# 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.