structures set up by nature and reinforced by man. In this light, let's take a look at American feminism.[147]

The sex-based class system mentioned here is reinforced every day due to the model encouraged by the nuclear family and upheld by the patriarchal system. Firestone details how the nuclear family is the first place where people learn the working mechanisms of oppressive power structures and how elusive these gender roles can be. In parallel, the heteronormative nuclear family is one of the dominant concepts that is systematically abandoned in gender separatist feminist utopian novels.

[147] Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 15.

North American radical feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye (1941-) worked explicitly on the theme of separatism as well. She found the theme of feminist separatism inherently connected to lesbianism and in general ubiquitous: from divorce to women-only spaces such as shelters and even lesbian bars. She saw separatism as a mode of separation from not only men but also from any patriarchal institution and relationship that supports male privilege. In her words:

> When our feminist acts or practices have an aspect of separation, we are assuming power by controlling access and simultaneously by undertaking definition. […] When women separate (withdraw, break out, regroup, transcend, shove aside, step outside, migrate, say no) we are simultaneously controlling access and defining. We are doubly insubordinate, since neither of these is permitted. And access and definition are fundamental ingredients in the alchemy of power, so we are doubly, and radically, insubordinate.[148]

Frye underlines the power inherent in this radical restructuring of society. This act of separation and redefining what it means to be a woman, to have a family, and to exist within society automatically destroys the gender binary and women's adherence to this binary. With Frye destruction is implied, then, through the concept of separatism; destruction is not made explicit but implied in revolutionary acts of insubordination or subversion. In other words, women destroy established patriarchal structures by way of overturning or simply defying them. She argues that women partake in these acts of separation every day to varying degrees. Her support for separation and specifically for women-only spaces aligns with the theme of gender separatist feminist utopian literature in which women-only spaces are the norm.

[148] Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 107.

Caribbean American civil rights activist and feminist Audre Lorde (1934-1992) underlined the value of radical transformation in order to bring about substantial change. Lorde's work was revolutionary and inclusive in the sense that she challenged the assumed hierarchy of white feminism and racism within feminist thought. One of the central tenets of radical lesbianism was the notion that adhering to the heterosexual mentality showed dependence on patriarchy. Lesbian feminist groups have interpreted this dependence as a privileged position of benefiting from patriarchy. Likewise, Lorde argued that white feminism was similarly benefiting from patriarchy. Lorde's approach to feminism was utopian in the sense that she argued for the deconstruction of white feminism and in favor of reaching a more inclusive and intersectional momentum:

> Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference; those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are black, who are older, know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those other identified as outside the structures, in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.[149]

This society's definition of acceptable women symbolizes upper-middle-class white feminists. Lorde's words inspire intersectionality and sisterhood among those marginalized from the

[149] Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House," *This Bridge Called My Back*, 95.

traditional definitions of society. Learning how to stand alone-but-together signals towards cooperation and commonality. Her iconic statement "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" makes it clear that no amount of adjustment or reform can be sufficient to make a sustainable and solid change. It is a radical utopian sentiment that encourages change from scratch because the tools of patriarchy would end up benefiting the patriarchy itself. Her activist voice is the revolutionary force behind her radical theory, which is not reformist, but requires destruction. Her words connote a manifesto that calls for the creation of a gender separatist utopian space. The parallel with the novels I study is predominantly that the protagonists are looking for a space, or "seek a world in which we can all flourish," in a process of learning: a pedagogical process.

Similarly, the radical restructuring of society was one of the concepts Mary Daly's (1928-2010) work emphasized. Daly was a North American self-identified radical lesbian feminist, who expanded on her ideas concerning radical separatist lesbianism in her work *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. While not directly mentioning and advising specific forms of destruction, she saw great benefit in Amazonian sisterhood which could not exist within a patriarchal structure:

> Whereas discussion of relations between men and women eulogize the so-called complementarity of opposites, an Amazonian analysis of female friendship/love discovers the fact that the basis of woman-identified relationships is neither biological differences nor socially constructed opposite roles. […] Rather than relying upon stereotypic role relationships, Amazon friends/lovers/sisters cast our Selves into a creative variety of developing relationships with each other. Since

> there are no models, no roles, no institutionalized relationships to fall back upon, we move together and apart in ever-varying patterns of relating.[150]

In the passage above, Daly describes a worldview that is not patriarchal and that does not contain men. All relationships are Amazonian and they revolve around women. Her vision of an Amazonian world stands in favor of gender separatist feminism. Her version of gender separatist utopia urges the reader to avoid traditional gender roles and relationships, and encourages the women to find new ways to form relationships with each other. The communities of women in the gender separatist novels in my corpus follow a similar path of building structures that avert traditional and patriarchal ways of existing and building connections through relationality. However, the first step to realizing this ambition is the destruction of their current world.

In the theoretical frameworks of radical feminism, the theme of destruction is sometimes explicit, but more often implicit whereas in the gender separatist utopian novels, this theme is explicit. Nevertheless, the vision of a theorized Amazonian space shares similar separatist principles with the utopian literature I am studying in this dissertation. The gender separatist novels in my corpus establish single-sexed worlds where the problems of the period in which radical feminism rose to prominence were solved due to the distinct separation of sexes. This does not deny that other problems resurfaced due to the undeniable abuse of power within these single-sexed worlds. This brings me back to the theme of destruction, its different manifestations, and its consequences. At this point, I want to elaborate on and examine the different types of destruction I came across in the novels selected.

[150] Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 382.

Externalization of the motivations for destruction

Destruction in the plots of gender separatist utopian works is an act to which the reader is exposed often when one of the protagonists starts recounting the history of their utopian land. Essentially, this plot element facilitates a moment of rupture from the state of women's lives in the previous world and allows for a new beginning. However, the radical act of destruction often poses a hindrance to the peaceful functioning of the new utopia. The events of the past and what preceded these events leave traces for the people of the new utopia to discover. Since the destruction as a plot element forms a link between the history of the world before the destruction and the utopian space that is built right after, defining or situating the responsibility of that destruction becomes crucial to the formation and maintenance of the utopian space.

To look at destruction as a defining plot element, I went through the selected primary sources and gathered information on how the destruction took place in the novels. In some of these, it is clearly explained that the destruction took place due to natural causes such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, or other types of natural disasters. In others, the reason can be more intentional and (hu)man-made such as nuclear bombing or other acts of violence. This is what I refer to as the externalization of the destruction motif: the responsibility of causing the destruction of the previous world is placed on events or people other than the leaders or the residents of the newly constituted feminist utopian space. I argue that this externalization of the destruction motif makes it possible to displace the responsibility of the destruction somewhere far away from women within the new utopian space and allows this new space to have a neutral starting point.

A common type of destruction in these novels is manmade destruction with unintended causes. This plot choice puts the blame on the assumed aggression of the male species. As mentioned in the first chapter, *Mizora*, written by Mary E. Bradley Lane and published in 1880, takes a direct political approach to the theme of destruction in the form of a civil war. The novel

depicts a country of women that has existed for the last three thousand years. Its state of affairs before the destruction is portrayed as dominated by men in public and private spheres. Women are set against a stark discrepancy in the rights they have and their sociopolitical status. Many calamities, wars, skirmishes, and natural disasters are included in the destruction narrative, emphasizing the great divide between gender roles and how inconsolable the situation becomes for their society in general, but especially for women who are depicted as the oppressed. In this novel, the concept of political revolution is used as the element of destruction. It is specifically underlined that women's struggle lasted a very long time, their victory ended up limiting the privileges of the adult males, and there was no common ground between men and women that could facilitate a mixed-sex living arrangement. The way the destruction theme is presented implies that only expansive and unflinching political action can resolve the tension and provide sustainable change and improvement for the whole society. The important point for now, however, is that the women within the newly created world were not responsible for the destruction.

In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian trilogy *Herland*, which was written during the First World War and was published in 1915, society has taken a big hit due to wars in which most of the male population is wiped out. Since it was the men who went to battle, the remaining and surviving portion of the society are mostly women.[151] Here a devastating war between women and the remaining men pushes the society into further chaos. This war is followed by natural disasters that caused the passageways among the mountains to cave in and kept the women physically blocked from the rest of the world. This space is where they end up creating a new world out of remnants of the past. *Herland* makes use of the colonial discovery narrative trope of a stranger man, or a group of men, stumbling upon a seemingly uncharted and uncivilized space of women. As the women teach men their ways of living, strangely enough,

[151] Gilman, *Herland*, 56.

they quickly form romantic couples and explore heterosexual and heteronormative life, which is something the women in *Herland* have not experienced before. The novel ends with one of the women deciding to travel to the United States with her husband to explore the outside world and everything she can learn from it.

As I mentioned above, the externalization of the responsibility for the destruction that took place in the past helps to motivate and convince the reader that the new feminist utopian space is built out of immediate necessity due to the natural causes of the event. This displacement of responsibility sets a neutral tone for the beginning of the feminist utopian space. In the case of *Herland*, the destruction is explicitly caused by a natural *deus ex machina*, but it is implicitly also the logical consequence of male aggression. This aspect of the destruction deepens the issue of responsibility because it directly relates to how gender politics are being dealt with in the novel. The subject responsible for human destruction is represented in gendered language. This extends itself, however, to the so-called natural causes of destruction. In *Herland*, we can observe both the gendered language and displacement of responsibility of destruction on nature:

> They made a brave fight for their existence, but no nation can stand up against what the steamship companies call "an act of God." While the whole fighting force was doing its best to defend their mountain pathway, there occurred a volcanic outburst, with some local tremors, and the result was the complete filling up of the pass - their only outlet. Instead of a passage, a new ridge, sheer and high, stood between them and the sea; they were walled in, and beneath that wall lay their whole little army.[152]

[152] Ibid.

I read this volcanic eruption as a symbol of the male body in the act of driving the women into an inland trap, where they cannot escape from the erupted lava that is blocking their way. Then when the narrative continues to dwell on the tall mountains protecting what is in its crevices and curves, the symbolism shifts to the woman's body. Even if the causal agency is attributed to nature in this part of the post-destruction land formation in *Herland*, it is through symbolisms of the male or female body. Nature creating a new utopian space for women also falls within the principles of traditional ecofeminist thought, which can be observed as a large influence in *Herland*.

In other novels, the responsibility for the destruction becomes clearer as the plot progresses. A closer look at Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* provides us with a provoking example of hidden responsibility and accountability. In the field of feminist science fiction, Joanna Russ was one of the most outspoken radical feminists of the 1960s in the United States. She was a lifelong author of fiction and as an academic, she focused on literary criticism, feminist theory, and science fiction. Like LeFanu, later, she argued that science fiction was a way to express the endless tension between what is possible and impossible, what is present and what could be the future.[153] Although her writing style has been characterized as angry, she is mostly celebrated for her revolutionary language and radical fiction.[154] The feminist science fiction novel, *The Female Man*, was influential in the way it presents multiple realities at the same time by using the parallel universe trope. It was also controversial in the way some of those realities suggested violence against men as the best option to imagine a better way of living for women. As a novel that shares four stories of four women living in parallel universes, it gives the reader a chance to observe and compare different realities that exist without the awareness of the other universes.

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[153] LeFanu, *Feminism and Science Fiction*, 22.

[154] See Peter Fitting's article "For men only: A guide to reading single-sex worlds," *Women's Studies*, 14:2, 101-117, 1987.

The exposition of the destruction motif in one of the parallel realities takes place as follows: "Plague came to Whileaway in P.C. 17 (Preceding Catastrophe) and ended in A.C. 03, with half the population dead; it had started so slowly that no one knew about it until it was too late. It attacked males only."[155] Framing the death of males through a plague based on gender chromosomes makes sure that the responsibility for the death of countless men falls on unintentional and unpreventable causes. The passage continues with a detailed description of how women re-established order after the plague left them in a state of chaos. Due to the plague that killed only men, the women are left with the whole world to themselves to recreate, govern, and maintain. Again, the responsibility of breaking free from the past and the oppression of patriarchy seemingly falls on neutral territory due to the usage of a plague motif.

However, as the plot progresses, the actual method of destruction is revealed when one of the protagonists confesses to the deed:

> Whileaway's plague is a big lie. Your ancestors lied about it. It is I who gave you your 'plague,' my dear, about which you can now pietize and moralize to your heart's content; I, I, I, I am the plague, Janet Evason. I and the war I fought built your world for you, I and those like me, we gave you a thousand years of peace and love and the Whileawayan flowers nourish themselves on the bones of the men we have slain.[156]

While the conceptual choice of "plague" as a way to eliminate men altogether could be merely biological or medical terminology, a biblical allusion becomes clearer when the name of the culprit is revealed: Evason – "son of Eve" –, the woman who is considered to

[155] Russ, *The Female Man*, 12.
[156] Ibid, 211.

have committed the first sin. Taking this perspective into account, I argue that the plague symbolizes both a warning and a punishment for men. Bringing the plague upon men in order to save women from the oppression of patriarchy represents a rewriting of a biblical story. In this version, plague acts as divine justice exercised by a woman because male aggression is considered harmful to women and the planet. With the confession in the passage above, the plague is no longer a biological occurrence but a conscious intervention by one of the protagonists. Consequently, the readers come to the realization that the responsibility for the actual act of destruction was misattributed at the beginning. The passage ends with a very clear motivation: the plague came to pass because Janet Evason wanted to give the women "a thousand years of peace and love" at the expense of killing all men. As can be seen, the example of *The Female Man* presents a situation where multiple factors intermingle into the externalization of the act of destruction, which was actually internal; executed by a woman from within the utopian community.

Unlike the more conventional reasonings above, some novels base their destruction on interplanetary travel and the destruction of multiple planets, which contributes to the defamiliarization effect I have mentioned before. In Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* from 1992, which I analyze more closely in the next chapter, the resetting of the current world takes place through an interplanetary mission of colonization. A planet called Jeep is rediscovered by a satellite probe which showed a small group of humans with unknown origins; however, there were a few clues about how the destruction motif was executed:

> […] two discoveries were made: that Jeep's natives were one hundred per cent female, and that there was a virus loose. The two were connected, of course. The incidence of infection of Company personnel was one hundred per cent. Eighty

> per cent of Company's female personnel recovered; all of the men, including Courtivron, died. The planet was closed; no one on, very few off.[157]

A virus that kills all the men on a planet, leaving it inhabited only by women, is the plot element that creates the destruction and the clean slate that follows. The discovery of this isolated planet is where the utopian narrative starts. This gender separatist utopian space is situated outside the confines of the planet Earth, which provides a slate so clean that the author could imagine anything as long as the scientific system is consistent within itself. Therefore, creating a planet in which to entertain and exercise feminist utopian ideas is an approach that works like a frame tale in terms of the infinite creativity and political freedom that comes with that choice. The virus causing the extinction of men in *Ammonite* sets the tone for allowing the reader to think that the virus discriminates on sex or another genetic characteristic. This plot choice emphasizes the biological essentialist view of gender difference through the choice of the destruction narrative.

In one novel the intersection of gender separatism and the destruction motif is exceptionally clear. *The Shore of Women*, written by the North American feminist author and editor Pamela Sargent in 1986, is a gender separatist utopian novel in which the effects of destruction are a common theme in the daily lives of the characters in the diegesis. In this novel, the development of the new utopian world takes place after a nuclear war, yet another common trope of the subgenre. In the new situation, the council of woman leaders makes such living arrangements that men are forced to live outside the city walls. These men visit the temples of The Lady that are scattered around the vast land. In these temples they see digital images of women, called "erotic dreams," and they do not know that real women exist outside these digital images. The real women live inside cities while extracting semen from men during these projected erotic dreams in order to continue to procreate. When the protagonist Larissa, one of

[157] Griffith, *Ammonite*, 21.

the inhabitants of the women's land, starts questioning the traditions of her community and ventures outside the city walls, she gets to meet men in person and gets treated as The Lady, who is the only woman character known to the outcast men.

In walled gender separatist communities such as this one, the event of destruction and the conversations about the old days are used as forewarnings. Repeatedly warning citizens of the gender separatist utopian community against the past is one of the most common ways of making the citizens relate to this past and willingly abide by the rules. When, for example, Larissa questions why a woman has to be exiled outside the city walls for attempting to murder another woman in self-defense, the reason the council gives her does not relate so much to the specific crime in question but instead to a larger condemnation of the past and the relentless repetition of the way things were: "Had such deeds gone unpunished in our past, we would never have been able to build our world on the ruins of the old; we could not have survived that struggle."[158] The council of women is afraid of the past and spreads that fear to the community to placate the community into obeying the new rules and traditions. This type of doom-mongering feeds the totalitarian regime and finds its legitimation in the destruction motif. The destruction is not to be repeated, it has to remain something of the past. In other novels, however, the notion of destruction as something of the past proves to be rather difficult, or impossible.

Studying the past or establishing the myth

In gender separatist feminist utopian novels, there is often a historian, an archivist, a clairvoyant, or someone with access to resources or skills that endow them with the knowledge of the past. The use of a monologue by one of the main characters is common in how the novels in my study convey the destructive events that happened in the past. This historical narrative is usually presented in a manner that elicits emotions in settings such as by the campfire, in a cave or while

[158] Sargent, *The Shore of Women*, 4.

hiding from danger. This narrative choice acts as a rationale for the revolutionary decisions to be made in order to protect the community from potential future destruction. At times the historian character is treated as an outcast because the amplification of cautionary tales about the atrocities of the past is not ideal for the governing councils or most citizens. The main reason for this that even among the cautionary tales, one can get a glimpse into the many human experiences that have been missed out on or that for which the protagonists have an urgent desire. This could cause unwelcome discoveries that could bring about another catastrophe like in the past. In most cases, the protagonists that encounter and communicate with historian characters end up questioning the morality of the rules of the community and deciding to explore the world outside the walls. This, in my opinion, is how these communities rewrite *herstory* by learning from *history*, and not being welcoming of this process is one of the pitfalls of the new matriarchies in the utopian texts that employ this narrative trope.[159]

Here I will take a look at an example from Sargent's *The Shore of Women* that I introduced in the previous section. In this novel, the historian protagonist within the community provides neutral and/or positive instances of the past as elements to be unearthed. This head historian is assigned to train the protagonist Larissa as a young historian. Here, for instance, are Larissa's first impressions from her training as a historian where she comes across an instance of heterosexual romantic love, just as she loves her partner Shayl within the community of women:

> I considered what history I knew at that point. Once men and women had lived together and had formed bonds. The old records showed that a woman might love

[159] I will continue to examine the literary trope of the historian character in my gender separatist feminist utopian corpus in the subsequent sections. However, here I will briefly mention some of the examples where this trope is functioning as a substantial part of the narrative: Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 1405; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, 1915; Suzy McKee Charnas, *Walk to the End of the World*, 1974; Suzy McKee Charnas, *Motherlines*, 1981; Katherine V. Forrest, *Daughters of a Coral Dawn*, 1984; Sheri S. Tepper, *The Gate to Women's Country*, 1989; Leona Gom, *The Y Chromosome*, 1990; Suzy McKee Charnas, *The Furies*, 1994; Leigh Richards, *Califia's Daughters*, 2004; Katherine V. Forrest, *Daughters of an Emerald Dusk*, 2005; Doris Lessing, *The Cleft*, 2007.

> a man as I had loved Shayl. Such love had been, of course, a trap. I could not imagine a woman willingly putting herself in the power of a man; women had given power to men, and men had nearly destroyed everything. It could not be allowed to happen again. […] History, I was beginning to see, might be instructive. I had read a few tales of women bought and sold, of depending on men for food and shelter, of being forced to endure contact with male bodies, of being murdered by men. Our ways were surely better.[160]

Larissa finds herself in a position where she is able to compare what she was taught at school versus what she is learning through her current study of history. She quickly realizes that the historical information that is circulated in schools is specifically chosen to reflect and uphold certain values while concealing others. What can be seen as the indoctrination of the council revolves around concentrating on gender-based atrocities and failed relationship dynamics. The history lessons in school feature no positive elements, as when stories are told of how a woman loving a man had to give up power, thus allowing the destruction of the past to happen again. References to the past are thus used as justifications for the current rules and, thereby, justifications for the destruction. They function as warnings that justify the destruction that took place as a result of which the gender separation could come to be. All this underlines the notion that men are evil by nature and education cannot salvage them.

The historian in *The Shore of Women* does not strive to change the ways of the gender separatist community; she only aims to take an impartial look at how life in the past used to be:

> It doesn't really change things. Whether or not men could behave ethically or peacefully isn't the point. The point is that they used their power, the power

[160] Ibid, 92.

> women gave them, to destroy the world, and can't ever be allowed to do that again. Nothing changes that. Most historians simply think it would be better for more of us to admit that ancient men weren't quite what a lot of women prefer to think they were.[161]

For this historian, knowledge about the past does not urge her to change anything about the traditions of her community, nor does it inspire her to empathize with the people of the past. The indoctrinated fear of men as a whole sex class and the glorification of women as a sex class confirm and corroborate the power and influence of the totalitarian regime. The destruction motif thus functions as a restraint on the community. This specific historian character disagrees with "most historians" who enjoy sharing knowledge on whether men from ancient times were as bad as the doctrines make them out to be. In this respect, historians with this attitude of servitude and loyalty are allowed to exist in the community without its leaders fearing a rebellion. Their function in society is to make sure that the dominant ideology is protected and supported, as I will explain in more detail below.

The difference between the older historian and the apprentice historian protagonist is their motivation and intention concerning the historical findings. In this context, Italian literary scholar Raffaella Baccolini argues that the recovery of historical knowledge leads to the recovery of individual and collective memory.[162] Because the totalitarian regime dominates the discourse around the past and its effects on the present, the collection of information and collective memory from the texts and artifacts becomes the first step in the resurgence of the forgotten past and its multifaceted effects on the present. Counter to this possibility, in *The Shore of Women*, when confronted with the idea of studying science to the point of rediscovering old machines and

[161] Ibid.
[162] Baccolini, "The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction," 520.

old ways of using technology, the older historian mentions that they "wouldn't want to push too far, considering the violent applications of science in the past."[163] Reciting the wrongful ways of the past and the repercussions of destruction are daily practices that work to maintain the political structure in several gender separatist utopian novels. Or the destruction motif and the events of the past that are used to justify the current status quo, become false evidence for maintaining the new and strictly supervised gender roles. Whenever a character has difficulty adhering to the rules of the community, they are reminded of the past and the destruction stories.

Towards the end of the novel, one of the members of the governing council reveals the actual story of how the destruction took place:

> Once, women had given men the power over life that women had held since the beginning of human history; so we have all been taught. Men had used their power for evil, and the world had been devastated and poisoned in ancient times by the weapons men had controlled. The great fire came and, after it, the long winter. Only scattered communities in isolated places had survived, living for ages in underground shelters, for life on the surface was not possible. Earth refused to yield crops, animals sickened and died, and humankind's damaged genes whelped monsters. Below ground, life had gone on, in a fashion. Even in the shelters many did not live, and tunnels holding the dead were sealed off from the living. These shelters, we are told, were our purgatory, places in which to pay for our sins. Gradually, Earth began to heal itself, and in time, it became necessary for some to venture above ground.[164]

[163] Sargent, *The Shore of Women*, 94.
[164] Ibid, 95.

The simplification of women giving birth and thus being the bringer of life, and men using weapons and causing the end of the world is a common trope in gender separatist utopian novels. And here as well, "the great fire" followed by what is most likely a nuclear winter points to a devastating war. Fire as a cleanser of society acts as a religious metaphor in this context, cleansing the previous state of the society where women did not have as many rights and privileges as men. However, the destruction is also seen as a divine punishment when the shelters are referred to as "purgatory" where the remaining population had to "pay for their sins." In its referencing biblical stories of origin or its referencing to the destruction in religious terms, the destruction motif is developed into an origin myth. This is emphasized in the novel through the use of capitalized terminology, such as "Destruction" and "Rebirth" among others. The leaders of this women's community turn the destruction motif into a religious story to ensure that the community has a grand narrative to believe in when they begin questioning the status quo.

In this context Sarah LeFanu argues that "[d]ystopian visions are in a sense mythopoeic: depicting a creation myth in a future world of darkness and silence."[165] This also becomes clear in my example above and appears to be a more general characteristic of the subgenre. In gender separatist utopian novels there is usually a destruction myth that enables a (re)creation myth. Considering how the sociopolitical rules that come after the destruction are framed in a religious narrative, the flood myth appears as a good metaphor for the destruction that washes away the previous corrupt state of the society. The paradigmatic example of the flood myth is the biblical deluge sent by God as retribution, with the aim of cleansing the world, destroying civilization as it is, and creating the stage for rebuilding. However, I see the destruction myth in gender separatist utopian novels rather as a subversion of this flood myth. In fact, it is the reversal of the creation myth, in which women had a passive role as retold in *Genesis*.[166] Therefore, the feminist

[165] LeFanu, *Feminism and Science Fiction*, 73.
[166] *Genesis* 2.22: "Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."

interpretation of this destruction myth includes women taking an active part either in the destruction, during cleansing, during rebuilding, or all of these at the same time. One influential divagation from the flood myth is that in gender separatist utopian novels written by woman authors, there is no special ark or the necessity to take two of every animal species. Instead, all women are welcome to stay in the new gated community as long as they abide by the rules of their community.

The flood myth is not necessarily a Christian story, moreover. It can be traced back to ancient Sumerians and can also be found in Hindu mythological accounts. Whether it is a Christian origin myth or not, the ethos of destruction and cleansing by fire or other natural elements appears in the plot as the new starting point of life. The choice of integrating an origin myth in the destruction pattern allows the novels to speculate about the origin of life and how to change the regular course of life into a new context that favors the well-being of women. In this perspective, the new world waiting to be rebuilt after the destruction rather underlines a *cycle* of destruction and renewal based on the archetype. It ushers in the possibility and the stage of tabula rasa – which is the subject of the next chapter.

The hopeful potential of destruction

What are the drawbacks of the radical destruction motif in gender separatist utopian novels? Even when destruction undoes what existed before, can it be considered a product of hope and also a bringer of hope in the plot? Or is the act of destruction, instead of holding the potential for reform, inherently anti-utopian? In order to shed some light on these questions, I examine Hans Achterhuis' critique of utopianism and his argument for the necessity of destruction in utopian narratives. Achterhuis' work is important because it includes a rich and engaging elaboration on anti-utopianism. In my dealing with Achterhuis I will also examine Merijn Oudenampsen's

response to Achterhuis' critique from almost the opposite perspective. I want to elaborate on their arguments in order to show how both theories interrelate to the novels in my research.

The reason why I chose to focus on the work of Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis is that he actively participates in discussions on social matters in general and specifically in the field of utopianism. His *magnum opus*, *De erfenis van de utopie* (*The legacy of utopia*), contains his critique on radical utopianism, which provides a relevant perspective on the novels in my study. Since Achterhuis argues that the theme of destruction is intrinsic to all utopian thought, his work helps me to explore how anti-utopian the cycle of destruction and creation in feminist utopian novels can be. First and foremost, Achterhuis is critical of the radical nature of destruction and eutopian world-building, which he sees as a holistic and totalitarian endeavor.[167] In the novels in my corpus, just as in countless other separatist utopian novels (whether dystopian or eutopian), destruction and rebirth are preferred over attempts to reform the existing society. The radical idea is that since every facet of the sociopolitical sphere is interconnected, radical change that is designed to really lead to another society is not possible without a sharp break from the past.

In his dealing with utopian thinking, Achterhuis criticizes the all-or-nothing mentality of utopian theory and practice. He believes that a utopian mentality is irreconcilable with reality. Setting "a disastrous present" against "the bright future" produces pessimistic and doomed results.[168] It may foster hope that change is possible by destroying the disastrous present so that things can start over. Yet the creation of a bright future will eventually fail because it is not possible to make utopias perfect. In order to make the new/future version more appealing (alleged to be eutopia), the present reality is represented darker and darker (alleged to be dystopia). This idea of "doom-mongering" is one of Achterhuis' criticisms against the feasibility

[167] Achterhuis, *De erfenis van de utopie*, 15.
[168] Ibid.

of creating and maintaining utopias.[169] Further, he states that utopias tend to become oppressive despite aiming to bring positive change. He argues that utopian authors and scholars do not recognize or fully determine the oppressive and manipulative aspects of utopian spaces.

As can be seen, Achterhuis has anti-utopian arguments. His thoughts on utopian world-building and the idea of the destruction of everything prior to utopia do not align with the perceived optimism of utopian thought. He believes that the actions motivated by utopianism inevitably require violence in order to transform their desired blueprint into reality. In his critique of destruction that takes place before the new utopia, Achterhuis mentions that while aiming to achieve progress in the perceived dystopian society, utopian consciousness needs to overlook and disregard the past, with its cultural traditions.[170] As Achterhuis argues, the cultural traditions and the heritage of a community can rather be an inspiring guiding factor to learn from. In contrast, in radical feminist theory, the empowerment that originates from breaking away from the past appears as be a political necessity for starting over. Keeping in mind that the novels in my study are separatist in nature, it would be challenging to make a clean separation without as strong a motivation that led to such a strict separation. The idea of being confined to a present state that is constantly revised and replotted can constitute a barrier to the imagination of real or sustainable change. In the end, gender separatist feminist-aiming utopian plots most of the time end up in a cycle that consists in an initial oppressive state, followed by some form of destruction, followed by a new eutopian vision and application, which turns out to be dystopian due to the effects of the destruction and separation, ending with hints towards yet another destruction to cure the newly originated dystopian state.

Relevantly, one of Achterhuis' overarching critiques concerns Blochian wishful thinking. He argues that in utopian literature, broad social ideals are not discussed in-depth enough to be

[169] Ibid, 23.
[170] Ibid, 72.

considered within the paradigm of utopian thought.[171] For him, the notion that utopian thought is ubiquitous actually devalues and reduces the ambitions of utopian theory and practice. He is critical of the Blochian idea of utopian impulse as being pervasive. Responding to this attitude, Dutch sociologist and political scientist Merijn Oudenampsen, well-known for his critique of neoliberalism and conservatism, examines and criticizes Achterhuis' anti-utopianism in his article "In defence of utopia". In the article, he argues that Achterhuis has a limited and biased concept of utopianism. He concentrates on the assumptions that Achterhuis makes:

> Firstly, an all-or-nothing approach to utopian thought. Achterhuis rejects the idea that utopia could serve as an unattainable ideal, an inspiration to guide action. On the contrary, he maintains there is a single, unitary utopian tradition that departs from the idea that utopia is realizable. Utopia is a detailed blueprint that must be implemented in its entirety: the utopian tradition rejects the reformism that improves elements of society or applies loose ideas.[172]

Oudenampsen emphasizes, much in the line of Bloch, that utopian thought and practice can constitute a guide, an inspiration, a motivation, and an ideal. However, in the reading of Oudenampsen whether a blueprint is followed or the blueprint is realized should not necessarily determine the necessity, futility, or success of utopian thought. He reminds us that there are utopian traditions that value reform over radical uprooting of the existing system. While Achterhuis criticizes utopianism on the assumption that it is radical action that aims at perfection and fails, Oudenampsen believes that there is potential for growth and progress in utopian thinking, regardless of the outcomes of the utopian action. Even if radical destruction fails to

[171] Ibid, 16.
[172] Oudenampsen, "In Defence of Utopia," 9.

produce the desired outcome of a eutopian existence that has all the subjects leading satisfactory lives and that has all the institutions functioning as they should, every seemingly imperfect attempt contributes to the collection of experiences that supports sustainable positive outcomes for that society in the future. If the cycle of destruction and rebirth, whether on a large scale or small, is the driving force behind utopian thought, according to Oudenampsen, this cycle does not negate possible improvements. He underlines the idea that utopianism is a theory in motion, not a static one that aims to achieve a traditional idea of perfection.

The discussion between Achterhuis and Oudenampsen necessitates a reflection on the work of Bloch (dealt with in my chapter on hope). Bloch had a poetic way of writing, especially in his famous *The Principle of Hope* where he introduced his ideas on utopianism, hopeful thinking, and the not-yet-become. The passage below from his *The Spirit of Utopia* reveals that his so-called "ubiquitous" utopian thinking is not that ubiquitous:

> The look forward becomes even more powerful the brighter it becomes aware of itself. The dream in this look becomes quite clear, and the presentiment, being the right one, will be obvious. Only when reason starts to speak, then hope, which has nothing false to it, will begin to blossom again. The not-yet-conscious itself has to become *conscious* of its own doings; it must come to *know* its contents as restraint and revelation. And thus the point is reached where hope, in particular, the true effect of expectation in the dream forward, not only occurs as an emotion that merely exists by itself, but is *conscious and known* as the *Utopian function.*[173]

Bloch mentions that the "look forward," the hope, and the wishful thinking become more powerful, concrete, and practical "only when reason starts to speak." Therefore, his notion that

[173] Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, 105.

utopian wishful thinking is ubiquitous is grounded on the expectation that wishful thinking will become reflective, that is, "conscious" and "aware" at large. Only then it will start to grow into a utopian function when the steps to take will be within the limits of reason. In my assessment, Bloch's ideas on the ubiquity of utopian thought are oversimplified and easily dismissed as empty and broad wishful thinking, as Achterhuis does. However, finding utopian ideas in all hopeful and wishful thinking does not necessarily mean that there are no concrete and practical applications and expectations possible. More in line with Oudenampsen, I hold that the utopian potential resides both in the projection of utopian hope and in its concrete applications.

The discussion between blueprint versus process utopias and the one between ubiquitous utopianism versus anti-utopianism is a valuable one that emphasizes the theoretical importance of critical and open-ended utopias. There are also gender separatist utopian novels in which both sides of the comparison exist together and in which the exploration of such concepts of hope is the main goal. In the following, I explore why I believe hope and failure can co-exist in this subgenre in a constructive manner.

Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*, written in 1988, is a post-apocalyptic novel in which the women in power end up creating a dystopia while aiming to create a utopia. Three hundred years after a devastating nuclear war precipitated by men, the known world is centered around women's cities such as Marthatown and Sallytown. Outside the walls of these cities, there are garrisons of men who live as warriors. Women survive via a network of local communities where goods and services are exchanged through traveling caravans. With walls surrounding these cities, these women separate their space from that of men. The women harbor a relentless suspicion of men with their assumed tendency to devastate the world with wars, as is proven by events in the past. In their separate worlds, the women's sphere is the heart of science, art, and technology. Men have to become part of a garrison fraternity where physical exercise and fighting are the way of living. Not allowed to have books, a non-military education, or to

socialize with women, men live in exile, away from the comforts of the women's cities. When women have male babies, they are given to the garrison at the age of five and these boys choose either to live among women or men at the age of fifteen. Arbitrary wars against other garrisons of sister cities are planned and executed to keep the men alert, giving the warriors a purpose in life. Even though there is hope in the beginning, the novel does not end on a hopeful note. This novel accommodates the opposing points of view of both Achterhuis and Oudenampsen as I will further demonstrate by means of some close readings.

In this dystopian novel, women's cities are governed by councils of women, acting as mothers of the community as well as strict leaders who keep reminding the citizens of the rules of the community. This corresponds to Achterhuis' aspect of doom-mongering as one of the ways the utopian spirit is kept alive. It also happens to be one of the methods the council of women uses in order to make sure that all the women subjects of their community abide by the rules at all times. In the passage below, Morgot, the leader of the governing council of this utopian space, share her rationale for why the ceremonies hold societal significance:

> "We all have to do things we don't want to do," Morgot had said. "All of us here in Women's Country. Sometimes they are things hurt us to do. We accept the hurt because the alternative would be worse. We have many reminders to keep us aware of that. The Council ceremonies. The play before summer carnival. The desolations are there to remind us of pain, and the well is there to remind us that the pain will pass."[174]

The new generation of women is raised with the intimidation that "the alternative would be worse." This notion is repeatedly presented as a reminder for the subjects to be obedient. The

[174] Tepper, *The Gate to Women's Country*, 12.

doom-mongering effect of reminding the painful past as a warning functions to protect the separatist utopia from disintegrating and keeps the women away from the men. To that effect, the men are portrayed as the others who are culpable and monstrous, those to be feared, avoided and kept at bay.

While this is a gender separatist novel with a dark plot, there is still some hope that shines through, as Oudenampsen would emphasize. In the passage below, the leader of the women explains why they continue to adhere to their principles and how they do not get disheartened by perceived failures:

> As for the rebellion, we have known about it since it began. Women's Country has been here for three hundred years, Septemius. How long could we have survived if we had not known about rebellions? How many rebellions do you think there have been? Every decade, every score of years there is a rebellion. Some faction in a garrison begins to feel aggrieved. Some group of women begin to play the fool. Rebellions! They begin like a boil, swelling and pustulent, and we let them grow until they come to a head. Then we lance them, and there is pain, and the swelling goes down. Until next time.[175]

Rebellion of the warriors against the women is one of many incidents that the leaders keep secret from the community of women. Such incidents work to undermine the women's trust in the leaders and might cause them to break the rules and socialize with the warriors.

Here, on the one hand, approached from the perspective of the leaders, they may succeed in keeping these painful incidents private and continue to work towards their goal of utopia. There is an element of hopeful thinking in that choice. On the other hand, the warriors rebel

[175] Ibid, 290.

against the women in an attempt to break free from the dystopia in which they are forced to live. This enables them to imagine their own utopia, as the women did, and perhaps not be confined within the walls of the garrison and lead a life of arbitrary wars. In this regard, from both sides of the opposite perspective, there is ubiquitous utopian thinking in the attempt to safeguard the newly established society and in the rebellions – both for women and for men.

In separatist utopian narratives, destruction resembles a reset function after which new realities can be imagined and then created. If destruction is taken as a negative occurrence by default, then the assumption would be that all utopias are doomed to fail. Seeing gender separatist feminist utopian novels as part of a broader constellation can facilitate finding solutions to common problems presented and explored not only in these novels but also in the eras when these novels were written. Each feminist utopian book has a limited reach and space by itself. However, when the subgenre is considered as a whole, plot elements in works of literature from different eras and contexts start to show certain patterns. In my reading, the destruction motifs and even dystopia itself can be considered constructive within the larger realm of feminist thought and literature. Most of the novels that I studied end with the clue that their eutopia is a bleak endeavor as more details come to the surface. They suggest that the eutopian entity as it currently is has to be challenged, disrupted, destroyed, and then rebuilt. This cycle of destruction and rebirth, which I ultimately consider to be constructive, is one of the central narrative motifs in the gynotopian subgenre.

Conclusion: The benefits of destruction in relation to the utopian motif

Destruction and cleansing before recreating the world is a required method of abolishing patriarchy and restarting the process of designing an ideal life that suits the needs and rights of women. To understand and validate the necessity of the destruction of patriarchy, I would like to remind the reader of what marks it. Gerda Lerner, who was one of the pioneer sociologist

historians in the field of researching and teaching women's history, defines patriarchy in *The Creation of Patriarchy* as follows:

> Patriarchy in its wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources.[176]

In her definition of patriarchy, Lerner mentions the full-scale institutionalization of male dominance over "society in general" and the nuclear family. In this context, Lerner sees the nuclear family as the bedrock of patriarchal dominance that oppresses women. At this point, I find the literary and by implication imaginary motif of destruction an effective one to use because the act of destruction fulfills its purpose of overthrowing a male dominance over women that is total, from the depicted nuclear families to entire societies. The destruction is required to reduce crimes against women, children, and other marginalized groups, as well as make it possible to improve their quality of life. Importantly, Lerner's definition of patriarchy ends with the remark that women are not totally powerless; they have always had certain influences even though these seemed at times quite different and contrasting from those possessed by men. The act of destruction within plots of gender separatist utopian novels and also the act of rewriting the narrative of society itself, support Lerner's assertion that women are not powerless subjects under patriarchy.

[176] Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 239.

In the novels I studied, patriarchy is a system that is so far-reaching in its influence and dominance that acts of reform cannot instigate sustainable change for marginalized and oppressed groups. The novels present patriarchy as a sociopolitical and economic system that is so rigid that only its destruction can cure the world of its strong and overbearing hold. Patriarchy is not only the primary root of women's subjugation but also a large factor that affects the lives of men and anyone who is forced to exist and survive under its rigid constellation. In order to maintain "the rule of the father," the metanarratives of specific gender roles are kept in place, emphasized by the legal, social, economic, and familial institutions under its discretion. Even though patriarchy has been challenged in some parts of the world, and even though there are considerable improvements in many countries, the reach of patriarchy is as strong as ever in the eras of the novels. This is why the novels imagine their alternative so radically.

This leaves us with the question of the frequent recurrence of a dystopian reality after the previous system has been destroyed. Some thinkers, such as the Trinidad and Tobago-born British sociologist and utopian scholar Krishan Kumar, argue that the seemingly dystopian motif of destruction points towards a decline in the prevalence of utopian thought. He believes that one of the main reasons why utopian thought is in decline is that utopian novels abandon their concern for society as a whole to instead concern themselves with personal emotions in a dystopian context.[177] He wonders, consequently, how it would be to experience the loss of utopian thought and then contends this would imply a static state. In his reading, human beings, having quite a mastery of their existence but suffering a loss of utopian ideals and development, are left to blind fate without any dreams of improving their lives.[178] I do not expect this bleak fate to ever befall feminist utopian thought. I rather agree with Sarah LeFanu who states that "there is a hidden utopian streak in these dystopian novels by women. They contain an element

[177] Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia*, 421.
[178] Ibid, 424.

of hopefulness that rests on a belief in the power and efficacy of women's speech."[179] The hidden utopian element in dystopian novels by women is embedded, that is, in the manifestation of the worst-case scenarios. These scenarios can give awareness to readers and inspire them to become politically conscious and active. Furthermore, visualizing and blueprinting new worlds, whether in fiction or in real life, constitutes a big part of how oppressed and marginalized people connect with each other and form supportive groups. Even a dystopian narrative and a plot or blueprint that rests on the destruction motif can bring women together so that they can create lasting change.

Destroying patriarchy is an imaginary act of resistance that lies at the heart of the destruction motif in gender separatist novels. This act of resistance is actualized and supported by forming an alliance against a common enemy. North American feminist and abolitionist scholar bell hooks focused on the intersection of gender studies, critical race theory, and anti-capitalism in her transformative and subversive work. Her call to action below provides a relatable indication of the motivation behind the act of destruction, in its potential to gather in solidarity, and to imagine an act of rebirth:

> Women are the group most victimized by sexist oppression. As with other forms of group oppression, sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo. Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men. We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are "natural" enemies, that solidarity will

[179] LeFanu, *Feminism and Science Fiction*, 75.

> never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must unlearn them if we are to build a sustained feminist movement. We must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning and value of Sisterhood.[180]

Breaking free from sexist oppression is first and foremost an incentive driving the imaginary destruction of the current status quo and the possible creation of a eutopian space. The reason behind the necessity for destruction is, in line with the argument of hooks above, that this overarching oppression is perpetuated by the subtly or obviously reaching hands of patriarchy. The inconspicuous and ubiquitous nature of this oppression makes it so that neither women nor men have a simple way of escaping its complex and ingrained structure. Moreover, within this structure, there is also the heteronormative narrative that women are each other's enemies and that they have to fight each other to gain the attention and affection of men. This narrative is supported by the gender roles that are forced on society and rewarded by the holy grail of the perceived supremacy of forming a nuclear family. In response to the both explicit and subconscious indoctrination involved, radical feminist sisterhood and separatist feminist utopianism can help unlearn the metanarratives of patriarchy and build a sustainable feminist movement that exists in solidarity. In my reading, it is the "true meaning and value of Sisterhood" that can be observed in gender separatist novels. Here, the first step of an imaginary destruction is required in order to step away from the sexist oppression and indoctrination that comes with patriarchy.

In conclusion, destruction turns out to be a necessary narrative archetype in feminist gender separatist utopian (dystopian or eutopian) literature. As I have argued in this chapter, the didactic warning inherent in dystopias acts as a hopeful utopian element where destruction is

[180] hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 43.

welcomed as a necessary act of cleansing. Destruction is not a solution but part of a cycle, as it is possibly followed by a *tabula rasa* state, which then leads to another oppressive society that in turn requires yet another destruction. This narrative cycle provides the tools with which the authors and their audiences can imagine different realities. Imagining these, the destruction motive, as suggested above, relates intrinsically to another motif: that of the clean slate or the *tabula rasa*. This is the central theme that is explored in the next chapter.

3. Tabula rasa as a clean slate – or uncleanable slate

The motif of destruction serves as a pivotal breaking point from a male-dominated historical narrative. In gender separatist utopian novels, the notion of an intentional or perceived tabula rasa that emerges in the aftermath of destruction becomes a driving force, motivating the imagination and construction of a feminist utopian society from the ground up - a society built on a fresh foundation unburdened by history. The previous world is destroyed due to the poor life conditions of women and it appears that a new eutopian condition can only be formed when the ashes of that old world have settled down. The question, however, is whether such ashes ever really settle down in a way that one can speak of a clean slate in the concept of tabula rasa.

In this chapter, I concentrate first on one of the fundamental motivations behind the concept of tabula rasa and how it relates to historiography and the concept of rebirth. Then I move on to exploring the history and theory of matriarchal societies in gender separatist utopian novels based on a sociopolitical structure that is formed on the foundation of a *tabula rasa* right after a form of destruction has taken place. The condition of tabula rasa acts as a convenient metaphor, then, for the enterprise of creating a new society, which is why the reduction of tabula rasa to "blank slate" in the historical and theoretical evolution of the term requires a closer look. I will do so in the next section. In the end, I examine how the idea of tabula rasa interacts with utopian hope in general.

There is some variety in how gender separatist utopian literary works express the motif of tabula rasa. *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (1984) by Katherine V. Forrest and *Ammonite* by Nicola Griffith (1992), for instance, are utopian examples that utilize a tabula rasa motif without any case of explicit destruction preceding the foundation of their societies. Instead, these novels employ more passive and implicit methods of cleaning the slate in their plots such as compulsory interplanetary relocations. From the same literary period, *The Y Chromosome* (1990) by Leona

Gom and *Califia's Daughters* (2004) by Laurie R. King are novels in which the concept of tabula rasa follows a clear instance of destruction fueled by genetic viruses that kill only men and/or as a direct consequence of the actions of men. Another example is Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1989) in which the destruction has been caused by a catastrophic nuclear war. In either case, the plots have one starting point in common: the tabula rasa stage in which the communities rebuild their societies, regardless of whether this takes place before or after recapitulating their pasts. Recognizing the nuances of this concept can provide a better understanding of the interconnected nature of destruction and rebirth in my corpus.

Tabula rasa, herstory, and historiography

The theme of tabula rasa aims to problematize and undo *history*. The first course of action it inspires is starting over with a new and improved society after a catastrophic event that destroys the old status quo. This process of unearthing and emphasizing a so-called *herstory* instead of a history underlines the achievements and capabilities of women that have been systematically overlooked in the written records of older patriarchal societies. In this context, the word *herstory* has transformative feminist energy: the use of this newer term is aimed at reclaiming women's space in history and rewriting the dominant male-centric narrative. Consequently, subverting an existing term to express *her* instead of *his* acts as an example of metaphorically destroying a word whose narrative traditions prioritized the justification and glorification of male achievements. Instead, *herstory* presents a term that emphasizes women's historical past and accomplishments.

When one takes a closer look, however, the etymology of the word *history* does not have any clear connection to the third-person male singular possessive determiner word *his*. The root of the word is *historia* from Latin, which means "expert, witness"[181] and *his* is not the male

[181] For the extended etymology of the word *history*, see https://www.etymonline.com/word/history

possessive determiner in Latin nor does it have a concrete connection with the Latin equivalent of *his*, which is *suus*. Therefore, the use of *herstory* as part of feminist terminology signifies a postmodern reshaping of the word as opposed to a *reclaiming* of the word from the male paradigm. In other words, the term *history* actually never excluded women's experience and achievements semantically. Therefore, there is no direct, etymological correlation with changing the word into *herstory* to facilitate the inclusion of women's experiences and achievements within the realm of history-writing. The way history has been interpreted and written, however, has immensely affected the representation of women's experiences and achievements throughout history. This is why I think the creation of the word *herstory* is undoubtedly valuable in the awareness it creates and the rewriting/reclaiming of the history it facilitates. In the literature I am studying, the concept of *herstory* transforms the fantasy of total destruction into an act of stepping away from the traditional understanding and supposed continuity of history.

The term tabula rasa is related to 'birth' in the context of gender separatist utopian novels. In this subgenre, it is presupposed that human nature is imperfect but somewhat redeemable. I reach this conclusion because education has always been a fundamental concept in woman-only utopian spaces. While there exists the belief that men are inherently aggressive and harmful, there is also the belief that women can be educated in such a way that they conform to the ideals of the post-destruction eutopia. Therefore, education is one of the core concepts in the re-imagination of the new society, based on the idea that a human being (or at least a woman) starts life without any preexisting traits such as aggression. However, at this point, I am especially interested in the different connotations attributed to the term tabula rasa rather than an examination of human nature itself.

Etymologically, the literal translation of tabula rasa from Latin is "scraped tablet," meaning the writing on the tablet has been erased, making the tablet available for use again.[182]

[182] For the extended etymology of the word *tabula rasa*, see https://www.etymonline.com/word/tabula%20rasa

The act of scraping is different from receiving a brand-new and clean surface to write on. The tablet carries the traces of the previous writings. Nonetheless, "blank slate" is the most common translation and terminological usage of tabula rasa. The conceptual discussion of tabula rasa can benefit from a brief discussion of its theoretical history; therefore, here I will look into some of the most consulted definitions and argumentations around the concept of tabula rasa from philosophical history. In the following pages, I briefly examine the work of René Descartes, John Locke, and Sigmund Freud in this context. Through this interrogation, some intersecting and perhaps conflicting notions around tabula rasa may arise and these can facilitate a better understanding of the inner workings of the destruction and rebirth motifs in gender-separated feminist utopian literary works in my corpus.

My list makes a rough start from the Enlightenment era. Seventeenth-century French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes holds a theologically creationist view in terms of tabula rasa, believing that there is an innate design and inherent logic behind human behavior and characteristic features, regardless of the processes of experiences and observations to which any child has access. Below is an excerpt from the dialogue in his work *The Search for Truth by Means of Natural Light* where he questions the first concepts that are known by people, what their "soul" includes by birth, and how he argues that this is an imperfect state to begin with:

> It seems to me that all this can be explained very clearly if we compare the imagination of a child to a *tabula rasa* on which our ideas are to be traced, these ideas being like portraits drawn from nature. Our senses, inclinations, teachers and intellect are the different artists who may work at this task, and among them the least competent are the first to take part, namely our imperfect senses, blind instincts and foolish nurses.[183]

[183] Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume 2*, 406.

Descartes starts by likening the mind of a child to *tabula rasa* and then relating that connection to an artist's painting. If nature is mirrored in this work of art, there will be several factors that cannot be fully controlled. He mentions that the least competent of the faculties ("imperfect senses, blind instincts and foolish nurses") will be the first to be imprinted on the child while still a baby. Descartes concentrates more on how to correct this imperfection. Following this presentation of the problem, Eudoxus, with whom Descartes is having the dialogue, suggests that it would be better to "wipe [the imperfections] off with a sponge" instead of wasting time by trying to make corrections.[184] They relate the example of the painting back to the mind of a child. They agree that when a child reaches an age of maturity, they could reframe their thoughts accordingly. However, this brings Descartes to his first point that the first imprints are not only the least competent but also the most deeply etched ones.[185] In his conceptualization, tabula rasa cannot be a clean slate, therefore, because it will at least carry the deepest imprints that were the first received.

Regardless of the dialogue from Descartes above, English philosopher and physician[186] John Locke is usually attributed as the first person to use the term tabula rasa in the context of "blank slate." He argues that any child starts life from a blank state and then learns certain skills and behaviors through empirical experiences:

> All ideas come from sensation or reflection. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas:- How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless

[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Although whether Locke was a medical doctor or not is disputed, it is accurate to state that he had comprehensive medical knowledge.

> fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either, about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.[187]

Locke refers to tabula rasa as "white paper" in this quote and reflects that the paper is completely void of anything it could hold. For him, everything comes from experience and observation of both external and internal happenings. He argues that we need to draw from both of these sources to fill our tabula rasa effectively. His ideas on the nature of a child's brain upon birth emphasize that people have the opportunity to obtain different experiences and observations to form their opinions, behaviors, and skills. He does not believe in the existence of innate ideas in a child's mind. This line of thinking also supports Locke's legacy as the father of liberalism, as evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker argues. This argument against innate opinions or qualities rules out the assumed differences among people from different ethnic groups, gender expressions, economic class, or other sociopolitical backgrounds.[188]

Here I will jump two centuries ahead and explore tabula rasa from the viewpoint of the Austrian neurologist and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. The human psyche comprises a significant portion of his work. The concept of tabula rasa plays a role when he concentrates on factors external to the psyche of the individual. In his essay "Notiz über den „Wunderblock"" he

[187] Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 17.
[188] Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, 6.

concentrates on memory perception apparatuses in the formation of the psyche. While doing so, he uses the term paper (*Blatt Papier*) referring to a clean page.[189] The way memory perception works would necessitate the person to keep needing new clean pages as more and more information or memories need to be stored. At this point, he mentions an object named *Wunderblock*,[190] which is a copy sheet notebook made with a celluloid plate and wax paper. The papers in this notebook create a copy of the writings on the previous page while leaving permanent traces (*auerhafte Erinnerungsspur*)[191] behind. The way Freud uses the terminology of tabula rasa underlines that it is an uncleanable slate. Since he is arguing in a cognitive development context, he also underlines that the slate is uncleanable; therefore, previous experiences can be remembered even when they become vague over time.

Let me, before I return to the function of tabula rasas in feminist utopian literature, sum up the main insights of this overview. The Cartesian view represents the existence of preconceived intrinsic ideas and models, thereby implying that the concept of a *clean* tabula rasa is impossible because there cannot be a blank slate. On the other hand, Lockean view puts the emphasis on a clean or empty start and the experiential learning process that fills the mind with knowledge. This view would be a better fit for the birth of a new world and the intended rebuilding purposes of the gender separatist utopian literary formulation. However, the way Freud uses the concept of tabula rasa through the example of the mystic writing pad (*Wunderblock*) provides many insights into the way tabula rasa is used in the gender separatist utopian subgenre. With his example, the past leaves its traces behind and it is indeed expected to leave traces behind so that those can be remembered. Even though the phrase *tabula rasa* may make us think of a *clean slate* and a fresh start free from history, the philosophical history behind

[189] Freud, "Notiz Über Den „Wunderblock"." *Internationale Zeitschrift Für Psychoanalyse* 10, no. 1, 1924, pp. 1-5. 1.
[190] Ibid, 2.
[191] Ibid.

the terminology reveals that a clean slate cannot be achieved. As both the warnings and nostalgia relating to the destroyed worlds in my corpus play an important role in how the new utopian spaces are imagined, created, and maintained, the *uncleanable but wiped slate* nuance of *tabula rasa* explains the narrative trope in my corpus in a more fitting way.

Semantic shifts and changes surrounding the term thus fluctuate between the perfection of a pre-existing clean slate – "formlessness prior to text" – and its exact opposite, namely an existing text being erased to make a clean surface on which new text can be written. The first option concerns a (textual) history that starts without a pre-history. The second option implies that textual production, and by implication history, is a process of permanent inscription, erasure, and new inscriptions. Both options are relevant, or operative, in gender separatist utopian novels, though with a different impact. The first option, of starting history from scratch, connotes a wish or a desire to be able to not have a pre-existing history. The second option connotes rather a plot structure of making history *anew*, and making history *anew* implies that there was a pre-existing history. In the following section, I will examine the operations and interactions of both of these options in my corpus.

American historian and literary critic Hayden White mentions that he treats history as "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing* them."[192] He further explains how the "transformation of chronicle into story" happens via the arrangement of the events in a temporal order, organizing a beginning, middle, and end, and characterization of events into motifs.[193] In my opinion, the novels in this subgenre have a very specific way of telling the events of the past. In many instances, their narrative impact almost feels like a gathering around the campfire. This narrative of the past is usually told by a revered

[192] White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*, 2.
[193] Ibid, 5.

member of the community who is either old enough to remember the past or who is a historian that has access to archives. The way this historical narrative is presented acts as a justification for the decisions of the past but also as a catalyst for future decisions. I argue that the representation of history in this context thus also brings forth the verbal construction of herstory through the narrativization of past events.

This rewriting of history brings up the question of when history actually starts: with the incident of destruction or with the presentation of the narrative story of history within the plot. If there is no history without being written or told, does it then start when we are told about the events of the past? As destruction creates a tabula rasa state, the rewriting of history starts when the utopian communities learn about or think back at the historical state before destruction. The concept of tabula rasa in this subgenre problematizes the idea of rewriting history into herstory.

From tabula rasa to tabula fixata

As I reviewed in the previous chapter, the destruction motif in gender separatist and radical feminist utopian novels is a subversive act rooted in the historical desire to take back control from the patriarchal power dynamics that interpreted the active role of women in society and family from a passive viewpoint. Therefore, in the act of rebuilding a feminist society in these utopian novels, there is a cyclical motion from passive struggle to active revolution and rebirth. The choice of utilizing the concept of tabula rasa as a point of departure in this subgenre of gender separatist utopianism further emphasizes the belief that human beings are redeemable, which is a notion that aids the cultivation of hope in this subgenre of utopianism.

As I said previously, the desire for destruction and world-building becomes an integral part of radical feminist utopianism on the basis that a blank slate enables the possibility for human redemption. As the concept of utopianism constitutes a hopeful endeavor in gender separatist novels, redeeming humanity is one of the main objectives of the newly established

communities. These communities presuppose a birth without history or a start from scratch and rely on educational efforts to create a society that aligns with the new utopian ideals. These ideals are meant to be fixed and become common traits of that society. Thus, these utopian communities aim to establish a transition from a tabula rasa state to a tabula fixata state.

The aim of reaching a clean slate with the perceived dystopian world is mirrored via the efforts of reaching a clean slate with human beings that are born in this new society. In the novels, the debate of educating or conditioning certain traits out of society mostly concerns whether males are aggressive by nature or not. This is an extension of the debate between genetics (what cannot be controlled prior to birth) and environment (what can be controlled through social interventions after birth). The origin of the concept dates back to the surge of the political and ethical debates around eugenics in science at the beginning of the twentieth century.[194] What was once a debate of comparison and denial between the two sides of an assumed binary opposition, genetics versus environment, has evolved into a complementary research effort of these two factors and an understanding that both substantially affect the development of an individual in different stages at varying levels.

The timeline of the novels discussed in this chapter coincides with the period after the culmination of research from the schools of both social and biological determinism. How we are by birth and how we grow are no longer considered opposing forces. The ending of the novels reflects this idea as well. Even though the communities of women shun males *en masse* due to their assumed innately aggressive nature, the gender separatist utopian communities of women often become aware of this misattribution towards the end of the novel. This resolution comes up when the women notice the aggression and corruption within the women of the community and

[194] See Francis Galton, "On Men of Science, their Nature and their Nurture." *Proceedings of the Royal Institution of Great Britain*. 7 (1875): 227-236.

when they start realizing that some men are not as inherently aggressive as the community leaders have indoctrinated the men to be and the women to believe that the men are.

The process of re-education of the society becomes an integral part of the newly established one. This emphasis on education is placed in order to fix certain desirable traits that are considered to advance the life quality and survival rate of society. First and foremost, the transition from the catastrophic destruction phase to the eutopian tabula rasa phase presents an amalgamation of aspects of both the innate and unchangeable characteristics as well as the redeemable and educable characteristics of human beings. The main rationale behind destruction, starting over, and rebuilding a women-led and women-populated society is the belief that if the educational efforts employed in patriarchal societies are adjusted to reflect the needs of women, the outcome of the societal status could also create a more egalitarian society. This would, in turn, cater to the needs of women in a more profound and constructive way. However, when these fictional societies enter the tabula rasa stage after the destruction that wipes out their civilization or that kills off only men, the new women leaders act on the assumption that the nature of men is inherently flawed. This biologically essentialist assumption leads to the creation of a gender separatist paradigm in which men are kept away from women. This is not only because their nature is considered to be detrimental to the overall wellbeing of the eutopian society but also because their assumably flawed nature would corrupt the society due to the war technologies they might develop. In other words, the assumed unwelcome inherent nature of men is expected to negatively affect the way in which the new society is supposed to be functioning.

Furthermore, these eutopias rely heavily on the precautions against the factors that have given rise to the destruction of society in the first place. This precautionary state is also the case in the gender separatist novels in my research in which such precautions become the main principles and also the laws of the new eutopian community. The rules become the foundations of the principles of nurture. Consequently, education holds great importance in the re-

establishment of society because, in addition to reproductive practices, education is considered to be the central activity in the survival of the new communities. Educational efforts in this context most often cater to the immediate needs of the community, both practically and culturally. The fear of advancing science and technology represents the fear of a perceived danger originating from the unpredictability of human nature that could start wars and similar phases of destruction known from history. Therefore, the common plots of gender separatist utopian novels explore the amplification of these polar opposites and show a didactic and often satirical version of gender relations.

Tabula rasa vs the inscription of history: a case study

One of the novels in which the concepts of biologically essentialist innate characteristics and education play an important role is *The Y Chromosome*, a utopian novel written in 1990 by the Canadian author Leona Gom. In addition to publishing poetry, Gom has worked as a professor in the fields of women's studies and sociology. Her gender separatist utopian novel *The Y Chromosome* takes place in the future where an all-woman society is formed after a deadly virus attacks the Y chromosome, wiping off the male species from the face of the earth. The new society comprised of the remaining people is apprehensive of the violence recorded in the male-dominated past and is cautious about certain risk factors, such as returning to the conditions that caused the destruction, so as not to return to those older times when women suffered heavily under an oppressive regime.

As I mentioned in the previous section, in this subgenre, the exposition of the past is usually accomplished through the historian character trope. Just as in the novels from the previous chapter,[195] *The Y Chromosome* also has a historian protagonist, Delacour. Despite other

[195] In addition to *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (1984) by Katherine V. Forrest, *The Shore of Women* (1986) by Pamela Sargent, *The Gate to Women's Country* (1989) by Sheri S. Tepper, *The Y Chromosome* (1990) by Leona Gom, *Ammonite* (2002) by Nicola Griffith and *Califia's Daughters* (2004) by Leigh Richards (from the

members of the community questioning the validity of her work, as a historian, Delacour feels dutiful towards her job of unearthing the past and enlightening the present for the sake of her community. When her friend Bowden says "It's just – all this stuff about the male. The Change was more than three hundred years ago. You can't assume everyone is interested in those times,"[196] Delacour's outlook on her job and her passion for it stays unchanged. The idea that *history* is not worth being studied due to the assumed irredeemable character of men's nature at times becomes a reason to socially isolate and ridicule historians in gender separatist communities.

An artifact from the past, which gives direction to the plot, is one of the highlights of *The Y Chromosome*: The book titled *The Journal of Adam Markov*, written by the allegorically named author Adam, the first man but in this case also the *everyman*, which is a stock character model based on the medieval morality play *Everyman* from the fifteenth century. The broad relatability of the everyman character makes the use of this trope effective in didactic literature; consequently, *The Journal* has a didactic effect within the novel.

This journal is one of the most important books in the community library and the main source of the community's collective knowledge about the male-dominated past. It is the way the women's society gets to learn about the ways of the past, how the virus developed, and how it spread enough to impact the whole world. On one of the first pages of *The Journal*, Adam writes "I just tried to read one of Elizabeth's reports she brought home from work. 'Sexlinked Immunodysfunction Syndrome.' What a pretty name they've given death."[197] As the research about the virus continues, the women feel secure with the knowledge that the virus is not affecting the X chromosomes while they are also emotionally distanced from how the men are

bibliography of this dissertation), *A Door into Ocean* (1986) by Joan Slonczewski and *The Cleft* (2007) by Doris Lessing also have a strong component of the historian character trope.

[196] Gom, *The Y Chromosome*, 18.

[197] Ibid, 40.

feeling about this virus. The emotional hardship the males are going through and providing them with the emotional support they may need is not a matter of discussion. Before long, the chromosome damage starts to affect the Y chromosomes at conception, thus preventing the birth of male babies and presenting a threat of extinction. Feeling agitated and cornered due to these fast and relentless developments that threaten their survival, men start to riot, mostly aiming at locations of culture (versus nature) where they would assume to encounter women to kill. This act of violence stems from the notion held by men, according to *The Journal*, that women have stopped caring about saving men. During these riots, which are presented as examples of male aggression, the sperm banks are also destroyed, leading to the probable end of the male species. Therefore, this plot development proves the assumed aggression of men in the pre-catastrophic society. According to the plot, the aggressive men deserved this extinction, by also destroying the sperm banks themselves through their own assumedly aggressive nature.

Since men are not a part of their society anymore, masculinity and the idea of being a man are merely sterile subjects of study in the classroom. However, the women of this new society do not conduct an objective study of the men: "If the male-defining phallus had really been pride-stimulus, it would not have been so determinedly hidden. Photographs. Film. Art. We are commonly depicted naked. Not males. The phallus: obviously an attribute of shame."[198] Their objectifying and intense dissection and criticism of the male body and assumed behavior show their efforts to make sure the community of women does not desire to seek out the men or wish to rebuild a society resembling the one in the past. The education in the classroom is therefore a reminder of the old times, underlining that the tabula rasa is not blank and that the past is still present.

This perspective is further emphasized by one of the two thematic options for interpreting tabula rasa, as I discussed in the previous section. To recap, this option suggests that textual

[198] Ibid, 25.

production, and consequently history, involves a continuous cycle of inscription, erasure, and subsequent inscriptions. Rather than starting history from scratch, this option conveys a plot structure centered around the continual creation of history, which inherently implies the existence of a pre-existing history.

The all-woman society is conditioned under the assumption that men are aggressive. Therefore getting rid of their genetic heritage also meant getting rid of aggression in society. However, the same students still question the rationale behind the assumed aggression of men:

> "But if the male was envious of us and felt inferior," asked someone, "how do you explain their oppression of us, their war-making and aggression?"
> Hythe shrugged. "Antithesis compensation. When one cannot emulate, one emphasizes difference. Elevate deficiency to superiority."[199]

As this quote makes clear, the women in the classroom have gendered assumptions on which they base structures of inferiority and superiority, strengthening the metanarrative of biological essentialism against men and in favor of women.

The clearest portrayal of how the women's community of the post-destruction era has grown to recognize men as aggressive is provided in *The Journal of Adam Markov* in which Adam documents in detail how the riots progressed. He was watching as he "saw another women's centre […] in flames, the crowd of men around it shouting, frenzied, the police seemingly incapable of control."[200] It is evident from the account in *The Journal* that the riots are taking place as a knee-jerk reaction to the fact that the female species is not targeted or negatively affected by the virus. The reaction of the men is presented as evidence of their

[199] Ibid, 28.
[200] Ibid, 56.

assumed aggression in a hyper-exaggerated way. Adam, however, stands as an example of a man who goes against his assumed nature, presenting the perspective that genetics-based prejudice and assuming inherent aggression in men is unfair and destructive in itself.

The riots have gone from being centered around women and spilled over to any location where rioters thought there would be women: "The attacks are getting more generalized. It's still mostly women's centres, but now the rioters seem to be taking on places such as libraries, museums, universities. Hospitals. Anyplace, it seems, where they think there'll be women. Maybe anyplace that represents to them culture, civilization."[201] Women's presence in spaces of culture, education, and achievement is a good reference to the general gender binary association between men and culture versus women and nature. The rioting men are under the impression that while men are dying, women are not working toward the survival of the male species and are ignoring their plight. Therefore, some groups of men react by lashing out at women in an attempt to prove their own superiority in the face of their impending extinction. This is also another common incident that presents the aggression of men as justification for the occurrence of destruction prior to tabula rasa.

As can be seen, in this novel, society learns about the outcome of the past aggression of men from the historical records in *The Journal*. However, when the women encounter a new man at the doorsteps of their community, they are surprised by the nature of this person's existence defying what they had been taught about the nature of the male species in the classroom through the gender-based assumptions upheld to maintain the status quo of the gender separatist society. Below Delacour is talking to one of the men from the visiting group:

> "Gentle and kind?" That doesn't sound like what we know of males. Isn't he… aggressive, dominating?"

[201] Ibid, 57.

> He shook his head vehemently, determined to convince her. "He's the least aggressive of any of us. Even less so than my mother. When the animals have to be killed, he refuses to do it." […]
> If Delacour noticed anything, she didn't pursue it. "I suppose there always were males like that," she said. "But they were in the minority."[202]

Delacour has difficulty believing that this man is gentle and kind, as she has been taught that men are aggressive and dominating. The comparison between the mother and this man not only opens up a new door to the past, but produces a moment of contact which may allow the people from the community to question their assumptions and the highly idealized tenets of their society. The information that even his mother is more aggressive than the men challenges the assumption that men are aggressive by nature:

> "We're not that different from you."
> "Don't you see ways in which you think, feel, behave differently from the rest of us?"
> "I don't know. How can I tell if the way I am is the result of my just being an individual or of my being male?"[203]

Through this conversation, the generalization of group versus individual and biological essentialism is problematized. The seeds of the next rebellion are sown through encounters that question the validity of the educational efforts of nurture in the gender separatist utopian society.

[202] Ibid, 179.
[203] Ibid.

When individuals from opposing groups engage in conversation about their own nature, the assumptions about the other group start to disintegrate.

There is considerable resistance, however, when the characters are faced with some societal and observational facts:

> "Still – how do you explain the world we've made, so different from the male world? Consensus governments, no wars, no killing – except by very ill people, and there were only two in the whole country last year. Violence against others as it was before the change is virtually nonexistent."
> "But perhaps that's only because this world had an unnatural beginning. It would pick what it liked and discard what it didn't. It seems to me that so much of life around us –" he waved his hand vaguely in the air "– the university, the way we work and think and live together – all that is chosen from the ways of the pre-Change world. This world didn't have to struggle through centuries of trial and error, of primitive science and religion and medicine and survival of the fittest."[204]

When Delacour questions how it is possible that there is no violence or wars in the community of women, the male visitor gives this explanation that speaks to the theoretical foundations of the subgenre. The motifs of destruction and tabula rasa provide the space for a calculated and careful reconstruction of the world. This consequently opens up the opportunity to build sociopolitical structures that can aim to avoid most of the social and communal evils and shortcomings that were observed in the past. This passage also articulates a comparison of blueprint and critical utopias in terms of how a blueprint utopia tends to cherry-pick desirable societal features and leave the rest out of the design of the new eutopian society. This way the new society is warded

[204] Ibid, 180.

off from certain concepts that frighten them, such as destructive technology, possessive relationships, and obsessive regimes in general that may lead back to catastrophes or the return of unsatisfactory living conditions for women. All of this is possible because the tablet is not clean and because they get the opportunity to remember and learn from the historical past.

This debate on innate characteristics brings about another moral dilemma when the protagonist is pregnant with a baby from one of the new male visitors who appeared at the gates unannounced. One of the women is committed to killing this baby for fear of having a baby from an old-fashioned conception and having the accepted societal norms shaken: Men are the root of all evil and aggression, and reintegration is undesirable if not impossible. However, she does not find the task of killing a baby easy and deals with an impasse: "*I'll kill the baby*. […]. Killing: what the males had done. Would they have justified it, too, as she was doing, that it was necessary, one small death balanced against a greater good?"[205] She tries to come to terms with her desire to kill the baby by rationalizing the act of killing as "one small death balanced against a greater good;" the greater good being the continued exclusion of the men due to the assumptions based on their perceived aggressive nature. This rationalization is one of the rupture points of the tension between the ideals and ethics of the community and the individual. The utilitarian notion of the eutopian dream starts to fade and the belief in the concept of biological essentialism is challenged. Later, she meets the baby and humanizes him as something other than the embodiment of the idea of aggression against the community but as an individual that requires personal consideration. In the end, she comes to the conclusion that she should not kill the baby.

In conclusion, this gender separatist utopian novel that builds on the premise of biological determinism against the male species ends on a hopeful note. In the passage below, the historian Delacour elaborates that a new way of handling gender politics may be possible:

[205] Ibid, 214.

> "I've studied history. I *teach* history. I know what it was like before the Change. But what caused the problems were overpopulation, poor political structures, class conflicts, resource shortages, pollution – males were trapped into them just as we were. But now, we don't have those pressures; we'd be bringing them into an entirely different system."[206]

Gender-based biological determinism is slowly put aside and the problems of the patriarchal society are placed more on the social, political, and economic factors that affect the nature and the nurture of people of all genders. Despite being reserved about initiating structural change, the historian character has doubts about the status quo. She is familiar with the actual causes of the gender issues of the past and reiterates that men have also been struggling under patriarchy. She fears that males would corrupt the system again as they had done in the past.[207] The governing leaders and councils of these gender separatist utopian societies use this precarious fear regarding the recurrence of past catastrophes as a way of closing off the community to change, therefore protecting it from the catastrophes of the past. The re-integration of males into the all-woman community is continually under scrutiny:

> "Or which they might contribute to and strengthen. Our world is hardly perfect now. People are still starving. Consensus doesn't always work. We're not all nice, nurturing people; we're greedy and ambitious, too, just like they were –"
> "We don't make war. We don't kill each other."

[206] Ibid, 207.
[207] Ibid.

> "It's all in what we're taught. Males were taught to kill. If we taught each other to make war and kill, we'd do it, too."[208]

Above is a conversation between two women from the community, one of whom is in favor of nurture and considers the mentioned traits to be aggressive and traditionally attributed to masculinity regardless of exceptions, and the other who thinks that the isolated all-woman society is a way to avoid wars and all other acts of aggression, oppression, and hostility. However, the conversation does not come to a logical end. It becomes clearer how much they value re-education as a means to resolving this clash of perceived gendered behavior.

This Socratic dialogue near the end of the novel gives hope of reintegration and a future with better prospects based on mixed-sex cohabitation. Thus the biological essentialism on which the women based their society is criticized and challenged to the extent that the decision is bound to change the foundation of the gender separatist utopian society. Through their practices of different methods of education, socialization, and exclusion, the community comes to realize that aggression, ambition, greed, and power struggles happen among women as well as men. Comparisons and encounters such as the one above demonstrate to them the flawed ways of adhering to outdated essentialist notions. The hope of re-educating a society with the expectation of making durable change against their inherent characteristics is nonetheless at the core of the motivation to initiate a destruction and tabula rasa narrative.

Matriarchal tabula ficta built on tabula rasa

In all the novels, after the event of destruction, one of the initial fundamental changes that take place is the establishment of a governing structure that is led and participated in only by women. This new structure is mostly referred to as matriarchal in the novels themselves and in the

[208] Ibid, 208.

secondary literature about the novels. Establishing a matriarchy becomes an integral and natural step toward the improvement of their society. However, building a matriarchy does not supersede the commonplace issues of power relations. When the remaining community consists of only women, the newly established sociopolitical structure is bound to be woman-led and participated. The motifs of destruction and tabula rasa conceptually support the creation of a woman-led governing structure due to the absence of governments after catastrophes. Consequently, in this section, I look back at the history of the matriarchal tradition to uncover a possible literary heritage in the matriarchal fictional narratives in feminist utopian literature. There is an impulse to revert to pre-patriarchal times and write a herstory instead, which could be useful in understanding the matriarchal urge in the gender separatist utopian novels in my corpus.

To give an example, *The Y Chromosome*, as I introduced in the previous section, is built upon a matriarchal structure with a large majority of women and only a few men. Both the politics and the education of this matriarchal society rest on the societally accepted superiority of women and the sense of trepidation they feel about the violent sociopolitical history of patriarchy from the past.

The portrayal of the patriarchal past as a physically as well as emotionally coercive and aggressive phenomenon is emphasized through the socialization of the characters and also through the exposition of the laws and principles of the eutopian community. A relevant example is when Daniel expresses discontent over being rejected by Bluesky. “I wish I’d lived before the Change!” he says, “Things would have been different then. Bluesky wouldn’t have rejected me.”[209] Even though his friend Highlands, again a woman, reminds Daniel that Bluesky has the right to reject his romantic interest, Daniel cannot seem to make peace with being rejected and accept not being able to possess the object of his desire. He goes on to insult himself and acts as

[209] Ibid, 70.

the victim of this situation, hoping to garner compassion and approval from Highlands. Instead, he is left alone with his thoughts, temper, and woe. This behavior of entitlement and desire to possess a woman against her consent is a crucial issue frequently encountered and studied in gender relations in radical feminist utopian novels. In certain power structures, women could not or would not always be in the position to verbally and explicitly reject such unwelcome advances or voice their opinions without certain legal protections in favor of them in place. In gender separatist utopian spaces, due to the matriarchal sociopolitical structure and the lack of male majority sociopolitical power, women are emotionally and structurally less constrained to set clear boundaries enforced and protected by their own laws.

These types of micro- and macroaggressions support the foundational motivation for why women wish to create their own eutopian space and establish a matriarchal governing structure instead of an egalitarian one that would encompass and treat both genders equally. The destruction and the state of affairs before the destruction set the stage for the tabula rasa that follows after the destruction. However, the events of the past are never forgotten and they actively shape the present formation of the new society. Some teachings and laws are repeated in daily life as if they are mantras. This helps the women, as well as the few remaining men, to not ever forget and deviate from them:

> "Before the Change was Chaos, and it was Male. Male is Danger and Death. Male must be Hidden." First Law, what everyone on the farms had to learn almost as soon as they learned to speak. He knew he had challenged it. Nervously he twisted a fallen leaf around his fingers. […] Finally she said, her voice cold and irritable, "Just don't think life before the Change was better, for anyone. If you believe that,

even for a moment, you've learned nothing. Nothing at all. Don't make me doubt I was right to amend First Law."[210]

The first law that is mentioned here is used in all post-catastrophe gender separatist novels in my study. Creating and perpetuating an aversion and avoidance towards the male species is considered a safety feature and warning against what could go wrong as it had gone wrong in the societies of the past. In my opinion, the all-woman communities need a strong rationale on which to build their sociopolitical foundations. It has to be repeated and practiced for long enough to create a ritual that replaces the collective memory and the desire of the patriarchal past. The repercussions for failing to follow the rules are usually exile or isolation of individuals in a comparatively emptier part of the world; therefore, there is a strong incentive and motivation for following the new matriarchal principles.

As observed in the plot of the novel above, this new sociopolitical structure involves gender role reversal against the patriarchal norms that existed before the destruction. In more detail, the society in question can be matriarchal, matrifocal, matrilocal, matrilineal, or any combination of these or all of them at the same time. Matriarchy is the sociopolitical system where the absolute power is wielded by women, whereas matrifocality is where the sociopolitical authority is focused on women even though men also have some form of power. Matrilocality is where the family lives on the mother's side, and matrilineality is the practice of tracing the bloodline from the mother's side. In the gender separatist, radical feminist, and matriarchal utopian novels in my study, these concepts co-exist harmoniously because matriarchies are built from scratch; however, the focus of the sociopolitical governing structure is comprised of governing councils of women and an overall concept of matriarchal practices.

[210] Ibid, 71.

Having a class structure among the women within the matriarchy is also a common narrative trait. These women's communities of the post-destruction phase could have also established egalitarian ways of existing, embracing all the women equally and sometimes even including the non-traditional men who also survived and got scattered around the land. However, the preference towards matriarchal structures is prevalent in this subgenre. What are the reasons provided that explain the woman characters' need to establish a eutopian matriarchy from the ashes of patriarchy that has failed due to the actions of men?

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Gerda Lerner's study on the origins of patriarchy has been influential in understanding the history of gendered power dynamics that have existed throughout history. In her work *The Creation of Patriarchy*, she starts her discussion of women's past by making a distinction between the unrecorded past, which encompasses all the events that took place in the past, and the recorded, thus interpreted, past. Lerner argues that women have always been part of history and civilizations as active agents:

> "Women have also shared with men in preserving collective memory, which shapes the past into cultural tradition, provides the link between generations, and connects the past and the future. This oral tradition has been kept alive in poem and myth, which both men and women created and preserved in folklore, art, and ritual."[211]

It is through the narrative of history-making in written language that women have been excluded from societal functions that were interpreted to be crucial for the survival of any given community. Lerner concentrates on history-making as rooted in the invention of writing, which has a later historical starting point than oral traditions. The invention of writing has brought

[211] Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 4.

about the consideration of certain privileges concerning who is allowed to learn how to write, to use precious materials to write with and to choose what is considered important enough to be written down. Lerner emphasizes historians, priests, servants, clerks, clerics, and scholars as the most common writers in history. These professional positions have been held mostly by men, which still applies in the twenty-first century in various contexts and regions of the world. Lerner argues that "[w]hat women have done and experienced has been left unrecorded, neglected, and ignored in interpretation. Historical scholarship, up to the most recent past, has seen women as marginal to the making of civilization and as unessential to those pursuits defined as having historic significance."[212] In this regard, feminist utopianism, and especially gender separatist utopianism, provides ample space for restructuring the patriarchal patterns of history-making narratives.

On a meta-level, the subgenre of feminist utopianism itself, and efforts to unearth unpublished, unheard of, or dismissed utopian works of women, are also part of this reclaiming of history-making. With respect to this, Lerner argues that the ethnographic evidence that substantiated the arguments of the Swiss anthropologist Johann Jakob Bachofen and the German philosopher Friedrich Engels concerning the historical evidence on the existence of past matriarchies has been proven to be inaccurate based on recent anthropological research. She argues that the societies previously considered matriarchal were egalitarian or, at best, matrilocal and matrilineal.[213] These are different concepts from a matriarchal system where the sole political power lies with the women. Lerner argues that it is not theoretically viable to make a direct connection between kinship and the sociopolitical rights of women in a given society. Matrilineal societies included contexts in which the male relatives of the woman in power control the decision processes.[214]

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[212] Ibid, 4.
[213] Ibid, 39.
[214] Ibid, 29; as cited by Lerner, from Martin and Voorhies, *Female of the Species*, 187.

Lerner reviews the egalitarian societies found in hunter-gatherer tribes, where the division of labor provided women and men with interdependency. While the women needed to have social access to a hunter (mostly men due to the absence of childrearing responsibilities) in order to procure meat for the children, the hunters needed a gatherer (mostly women due to childrearing responsibilities that made women's circle of movement more limited) who would prepare food from the hunt, provide food outside the hunting periods and when the hunt was not successful. This peaceful interdependency emphasizes an egalitarian existence over an oppressive communal structure.

The hunter-gatherer society paradigm as described above comes with its own connotations. The men do the hunting while the women protect the offspring; therefore, this romanticized story supposedly proves the superiority of men over women. However, it is clear from the abundant anthropological research that the gatherers/women have provided more food for their community than the hunters/men even though the meat from the hunts has been valued more and used as currency between tribes.[215] This interpretation of the hunter/gatherer society provides a perspective in which the sociopolitical system is more egalitarian as opposed to patriarchal or matriarchal, even if such societies have a matrifocal, matrilocal, or matrilineal structure. Consequently, in her study, Lerner finds no evidence or argument confirming the existence of prehistoric matriarchies.

The matriarchal sociopolitical systems practiced in gender separatist utopian novels in my study all refer to prehistoric power structures due to the plot choices that include a destruction motif. The motif of destruction not only destroys the physical world but also implies the continuity of another history. Therefore, history gets to be reset and restarted with the gender separatist radical feminist efforts and principles.

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[215] Ibid, 30; as cited by Lerner, from Martin and Voorhies, *Female of the Species*, 190. For more information and different interpretations see Jean L. Briggs, "Eskimo Women: Makers of Men," in Carolyn J. Matthiasson, *Many Sisters: Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1974) and Elise Boulding, *The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time* (1976).

The concept of historical evidence, however, depends on the interpretation of the evidence. If matriarchies have never existed, it makes all the more reason to imagine one in literature. However, if there was not a matriarchy in history, then the sociopolitical reflex to create matriarchies does not rely on influence from the past but is a utopian political reflex on its own. Since the existence of past matriarchies depends on the interpretation of the core definition of that system, Lerner compares some definitions of matriarchy that she believes to be inaccurate or inconsistent, when Lerner argues that researchers:

> …rest their case on evidence from myth and religion.[216] Others call matriarchy any kind of societal arrangement in which women hold power over any aspect of public life. Still others include any society in which women have relatively high status.[217] The last definition is so vague as to be meaningless as a category. I think one can truly speak of matriarchy only when women hold power *over* men, not alongside them, when that power includes the public domain and foreign relations and when women make essential decisions not only for their kinfolk but for the community.[218]

Lerner makes a distinction between "any kind of societal arrangement in which women hold power over any aspect of public life," "any society in which women have a relatively high status," and "when women hold power *over* men, not alongside them." Only the last one would represent a matriarchy in its current definition. Lerner defines matriarchy as a reversed mirror of patriarchy,[219] which is in line with how the matriarchies in gender separatist utopian novels are

[216] Ibid, 30; as cited by Lerner, from Abby Kleinbaum, *The War Against the Amazons*, 1983.
[217] Ibid, 30; as cited by Lerner, from Michelle Rosaldo, "A Theoretical Overview," in Rosaldo and Lamphere, *Woman, Culture and Society*, pp. 12-42.
[218] Ibid, 30.
[219] Ibid, 31.

structured, and concludes that matriarchies within this definition have not existed in history. Consequently, Lerner summarizes the findings of her research concerning the history of matriarchies:

> (1) Most of the evidence for female equality in societies derives from matrilineal, matrilocal societies, which are historically transitional and currently vanishing.
> (2) While matriliny and matrilocality confer certain rights and privileges on women, decision-making power within the kinship group nevertheless rests with elder males.
> (3) Patrilineal descent does not imply subjugation of women nor does matrilineal descent indicate matriarchy.
> (4) Seen over time, matrilineal societies have been unable to adapt to competitive, exploitative, techno-economic systems and have given way to patrilineal societies.[220]

Based on Lerner's study of existing research and her observation that matriliny and matrilocality do not give women political rights of governance and that matrilineal societies did not survive due to adaptation issues, matriarchies in gender separatist utopian literature may not be based on real matriarchal societies that existed in the past. The matriarchal sociopolitical systems created in gender separatist utopian novels resemble the gender-reversed version of patriarchy without any structural change in the foundations of its governing nature. If there is no concrete historical evidence for the existence of such a sociopolitical system as matriarchy, then the practice of matriarchy in these gender separatist utopian novels are alternative visions of the conditions that allow and foster the existence of this type of regime. The newly formed matriarchal societies are

[220] Ibid.

still largely improved in terms of the crimes that affect women's lives the most. However, there is still oppression in this system among different sociopolitical and economic classes of women, and this oppression creates frustration and disappointment that is usually revealed at the end of the novels and often causes the disillusionment and dissolution of the utopia.

In the novels within the scope of my study, with the creation of a matriarchal structure, the remaining women's community is in fact aiming to create a distinct sexual class, which is one of the fundamental principles of radical feminism. Lerner emphasizes that while "men and women have suffered exclusion and discrimination because of their class, no man has been excluded from the historical record because of his sex, yet all women were."[221] The consideration of sex as a class resonates with some of the main principles of radical separatist feminism of the '60s and '70s. The action towards changing the sociopolitical structure when women have the authority and the space due to the motifs of destruction and tabula rasa underlines a revolutionary project in feminist literature and thought. This action also lets women move away from the victimization narrative they are historically attributed. Lerner concludes that "[t]his coming-into-consciousness of women becomes the cyclical force moving them into action to change their condition and to enter a new relationship to male-dominated society."[222] This coming into consciousness that Lerner is referring to becomes the motivating push behind various feminist movements and waves and starts restructuring women's place in sociopolitical and economic contexts. The gender separatist utopian literature is one of the many facets of this relationship.

[221] Ibid, 5.
[222] Ibid.

Tabula rasa as an uncleanable slate

After considering the nuances in the terminology of tabula rasa and biological essentialism versus a rebirth in relation to gender separatist utopian literature, I now ask if it is ever possible to obtain a clean slate after the occurrence of destruction in this subgenre. In the previous sections, I mentioned that tabula rasa is closer to a scraped tablet than a clean slate. In this section, I trace how this tablet continues to carry the traces of the past and is inevitably tainted by the events of the past. This raises the question of whether the attempt to have a birth without history can ever work, or whether destruction is ever able to fully erase the past. In this section, I will look at three representative examples from the subgenre where the concept of tabula rasa is used in different historiographies: of spatial distance through interplanetary escapism (*Daughters of the Coral Dawn*), of the historian character as a bridge in between (*Ammonite* and *Califia's Daughters*), and of history as a set of warnings (*The Gate to Women's Country*).

Moving to a different planet comes across as a swift and efficient method of erasing history and initiating the revisions of herstory. Written in 1984 by the award-winning Canadian American author Katherine V. Forrest, who mostly writes lesbian literature, *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* engages in the creation of a type of tabula rasa that is distinct from those that follow the destruction of the known world. In this novel, the protagonist Megan is expected to lead her community to establish a settlement on a new planet far away from planet Earth:

> "Dear ones, the lines of history are intersecting again as the girls have just shown you. On this dreary planet it's all so depressingly predictable. Males become spastic with terror everytime women break through to new choices and freedom. And this most recent freedom – no longer needing the poor things at all to make babies for us – well, have laws ever been passed more quickly? […] "There is this possibility," Hera intones. "On-planet relocation. We have the means, the

> technology to remain undetected – with certain precautions, within certain parameters."[223]

Megan's family wishes to find a habitable and uninhabited planet where the fleeing community can start building their lives and institutions from scratch, unburdened by the fear of getting discovered and caught by the people in their former planet where the oppression from men was overbearing. In the passage above, Megan is giving a speech that motivates the move of her community to another planet. The statement "[m]ales become spastic with terror every time women break through to new choices and freedom" amplifies the frustration women feel with the oppression exercised by men and the patriarchal institutions they create and lead. Therefore, the women aim to leave for fear of the increase of coercion and injustice against the basic rights and needs of women. As much as it seems needed, the impact of leaving behind their planet (a symbolic type of destruction of their status quo) and landing on a new and empty planet (a symbolic type of tabula rasa) leaves its lasting mark on the community:

> The mythology has already begun. Songs written of our departure and journey, her heroism. […] While none of us can forget nor wishes to forget those precious ones we have left on Earth, as time passes we make the transition from our own lives there with greater ease.[224]

While the community is content with the repercussions of their decision to leave Earth and arrive at a planet they come to call Maternas, they still recognize that this interplanetary move also caused a separation from the women who had to stay behind on Earth. In the context of this

[223] Forrest, *Daughters of a Coral Dawn*, 19.
[224] Ibid, 105.

novel, remembering the state of their former planet reflects their urge to reminisce about the pre-departure period which shows that a tabula rasa state is not possible in this novel. The characters are haunted by what they left behind and the conditions in which those women on Earth survive while Maternas has been a very favorable location for both the physical and emotional survival of their community. Even when the women relocate to another planet to avoid the misogyny and oppression they are experiencing on Earth, their slate cannot be perfectly clean due to the women they had to leave behind and their persistent knowledge that the oppression continues to be a reality there.

The second thematization within the concept of tabula rasa is that the historian characters act as a bridge between the past and the present. The motif of the historian character in gender separatist utopian novels keeps the pre-destruction memories and narratives actively recited to the community while assuring that the current motif of tabula rasa would not provide a clean slate due to the recollection of memories. In his work on historiography, Hayden White shows that the creative difference between the historian and a fiction writer is not so broad and, in fact, it can be a thin line. He argues that the way a historian may choose and represent historical events can create a story:

> The historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, and end.[225]

The arrangement of the events into a story of the past that contextually makes sense becomes a narrative tool in the novels in this subgenre. The beginning, middle, and end signify a cause-and-

[225] White, *Metahistory*, 7.

effect relationship because history is narrated in context, as opposed to being a series of events. White calls this contextualization "emplotment", as in "the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind." The emplotment in my subgenre, as I touched upon in the previous section, is one of warnings, destructions, and horrors; thus, an emplotment of tragedy ensues.

Written in 2004, *Califia's Daughters* also features a historian character. Its author, Laurie R. King, is an American author who mostly writes detective fiction but also wrote *Califia's Daughters*, which is a science fiction novel. She used the pseudonym "Leigh Richards" when writing this novel, perhaps in an attempt to explore certain themes around feminism, gender, and utopianism without getting criticized by her fans who know her from her detective fiction. The novel takes place in a peaceful community of women following deadly bombs, and afterwards, a virus that kills the men on the planet. This is how the initial exposition of the plot is conveyed on the first page of the novel:

> "They kept only those few men whom they realized they needed for their race not to die out," Rodriguez de Montalvo writes. Little had he anticipated the rapid-fire series of plagues, wars, and environmental disasters that was to tip humankind into a downward spiral during the first century of the third millennium, slashing the world's population to a fraction of what it had been at the year 2000, overturning social orders, turning dearly held beliefs and mores to dust overnight. Particularly he could not have precited the propensity of one virus to attach itself to the male of the species, one generation after the next. By the time of this story, the world holds one male human being for every ten or twelve females.[226]

[226] Richards, *Califia's Daughters*, 2.

The tabula rasa phase is presented through a direct and unforgiving explanation of the timeline of the events. The phenomenon of several catastrophes one after the other acts as a hint toward a biblical narrative where the exposition of the plotline resembles an eschatological end-of-times story. The virus that kills most of the men, also referred to as the "plague," becomes the breaking point that concludes the motif of destruction and initiates the process of tabula rasa. However, the fact that there are men who survived the virus already creates a version of tabula rasa that carries people of the past to the supposedly all-woman future. The existence of these men is a constant reminder of the events of the past and the effects of these events on the present. The surviving men are protected by warrior women because these men are considered to be crucial to the survival of the species. With a group of visitors discovering their community, the women get to recognize that there were numerous men outside the walls of their community of women.

In the midst of all the destruction plotlines based on viruses, it is also true that not all viruses are purely destructive. The novel *Ammonite* is written by the British American author Nicola Griffith in 1992. Griffith is an award-winning artist and, like most of the other authors in my study, is also a teacher. The novel takes place on a planet called Jeep which was colonized by people from the Earth centuries ago. An expedition group that arrives on the planet for reconnaissance has all its members dead due to a virus that inhabits this planet. During the events of this novel in the current time, the new expedition discovers the native population consisting of only women. Just as in the novel *The Y Chromosome*, the virus on this planet is only deadly for men while women do survive the virus despite getting infected. The few women from the expedition party who survived ended up wanting to live with the native population instead of returning to their home planet. When these women are infected by the virus, they gain the ability to reproduce via a mystic storytelling technique called deep search without needing men. By killing men, the infection gives women the space and opportunity to connect to each other as a community and to connect to themselves at a deeper level to unlock mystic abilities. Here the

virus becomes a metaphor for the sisterhood as a key to opening the doors to their gender separatist utopian space and reproductive autonomy.

However, the common dystopian trope of warnings continues regardless. Kirsten the historian keeps retelling the stories of the past as a way of coping with the melancholia of that shattered past, countless deaths, and various unwelcome changes:

> I am so tired, she thought to herself. I have seen too much, fought too many battles, tasted more adrenaline that one women ought. Long, long ago I was granted a few sweet years of childhood; then the Troubles began, with images burned into our minds: planes slipping into buildings with a bloom of fire; a city school dead down to the last classroom pet; a small town littered with corpses from a bioweapon. The vocabulary of terror – virus and nanophage, genetic modification and dirty bombs – causing the collective mind to wince back from the horrors, that grinding fear of crowds that seized us all, and our powerful mistrust of all but the simplest of technologies, followed finally by the Valley's retreat into itself.[227]

The way the historian talks about the past is a constantly reminded warning by itself: how much the past was full of struggles and wars. The burden of the historian is to remember the past, distill the lessons from the catastrophes, and remind the communities of possible woes and foes, but still succeed in keeping themselves and the community motivated and hopeful toward the future, notwithstanding the hardships with which the society is dealing on a daily basis.

[227] Griffith, *Ammonite*, 30.

Stories of historians do not always depend on hardships and warnings, though; their stories also reflect how gender relations and power dynamics used to be in the societies that existed before the destruction phase:

> "As you know, in those days, when I was young, men were very different. […] The menfolk made most of the important decisions and, more than that, they did all of the nasty, dangerous jobs, like digging up septic tanks and felling trees and running the farm machinery. Yes, Lilyanne, they did so. Boys ran wild, climbed trees, went hunting with rifles. Girls too, but boys more. Hard to believe, isn't it?"[228]

The historian continually reminds the surviving community of how gender relations and related power dynamics used to be so that they do not idolize and glorify the old ways. Informing the new community about the old ways of how gender relations used to be assures that the new generations would be careful and vigilant about protecting their rights. Just as mentioned in the passage above, the experiential knowledge Kristen has about gender relations is shared in a neutral tone: as a matter of fact, the men made most of the important decisions while they also did all of the dangerous jobs. The historian tries to reflect her knowledge without much bias, even though sometimes they are under threat or intimidation due to their precarious amount of knowledge. That said, the gender relations of the past nevertheless exhibit a substantial contrast compared to the gender relations of the new matriarchal community.

Even though the motif of history studies and sharing knowledge about the past contributes to the condition of the community in a constructive way, the newly established society nevertheless becomes one that is based on fear and anxiety about the way everything

[228] Ibid, 36.

used to be, not a clean slate on which to build a purely positive eutopian society. Most often, the main goal is to avoid repeating the past which is still clearly legible on the current tabula rasa, making the slate impossible to clean. The existence of these hardships, the genealogy of which can be traced back to the times before the destruction, is one of the main reasons why the foundation of tabula rasa is not perfectly clean enough on which to build a peaceful feminist eutopia.

The last form of the tabula rasa that I will examine is using the events of the past as warnings and deterrents for the future. For that, I will examine a novel that depicts a gender separatist feminist utopia which turns into a dystopia for the women in the society as well as for the men. *The Gate to Women's Country*, which was written by the North American science fiction and mystery fiction author Sheri Stewart Tepper in 1988, portrays a totalitarian regime that gives the impression of extreme patriarchy administered by women instead of men. A council of women holds all the power and has access to classified information, thus rendering men dependent on only the partial knowledge made available to the male community by this council of women. These women constitute the ruling class that runs society by maintaining a structure of positive eugenics[229] in combination with gender-based separatism on the one hand, and practicing negative eugenics using classified medical procedures on the other.[230] After the nuclear wars that destroyed their world and left but a few people behind, mostly women and children, the emerging idea is to rebuild a society where aggression and wars would be staved off with whatever means necessary. Morgot, the leader of the town in which the bulk of the novel takes place, summarizes the history of and the reasoning behind the establishment of Women's Country, which geographically consists of a group of women's cities surrounded by walls:

[229] Positive eugenics focused on improvements by encouraging people with the desirable traits to procreate.
[230] See Patrick Parrinder, "Eugenics and Utopia: Sexual Selection from Galton to Morris." *Utopian Studies* 8, no. 2, 1997, pp. 1-12 for an overview of the use eugenics themes in utopian literature.

> Three hundred years ago almost everyone in the world had died in a great devastation brought about by men. It was men who made the weapons and men who were the diplomats and men who made the speeches about national pride and defense. And in the end it was men who did whatever they had to do, pushed the buttons or pulled the string to set the terrible things off. And we died, Michael. Almost all of us. Women. Children. […] Only a few were left. Some of them were women, and among them was a woman who called herself Martha Evesdaughter. Martha thought that the destruction had come about because of men's willingness - even eagerness - to fight, and she determined that this eagerness to fight must be bred out of our race, even though it might take a thousand years.[231]

Believing male aggression to be the root cause of all death and destruction, the Councilwomen decide to breed this personality trait out of male children by invasively micromanaging reproductive practices. The Councilwomen start by creating a garrison outside the walls of Women's Country and employing a military honor narrative that, as far as they believe, attracts the males with this aggressive gene. The men who choose to become warriors are kept busy in the garrison with arbitrary skirmishes and wars between other towns while women residing in towns also lead a restricted life due to their functions in the society already laid out for them and due to the strict class structure within their society. The reverse power structure does not bring much freedom to women either, however. Tepper's gender separatist utopian world is ruled first and foremost by the established fear of any unruly behavior and consequently a possible recurrence of the past destruction. The novel, in the end, is a story of tragedy for both women and men regardless of whichever side of the wall they live. It is not a blueprint eutopian story of a happy and peaceful people.

[231] Tepper, *The Gate to Women's Country*, 301.

In the novel, the Councilwomen act as "a modest, suspicious power" with their nurturing presence and their anti-war stance. Still, they harbor secrets whose emergence could dismantle their society and the perfection they aim to reach and uphold. At the end of the novel, the whole garrison is killed for attempted mutiny and Women's Country lives on, which gives enough indication that the Councilwomen's disciplinary power is successful. The Councilwomen also make use of the instruments that French philosopher Michel Foucault mentions in *Discipline and Punish*: Hierarchical observation is done by means of micromanaging the society in all aspects, making major life choices for the members of the said society, and also observing the people living outside this society.[232] In the garrison, the General does the observing. Medical examinations are used to control who gets to have a child with whom and who gets to be sterilized. Harboring various aspects of totalitarian societies, Women's Country runs closer to a totalitarian dystopia in a Foucauldian sense than a peaceful eutopia of hope.

By the same token, the Councilwomen have the authority to regulate free speech by deciding the type of education women and warriors would receive in separate camps, as can be observed in the conversation between Stavia and Chernon, the main protagonists:

> "Genetics."
>
> "What's that?"
>
> "The science of how things pass on their characteristics to their offspring."
>
> There was a long silence. He sat down on the railing beside her, his head turned away. If she could have seen his face, she would have seen it concentrated in thought, in sudden inspiration.
>
> "What's the matter?" she asked him.
>
> "You make me feel… you make me feel ignorant," he said in a wounded voice. "I

[232] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 170.

don't know about things like that."

She gave him an astonished look. "It's all in books! The garrison has a library."

"Romances, Stavia. Tales of battle. Sagas. Designs for armor. Hygiene. Maintenance of garrison property. You know' Nothing about real things. Nothing about medicine, or engineering, or management."

"Those are women's studies."[233]

In this passage, the protagonists are speaking to each other through a hole in the wall that separates their countries. The difference in the type of books women and men are separately allowed to read raises concerns because this act of controlling the kind of information each gendered community would receive also determines the intellectual and emotional depth of their sociopolitical existence. While the so-called women's studies in this land relate to more scientific and productive fields of inquiry, the library of the garrison is filled with resources relating to the lives of warriors, tales of valor, and physical activities. As can be observed in the conversation, totalitarian regimes like these create diverse frictions in the newly established society, which seems antithetical to the project of utopia.

In essence, Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* is a dystopian novel based predominantly on warnings, the most prominent warning is against totalitarianism that accompanies blueprint utopias. In Women's Country, women in towns build high walls around their space in an effort to keep themselves safe from negative external factors. By keeping aggressive males out and creating an off-shoot community whose raison d'être relied on fighting incongruous wars and glorifying their principle of honor, women aim to keep the warriors busy. This is the case up until the point that the men rebel, at which point they are slaughtered for their rebellion. Withholding knowledge and education from men who live outside the walls and

[233] Tepper, *The Gate to Women's Country*, 78.

possessing technology the men have no knowledge of, the Councilwomen assert strategic and intellectual superiority over the male warriors.

The main storyline of *The Gate to Women's Country* is based on the notion of biological essentialism in that the Councilwomen believe there are certain inherent male and female characteristics to glorify or condemn. This moral stance concerning biological essentialism often reinforced by the leader of the town, Morgot, becomes more and more pronounced as the novel unfolds:

> War is dreadful, daughter. It always has been. Comfort yourself with the knowledge that in preconvulsion times it was worse! More died, and most of them were women, children, and old people. Also, wars were allowed to create devastations. Under our ordinances, no children are slain. No women are slain. Only men who choose to be warriors go to battle. There is no devastation.[234]

With the constant reminder of their traditions, rules, and rituals, the Councilwomen uphold an atmosphere of fear-mongering and thereby keep their female and male subjects submissive under their rule. There are two main methods that the Councilwomen use to maintain control over women and men as a whole: the covert medical interventions and the elaborate military narrative they uphold. Meanwhile, the suffering the warriors must endure only because they 'chose' to be warriors is meant to be unresolved and made into an example. This example should have a deterring effect on younger men who can still choose not to be warriors. How genuinely these men choose to become warriors, however, is open to debate due to the undeniable influence of heavy socio-cultural indoctrination that encompasses their lives since they are five years old.

[234] Ibid, 131.

As previously mentioned, by creating a garrison outside Women's Country and employing an alluring narrative of military culture, the Councilwomen maintain a space where men who choose to become warriors can rationalize their antagonistic behavior in the name of military ambitions and success. One important factor related to this is the notion that since the warriors are already assumed to be aggressive, physically and emotionally vigorous, and stubborn in the garrison, they are deprived of positive examples, encouragement, or incentive to improve their behavior let alone recognize it as problematic. Since they do not have access to any books, their potential for improvement is also limited by the totalitarian regime. The Councilwomen aim to impede warriors from gathering knowledge that would lead them to discover weapons of mass destruction; however, they also end up impeding the men's growth and consequential return to and integration with the Women's Country. As an unforeseen aftereffect of their well-intentioned blueprint in search of preventing wars, the Councilwomen find themselves systematically slaughtering garrisons to conceal their regular uprisings. This intersection is one of the instances where feminist utopian narratives that target men as the source of the evils of the past reach a point of disillusionment in their strictly held beliefs. In this novel, it is not a commonly-held belief that the Councilwomen have been wrong in restricting men's equal access to education; however, the seeds of hope for change are sewn in realization moments like these.

These disparate communities represent different levels of repression and restriction of expression in order to maintain their totalitarian principles and the fixation on their utopian ideals. This brings to mind Foucault's concept of Victorian morality:

> Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid

> down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague […]. If it was truly necessary to make room for illegitimate sexualities, it was reasoned, let them take their infernal mischief elsewhere […]. The brothel and the mental hospital would be those places of tolerance.[235]

Just like in Foucault's conception of sexuality in the Victorian age, in Tepper's utopian world, sexuality is confined to close quarters, notably regulated, and only permissible during the reproductive carnival between specific people as part of a public procreation event. The medical interventions that are kept as governmental secrets so that society can function as planned via their blueprint constitute the foundation of the community's functioning. Sexuality is no longer considered an act of pleasure, but an act of duty in two out of the three communities in the novel: in Women's Country, sex is linked with reproduction and the prospect of producing warriors, while in Holyland it is linked with divine duty for men and normalized rape for women. Only in the liminality of the borderlands between these two communities can sexuality exist without any repression or limitation, which is the room made for "illegitimate sexualities" mentioned above by Foucault. In the context of this novel, these illegitimate sexualities refer to any practice of sexuality with the opposite sex without the intention of reproduction. These liminal experiences are also critiqued by the Councilwomen from a moral standpoint and misused by the warriors for their own pleasure while acting in emotionally and physically destructive ways toward women in those communities.

[235] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol I: The Will to Knowledge*, 4.

In the end, this utopian novel is a eutopia turned sour, perhaps even an anti-utopia: The viewpoint of biological essentialism based on the assumed difference between women and men, with the assumption that men are considered to be more physically apt while women are more intellectual, suffocates the eutopian ideals adopted for peace and prosperity. It is this essentialist assumption that results in forcing men into garrisons and women into highly controlled intellectual lives. Men who do not wish to become warriors have to face group bullying, ridicule, and social exclusion while women who do not wish to live by the strict rules of Women's Country are either forced by the Councilwomen to abide by the rules or go outside the walls to live with "the gypsies" in borderlands. In essence, nobody is content in *The Gate to Women's Country*, and the Councilwomen aim at utilitarianism over happiness regardless of the informed consent and participation of the society. One of the Councilwomen, Morgot, talks to her daughter:

> "Whether you ever feel guilty over what you do? You few who do all the doing."
> She sat for a time without answering. At last she shifted in her chair and said, "I'll tell you what we call ourselves, among ourselves. That will answer your question."
> […]
> "We call ourselves the Damned Few. And if the Lady has a heaven for the merciful, we are not sure any of us will ever see it."[236]

This passage makes clear that the Councilwomen are aware of their destructive methods and live with guilt and sadness over their actions. The pain humanity goes through with nuclear wars, as

[236] Tepper, *The Gate to Women's Country*, 289.

well as the plight of women in general prior to the wars, convince the Councilwomen that they have to persevere to keep the ordinances strictly followed.

On the basis of my findings in this chapter, I believe that such gender separatist utopian novels, whether they are eutopias or dystopias, should be read as didactic pieces of literature. Utopian scholar Claeys argues that utopian authors aim to frighten the reader by showing how wrong things could go with regard to the moral, social, and civic responsibilities of the citizens.[237] Similarly, dystopias follow the notion that human beings are incorrigible; thus they often end up showing what necessarily goes wrong when one tries to bring social and individual improvement. This is actually what the Councilwomen are doing to the warriors: **"**Physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty. From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights."[238] Warriors are thus penalized for a trait of aggression which the Councilwomen believe all men are born with. By putting them into a garrison and treating them as guilty without any evidence, the system actually perpetuates the cyclical structure of misbehavior. Considering the fact that men do not receive similar benefits of education, which keeps them further away from improvement, rehabilitation, and reintegration, the garrison, in this regard, acts as a prison where the aggressive males are kept busy but within their own echo chamber.

All in all, the world of *The Gate to Women's Country* starts at a post-apocalyptic dystopia of nuclear devastation, moves to a eutopian blueprint aiming at eliminating wars in the future, and ends up creating another dystopia of social ailments and orchestrated wars. Women's Country stands as a warning of the dire consequences of a blueprint-based utopia. Just as feminist dystopias, gender separatist utopias also succumb to the pitfalls of the desire to control every aspect of life out of fears pertaining to the future.

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[237] Claeys, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, 17.
[238] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 11.

The analysis of the plot emphasizes the challenges in attaining a clean slate, the role of historians in shaping the narratives, and the recurring theme of warnings from the past. Each example illustrates the complexities and limitations of striving for utopia, showcasing how even well-intentioned efforts can lead to new forms of oppression and dystopian futures. The passage is concluded by highlighting the didactic nature of gender separatist utopian novels, serving as cautionary tales about the potential pitfalls of attempting to create a perfect society.

Considering the reversal of gender roles prompts a reflective examination of the pervasive influence of historical contexts. Despite the gender role reversal, the indelible imprints of societal norms and historical expectations persist, necessitating a deeper exploration of alternative sociopolitical approaches. The idea that merely reversing roles may not offer a complete emancipation from historical legacies compels us researchers to seek novel and transformative paradigms that can genuinely transcend the constraints imposed by the past.

In envisioning a utopian society, the call for new ways of thinking is critical. Rather than imposing a predefined top-down utopia onto individuals, the notion of designing utopia as a communal practice presents itself as a valuable alternative, perhaps the only working alternative. This thought process advocates for collaborative and inclusive blueprints, where all women in the community come together to co-create and maintain a vision of their collective ideal society. By engaging people in the participatory design of their utopia, the blueprint of utopia becomes a collective endeavor that reflects the varied perspectives and values of the community, which supports a sense of shared ownership and responsibility.

Conclusion: Seeking hope in the concept of tabula unerased

The concept of tabula rasa, the “scraped tablet”, aims to replicate a rebirth without history. It is the practice, or the attempt, of erasing history. Using the tabula rasa plot element underlines the notion that human beings are redeemable, that societies could start over, and that we could have

a different way of living. In gender separatist feminist novels, the tabula rasa doubles as an opportunity to break away from history, leave the burden of the past behind, and create an alternative feminist society. In this regard, the formulation of tabula rasa creates a platform for women's communities to attempt to realize their conceptualization of ideal life. The presence of an assumed cleaned slate aids in the creation of the new gender separatist governing bodies because the separation takes place when it is possible to reimagine all sociopolitical structures without any prejudice from the past.

However, the tabula rasa narrative faces a challenge due to one crucial peculiarity: Destruction is never total because there is always a hint, a book, or a survivor that informs the remaining community of the dangers of the past. In order for the concept of separatist utopianism to make sense, tabula rasa via destruction is a commonly used plot element as there is still a need for justification to show the new community that the old ways have to be disregarded and forgotten. Only in this way, the dystopian traits of the past can act as a warning. The experiences and knowledge of the destroyed past appear to stay intact in the present, time and again, explicitly or implicitly stored in the collective memory of the newly established communities.

In effect, however, this function of history, in the context of gender separatist utopian novels, turns the tabula rasa into an uncleanable slate; a slate on which the conditions of the past and the atrocities of the thematized destruction continue to linger, making eutopian projections unattainable. Consequently, this creates frustrations that cause a denouement in plots, which, in turn, may generate a crisis, chaos, or disillusionment. This, however provokes ideas for a better eutopia in the future, thus opening up a eutopian cycle. In this sense, the destruction and tabula rasa motifs contribute to the utopian hope I argued about in the first chapter because world-building for the future inherently includes hopeful speculation and optimistic utopian imagination.

The imperfection within the concept of tabula rasa does not diminish the revolutionary potential of the concept as a whole. As the utopian scholar Moylan mentions below, the function of utopia can be more valuable than its apparent form:

> To write utopia is to indicate what cannot yet be said within present conceptual language or achieved in current political action. To write utopia is to perform the most utopian of actions possible within literary discourse. The form is itself more significant than any of its content.[239]

As a self-reflexive comment on the genre of utopian writing, including its numerous subgenres, Moylan's words above underline the notion that the subversive and transformational act of utopian writing establishes and communicates the intention of utopian thinking. Each new step practiced in the creation of a new and improved utopian world adds to the spectrum of possibilities within utopian literary discourse, be it in the shape of destruction, discovery, or rebirth.

[239] Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, 38.

Conclusion: Cruel utopianism and acts of recovery

Feminist utopian literature has expressed the reimagination and manifestation of how a world without patriarchy or explicitly without men would create a different manner of relating and existing. This dissertation is focused specifically on the subgenre of gender separatist utopian literature where women and men are separated into different living spaces under the control of different sociopolitical institutions based largely on notions of biological essentialism. I evoked the specific narratological cycle of hope, destruction, and rebirth in the form of tabula rasa in these gender separatist utopian works of literature. I set out to examine the expression of optimistic discourse in which the main action begins with hope and then leads to destruction, which inspires a rebirth with a desire to start from scratch and often continues with hope for even a better utopia, which will again require some form of destruction to undo and redo. Motivated by the realization that there had actually been various utopian narrative works prior to Thomas More's *Utopia*, I selected some works of literature from the medieval ages to the twenty-first century through a specifically feminist emancipatory lens. With these works of literature, I concentrated on interrogating the gender relations and utopian world-building practices within this utopian subgenre.

In Chapter I, I explored hope as an incentive for the creation and expression of gender separatist and feminist utopian spaces. In this chapter, I examined the intersection of feminist theory, practice, and fiction in the context of feminist utopianism. I looked for the expression and function of hope not only in traditional but also in unconventional works of feminist utopian literature. In Chapter II, I illustrated the motivation behind the destruction motif which often motivated the rebuilding phase in gender separatist utopian novels. I challenged the types of destruction that help women break free from fundamentally patriarchal structures and traditions. This radical act of destruction appeared as a phase of cleansing. In Chapter III, I discussed the

concept of tabula rasa as an attempt to achieve a clean slate. This phase acts as the almost completely free realm of exploration and creation of a feminist utopian space. I concentrated on the notion of tabula rasa as a space to explore the controversy of history versus herstory. Consequently, this "scraped tablet" turns out to be an uncleanable slate with evidence of usage that can be cleaned but cannot be erased. Realizing that the clean slate has actually been compromised, the utopian communities experience a form of disillusionment that fuels the period of reevaluation and new decisions toward the unreachable horizon.

My main question in this dissertation concerned, as mentioned before, how the narrative cycle of hope, destruction, and rebirth affects the literary repercussions on the subgenre of gender separatist utopian literature. I focused on how this cycle relates to the literary form, and how the stylistic and thematic aspects of the subgenre interact with feminist utopian literary theory. The diversity within feminist utopian thought and utopian literary studies drew my attention to the self-reflexivity of the subgenre which emphasized one fundamental aspect of it: that it is always in evolution and never intends to reach a static phase of perfection.

In addition to my central question, when I ask how female subjectivity relates to the problem of history and how the female subject sees her role in relation to her sociopolitical context and identity, the pattern of recovering a feminist literary history is revealed. With the popularization of under-researched feminist utopian works, a utopian tradition older than expected meets the eye. The body of feminist literature forgotten, underestimated, and understudied because they were simply written by women, provokes a desire for the recovery of a women's utopian literary herstory among the male-written and -dominated utopian literary field. This act of recovery involves two distinct layers: firstly, the redemption of an overlooked feminist utopian literary history, and secondly, the broader implications of this fictional recovery on the domain of women's utopian history as a whole.

In conclusion, I see a subgenre caught in transition. In the body of literature in this dissertation, the strict adherence to the gender binary aids the perpetuation of gender-based discrimination and hierarchy, while also erasing the existence of non-binary, non-cis, and trans existence. The tension of the separation causes inter-gender conflict. The gender reversal does not nullify the imbalanced power structures that surface in worlds dominated by men as well as women. When these gender separatist utopias enter a stage of disillusionment with their utopian project, the tension caused by gender separatism gives way to the perceived failure of the gender essentialist world. However, this type of failure is one that is necessary for the cycle of utopian creation and re-creation. It is this constant revision that benefits the intersection of feminist and utopian theory and practice. While gender essentialist notions intervene in trying to portray a common human nature among all women and all men, the binary separation of men versus women erases the recognition of a gender-free, gender-fluid, or transgender existence. These works of literature aim to recover a forgotten utopian feminist literary history, while the future is genderless. However, this does not make the subgenre incompatible with the overarching goals of gender emancipation or feminist utopianism. It provides a different perspective into common issues.

In the end, the novels in this subgenre also portray that there cannot be any universal utopia that can fulfill everyone's desires. I want to go back to Hans Achterhuis who criticizes this hypocritical duality of utopias: The purity of the utopians exists by the grace of others who are 'unclean,' who do the dirty work for them. He states that the whole of Utopia is based on the opposition between 'us' and 'them', between citizens and outsiders.[240] Therefore, the clash between communities of women and men, thus between complementary but conflicting elements, underscores the relevance of the utopian and dystopian realms within the novels. Since

[240] Achterhuis, *De erfenis van de utopie,* 78. Original text: "De zuiverheid der Utopiërs bestaat bij de gratie van anderen die 'onrein' zijn, die de vuile werkjes voor hen opknappen. Heel Utopia is gebaseerd op de tegenstelling tussen 'wij' en 'zij', tussen de burgers en de buitenstaanders."

there cannot be one common human nature, the existence of one perfect utopia for everyone is unrealistic. On this note, Ruth Levitas argues that all utopias make a statement about human nature. Since the needs and traditions of a society will change not only by gender but also by geographical and geopolitical conditions as well, human nature reveals itself as a socially and contextually constructed phenomenon; not a universal concept. She states that systems may contain conflicting elements among people, which can support utopian as well as anti-utopian reactions to totalitarianism.[241] The emphasis on defining human nature comes from the desire "to legitimize the particular social arrangements prescribed."[242] Consequently, there can be no universal utopia but only essentialist utopias acting as universal ones, where conflict breeds new forms of destruction and then new patterns of rebirth.

In order to outline the rich herstory of the subgenre of gender separatist feminist utopian literature, I have looked at its most common foundational narrative elements. The usage of the concept of tabula rasa as a metaphor for a new beginning in central to the creation of new feminist eutopian spaces. An act of destruction in the past becomes the crucial plot element that makes the concept of tabula rasa possible in the first place. This state of metaphorical blank state is central to the creation of the feminist utopias in these literary works. Consequently, the act of destruction is presented as a means of justification for the establishment of a new and hoped-to-be better community. The destruction serves as a symbolic gesture that signifies the rejection and subsequent abandonment of the pre-existing traditional gender roles and societal structures. In other words, the destruction becomes the framework that emphasizes the urgency of abandoning the old ways in favor of a feminist eutopian alternative.

In addition to the motif of destruction that enables the rebuilding of the utopian society, the strong portrayal of the dystopian traits of the past as warnings for the future contributes to

[241] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 213.
[242] Ibid, 214.

the complexity of the narrative. The new community is forewarned about the potential shortcomings of its people through the preservation of the memory of the dark past. This cautionary aspect of gender separatist feminist utopian literature serves many roles in the plots: a guiding force, a stabilizing presence, a protective layer against a new possible destruction and a moral compass. This cautionary tale of destruction influences the evolution of the community and shapes its collective identity.

In these examples of feminist utopian literature, history is not entirely erased. This is evident in the fact that the communal experience and knowledge of the destroyed past persist in the present in different ways. This knowledge and experience of the past is stored in the collective memory of the newly established communities, either explicitly through documented records or implicitly through shared narratives and cultural practices. This historical awareness and the meta-awareness it creates for the readers becomes a foundational narrative element. Furthermore, this notion helps shape the identity of the community and influence its evolution. This collective memory also serves as a collection of lessons and provides a reference point for the community.

One of the most important reasons why gender separated communities end up feeling disillusioned from the separatist utopian ideals is that separatism has proven to be practically impossible. The women's communities in literature physically separate themselves from men, but not from patriarchy or misuse of power in general. This creates tensions among both women and men because some of them wish to join communities, while others cling to the traditional idea that men are to be avoided due to their assumed and perceived aggressive nature. In other works of literature, the separation is caused by biological and/or natural catastrophes such as epidemics, meteor strikes, and earthquakes, which makes an allusion to the supposedly deep connection between women and nature. Feminist scholarship has examined matriarchy as a social and political structure that differs from patriarchy in terms of not only gender in particular

but also how they do politics in general. Nonetheless, the matriarchal administrations in many examples in literature resemble a strict patriarchal system but with only women as leaders.

The disparity between the actions, expectations, and reality in relation to the formation of a gender separated matriarchal utopian society is note-worthy. The actions that are expected to bring improvement and contentment to society can have outcomes that fail to fulfill this expectation. As I mentioned in Chapter I, Berlant's approach to cruel optimism is a fitting analogy to the narrative cycle of hope, destruction, and rebirth in the gender separatist novels I am researching. She focuses on the precarity that occurs following the desperation and violence that arise after the failure of capitalist good life promises, which are akin to utopian better life promises.[243] As mentioned earlier, in her work *Cruel Optimism*, she argues that social theory has the task of answering the questions about the need for formal and informal institutions, and affective aspirations that could potentially support the ideals of the collective utopian ambitions of the good life.[244] While the sociopolitical systems around us make good life promises such as sustainable income, health and healthcare services, recreation, personal development, environmental enrichment, and accessibility, precarity and disappointment usually follow due to the actions we take to reach these promises.

In the gender separatist works included in this dissertation, there is a strong desire to create a world that does not allow for the repetition of past mistakes because these mistakes are considered to have caused the destruction of their worlds. This desire to create a better world results in attempts at eliminating all possible risk factors that may cause atrocities similar to those in the past. This particularly high level of utopian micromanaging and blueprinting ends up creating a utopian world where the crimes of the past are eliminated, only to discover new horrors that originate in the conditions of the new utopian worlds. Thus the methods used to

[243] "Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable with Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cvejić, Isabell Lorey, Jasbir Puar, and Ana Vujanović." pp. 171.
[244] Ibid.

actualize the desire for a perfect feminist utopian world become an obstacle to the flourishing of the gender separatist utopian worlds. Even though Berlant is concerned with real-life situations in her discourse, the desire for the good life and the optimistic attachment to this desire, also in utopian literature, gets increasingly more difficult to abandon as the attachment to the optimistic outcome grows. As more effort and hope are immersed into the process of achieving optimistic aspirations, the loss that comes with the perceived failure of the good life will be greater. Berlant further argues that desires for betterment, which she calls optimistic relations, are not cruel by nature, but that they become cruel when the inherently optimistic attachment to these improvement projects and ideals impedes the desired progress and results. Berlant argues that optimism about such promises and aspirations of the good life may not always cater to the promised feeling of progress, positivity, or optimism.[245]

Similarly, in gender separatist utopian novels, the idea of the good life for women is at the center of the internal process of the subgenre; however, the realization that their utopia is not perfect or finalized creates the disillusionment that makes the characters question their decisions. This notion relates to the novels I am studying because the leading councils of women in the gender separatist utopian societies depend on the idea that separating the society based on assumed gender status and micromanaging the sociopolitical life of the society would, in turn, bring about peace, safety, and security. However, these well-meaning actions do not always provide the predicted positive outcomes and, more importantly, the harsh conditions brought about by these very actions cause society to stray further from the expected outcome. Peace, safety, and security start to feel like an unreachable shore, relating well to the spirit of ever-evolving utopianism.

The creative (the meta-process of writing the utopian text) and societal (the progress experienced by the society in the novels) journey undertaken in the gender separatist utopian

[245] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 2.

community differ in certain ways that are not always linear. This lack of progress linearity is an inherent part of utopianism. The unfolding of utopian spaces is a process that includes moments that resemble failure and others that resemble elation, all of which form a cohesive whole that supports constant evolution with no closure. In the narrative structure of these works, this final moment of disillusionment is employed as a strategy to critique the separatist aspect of these specific feminist utopias/dystopias. This point of view leads us to the idea of disillusionment with the concept of utopia itself, self-preservation through separatism, and the possibility of personal and societal transformation. Berlant's work focuses on the outcome of the disillusionment from the optimistic relation once it becomes cruel. She defines this impasse as "a time of dithering from which someone or some situations cannot move forward."[246] In gender separatist utopian works of literature, the readers encounter the impasse when the protagonists experience disillusionment by the end of the plot, as they realize that their supposedly utopian home is built upon many secrets and atrocities from the past. The impasse is realized when it becomes obvious that there is no turning back, and going forward would mean destroying what stands in front of progress, therefore feeding the cycle of cruel optimism.

This also relates to cruel utopianism in a sense because the sacrifices they make to reach an unreachable utopia end up making them look for yet another utopia. It is this never-ending nature of the process that negates the death of feminist utopia. In that regard, after centuries of writing about perfectly peaceful feminist utopias, it is no doubt that the trend has shifted towards framing utopianism through a popular narrative: catastrophes. This in turn makes me question the very definition of utopia again. In a recent interview in the *Oxford Political Review*,[247] Claeys underlines that he is arguing in favor of "a realizable utopianism" by which he is

[246] Ibid, 5.

[247] See https://oxfordpoliticalreview.com/2022/09/25/interview-with-gregory-claeys-utopianism-for-a-dying-planet/

criticizing the ubiquitous utopian hope and everyday utopianism. He argues for a utopianism that is concretely theorizing, not abstractly hoping:

> Utopia has a specific content, and is a social concept. Where hope is a synonym for faith, it is counterproductive and archaic. As mere hopium is merely dulls our sense of anxiety. It is pointless to say "we hope for a better world" or "a better world is possible" without specifying what we mean by these terms, and discussing the specific content of utopia.[248]

I acknowledge how the concept of hope can be both significant and elusive. Hope, in itself, does not guarantee specific outcomes; rather, it embodies the belief that the pursuit or process is inherently valuable and worth fighting for. However, in gender separatist feminist utopian literature, I find using utopian hope as a catalyst for dreaming and designing a eutopian space much more compatible with the ideals of feminist utopianism. As Bloch also underlines, this ubiquitous hope has to be "conscious" and "aware" – not a concept of empty hope that acts as blind faith.[249]

Berlant's concept of cruel optimism and Levitas' specific concept of utopia as method (of archaeological, ontological, and architectural) paved the way for me to find that the common narrative cycle in the gender separatist utopian literature in my thesis is eutopian and optimistic in and of itself despite the fact that their portrayal of the new world can feel dystopian for women and gender equality at large. Nonetheless, the works of literature in this subgenre aimed in good faith to create a women-only safe space.

[248] Ibid.
[249] Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, 105.

Feminist utopianism situates itself apart from static blueprint utopianism. This principle is also in line with the multiplicity, intersectionality, and self-reflexivity of feminist utopianism. The act of leaving the static blueprint scheme of utopianism behind provides space to employ world-building narratives that explore a wide variety of co-existence between the spaces of women and men, and also within these gendered spaces themselves. Even when the stories start from the perspective of gender separatist feminism, the issues handled in these works of literature do not stay at the level of gender politics but delve into many intersecting aspects of life such as politics of work, education, societal collaboration, resourceful variants of alternative living, and military assurance. Despite creating women-only spaces, the fact that women oppress, control and even abuse other women and the fact that most of these literary texts end with disheartened tension expresses a self-reflexive critique within specific schools of feminist thought; in this case, radical feminism. Even though gender separatism has had its merits in certain contexts of safety and perseverance, the novels in my study show that separatism did not help communities build improved gender relations and a peaceful society. On the contrary, gender separatism was the reason for the disintegration or the disillusionment of their societies.

In conclusion, the cyclical nature of the narrative makes this subgenre eutopian at heart because the constant destruction and rebuilding for the betterment of society is the essence of utopianism. As anti-utopianists argue that the impossibility of perfection and the rigidity (even totalitarianism) of the regime make utopianism unrealistic and harmful. I find the impossibility of perfection one of the central and most valuable characteristics of utopianism. Gender separatist utopian literature emphasizes this utopian pattern of renewal with its common narrative cycle of hope, destruction, and rebirth. Ideally, utopia is never to be reached but always chased on the horizon.

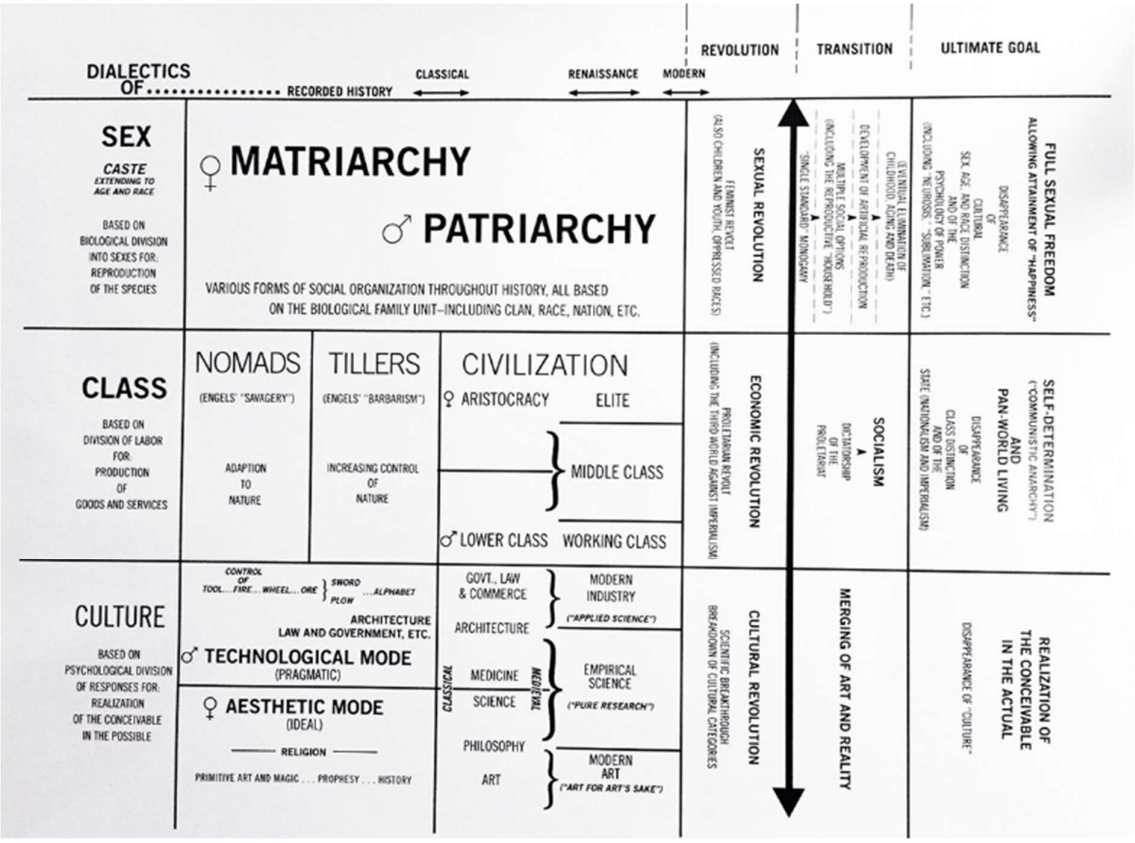
The recognition of women as a separate gender-based class underlines the multifaceted nature of societal structures. The unique challenges faced by women are therefore acknowledge.

This acknowledgement also shows that a singular utopia catering to everyone of the same gender is an unrealistic notion. Individuals will, irrespective of their gender, harbor a unique group of features that defy the probability of societal homogenization. Therefore, the pursuit of utopian blueprint of gender peace requires the understanding that the ideal fictional society needs to be diverse and adaptable in order to accommodate individual nuances of the broader context of gender identity.

While I make this statement, I am also fully aware of the fact that these constant and at times too subtle attacks on women's rights continue to confront women in many parts of the world to varying degrees. Some geographies are luckier than others in certain aspects; however, how far we have come in the women's rights movement cannot be taken for granted. This is also why I argue that we still need utopian hope and feminism for a better tomorrow.

I would like to end my dissertation with Shulamith Firestone's "diagram of the revolution" which was included in her book *The Dialectic of Sex*.[250]

[250] Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 6.



In this diagram, Firestone illustrates the categories of sex, class, and culture across the Classical, Renaissance, and Modern ages. She envisions three crucial revolutions to achieve the ultimate goals of the feminist revolution: the Sexual Revolution, the Economic Revolution, and the Cultural Revolution. These revolutions would lead to Full Sexual Freedom, Self-determination, and The Realization of the Conceivable in the Actual. Firestone uses this map to forge intersectional connections between class, culture, and sex, underscoring the potential for transformative change. This practice serves as a valuable tool for mapping the stages of a Marxist feminist revolution.

In order to recover their herstory and build their own utopia, women look to the past, gather hope for the future, destroy the present, and initiate a period of rebirth. It was my goal to dissect this act of recovery in gender separatist feminist utopian literature in my dissertation. First, I delved into the expression of hope in my corpus, examining how this hope is articulated

and how it motivates the eutopian spaces. I looked to establish a tradition of women-authored eutopias predating Thomas More's renowned *Utopia*. I observed the intersection of hope and the perceived death of utopia. Later I specifically concentrated on the motivation behind the destruction motif that came before the formation of the eutopian spaces. I noticed that this motif has served as a means of purging the world of the hardships faced by women in that community. Therefore, the concept of destruction has become a means of breaking away from the past that has come to shape the present. Thus, destruction becomes a necessary part of creation. I then shifted my focus to the concept of tabula rasa, which includes the examination of historiography, the reclamation of history, and the writing of herstory. Through a historical review of matriarchal societies, I examined the sociopolitical structures that are formed on the theoretical foundation of tabula rasa immediately after a form of destruction occurred. These structures start from destruction and arrive at tabula rasa, only to find a need for a better world. This need necessitates and creates hope as the fuel, thus the cycle of destruction continues. This cycle contributes to the crisis, chaos, disillusionment, and potentially paving the way for future ideas towards a better eutopia.

In the end, the literary tropes present in separatist feminist literature (such as those I examined; hope, destruction and rebirth) contribute to a rich literary tradition in feminist utopianism. These literary tropes act as a foundation for the exploration of the space between destruction, creation, memory, trauma and progress. The infinite pursuit of eutopia continues to exist in the subgenre of gender separatist feminist utopian literature.

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Appendix I

Below is the list of gender separatist utopian works I have found throughout the years in my research project. As I mentioned in the body of the text before, certain works were derived from entries listed on Wikipedia, GoodReads and such cataloguing websites, while others originate from feminist zines accessible online, although some are no longer available. Over the years, additional titles have been accumulated from my supervisors, other professors with an interest in the subject, and colleagues within the field. Unfortunately, certain separatist feminist online groups mentioned in secondary sources have disappeared over time. Below is a chronological list of the primary literature that I have found. The list contains both female and male authors. Some of them are misogynistic and some misandrist.

Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 1405.

Sarah Scott, *A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent*, 1762.

Elizabeth Corbett, *New Amazonia: A Foretaste of the Future*, 1889.

Mary Lane, *Mizora: A Prophecy: A Mss. Found Among the Private Papers of Princess Vera Zarovitch: Being a True and Faithful Account of her Journey to the Interior of the Earth, with a Careful Description of the Country and its Inhabitants, their Customs, Manners, and Government*, 1890.

Begum Rokeya, *Sultana's Dream*, 1905.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Moving the Mountain*, 1911.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, 1915.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *With Her in Ourland*, 1916.

Poul Anderson, *Virgin Planet*, 1959.

John Wyndham, *Consider Her Ways and Others*, 1961.

Edmund Cooper, *Five to Twelve*, 1968.

Edmund Cooper, *Who Needs Men*, 1972.

Joanna Russ, “When It Changed,” 1972.

Suzy McKee Charnas, *Walk to the End of the World*, 1974.

Gerd Brantenberg, *Egalia’s Daughters: A Satire of the Sexes*, 1977.

Sally Miller Gearhart, *The Wanderground*, 1978.

Rochelle Singer, *The Demeter Flower*, 1980.

Suzy McKee Charnas, *Motherlines*, 1981.

Katherine V. Forrest, *Daughters of a Coral Dawn*, 1984.

Joan Slonczewski, *A Door into Ocean*, 1986.

Joanna Russ, *The Female Man*, 1975.

Pamela Sargent, *The Shore of Women*, 1986.

Sheri S. Tepper, *The Gate to Women’s Country*, 1989.

James Tiptree Jr., *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever*, 1990.

Leona Gom, *The Y Chromosome*, 1990.

Nicola Griffith, *Ammonite*, 1992.

David Brin, *Glory Season*, 1993.

Suzy McKee Charnas, *The Furies*, 1994.

Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra, *Y: The Last Man*, 2002.

Katherine V. Forrest, *Daughters of an Amber Noon*, 2002.

Leigh Richards, *Califia’s Daughters*, 2004.

Katherine V. Forrest, *Daughters of an Emerald Dusk*, 2005.

Elizabeth Bear, *Carnival*, 2006.

Doris Lessing, *The Cleft*, 2007.

Sarah Hall, *Daughters of the North*, 2007.

Kameron Hurley, *The Stars are Legion*, 2017.

Jonathan Frame, *Schrödinger’s Elephant*, 2018.

Lauren Beukes, *Afterland*, 2020.

Christina Dalcher, *Femlandia*, 2021.

Christina Sweeney-Baird, *The End of Men*, 2021.

Sandra Newman, *The Men*, 2022.

Samenvatting

Gender-separatistische utopische literatuur portretteert gemeenschappen die uitsluitend bevolkt worden door vrouwen, terwijl mannen elders leven of soms als slaven leven. Dit separatisme weerspiegelt sociaal-politieke en emotionele conflicten tussen vrouwen en mannen. Het subgenre biedt niet alleen grote mogelijkheden voor het onderzoeken van de representatie van veronderstelde biologisch inherente verschillen tussen vrouwen en mannen, of tussen vrouwen binnen dezelfde gendergroepen, maar biedt ook inzicht in de relatie tussen utopisch verlangen en de emancipatie van vrouwen. Ik heb mij in het kader van dat laatste vooral gericht op de narratieve cyclus van hoop, vernietiging en wedergeboorte die aanwezig is in veel voorbeelden uit dit subgenre.

De utopische cyclus begint met de volledige vernietiging van een huidige stand van zaken in de respectieve werelden om een staat van *tabula rasa* te bereiken. Daardoor wordt een wedergeboorte mogelijk zonder geschiedenis alsmede een geloof in de heropvoeding en rehabilitatie van mensen, waarop de hoop voor redding is gebaseerd in een zich ontwikkelende eutopie. In bijna alle gevallen slaagt de vernietiging van het patriarchaat er niet in om de hoop op een beter leven voor vrouwen te vervullen, omdat de daad van vernietiging zelf een belemmering vormt voor de natuurlijke evolutie van de nieuwe samenleving. Na de vernietiging raken, zo blijkt uit het corpus, de beschreven samenlevingen gedesillusioneerd over het utopische project en de nieuwe hoop of de belofte die in gender separatisme zit vervat, gaat teloor.

In dit onderzoeksproject heb ik een breed scala aan gender-separatistische feministische utopische teksten onderzocht, variërend van het werk van Christine de Pizan uit de 14e eeuw – afwezig in veel overzichten van het door mannen gedomineerde utopische

genre – tot het werk van Laurie R. King in 2004. Door de reikwijdte van mijn corpus zo breed mogelijk te houden heb ik een overzicht van het literaire subgenre in kaart gebracht, met een duidelijke focus op de laatste decennia van de 20e eeuw.

Mijn proefschrift gaat in op de vraag of de connectie tussen de narratieve cyclus en utopische desillusie leidt tot een daadwerkelijk mislukken of falen van het utopische ideaal, of dat een levend feministisch utopisme te vinden is in feministische dystopische verhalen van vernietiging. Ik onderzoek daartoe hoe de narratieve cyclus interageert met gebruikelijke tradities van utopische literatuur, maar ook met feministische theorie. Kernpunten zijn hoe de subjectiviteit van vrouwen in de gekozen literaire werken zich verhoudt tot het probleem van de geschiedenis; hoe het "vrouwelijke subject" haar rol ziet in relatie tot haar sociaal-politieke context; en hoe het mechanisme van hoop, vernietiging en optimisme iedere keer opnieuw vorm krijgt in dit subgenre.

De creatieve en maatschappelijke reis die wordt ondernomen in de gender-separatistische utopische gemeenschap ontwikkelt zich op manieren die niet altijd lineair zijn. Dit gebrek aan lineaire vooruitgang beschouw ik als een inherent onderdeel van utopisme. Het ontvouwen van utopische ruimtes is een proces dat momenten omvat die op mislukking lijken en anderen die op opgetogenheid lijken, die allemaal een samenhangend geheel vormen dat een voortdurende evolutie ondersteunt zonder afsluiting. In de narratieve structuur van deze werken wordt een laatste moment van desillusie eerder gebruikt als een strategie om het separatistische aspect van deze specifieke feministische utopieën/dystopieën te bekritiseren. Dit standpunt leidt ons naar een heroverweging van de idee van desillusie in het concept van de utopie die hier bestaat in zelfbehoud door middel van separatisme en de mogelijkheid van persoonlijke en maatschappelijke transformatie. Uit mijn analyse van de narratieve dynamiek die hoop, vernietiging en wedergeboorte bindt, blijkt dat desillusie

onderdeel is van een eindeloos proces dat de dood van de feministische utopie tegenwerkt, of die in leven houdt.

De cyclische aard van het proces maakt dit subgenre in de kern utopisch, omdat de constante vernietiging en wederopbouw ter verbetering van de samenleving de essentie van het utopisme is. Ik beschouw de onmogelijkheid van perfectie als een van de centrale en meest waardevolle kenmerken van dit type van utopisme. Gender-separatistische utopische literatuur benadrukt het utopische patroon van vernieuwing met haar gemeenschappelijke narratieve cyclus van hoop, vernietiging en wedergeboorte. Idealiter wordt utopie nooit bereikt, maar altijd nagestreefd, als een richtpunt aan de horizon.

Het concept van hoop kan zowel significant als ongrijpbaar zijn. Hoop op zichzelf garandeert geen specifieke uitkomsten; het belichaamt eerder het geloof dat de zoektocht of het proces inherent noodzakelijk is en waard is om voor te vechten. In gender-separatistische feministische utopische literatuur kan feministische utopische hoop echter worden gezien als een katalysator voor het dromen en ontwerpen van een utopische ruimte. Het nastreven van een utopische blauwdruk van gendervrede vereist het begrip dat de ideale fictieve samenleving divers en aanpasbaar moet zijn om individuele nuances van de bredere context van genderidentiteit te kunnen accommoderen.

Curriculum vitae

Zeynep Anli was born on the Aegean coast of Turkey in 1986. She studied at a well-established high school with a specific trajectory on language and literature. In 2008, she received her BA diploma in English Language and Literature from Hacettepe University in Ankara. During her studies, she wrote short essays to contribute to the journal of the department. She took a professional break for a couple of years to work as a language and communication instructor at universities in Tekirdag and in Istanbul. In 2011, while still working as an instructor during the day, she started her evening MA studies in the department of Comparative Literature in Istanbul Bilgi University. During this period of two years, she studied world literature as well as various subjects from critical theory and philosophy. Her MA thesis was titled "It is a Woman's World: Gender Politics of Gynotopian Novels" and engaged in the literary theory of feminist separatist utopian novels, focusing on the works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Joanna Russ and Doris Lessing.

Zeynep Anli started her PhD research as an external student at Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS) in 2014 while still living and working in Turkey. In her doctoral trajectory, she aimed at expanding her MA research into a wider timeframe, going into a deeper intersectional analysis of the literature, and providing a critique of missing feminist links within utopian literary theory. After working as an instructor for eight years, she started to work as an editor and freelance translator. In 2017 she noticed the difficulty of being an external student away from the scientific community in question and decided to move to the Netherlands to complete her studies in person. She participated in the courses and events of the graduate faculty as well as playing an active role in the publication of the graduate journal for two editions. In the meantime, she has been working at the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) as a researcher, publishing in that department and responding to editorial/referee requests from both her field at CWTS and her doctoral studies at LUCAS.

Propositions

1. While feminist utopian literature engages in imagined literary worlds that aim to be better than the reality they set out to criticize, it underlines that these worlds contribute to societal progress through the act of desire and imagination, even when there is conflict and perceived failure in these literary worlds.
2. Acknowledging utopia as a method instead of a blueprint practice widens the spectrum of possibilities and encourages thinking vigorously about societal issues.
3. Feminist theory is inherently utopian due to its nature of constant revision and improvement despite the fact that the feminist utopian project is far from its destination, especially beyond the Global West.
4. On the surface level, the gender separatist aspects of the subgenre of feminist utopian literature seem to erase any gender identity that falls outside the binary, while it actually problematizes some of the most common assumptions about gender identity and performativity.
5. Many worlds in feminist utopian literature are conservative and even totalitarian in the sense that their leaders and/or leading councils have the strong tendency to adhere to certain rules to avoid a repetition of the devastations of the past patriarchal worlds.
6. Contrary to the belief of some, utopianism is not some unrealistic juvenile dreaming but the eternally imperfect journey towards a better state of affairs.
7. I interpret Audre Lorde's famous adage "Revolution is not a one-time event" from *Sister Outsider* as an allusion to utopian thought, emphasizing the need for constant revolution for a better world.
8. Whether a utopian work of literature is meant to be satire or not, or whether an imagined world in literature is dystopian or not, can be quite ambiguous at times and this ambiguity is what makes utopian literature self-reflexive and transformative.
9. The literary setting of utopia underlines the necessity of an intersectional critique on power relations because the acts of oppression in these utopias are not only gender-based but diverse and intertwined.
10. Being an external PhD candidate, while having a full-time job at the same time, requires quite a utopian mentality, with the risk of stumbling upon cruel optimism along the way.