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**Becoming Woman in the Land of Women:
Investigating the Paradigm of the Individual versus
the Collective in Contemporary Feminist Utopianism**

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PhD Comparative Literature
The University of Edinburgh
2020

Abstract

Studies in feminist utopianism have demonstrated how this literary current provides fertile ground for critiquing masculine hegemonies and imagining new ways of being. A central aspect of recent feminist debates, which has not yet been explored in this context, however, is the issue of how to build alliances between women, when notions of a shared female identity have been challenged in the poststructuralist era. Yet, given its concern with community and collectivism, utopia is a productive space for investigating literary visions of female solidarity. To shed light on this cross-section between utopia and feminism, this thesis investigates how three speculative texts represent the group, the individual, and the ties that bind them together. The novels, selected for their focus on female bonds, are: *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* (1995) by Belgian writer Jacqueline Harpman, *El país de las mujeres* (2010) by Nicaraguan author Gioconda Belli, and *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman from the UK. The texts were approached through a critical linguistic framework of narrative point of view, which considers perspective along three planes: ideological, psychological and spatiotemporal. From this detailed analysis, the first of its kind applied to such texts, it was found that the novels, despite differences in political stance and utopian mode, all depict small groups of women in a positive light. Here, the local collective provides a source of support and mutual recognition for the individual, substantiating a move away from the conformist or homogenising groups associated with the canonical genre. Moreover, groups of women tended to be allied through an imposed or self-ascribed shared identity, with the novels oscillating between performative and biologist understandings of gender. These representations were read as pragmatically balancing dominant and oppositional discourses, to deliver a critique of gendered hierarchies within their particular contexts. Overall, this thesis contributes across three fields of research by developing the critical linguistic model, adding a cross-cultural dimension to research in the genre, and building on understandings of utopian collectivism.

Lay Summary

Research has shown how literary utopias (be they dystopian nightmares, idealised societies or a mix of both) have been used by women authors to highlight sexism and restrictive gender roles, as well as to suggest new possibilities for social transformation. A key feminist debate, which so far has not been studied in depth in these kinds of novels, is identity politics. The benefits and pitfalls of identity politics (that is, whether to rally behind a vision of ‘woman’ or not) have been subject to much academic discussion over the last 50 years. Some theorists champion the political need for a shared subject position; others have underlined the dangers of promoting a universal idea of femininity. Identity politics is also relevant to utopian writing, given that utopias often focus on how an individual relates to a group or society. For example, a character’s identity may be suppressed by the collective, or social cohesion may be achieved by adherence to a common identity. To explore the theme of feminist identity politics in the utopian genre, this thesis studies three contemporary speculative novels by women authors. The aim is to discover how these texts represent the collective, the individual and the relationship between them. The novels, selected for their focus on groups of women, are: *Moi qui n’ai pas connu les hommes* (1995) by Belgian writer Jacqueline Harpman, *El país de las mujeres* (2010) by Nicaraguan author Gioconda Belli, and *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman from the UK. These texts were analysed using a linguistic framework of narrative point of view. It was found that they all depict small groups of women in a positive light, although they differed in the extent to which they affirmed or contested a shared female identity. These female collectives were represented as an important source of support and validation for their members, regardless of the type of utopian world (dystopian or idealised) they were set against. This thesis contextualises these findings against contemporary feminist debates on identity and collective action, as well as trends in literary utopianism. Overall, this study adds a cross-cultural dimension to research in the genre, and develops understandings of collectivism in feminist utopian fiction.

Acknowledgements

To Fiona, Susie and Carole, your knowledge and insight have been invaluable in helping to guide this work. Thank you for the time and care you have taken to read and comment in detail on each section. In a system which overfills your days with research, teaching, outreach and admin, the effort and hours you have spent on my project are no small thing, and are greatly appreciated. Thank you as well for the encouragement, reassurances and advice which have always arrived at the right time, keeping my spirits up and my forward momentum going.

I am grateful to the University of Edinburgh for the College Research Award which covered my tuition fees, and to The Sir Richard Stapley Educational Trust, The Edinburgh Association of University Women President's Fund, and the John Orr Research Award for the supplementary funding which made it possible for me to carry out this research.

Thanks is also due to the team at Edinburgh World Heritage for their flexibility and support. Working with you enabled me to undertake a PhD, as well as build new skills and broaden my horizons. I could not have spent those years with a better group of colleagues - thanks pals.

To my friends and family, especially my mum, Laura Watson, thank you for your encouragement and unconditional support. You see me as whole and valuable regardless my academic work, and for that I am so grateful.

And to Al, who has been by my side throughout this whole process, thank you for your unwavering belief in me, for reassuring me, and for letting me garble at you about my research in its early days, hopefully becoming more coherent as the time has gone on. You have helped me to keep perspective, to develop my critical thought, to aim high. Thank you.

This thesis is dedicated to Ashley Watson, who couldn't be here to see it finished but knew it would be. Thank you for all your wise words which have stayed with me through the writing process, and will always.

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Introduction

Under the banner of comparative literature, this study brings together three disciplinary strands: feminist theories on identity and difference, literary utopianism, and a critical linguistic approach to narrative point of view. As such, it sits across the fields of gender studies, genre studies and poetics. It also takes on the task of comparing three contemporary novels from three languages and distinct cultural contexts: English and the United Kingdom, French and Belgium, and Spanish and Nicaragua respectively.

Already, this prospect appears alarmingly wide-ranging for an in-depth analysis. Yet, the thesis hinges on one central problematic which serves as a unifying thread and guides the analysis. The issue in question is the relationship between the individual and the collective. How to manage this dynamic is the fundamental concern of all social contracts and the ethical heart of politics itself. In broad terms, individualist or collectivist orientations separate right from left, capitalism from communism, liberalism from socialism. For me, the topic fascinates for the way it cuts through the personal and political divide, demonstrating how politics is subtended by beliefs about personhood: identity, choice, agency and power. Policies on how to organise, represent and legislate, rely on ideas of value, of what a person is, of intersubjectivity, of responsibility and freedom, which themselves in turn depend on theories of knowledge and existence.

However, in the face of poststructuralist challenges, these ontological and epistemological building blocks have been rendered increasingly contingent and unstable in recent decades. Can we carry on with grand narrative solutions to social relations in the face of uncertainty and unmasked hegemonies? These existential

dilemmas preside over the discussion throughout the following chapters, and more specific analysis of how feminist discourses conceive individual identity and collectivism can always be related back to these primary concerns.

Moving now to outline how the topic gains pertinence in relation to the foci of the thesis: utopianism, feminism and narrative point of view. When it comes to literary utopias (a moniker which here subsumes *eutopias* (good places), dystopias and anti-eutopias)¹ critics agree that the paradigm of the individual encountering the collective is a central tenet of the traditional genre (Booker “Collective” 59; Claeys *Dystopia* 8). Whether that be the figure of a traveller visiting a eutopian land, or an individual trapped within an oppressive total system, utopianism often thematises the relation between the individual and the group. The prominence of this feature has led key theorist Gregory Claeys to formulate a definition of eutopian and dystopian visions based on their attitude to collectivism. In his schema, dystopias exhibit “compulsory solidarity” where group cohesion is coerced and secured through fear, and eutopias characterised by “enhanced sociability” with conditions promoting friendship and cooperation (Claeys *Dystopia* 8). However, between these positive and negative poles a whole scale extends, and of course texts may vacillate in their collectivist ethos. Indeed, examining trends from the 1960s to 90s, theorists including Tom Moylan, Lucy Sargisson, Raffaella Baccolini and Dunja Mohr, have identified that contemporary utopianism tends to transgress the boundaries between dystopia and eutopia. They highlight a critical dimension in their corpora which brings generic absolutes, blueprint solutions and fixed concepts into

¹ These definitions will be explored further in the first chapter.

question. However, although modern literary utopianism has attracted much academic attention over the last thirty years, with new definitions emerging in response to the evolving output, to date no study has specifically focussed on the interrelation between the self and the group in feminist fictions. This angle represents this thesis' main original scholarly contribution, and opens a productive avenue for examining literary representations of female subjectivity and collectivism, and their political ramifications.

Undoubtedly, the notion of group and individual identities, and how they interact, is of paramount importance to feminist theorising and activism. It has been centre stage in feminist discourses since the 1970s when Black, queer, postcolonial and post-structural academics began to query the foundations of 'woman' as a universal shared category (see for example Carby; Crenshaw; hooks; Spivak; Wittig "naît"). They argued effectively that any stable definition of female identity is not only illusory, but partial and harmfully whitewashes out differences between women, treating lived experience of gender as homogenous and excluding those who do not fit into this vision of "a global McSisterhood" (Sawhney 205). As will be shown more fully in the first chapter of this thesis, ideas of selfhood and sexual difference as coherent, fixed and pre-given have been deconstructed and, accordingly, the grounds for any identitarian alliances have come into question. As a result, feminists now face the challenge of finding new ways to conceive female subjectivity and new mechanisms for affiliation, given that political action, necessary to effect change in the material circumstances of women around the world, is problematised if the participants do not associate as a group. As eminent feminist linguist Deborah Cameron points out, "feminism must exist in the

space between the extremes, between a falsely universalised ‘woman’, and an ungraspable diversity of women” (185). It is this tension that I aim to occupy in this study, the crucial threshold between the constructive impulse to coalesce, collectivise, act and speak together, and the deconstructive imperative to question, and even police, these formations. The dilemma in feminist movements on how to juggle the interrelations between the individual and the collective is unresolved, and some would argue unresolvable: best left open and un-pre-configured. Yet activists and authors continue to act, write and organise, moving forward in difference. That is, difference of opinion, of intersecting subject positions, of priorities. So how are collectives being imagined in speculative feminist fictions? Are they conceived as dystopian threats tyrannising and silencing, or do they contain emancipatory potential? What about individual identities: are they fluid and fragmented, or do they hold on to a tangible communal nature? The utopian genre, with its focus on group dynamics, provides the ideal space to explore these feminist debates on self and intersubjectivity.

Against this background then, narrative point of view provides a useful framework for analysing textual representations of individual and collective identities. The critical linguistic approach in particular offers tools for interpreting how a sense of personality (the impression of individual consciousness) is constructed, as well as how the collective is portrayed: how it is evaluated and what attitude is expressed towards it in the narrative. This model of point of view moves beyond the voice/focalisation dichotomy to conceptualise three concurrent textual perspectives: ideological, psychological and spatiotemporal. In this way, it provides a means to discuss not just the

angle from which events and characters are represented, but also how the text-world is coloured, valued and its overall “feel” (Simpson *Ideology* 46). This framework encourages close reading and reference to linguistic patterns to build arguments on how effects such as horror, alienation, or empathy are promoted. Yet, it does not advocate a rigid structuralist language to effect relationship. Rather, it is based in pragmatic, sociolinguistic theory which navigates a path between a straightforward code/decode model of language on one side and radical indeterminacy on the other. Its intersubjective and multifunctional account of meaning allows for ambiguity and failures of communication, whilst acknowledging a certain regularity in interpretation. Critical linguistics is also a politically engaged practice which links texts to their contexts, and views all texts (literary ones included) as explicitly and implicitly embodying particular worldviews. As such, it is a highly appropriate methodology with which to approach feminist utopianism, providing as it does a starting point for unpicking the workings of this politicised genre. In a very concrete sense, whether a text-world community is eutopian or dystopian is a matter of perspective. It is the creation of these points of view (the angle, attitude and judgement mediating the content) which will be investigated in this study.

To state clearly then, this thesis will undertake a critical linguistic analysis of narrative point of view in three contemporary, utopian novels by women authors to evaluate and contextualise their representations of the relationship between the collective and the individual. The novels in question are: *El país de las mujeres* [The Country of Women] (2010) by Nicaraguan author Gioconda Belli, *The Power* (2016) by

Naomi Alderman from the UK, and *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* [I Who Have Never Known Men] (1995) by Belgian writer Jacqueline Harpman. Three central research questions will be posed, along three disciplinary but related lines. Firstly, this study will seek to understand *how* individual and collective identities are constructed and framed in the novels. That is, how narrative perspective is exploited to build a particular vision of the self, the group and their interplay, and what resulting positive or negative, eutopian or dystopian portrayals emerge. Secondly, it will then be considered how these representations align with, or challenge, feminist discourses on identity and difference within and beyond their contexts. Lastly, the novels' interaction with generic convention will also be interrogated to situate the works in relation to each other and to feminist utopianism as a literary current.

One potential hypothesis is that, situated in a post-feminist era where suspicious critique has entered the academy and individualistic neoliberal discourses dominate mass media, singular protagonists will be favoured and collectivism repudiated as dangerous and repressive. Yet, this one-dimensional narrative will be complicated throughout the study, not just by the inclusion of a novel from outwith the Anglo-European context, but by the multiple, sometimes contradictory, possible readings of the texts. In any case, it will be argued that these novels work pragmatically, appealing across political divides and benefitting from the utopian space to dramatize the friction between the hope for positive affiliation with the risk of domination, and between fluid, performative notions of identity and a persistent attachment to clear, potentially powerful, subject positions.

Evidently, given the modest size of the corpus, the aim is not to provide a new overarching theory of contemporary utopianism nor to reach general conclusions about literary movements in Europe or Central America. Instead, it has the advantage of detailed textual analysis, takes an original cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural perspective, and contributes therefore to enriching understanding in each area. Specifically, the significance of this thesis relates to how:

- it will expand and refine the application of the critical linguistic model of point of view by exploring its utility in the context of feminist utopianism;
- through comparison of the novels, it will identify linguistic patterns which contribute to building or blurring the self/other divide, and to creating a eutopian or dystopian 'feel' to texts;
- as the first study to focus on the paradigm of the individual versus the collective in feminist fictions, it will draw conclusions on how this key generic theme is conformed to or subverted by contemporary women authors, and relate this to feminist debates;
- it will further the research of Lucy Sargisson, Dunja Mohr, Raffaella Baccolini, Sarah Goodwin, Libby Jones, Ellen Peel, Jane Donawerth and others, by assessing whether the critical and transgressive nature of feminist utopianism is continuing from the 1960s-90s into the 1990s and twenty-first century;
- by placing the three novels in dialogue, it will suggest possible common ground and divergences in current feminist thinking and literary practice across borders.

In broader terms, the thesis denies that eutopianism represents escapist idealism, and adds its voice to those, such as Ruth Levitas, who argue it is a legitimate and useful tool for sociocultural critique and envisioning new possibilities. Regarding feminist impact, this study investigates literary utopia as a politicised space vital for inspiring real-world change, and contributes to debates shaping present day women's movements.

When it came to the choice of novels, the relationship between the individual and the collective was again the basis for inclusion in the study. All three texts focus on a collective of women, and foreground interactions between the individual and the group. Notably, each contains a plot device which acts to force or allow a common bond to emerge between female characters and bring them into association. They are all also clearly speculative, taking place in alternate versions of reality, and participate in the utopian genre, although each novel privileges a different mode: eutopian, anti-eutopian and dystopian respectively. Nicaraguan poet, activist and author Gioconda Belli's text *El país de las mujeres*, charts the rise to power of an all-female political party in the fictional Central American state of Faguas. After the testosterone levels of men in the country are temporarily lowered by toxic fumes from a volcanic eruption, the new party surge in the polls with a promise to "limpiar este país" [clean up this country] (Belli *país* 110). When in government, the party remove all men from civil service and send them to work in communal kitchens, nurseries and the home, with women appointed to fill the vacant public positions. This gender swap scenario is echoed in Naomi Alderman's *The Power* where women and girls develop an electrostatic force in the palms of their hands. In this 2016 novel, the new biopower results in a re-balancing of social relations with

women gaining cultural, political, religious, economic and military status and control over men. Although differing in mode, with *The Power* a darker anti-eutopian tale and *El país* a hopeful eutopian narrative, both novels also share a similar macro-level structuring of point of view with most of the text narrated by a heterodiegetic narrative agent which alternates focalisation between a set of characters. *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* by Jacqueline Harpman on the other hand, offers an interesting contrast to this with its single character-narrator who relates the entire narrative. This novel opens with 39 women and one adolescent trapped in an underground cage watched over by guards. This situation has come about after a disaster which is never explained in the text, and ends equally abruptly one day when the alarm goes off, the guards disappear and the women escape. They then spend the next decades trying to survive in a barren and uninhabited land, with the group gradually succumbing to illness until only the narrator remains to die alone at the end of the book. This is quite clearly a dystopian vision, however, like the other works in the corpus, different strands are woven through and eutopian values do surface. Moreover, all texts are also 'feminist' in the sense that they are concerned with gender relations, notions of femininity, and thematise women acting collectively. Hence, in terms of genre and subject matter, these narratives provide excellent material for analysing the individual versus the collective paradigm from a feminist perspective.

The motivation for including a work from the Central American setting, aside from the text itself meriting study and being highly relevant to the topic at hand, is a desire to transcend narrow conceptions of utopia as a 'Western' phenomena (see for

example Jacqueline Dutton's article on this bias). Yet, taking on a comparative project across cultural contexts brings its own delicacies and challenges. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has highlighted, the discipline of Comparative Literature was established as part of the “knowledge venture of imperialism” (160). Writing about the Global South from an Anglophone institution in Europe and embedded in the theories, training and perspectives of the Global North, I must acknowledge this positioning and legacy. I cannot escape the direction of my gaze, but I can take steps to avoid “arrogant perception” (Frye 66). That is, objectifying, cursory, or instrumental engagement with cultures and literary traditions beyond my own. For a start, I am aware that the background to the issues explored in this thesis, a post-structural disruption of identity politics, arises from within the Anglo-European academy. This theoretical problematic may not be of relevance to Nicaraguan women’s movements or artistic outputs, which have developed responding to different sociohistorical factors. It is important therefore not to rush into a comparison which unthinkingly applies a measure from one domain onto another without accounting for context. This would be to suppress difference by positing unqualified equivalence. The aim instead is to balance the potential for connections and a global cross-pollination of ideas, with attention to the specificity of each individual country and setting. For me, an open attitude which does not hold on to normative or fixed concepts is necessary when approaching such research. As such, I will not impose in advance an idea of what ‘identity’ is or should be, nor what ‘feminism’ is or should be, nor what a ‘woman’ is or should be. Instead, I will look to the texts to discover how they portray these ideas and interpret that representation within its own discursive environment. Undoubtedly, any temporal logic of comparison which

ties to hierarchical notions of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ must be abandoned. To aid in avoiding this, the texts are studied in non-chronological order, arranged instead to best draw out dialogue between them. Indeed, comparisons and contrasts will be drawn, but only when full due has been paid to contextual variance.

Furthermore, it is worth including at this stage a brief statement on translation strategy given that this thesis is working across languages. A critical linguistic approach is evidently interested in the language of the text, therefore it is important to ensure that it is the original wording that is accessed. As has been effectively demonstrated, the translation process enacts shifts in narrative point of view (see for example Bosseaux; Chan; Deane-Cox). This is partly due to differing linguistic resources between languages, but also as a result of the translator’s creative input. Therefore, the primary sources have been read in French or Spanish and *not* in translation. However, as this thesis is created within a UK institution, translations into English of the literary and academic material are provided to accommodate Anglophone or bilingual readers. To aid the readability and flow of the chapters, the English translations will be included in the body of the text and the original wording in footnotes for longer quotations, or in the main text for shorter extracts. I will perform these translations, and in general, I will carry out an “instrumental” translation. This entails re-creating an analogous communicative act in English, in other words the translation should *do* what the original *does* (for more on these definitions see Nord). This is to ensure that they read fluently and carry out similar functions in translation. At times, however, when the translation necessitates a shift from the source text which would close down on multiple possible

meanings (particularly when this relates to interpretation of narrative point of view) a back translation or explanation will also be included. A back translation is where the source is translated word for word into the target language, even if it is not grammatically correct. Multiple wordings may also be included to approximate the sense of the original. An explanation may talk of, for example, how imperfect tenses in French and Spanish often have no direct counterpart in English but convey a sense of ongoing or habitual action in the past. When a back translation, or otherwise unidiomatic translation, is required to capture the nuance of the source text, then a second more fluent translation will also be included. It is hoped that this strategy will maximise the clarity and flow of the main document, whilst preserving the linguistic particularities of the novels in question.

Further theoretical and methodological clarification will be provided in the first chapter. The aim of that introductory section will be to provide background on the key debates and issues that flow through the rest of the thesis. It will include three main sections. On utopianism, it will deal with the evolving characteristics of the genre and feminist fictions in particular, examine definitions, and situate this research project within the existing scholarly corpus. On feminisms, it will provide background on women's movements from each setting, before investigating the main approaches to sexual difference, identities and collectivism. Then, on critical linguistics, it will justify the choice of methodology, examine the implications and theoretical assumptions of this approach, and explain how it will be employed in the following chapters. The next three chapters will analyse the three novels in turn, seeking to address the central research

questions, before the final fifth chapter will synthesise the findings and draw conclusions regarding these fictional visions of the individual and collective.

Chapter One. Definitions Theories, Debates

1.1 Utopia: An Evolving Concept

The value of applying a generic lens is that it points to consistency between objects of study. Reference to generic conventions can be made with an awareness of their ideological construction, which allows examination of the way texts conform to, or subvert, literary norms. Generic reference points thus create opportunity for oppositional practice, and it is in this dynamic spirit that genre will be addressed in this thesis.

The aim of this section will be to sketch out these ‘generic reference points’ for the utopian genre, so that the novels in this corpus can be considered against this background. Hence, a brief overview of generic trends and criticism to date will be provided, with an increasing focus on feminist contributions. To account for differences in sociohistorical influences on genre fictions, a section on Latin American utopianism will be included to highlight the region’s own particular traditions.

1.1.1 Utopia: A Short History

Famously, the word utopia was first coined by Thomas More in his 1516 book of the same name. The harmonious island society portrayed in the text is called “Utopia”, with More creating the neologism from the Greek words *ouk* [no] and *topos* [place]. Later in the work however, Utopia the island is described as a “eutopia”, a good place. The two meanings have thus ever been conflated, with utopia simultaneously invoking a non-

existent place and a good place (Vieira 4-5). Although utopian writing was not new (scholars argue for the inclusion of earlier works in the canon including Plato's *Republic* (Johns 174)) undoubtedly, *Utopia* is the benchmark of the genre in its traditional form. Of particular relevance, this paradigm Utopian society privileges the group and conformity to its norms, "at the cost of individuality" (Claeys *Dystopia* 7); thus establishing a utopian trade off of diversity for harmony. After More's Renaissance social vision, Enlightenment ideals of progress, national and industrial revolutions, and communitarian social theorists greatly influenced utopian literature into the late-nineteenth century (Roemer 84-86). Reflecting these optimistic discourses on social amelioration, the theme of collectivism has therefore been closely associated with the utopian genre since its beginnings. Definitions tend to emphasise this preoccupation with social arrangements, as well as the idea of a perfect state of affairs. For example, Darko Suvin, a prominent utopian critic, describes utopia as follows:

The verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community (132)

In addition to its content, Suvin deems the main formal feature of the genre to be estrangement. That is, by presenting an alternative society, recognisable but with certain differences, practices and behaviours that we take for granted can be defamiliarized, and shown to be open to change and questioning. Consequently, due to the estrangement it enacts, the function of the genre is widely accepted to be social criticism.

We have arrived here at an idea of the utopian genre in its traditional form.

However, from the late-nineteenth century, positive visions were challenged by events

and theories that contested the possibility of progress and the desirability of enacting fixed social plans. Dystopian and anti-utopian writings began to emerge, and utopianism itself came under suspicion. For example, in Karl Popper's 1945 *The Open Society and Its Enemies* he argues that utopias are dogmatic blueprints based on "one absolute and unchanging ideal" (161). Hence, utopianism will inevitably lead to the oppression of freedoms in the attempt to mould imperfect reality into a perfect model. This direct link between utopia and authoritarianism has since been refuted (see for example Claeys "Origins" 108), nonetheless it was an outlook shared by dystopian and anti-utopian fictions, particularly in the turbulent early-twentieth century. Canonical texts from this first dystopian wave include George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) and Yvegeny Zamiatin's *We* (1924) which focus on the stifling repression of social engineering projects. Common to both, and characteristic of the traditional dystopian genre, is the confrontation between the individual and the oppressive collective which represents a threat to their autonomy. Like utopias, leading utopian scholar Gregory Claeys stresses that dystopias similarly portray group cohesion and unity. However, the difference is that the renouncement of individuality for the good of the group is coerced, not freely given (Claeys *Dystopia* 8). This darker dystopian current is also formally similar to the utopian genre in its exploitation of defamiliarising techniques, that is:

by focusing their critiques of society on spatially and temporally distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable. (Booker *Impulse* 19)

Whereas utopia critiques by promoting positive alternatives, dystopia critiques by displaying the potentially nightmarish outcomes of existing trends (Claeys “Origins” 109). Moreover, there is an important distinction between dystopia which acts as a critique of society, and anti-utopia which is instead a critique of utopianism. Anti-utopias are therefore potentially anti-change and “implicitly a defence of the status quo” (Fitting “Utopia” 141). In this way, novels presenting a seemingly utopian society may in fact ultimately frustrate the utopian impulse in the narrative, and as a result, deny the possibility or benefit of changing the existing system.

We have now identified three main generic threads: utopia, dystopia, and anti-utopia. To distinguish between the concept as a whole (utopia as an alternate society, a fictional ‘no place’), and its particular positive and negative incarnations, from now utopia as a *good* place will be referred to as ‘eutopia’ and anti-utopia as ‘anti-eutopia’. Utopia then becomes an umbrella term for different modes: eutopia, dystopia and their variations. This usage is increasingly common practice in Utopian Studies. For example, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* includes both eutopian and dystopian works in their list of “key works of utopian literature” (Claeys *Companion* xv-xvi), and it appears in utopian scholar Lyman Tower Sargent’s taxonomy of the genre in which he lists eutopia and dystopia as subsumed under “utopia” (9). The use of utopia as a hypernym has the benefit of emphasising the close links between dystopian and eutopian paradigms, such as the defamiliarising alternate setting, social focus, and critical function. The only drawback with this approach is that many monographs and articles to date have used the conventional ‘utopia’ for eutopia. To address this issue, the

quotations will not be altered, but in the surrounding text care will be taken to pinpoint whether the publication addresses eutopia specifically, or utopia more generally. That said, however, research by Booker, Baccolini, Mohr and others has indicated that “utopian and dystopian visions are not necessarily diametrical opposites”, rather they form part of the same phenomenon (Booker *Impulse* 15). Or, as Margaret Atwood puts it, “each contains a latent version of the other” (6). Thus, often findings originally intended to speak to eutopia or dystopia alone, are applicable across all subgenres. Employing an umbrella term allows for generic hybridity and mixing between modes, which, as we will soon see, is evident in more contemporary fictions.

Returning now to the twentieth century, despite the prevailing negativistic ethos, eutopian thought and philosophy did continue, albeit in a transformed form. Overall, conceptualisations of eutopia broadened from fixed schemes, to the more open idea of an impulse or desire. Perhaps the most influential theorist of this neo-eutopianism is Ernst Bloch. His work has spread through utopian literary criticism over the last 40 years, with key scholars using his ideas as a basis for their analysis (for example Moylan; Sargisson). In Bloch’s epic three-volume *The Principle of Hope* he looked beyond the literary genre to discuss the eutopian impulse in other areas such as religion, myths, and daydreaming. Working from the Freudian notion of the unconscious, he developed the idea of a creative “not-yet-conscious”, which is the source of “expectant emotions” including hope (Bloch 13, 108). Hope, for Bloch, manifests in the eutopian impulse and is innate in humans. In this understanding, hope is more than just an emotion, but “a directing act of a cognitive kind” (Bloch 12). That is, an anticipatory,

forward orientation which motivates people to go beyond the present. In Bloch's words, "the emotion of hope goes out of itself ... the work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming" (3). Bloch's vision of eutopianism as a projective, hope-fuelled move into the future, unfixes eutopia from set social plans. This more dynamic impulse avoids the dangers, highlighted by Popper, of dogmatic idealism turning totalitarian. However, some critics take issue with the essentialist notion of an inborn impulse. Contemporary utopian scholar Ruth Levitas prefers to think of eutopia as "a social construct" which responds to "an equally socially constructed gap between needs and wants generated by a particular society" (210). This view of eutopia, as a culturally derived "desire for a better way of being" (230), is more useful to this thesis' politically engaged stance. In addition to Levitas' sociological and Bloch's psychological notions of eutopianism, theories which examine utopia from an ideological perspective are also worthy of note. For example, French critic Louis Marin stresses that "utopia is a form of ideological discourse" (297),² given that ideas of what constitutes a better state of affairs rely on suppositions about what is valuable and ethical. Equally, Marxist academic Frederic Jameson highlights how "the effectively ideological is also, at the same time, necessarily utopian" (286). From this angle, utopian visions become a tool which can be taken up by groups, be they oppositional or dominant, to gain support for their beliefs and actions. This is a more focussed view of utopianism, but one which is useful for consideration when approaching feminist fictions.

² L'utopie est une espèce du discours idéologique

These developments in utopian theory have allowed literary critics to consider utopia as a mode weaving through narrative, rather than a genre. Sarah Goodwin, in *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*, is a proponent of this approach, stating that eutopianism “does not necessarily present a paradigm or a program”, but “may be present as a metonymic drive through a narrative” (2, 5). Eutopia and dystopia in literature could then be wishful or fearful emotion, a comforting or horrifying space, atmosphere, relationship or so on. This is certainly a valid way to explore utopianism as sociological or psychological phenomenon. In a sense, this thesis will echo this more flexible notion, because eutopian and dystopian imagery, connotations and affects will be seen to occur within the same text. However, it is important to distinguish between utopia as a theoretical concept and as a literary genre. My primary focus does remain utopia as a speculative genre, and the features which characterise it such as defamiliarisation, an alternate setting, critical function, and social orientation. So, it is to the literary genre that we now return, but this time with a closer focus on the development of contemporary *feminist* utopianism.

1.1.2 Transgressing Binaries: Postmodern Feminist Utopias

As well as eutopian theories, eutopian writing resurged in the twentieth century. Peter Fitting hails the 1960s as the “beginning of modern utopianism” (“Utopia” 142). This eutopian revival was influenced by the dawn of counter culture. For example, social justice movements such as civil rights activism, the women’s movement, and May 1968 student protests in France all provided the rebellious zeal to relight the eutopian touch

paper. Once again, writers explored the eutopian genre, but challenged grand narratives and subverted generic paradigms, reflecting the cultural and philosophical environment of the era. In one of the first, and most influential, studies of these new generic variants, critic Tom Moylan coined the term “critical utopias” to describe them (10). These narratives are by name and nature critical, questioning both existing social norms *and* the notion of eutopian perfection itself. Therefore, rather than outlining a one-size-fits-all hegemonic model, they depict an evolving and imperfect eutopian space. Moylan confirms that critical utopias “reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream” (10). Critical utopias are also representative of the postmodern ethos burgeoning at the time; they are fragmented, shun closure, include multiple viewpoints, mix registers and blur generic boundaries (Booker *Impulse* 142). Moreover, Peter Fitting argues that these texts represent a transition from the eutopian genre as political rhetoric to its “novelisation”, where plot and characterisation become central, rather than the allegorical characters and narrative stasis of the traditional genre (“Turn” 153). Thus, in the 1960-70s eutopian literature transformed into a more complex and critical form, and disposed with monolithic solutions.

Given the oppositional potential of this critical eutopian genre, it proved a productive space for feminist authors to estrange gender dogmas and imagine emancipatory ways of being. From an Anglophone perspective, key authors of this period include Marge Piercy with her 1976 time-travel novel *Women on the Edge of Time* which provides glimpses into alternative futures: one an egalitarian gender-neutral utopia of Mattapoissett, the other a nightmarish dystopia with gross inequalities. Joanna

Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) follows four protagonists as they journey between each other's worlds. The story is told through multiple narrators with each character's perspective and way of life defamiliarising the other societies. Other influential novels include Doris Lessing *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980) with its multiple worlds and battling sexes, and Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) set in the androgynous society of Gethen, and *The Dispossessed* (1974) featuring opposing societies with patriarchy coming into conflict with sexually liberated anarchy. In a Francophone setting, of this period Monique Wittig's fragmented battle-of-the-sexes eutopia *Les Guérillères* (1968) is read as a "matri-text" influencing a host of feminist utopian works including *Archaos, ou le jardin étincelant* (1972) by Christiane Rochefort, *L'Eugueionne* (1976) and *Pique-nique sur l'Acropole* (1979) by Louky Bersianik (Arbour 13). In her 1984 study of these works, Kathryn Arbour argues that Wittig's writing is "the core around which French feminist utopianism gathers its energy", with its thematic concern with rage and language, and formal circularity recurring across the other works (13, 193).

Indeed, characteristics and themes of feminist critical utopias of the 1960s and 70s have been studied extensively. These include: a focus on personal concerns over political meta-structures (Fitting "Turn" 148); the "centrality of education" to the narrative; a "gradualist approach to change" reflecting the move from blueprint to process utopias in this period; and a concern with environmentalism (Johns 178-92). One particularly influential critic who has been central in theorising contemporary feminist utopianism is Lucy Sargisson. Her notion of the transgressive nature of the

genre has shaped much of the academic conversation in the last two decades. It has been employed by scholars across Anglophone, Francophone and Hispanophone studies in their analyses of feminist fictions (for example McDowell; Mohr; Pereyra; Taylor). Given its critical influence, it will be a key reference point for this thesis. In her 1996 monograph, Sargisson outlines what she considers to be the central features of feminist utopian practice, namely: multiplicity, lack of closure, critical function, and transgression. She examines utopian narratives by Monique Wittig, Marge Piercy, Joanna Russ and Suzy McKee Charnas amongst others to conclude that they are “open-ended texts that let go the notion of perfection” (Sargisson 20). A critical purpose can also be identified within the works; they oppose the status quo by creating spaces “in which totally new ways of being can be envisaged” (63). These features echo Moylan’s notion of a critical utopia, but the difference with feminist utopias specifically is in the nature of the critique. Sargisson argues that they are defined by a concern “with diverse manifestations of sexual power relations” (17). This broad critical orientation allows for a range of feminist discourses, including liberal, cultural and radical stances. The other central element for Sargisson is transgression, with the narratives she studies transgressing both “stereotypes and codes of social normality such as gender, sex and the nuclear family”, and traditional arrangements of narrative chronology, form and sequence (201). For Sargisson, these transgressions are a vital part of their political purpose. She states that “emancipatory projects are doomed to failure and conservatism unless they challenge and provide alternatives to this conceptual system, which rests on dualistic thought and hierarchical relations” (Sargisson 4). She thus portrays the breaking of narrative boundaries, as well as social norms, as necessary to challenging the

current prevailing order. This alignment of narrative subversion with revolutionary ideals implies that the symbolic system must be destabilised to bring about a new, better way of being. Other critics, such as Ildney Cavalcanti, have questioned whether transgressions on the formal level are a necessary component of an oppositional text. Cavalcanti explains that the stance of equating formal innovation with radicalism “reveals a highly prescriptivist way of looking at literary text” which depends ultimately upon the “simplistic notion of linguistic and narrative structures as being inherently patriarchal and oppressive” (154). The debate on whether there is a necessary link between narrative and conceptual orthodoxy in a novel, and conservatism will be considered throughout the thesis.

From this eutopian flourishing, the 1980s saw a decline in feminist eutopianism and a rise in darker dystopian novels. Remarking on this shift, Jane Donawerth observed that “in the 1990s, it is much more difficult for feminists to dream a better future than it was in the 1970s” (58). Critics cite three connected reasons for this change of mode: divisions amongst feminist groups leading to a dissipation of momentum; a backlash against feminism from the media and public figures in the conservative political atmosphere of the 1980s; and the rise of a “more individualistic and essentialist post-feminism” (Helford 291). These factors likely contributed to the dampening of eutopian hope, and fear of worsening inequalities expressed in the feminist dystopias published from the 1980s to date.

No overview of feminist dystopias can overlook Canadian author Margaret Atwood’s benchmark text *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985). Set in a near future where a

patriarchal religious cult has taken control of the United States, it follows Offred the narrator-protagonist in her imprisoned life as a reproductive slave to a ruling couple. Reproductive politics are also central to US author Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984) in which women have been stripped of their civil rights, and once they have passed their reproductive usefulness they are sent to 'Barren Houses' where they live communally. In addition to the theme of control over women and their bodies, Jane Donawerth, in a study of over 15 dystopian novels from the 1990s, identifies dysfunctional families and absent mothers, urban post-apocalyptic spaces and problematised sexual relations as characteristic of this period (49). In a Francophone context, critical attention has been drawn to a spate of narratives written around the turn of the new millennium which display a *fin-de-siècle* malaise, that is nostalgia for the end of an era and anxiety of the unknown future (Bainbrigge "Transgressive" 1021). Examples of this period include Marie Darrieussecq's Kafkaesque fantastic work *Truismes* [Pig Tales] from 1996 in which the narrator slowly transforms into a pig, Belgian author Amélie Nothomb's 2005 *Acide sulfrique* which recounts a concentration camp style reality television show, and Jacqueline Harpman's post-apocalyptic *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* (1995), studied in this thesis. This "anxiety about the unknown, in relation to the increasingly technologically controlled world in which we live" (*ibid*) continues to the present day, with recent novels also expressing a similar unease. For example, there is a strong dystopian bent to the new works by Camille Laurens (*Celle qui Vous Croyez* [She who You Believe] 2016), Emmanuelle Pirote (*De Profundis* [From the Depths] 2016), and Marie Darrieussecq (*Notre Vie Dans les Forêts* [Our Life in the Woods] 2017), all of which focus on the darker side of technology,

health and the media, and reveal the continuing relevance of dystopian expression in Francophone literature.

Beyond these thematic interests, feminist dystopian novels of the 1980-90s share many traits with critical utopias defined by Moylan and Sargisson; ambiguity, multiple perspectives, fragmentation, a troubling of binary categories and a foregoing of closure (see for example Donawerth 51-54). Raffaella Baccolini defines these dystopian works as “critical dystopias”. These multifaceted works share with critical utopias “the expression of oppositional thought with regard to the genre and the historical situation” (Baccolini 16). Moreover, like utopias which challenge the traditional generic form, these dystopian counterparts also blur generic boundaries, and include utopian elements in their negativistic vision. Baccolini links this generic fluidity to a deconstruction of “the confines between official history and personal stories”, and that these texts “question the supremacy of the former over the latter” (30), demonstrating a similar concern with the politics of the personal outlined earlier in relation to critical utopias. Baccolini’s study also showed that the open endings of Atwood, Piercy and Butler’s novels maintain the utopian impulse “at the level of form” (18). There is thus a breakdown of the divide between utopian and dystopian outlooks. Writing a decade after Sargisson and five years after Baccolini, Dunja Mohr builds on their work by reconceptualising the relationship between utopia and dystopia in feminist fictions. Mohr analyses novels by Margaret Atwood, Suzy McKee Charnas and Suzette Haden Elgin from the late 1970s into the 1980s to show how they “incorporate within the dystopian narrative a utopian undercurrent” (3). These texts therefore have utopia as a

recurring thread rather than simply an alternate ending as Baccolini had argued. From this observation, Mohr coins a new dystopian subgenre “transgressive utopian dystopias” (68). The concept of transgression is central therefore both to Sargisson’s eutopian and Mohr’s dystopian corpora, on the levels of form, content and genre.

Mohr defines transgression as pertaining to a “fluid moment of suspended binary logic” (67). That is, these texts enact a deconstructive questioning of naturalised oppositions, through hybridity, multiple perspectives, contradictions and “a general dissolution and cross fertilization of generic and narrative boundaries” (Mohr 50). From Mohr’s perspective, the eutopian and dystopian interplay in feminist texts links to the imperative to “abandon notions of a monolithic coherent feminism” (8). Similarly, Sargisson underlines how closure of a debate is in fact, “a political act, the function of which is to impose a methodology that privileges sameness and oneness and favours self over others” (65). With open endings and interwoven dystopian and eutopian visions, these texts avoid imposing a didactic blueprint to shut down debate. Yet, there is another side to this inclusive non-hierarchical form, as Ruth Levitas remarks, “the ambiguity of utopia is not merely exploratory and open, it is also disillusioned and unconfident” (17). The reticence to impose a monopolistic ‘feminist truth’ in bold eutopian or dystopian rhetoric reveals an admirable urge to avoid silencing or dominating other feminist positions. However, this need for “integrationist thought” (Sargisson 66), must be balanced with a motive and vision for women to rally around to push for material change. How the texts in this thesis’ corpus negotiate this dilemma, between building a clear vision and allowing scope for difference, will be a central consideration. In the

chapters that follow, Sargisson and Mohr's definitions of transgressive feminist practice will be a benchmark, and this thesis will seek to discover how the novels in this corpus conform with or vary from their predecessors. Moreover, as is evident in the overview above, most of the major, full-length studies look at texts from the 1960s-90s. By analysing novels from the 1990s-2010s, this research will contribute to understanding more recent developments in feminist utopianism, and point the way to continuities and new avenues in the genre.

1.1.3 Latin American Utopianism

The Latin American setting is treated here in a separate section from Anglo-European utopianism to highlight and acknowledge the distinct histories and traditions that have fed into the development of the literary genre in these regions.³ Until recently, the consensus, confirmed by leading utopian scholar Fernando Ainsa, was that "the list of utopias written in Spanish is very limited"⁴ Yet, applying a broader definition, it is clear that the eutopian impulse has been an enduring presence throughout Latin America's campaigns for independence and reform. For example, Simón Bolívar's *Carta de Jamaica* (1815) and Venezuelan Francisco de Miranda's 1801 "Government Plan", are eutopian political treatises which outline projective, hopeful schemes for liberated pan-American unions. Eutopian ideals have also been behind more

³ For example, their positioning on opposite poles of the coloniser/colonised relation is a dynamic which was crucial in the birth of utopian writing in both settings, but in very different ways. For European renaissance writers, the discovery of the 'New World' inspired their eutopian social visions (Pereya 18), whereas in Latin American eutopian writing became a means to resist the colonising gaze.

⁴ La lista de utopías escritas en español es muy reducida

contemporary political movements, such as the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua (1979), Allende's short-lived socialist Chilean government (1970-73), and the present-day autonomous Zapatista commune in Mexico, which represents "one of the most internationally recognized ongoing utopian projects in contemporary culture" (McDowell 31). Indeed, the continent boasts a long heritage of eutopian thought and projects, characterised by concerns over self-determination, egalitarianism, and the drive to recover indigenous identities and voices.

Moreover, in terms of the literary genre, Ainsa's 1999 statement has since been challenged by an increased production of, and interest in, Latin American literary utopias. For example, critic Gisela Heffes recently identified a number of authors creating imaginary cities at the turn of the millennium including José Balza (Venezuela), Héctor Faciolince (Colombia), Antonio José Ponte (Cuba), and Gioconda Belli (Nicaragua) (237). In Belli's eutopian text *Waslala* (1996), Heffes reads this depiction of "a spectral city which gradually collapses into ruins", as a dissolution of the eutopian ideal (201). Similarly, in her study of Mexican author Cristina Rivera Garza's *La Cresta de Ilión* [The Iliac Crest] (2002), Lila McDowell discovers a "contradictory and confrontational feminist utopia that rejects any sign of completion or hint of perfectionism" (38). Here we have evidence that Latin American feminist utopianism shares a critical and open-ended tendency with its Anglo-European counterparts. Despite this, it is important to recognise that due to differences in socio-historic context, the region does not follow the same dystopian and eutopian turns outlined above. Instead, it has its own influences and tradition. The Nicaraguan context will be detailed from a

feminist perspective in the next section, and this thesis will contribute to understanding contemporary utopianism in this area. A 2002 comparative study by Marisa Pereyra has already pointed to some possible shared characteristics of Latin American feminist utopianism. After a survey of Uruguayan, Argentinian and Chilean novels, she concludes that, despite differences in style, all novels evidenced the presence of “a collective voice which isn’t dominant but which seeks cooperation” (Pereyra 114). It will be worth bearing this collective tendency in mind, to evaluate whether it is an aspect which is particularly prevalent in the Latin American setting, or recurrent more generally in feminist utopianism. Indeed, this thesis will be the first time that feminist utopian writing has been compared between Latin America and Europe. The study therefore hopes to provide useful insights into commonalities or divergences in practices, and how these could potentially be linked to the socio-political realities women face across the different contexts.

1.1.4 New Angle of Approach

In addition to the original cross-cultural comparison, this thesis’ contribution to feminist utopian studies relates to its critical linguistic approach and focus on collectivism. Most research in the genre centres on identifying recurring themes and defining the literary current. Whilst this thesis is interested in how the corpus interacts with generic trends, the analysis will concentrate primarily on the language of the texts. There have been other literary linguistic studies of the genre (see for example Burton; Cavalcanti; Nuttall; Peel), and the methodology section will detail how this thesis distinguishes itself from

this past research. For now, it suffices to say that this study will be the first to explore narrative point of view in feminist utopianism. This will provide a useful addition to the scholarship, given the role of this structure in mediating ideology and attitude.

Moreover, this study will be the first to focus specifically on collectivism in feminist utopias. The functioning of the group is a common concern of utopian literature across the spectrum. Even disparate examples, such as More's *Utopia*, Wittig's *Les Guérillères* and Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, evidence an interest in group dynamics. In fact, so central is the relationship between the group and the individual that Gregory Claeys has recently elaborated a definition of the genre which hinges on this element. For Claeys, utopias of all forms tend to exhibit a "collectivist ethos", however the difference is in how this bond is secured, with eutopia representing a form of "enhanced sociability" and dystopia "compulsory solidarity" (*Dystopia* 8). His emphasis is not so much on the characteristics of the group, such as unity or equality, given that these may be perceived in a positive or negative light. Rather, importance is placed on how the social contract is upheld; willingly or with coercion. This definition fits well with a more fluid concept of utopianism, and postmodern texts which blend modes. For example, in a speculative novel, collectives engendering "enhanced sociability" and "compulsory solidarity" could both theoretically appear. Indeed, there is no necessary connection between the texts' overall ethos, and the groups it contains. A eutopian paradise may well have oppressive milieus. Yet, in terms of past research on the canonical genre, there does seem to be a correlation between dystopias and negative groupism, and eutopias and positive collectivism. For example, critic M. Keith Booker argues that "Western"

dystopias tend to exhibit a “horror of collective experience” (“Collective” 72). One task of this thesis will be to find out if its contemporary feminist corpus conforms to or troubles the paradigmatic dystopian anti-groupism / eutopian pro-collectivist dichotomy. Claeys’ study indicates that there is a contemporary trend away from dystopias which focus on social repression, to those that fear “collapse of the social order” through ecological or technological disaster (*Dystopia* 495). Will this be echoed in feminist fictions, with groups becoming safe havens? Or will they reflect a neoliberal disarticulation of links between women, or a post-structural unveiling of hegemonic group functioning? Going forward then, Claeys’ research will offer a useful lens for understanding the portrayal of the relationship between the individual and the group in this corpus. This study will build on his work by exploring his definition in feminist texts, and by considering utopian collectivism alongside feminist discourses on shared identity and difference.

1.1.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis will contribute to literary utopian studies in two respects. Firstly, a useful insight into the role of narrative point of view in constructing dystopian or eutopian visions of groups will be provided. Secondly, these representations of collectivism will be linked to feminist debates, thus adding a new angle to the critical conversation on contemporary feminist utopianism.

1.2 Negotiating Differences: Feminisms, Identity and Collective Action

For a section announcing its intention to address ‘feminisms’, the most obvious place to start is with a definition. However, given the exclusionary practices that have been uncovered at the heart of feminist movements, this is a contentious proposition. Prescriptivism has become an anathema to feminism, and thus to draw a line around something which now (often, not always) aims to be open and uncentered seems an inconsistent move. Yet, a broad definition can shed light on the area under consideration, whilst allowing room for differing beliefs and objectives. Monique Wittig’s neat designation of a feminist as “someone who fights for women” (“naît” 79),⁵ meets this inclusive requirement by providing a topical focus, but leaving the nature of the fight and the definition of ‘women’ unspecified. She goes on to clarify that this would cover fighting for women *as* women, as well as the struggle to abolish the very category of woman. Indeed, under the feminist umbrella many such oppositional positions exist. Considering this ideological diversity, it is perhaps more helpful to conceive of feminism not as a set cluster of opinions but as the interplay between them, that is, as a discourse.⁶ A discourse which interrogates sex and gender, and which is inextricably linked to other aspects of society such as our economic and political arrangements, and wide-ranging class, racial, sexuality, age, and ability struggles for inclusion and reform.

⁵ quelqu'un qui lutte pour les femmes. All translations will be my own.

⁶ This approach is championed by Jane Mansbridge (27) and Sonia Alvarez (*Feminismos* 283).

One point of greater consensus is that feminism has been marked by an ongoing reflective process in recent decades, and much of this chapter will be dedicated to detailing those developments. In particular, points of contention in feminist discourses on identity, and on the dangers and benefits of acting collectively, will be elaborated. First, however, a short overview will be provided of feminist movements across the three contexts that this thesis examines.

1.2.1 Setting the Scene

Having developed in response to different sociohistorical conditions, feminist movements in Nicaragua, Britain and Belgium must be considered in context, so that the terms of debate on female identity and collectivism, specific to each setting, can be traced.

1.2.1.1 The Nicaraguan Women's Movement

As this thesis is written from within a British institution, the reader may be less familiar with the Nicaraguan setting, than that of Europe. Therefore, a brief historical overview will be provided before discussing the country's women's movement.

In common with other Latin American countries, Nicaragua underwent a violent civil war during the twentieth century. In the early 1960s, the FSLN, or Sandinista party,⁷ was founded to challenge the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle (Gramlich 15). The Somoza dynasty had held power since the American military occupation in the 1930s, and became increasingly unpopular due to repressive authoritarian controls and widening inequalities (Isbester 2). The Sandinistas, influenced by Marxism and committed to mass participation, gained grassroots support for their cause, and eventually took power in 1979, forming a revolutionary government led by Daniel Ortega (Gramlich 16). However, their rule was contested by the US-backed Contras militia, and civil war broke out. The ensuing conflict took an enormous psychological and economic toll on the country. The situation became unsustainable for the revolutionary government, and so in 1990 free elections were held. A coalition of 14 parties came to power led by socially conservative politician Violeta Chamorro (Destrooper 8). Since this democratic transition, the FSLN, again under Ortega, returned to power in 2006, and in 2016 he secured his fourth term in office (Watson n.pag.). This incarnation of the FSLN, however, has diverged from their revolutionary roots to adapt to the capitalist world-system. Moreover, Ortega is now under scrutiny for charges of corruption, breaches of human rights, and violent repression of protests against his increasingly authoritarian rule (see for example Lakunza; Stirling Hill). Hence,

⁷ Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional [Sandinista National Liberation Front] (named after freedom fighter Augusto Sandino who opposed the American occupation of the 1930s).

Nicaragua has a turbulent recent history which has left a legacy of deprivation and violence, but also of widespread political engagement and activism.

The origins of the Nicaraguan women's movement in the revolution holds the key to understanding the scale and effective organization of its women's groups. Initially the Sandinistas were committed to gender equality, writing a manifesto on women's rights and setting up a women's wing of the party (Destrooper 5). Through participation in this women's section and its work to oppose the dictatorship, women gained skills in public speaking, lobbying, collective organising, and even combat operations (Chinchilla 376).⁸ Fuelled by this activism, women fostered a sense of pride in their role as capable social actors and drivers of change (Isbester 192). Yet, increasingly, this politicised movement focussed on support for wives and mothers of combatants over any attempts at gender reform (Gramlich 21). Norma Chinchilla's study on the topic confirms that women participated in the organisation, "more out of a strong identification with their roles as mothers, grandmothers, and spouses than out of any critique of the gendered division of labour" (387). However, women were being increasingly overworked and undervalued during the civil war, whilst the FSLN sidelined women's rights as a "minority" interest, compared to the "universal" interest of the revolution (Heumann 337). Thus, they reneged on manifesto promises, and dissatisfaction amongst women grew. As a result, in 1985 the nationalised women's group arranged mass local assemblies, which over 40,000 women attended (Chinchilla 385). The meetings resulted in organised campaigns to end violence against

⁸ It has been reported that up to 30% of guerrilla forces were composed of women (Destrooper 5)

women and promote women's access to positions of institutional power. Chinchilla notes that this marked the first time that "women constituted a real pressure group capable of making demands on governmental agencies" (*ibid*). Then from 1990, the end of the revolution and entry into the global marketplace led to a diversification of the women's movement beyond the centralised Sandinista assembly, with many new groups and international alliances forming. New challenges also arose: from standing up to policies overtly hostile to women's social participation, to the benefits and compromises of international funding for the gender agenda. At present, there remains a very active and diverse women's movement across the country with over 60 independent collectives.

Equally significant to understanding contemporary women's groups in Nicaragua are culturally embedded beliefs about motherhood. Alyssa Howe's 2003 research discovered a split between those that self-define as feminist and those (the majority) who class themselves part of the women's movement. The divide hinges around two issues: lesbian rights and abortion. Feminists support both women's right to access abortion in conditions beyond the strictly therapeutic setting, and they also advocate for greater rights for LGBTQI+ communities. Women's groups sometimes support one of these proposals, but not both (Howe 211). Yet, despite a lack of consensus on these topics, women's and feminist groups often work together through a network approach, particularly on the issue of gender-based violence. However, Howe notes that the success of these joint efforts are grounded on "agreed-upon silences" over abortion and lesbianism (Howe 214). Indeed, homosexuality and abortion are the areas which have

faced most resistance from government. For example, there is a blanket ban on abortion in Nicaragua, even in cases where the mother's health is in danger (Davies n.pag.). Part of the apparent intransigence from legislators on these issues relates to the social conservatism of the ruling parties, and Catholic values of the 80% religious majority (Lubensky n.pag.). What's more, lesbianism and abortion disrupt the (heterosexual) cultural ideal of woman as child-bearer which many studies have remarked is deeply ingrained in Latin American cultural imaginaries (Chinchilla 381-82; Cupples 157; Kaminsky 18). Cristina Santaella, analysing the treatment of Latin American feminisms within the North American academy, outlines how scholars often fail to address, or censor, the value placed on women's traditional roles in Latin America. She highlights how there is a "bio-magical-social status accorded to women as mothers" (42) which stems not only from Catholicism and veneration of the Virgin Mary, but from indigenous beliefs. Isbester agrees that, on an individual level, women's identity in Nicaragua is predicated on "the physical experience of being female" (15). The belief in 'woman' as a biological certainty, amongst those active in the women's (rather than feminist) movement, underpins their political activity and subjectivity. These groups tend to undertake campaigns *as* women and *from* their positions as wives and mothers. Santaella remarks how women's organisations have "politicized traditional roles, simultaneously struggling for socio-political transformation and maintaining cultural tradition" (21). This resonates with the lobbying work of Sandinista activists for the release of their sons and husbands during the Somoza dictatorship, and the group's later focus on supporting wives and mothers of deceased combatants.

Whilst care must be taken not to overgeneralise (many feminists do work within the Nicaragua to challenge traditional roles), the culturally hegemonic understanding of women as a discrete biological category with the attendant emphasis on their reproductive role, is an important contextual factor in understanding the dominant ethos of the contemporary women's movement.

1.2.1.2 Feminism in the United Kingdom

After initial struggles over suffrage and civil rights, and a post-war upsurge in liberal and radical feminisms, the 1980s and 90s saw the beginning of a “post-feminist” era. The term post-feminism was first investigated by Susan Faludi in *Backlash: The Undeclared War on Women* from 1992. Faludi outlined how ‘post-feminism’ was a label advanced by the media as a means of discrediting feminist movements, locating them as obsolete and unjustified. Angela McRobbie has since provided a virtuoso study of the subtle ways feminism is at once taken account of and, with the same move, rejected as no longer relevant in post-feminist discourses in her 2009 text, *The Aftermath of Feminism*. Her central argument hangs around the exposition of this “double entanglement”, that is how “gender retrenchment is secured, paradoxically, through the wide dissemination of discourses of female freedom” (McRobbie 52). As neoliberal governmental structures mainstream gender equality agendas, the more feminism is represented as outmoded and surplus to requirements. Furthermore, McRobbie contends

that women's participation in this new, more ostensibly equal, environment with access to education and the highest roles in government and business, entails a "social compromise" of stepping back from feminist critiques of masculine hegemony, and performing a "post-feminist masquerade". She defines this masquerade as "a licensed, ironic, quasi-feminist inhabiting of femininity as excess" (McRobbie 64). Her point is that, with social constructivist beliefs about gender predominant in society, women understand that their comportment and behaviours as women are not biologically intrinsic, but optional. They thus see acting or dressing up as feminine as a choice, and view the feminine as appropriable and enjoyable, not something which is imposed upon them. In addition, for McRobbie, this ironic and purposeful adoption of feminine beauty ideals, "functions to re-assure male structures of power by defusing the presence and the aggressive and competitive actions of women as they come to inhabit positions of authority" (63). Hence the compromise, women are able to attain power but they must do so on an individual basis, avoid direct attacks on masculine dominance, and whilst maintaining a traditionally feminine demeanour and appearance. However, even if carried out with ironic knowing, this post-feminist masquerade serves to reinforce conservative, heteronormative values of femininity and avoids consideration of how choices may be constrained or conditioned through gender.

McRobbie's book was published in 2009 and it could be said that in the intervening years the perception of feminism in Britain has changed to a degree. Nicola Rivers' research into contemporary feminist thought maintains that "feminism is undergoing a resurgence" (6). This contention seems corroborated by the popularity of

authors such as Caitlin Moran who self-define as feminist, the 2018 scandal over gender pay gaps in business, and social media campaigns such as #metoo and Time's Up! which look to address sexual harassment. Yet, crucially, even if there is a renewal of interest in feminism and a de-stigmatisation of the word, the neoliberal political landscape and dominant consumer capitalist culture shape how issues of sexual violence are gender-based inequalities are understood (see for example Banet-Weiser; Rottenberg). For example, the #metoo campaign aims to expose the prevalence of sexual harassment across society by asking people to come forward and share their experiences. However, the media commentary often subverts the scope of the critique by focussing on pathologizing the individuals accused of harassment. This concentration on the aggressors as anomalous, places sexual aggression as a personal perversion. This stands in contrast to emphasising the scale of the movement and global responses, which would act to frame sexual harassment and violence as a symptom of a culture which systematically devalues women, thus entailing more comprehensive solutions. Against this landscape and bearing in mind McRobbie's double entanglement, collective action can be portrayed as redundant. Yet, women continue to collectively organise, and it is this tension between an increasingly individualistic society, as well as other theoretical challenges to identity and collective identity, and the possibility, and even vital necessity, of working together that this thesis seeks to critically investigate.

1.2.1.3 Francophone Belgian Feminist Context

This section will cover feminisms in France and Francophone Belgium, given that there are close cultural connections across both areas. From the late 1960s, two main theoretical currents in Francophone feminism emerged. On one hand, there were materialist feminists influenced by neo-Marxism who built on Simone de Beauvoir's influential analysis of gender as a social construct in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, and sought an end to gendered divisions. On the other, the *Psychanalyse et Politique* [Psychoanalysis and Politics] group who, drawing on, but diverging from, Lacanian and Freudian theories, affirmed feminine difference. This current, with Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray as its best-known theorists, is sometimes represented outside of France as constituting the sum of 'French Feminism'. However, despite the international enthusiasm for psychoanalytic feminism, within France it is more marginal, and many of its scholars do not associate with the label of 'feminist' at all (Costello 5). Within the group there are differing theoretical perspectives, yet they share a psychosexual understanding of ego formation, and believe morphology to be determining in one's relationship to the symbolic order (that is, to all language and representation). Their views will be outlined more fully in the section on sexual difference.

Second wave materialist feminism, on the other hand, is associated with the writings of theorists such as Christine Delphy, Monique Wittig, and Colette Guillaumin. The materialist designation relates to their neo-Marxist approach of focussing on the material circumstances which lead to women's inferior social positioning (Costello 146). However, they expanded the Marxist focus on macro-level structures to question the

distribution of labour within the family unit. They critique the systematic appropriation of women's unpaid labour in the domestic setting based on their role as sole carers, which results in limited or low-paid employment outside of the home, and economic dependence on men (Alphonso 60). On this basis, Delphy concludes that women represent a social class, and their standard of living within this class is determined by the level to which their labour is exploited by their husbands ("Enemy" 34-35). Delphy's description of women as a class has been much criticised for its monolithic vision of a universal patriarchy which homogenises differences among women and places them as perpetual victims (see for example Moi 98-99). Nonetheless, a materialist approach which investigates the social factors leading to gender inequalities remains the dominant theoretical paradigm, and is increasingly being refined and combined by feminist academics with Foucaultian theories of power (Noyé 4).

Although antagonistic relations between particular members of these theoretical currents are well documented, their positioning as polar opposites is to an extent constructed and does act to mask certain interactions between them (for more on tensions see Costello 114, and for an example of points of contact see Kristeva's recent monograph *Beauvoir présente*). Of course, there are also feminist theorists who do not fit within either strand. In the Belgian context, one notable outlier is Françoise Collin, the editor of Franco-Belgian journal *Les cahiers du Grif*, who was an active part of the Parisian and Brussels feminist scene in the late-twentieth-century. Rosi Braidotti's recent article on Collin's influence notes the writer's "independent stance" from the dominant psychoanalytic and materialist currents, as well as the role her journal played

in uniting “intellectual feminist elites with the militant base of the movement” (“Grif” 600, 598). *Les cahiers du Grif* also serves as a useful example of the close links between French and Francophone Belgian feminist context, given Collin’s professional life was split between the two capital cities and, when based in Belgium, French students would travel from Paris to meetings organised by Collin in Brussels (Braidotti “Grif” 597-98).

With regards to Belgium in particular, the feminist political lobby achieved more gains, earlier, than in other countries. For example, in France, there was a long-running debate in the 1990s on whether parity in political representation is desirable or not. Parity, in this context, is the call for 50% of candidates that every party puts forward for election to be women. In France, the parity bill was passed in 2000 (Lépinard 375); however, Belgium has had a gender quota since 1994. Further, in Belgium gender quotas have extended beyond politics into business and the public sector, consequently Petra Meier, in a working paper on the topic, calls Belgium a “world-leader in gender quotas” (11). Yet, these legislative measures contrast with the country’s “conservative gender regime, fed by the Catholic tradition and its impact on politics” (Meier and Celis 62). Thus, despite legal measures to promote gender equality, studies have shown that traditional gender roles persist within family structures, with women taking on the majority of caring and domestic duties (see for example Leitner; Vielle and Reyniers). As such, relevant for the Belgian context is its high degree of formal equality, but cultural conservatism.

1.2.2 Key Debates

1.2.2.1 Sexual Difference and Individual Identity

Arguably the most fundamental question when evaluating feminist positions is: what is their theory of sexual difference? It is a subject that all three novels in this thesis explicitly or implicitly interrogate, and which is highly pertinent to understanding how individual and group identities are conceived. For example, if sexual difference is affirmed, then women and men form two clear, opposing groups. However, if sex difference is posited as constructed, then there is no intrinsic bond between women. It thus relates to how the individual 'woman' links into a grouping of 'women', as well as what makes a 'woman' in the first place: be it natural or cultural factors.

1.2.2.1.1 Difference Feminisms

This group of positions hold a sex polar understanding of sexual difference. That is, they believe that there are two sexes which due to biological, or psychosexual developmental reasons, are different in terms of behaviour, aptitudes and sense of self. The nature of this conviction varies between theoretical approaches and in different contexts.

As noted above, in Nicaragua the dominant paradigm for conceiving sexual difference centres on reproduction. Women's bodies and reproductive functions are seen as determining their social roles of mothers, lovers and carers. Santaella attests to a "deeply rooted belief that motherhood empowers women"(22). This cultural tendency to place the locus of women's identity and power in their capacity to bear children and in

their (hetero)sexuality will be important in interpreting the representation of female identity in Gioconda Belli's *El país de las mujeres*. Again, however, it must be stressed that this biologist stance is not always absolute or universally shared throughout Latin America. In her book on feminist thought in the region, Francesca Gargallo remarks on a constant transit between "a fight for emancipation and the affirmation of a positive difference between women and the world of men", and "an awareness that, through socialisation, the female body becomes the site of normative constructions of femininity" (38, 55). The main point to underscore is that in general, and certainly in relation to Belli's novel, views on sexual difference as biological actuality which determines the lives and experiences of men and women is widely held within the women's movement in Nicaragua, and founds their political activity.

Similar biologist standpoints on sexual difference are discernible in mass-media discourses in the Global North. In a 2013 chapter on post-feminism, Gill and Donaghue assert that whilst there is political support for and a push towards formal gender equality, there is also a return of a popular "view of sex differences as real and powerful" with an attendant call for women "to recognise their strengths – and pleasures – as being located in these differences" (251). It would be difficult to determine exactly how widely held essentialist understandings of sexual difference are throughout the United Kingdom or Belgium, however suffice it to say that this position does underlie much post-feminist discourse both in the media and advertising, as has been confirmed by the work of McRobbie, Gill, Scharff, Donaghue, Faludi and others.

In an academic setting, psychoanalytic feminisms, particularly the Francophone strand of Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray, represent the most influential variety of ‘difference feminism’. Although to label them ‘feminist’ at all is a misnomer, these theorists do not tend to identify as feminist; rather they sustain that the feminist movement pushes for participation in a phallogocentric system (Costello 99). Psychoanalytic approaches vary greatly amongst themselves and from biologically determinist understandings, notably in, for example, their conception of difference as metaphysical not essential. With a biological view of sexual difference, differences between men and women in society (roles, dispositions, predilections) are naturalised and explained through physical differences. From a psychoanalytic perspective such as Julia Kristeva’s, these differences are determined, not from an intrinsic essence, but through developmental processes. Philosopher Rosi Braidotti notes that this causal link aligns them to a constructivist position, with theorists relaying “a psychosexual version of social constructivism” (“Difference” n.pag.). They render differences as contingent, meaning that they are particular to our mechanisms of socialisation and not an inborn path. However, these psychosexual processes which partition the sexes are not random, but based on morphology, and result in clearly defined sexed identities. Hence, despite their non-naturalist stance, psychoanalytic approaches are normally aligned with positive sex difference due to their universalised account of a subject’s assumption of their sexed place in the symbolic order.

Although each critic differs in their theories and specific area of interest, Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva all work from, yet contest, Freudian and Lacanian theories of

subject formation. The broad lines of the theory hold that when we are born we are unable to differentiate ourselves from the rest of the world, or from the maternal body; we have no ego boundaries. From completeness and sexual in-differentiation, Lacan holds that the child's entry into language, the symbolic order and selfhood is coterminous with acceptance of the 'law of the father' or paternal prohibition of the maternal body. In Freudian terms, the transition through the Oedipus complex leads to sexed identity, and is mediated by the threat of castration. Under fear of castration the male child separates from the mother, and identifies with the father. The female child, however, cannot be castrated, or identify with the father, and thus perceives the absent penis as a lack which she hopes to fill through bearing children of her own (Freud 195). The valorisation of the phallus and masculine bias in Freudian, and Lacanian, theory has been much criticised within feminist psychoanalysis. For example, Kristeva disagrees that the entry into the symbolic is unpleasant or else we would not submit to the move. Her argument refocuses the analysis from the paternal to the maternal. She promotes the idea that the maternal body becomes a threat to burgeoning boundaries and sense of self, and is experienced as abject; a mixture of fascination and horror (Kristeva *Powers* 4). On the other hand, for Luce Irigaray the whole symbolic order of language and representation, including Freudian theories, is phallogocentric. Phallogocentric comes from phallogocentric, that the default subject in language is masculine, and logocentric, the rationalist belief that consciousness and subjectivity coincide (Braidotti *Nomadic* 96-97). Irigaray argues that 'woman' of language and representation is a creation contained in that masculine system. Her perspective is that the female sex is "heterogeneous to this whole economy of representation", and we must find ways to express feminine

specificity (Irigaray “Sex” 209). In this way, sexual difference in these terms is not located within existing cultural models of gendered identity, rather it is the split between male-orientated language and culture, and that which evades it: the feminine. These feminine forces (the ‘semiotic’ Kristeva’s terms, or the feminine economies of Irigaray and Cixous) are disruptive to rationality, binaries, and meaning. Importantly, as Elizabeth Grosz’s reading of Irigaray stresses, Irigaray is not aiming at a single ‘truth’ of feminine identity, but writes to deconstruct patriarchal discourses of ‘woman’, and instead “devise a strategic and combative understanding” (*Subversions* 110). For Irigaray, therefore, positive feminine sexual difference is not real, but fictional. The theorists thus share in creating a mythologizing discourse of the feminine, which although not inherent in the biological sex, is still labelled and aligned with the female.

In common with other sexual difference theories, these approaches seek to positively revalorise the feminine and create an identity politics which empowers women to act and to gain self-worth. Kristeva clarifies that for her, the aim is “the sociocultural recognition of women, in a qualitative sense” (“Women's” 187). Much of Cixous’s lyrical writing also rallies for the liberation of women’s repressed and trapped libido, championing the release of their drives, strengths and creativity. In a similar vein, in Nicaragua young feminists are calling for a “feminism ‘from the body’” and believe the body to be locus of “creative and transformative potential” ready to be harnessed

(Blandón et al. 9, 131).⁹ The inspirational and eutopian visions of difference feminisms make them attractive, and useful in political organising.

However, they have received criticism both against the tenets propping up their assertions, and the exclusory implications of their universalism. For example, in cultural or difference feminisms, the explanatory weight of sexual difference is privileged over any other factors which could influence subject formation (Braidotti *Nomadic* 106). They also assume a binary masculine / feminine split, rather than questioning the dichotomous partition itself. From this perspective, bodies which challenge the sex difference binaries, such as trans or intersex bodies, expose them to be far from neat and discrete groupings. With this angle in mind, in her totemic 1990 work *Gender Trouble* queer theorist Judith Butler highlighted how these perspectives can be guilty of “a kind of epistemological imperialism” (18). That’s to say, they deal in high-level abstraction and do not address gender oppression in context, where sex differences are experienced and conceived differently in relation to varied factors. The issues with focussing on gender in isolation will be covered later in the chapter.

Contemporary difference theorists are well aware of the issues with homogenising women and the arguments against essentialist stances. Some academics therefore call for a re-examination of the concept of ‘essence’ and look for ways to theorise it as fluid and open. Rosi Braidotti, for example, works towards reconciling the fragmented and unstable postmodern subject with the stubborn persistence gendered

⁹ feminismo ‘desde el cuerpo’ ... potencial creativo y transformador

identities. She argues that “feminists cannot hope to merely cast off their sexed identity like an old garment”, and thus seeks a pragmatic approach to sexual difference as a “political project” (*Nomadic* 103, 113). That is, to accept sexual difference as contingent and unfixed concept but, due to its prevalence in cultural understandings and in subjectivity, to consciously choose, the “affirmation of sexed identity as a way of reversing the attribution of differences in a hierarchical mode” (Braidotti *Nomadic* 161). In other words, to fight imposed difference with chosen difference. Nonetheless, this strategy would still be contested however by materialist feminists, for example, who view sexual difference as a consistent mechanism of oppression and particularisation of women, and call for the destruction of gendered categories. French feminist Colette Guillaumin argues that the endorsement of sexual difference by women’s movements equates to the “flight of the oppressed” (104). Her view is that any campaign for difference represents the interiorization and celebration of inferiority, and maintains that these forms of activism are easily tolerated within existing social structures because masculine privilege remains unchallenged. This debate on whether feminist activity should aim for change within the terms of, or to overthrow, cultural paradigms will be a key concern throughout this thesis.

1.2.2.1.2 Social Constructivist Split between Sex and Gender

Social constructivist views on gender maintain the existence of two biologically distinct sexes, but assert that the roles and behaviours associated with them are socially constructed. This distinction between biological sex, and cultural or social gender was

first articulated in 1972 by sexologists John Money and Anke Ehrhardt (in Fausto-Sterling 3). However, although employing different terminology, Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* had earlier outlined ways in which femininity is created and assumed in society. She extracted 'woman' from its biological fixity, arguing in her chapters on socialisation that feminine qualities are not innate, but learnt. This distinction was taken up by many strands of feminism including influential voices in Anglophone feminism such as Betty Friedan and Kate Millett. Indeed, if sex and gender are distinct and there is no necessary connection between them this has the benefit of demolishing the grounds on which women have been traditionally discriminated against. For example, emotional instability and passivity all emerge as belonging to the order of socialisation and are not, therefore, intrinsic to women. From this position, of a sex neutral standpoint where all differences develop contingently, there lies the hope of changing relations, behaviours and attitudes. Hence its appeal to many feminists.

On the other hand, regardless of its prevalence outside the academy, social constructivism has been a much-challenged proposition in feminist thought. The main issue centres around the separation between nature (sex) and culture (gender), which many see as a false distinction, given that the knowledges which establish our ideas of nature are created and conventionalised through culture. Ann Fausto-Sterling, a biologist and feminist theorist, highlights the partial perspectives shaping the seemingly matter-of-fact classification of bodies:

If viewpoints about sex and sexuality are already embedded in our philosophical concepts of how matter forms into bodies, the matter of bodies cannot form a

neutral, pre-existing ground from which to understand the origins of sexual difference. (22)

Thus, if the belief in two sexes as self-evident premises research into human sexual differences, then their design will be configured to produce only results which fit in with that dichotomous schema. This hints at how the interplay of discourses, ideology and power structures contribute to constructing 'fact' and the 'natural'. Moreover, this sex neutral standpoint has trouble explaining the consistent, but not absolute, correlation of sex and gender. In fact, if gender identity is not caused by sex, then as Claire Colebrook points out, "we have a great deal of difficulty explaining its pervasiveness" (10). Picking up on the disparity between the alleged independence of sex and gender, and yet their enduring coincidence, in her 1993 text *Bodies that Matter* Judith Butler provides a different take on their relation:

If gender consists of the social meaning that sex assumes, then sex does not accrue social meanings as additive properties but, rather, is replaced by the social meanings it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption, and gender emerges, not as a term in a continued relationship of opposition to sex, but as the term which absorbs and displaces 'sex'. (5)

That is, it is sex itself which is constructed, rather than sex pertaining to a neutral, unquestionable 'reality' which gender is built upon. This discursive view of sex provides the biggest challenge to positions which distinguish sex from gender.

1.2.2.1.3 Sexual Difference Deconstructed

The two versions of the deconstructive stance on sex difference that are pertinent here are from the French materialist school represented by Monique Wittig, and from Anglo-American queer theory exemplified by Judith Butler's work. For Wittig, the key to denaturalising sexual difference lies in unlocking the heterosexual assumption subtending dominant ideology. She argues that the sexes are only meaningful in sexual relation to one another, and identifies this heterosexual paradigm as so ingrained that it represents, even when other ideals of 'nature' are being deconstructed, "a core of nature which resists examination" (Wittig "straight" 49).¹⁰ Yet, the "totalising interpretation" of sexual difference applied by the "straight mind" is challenged by lesbians who do not enter into relations with men, and thus stand outside the logic used to figure sexual division (*ibid*).¹¹ Her belief is that lesbians are "beyond the categories of sex" and cannot be considered women, "either economically, or politically or ideologically" (Wittig "naît" 83).¹² That is to say, the grouping of women as a natural category relies on ideas of sexual complementarity between sexes. Therefore, when a person cannot be defined through their sexual or reproductive relations with the opposite sex, they exceed existing gender frameworks and expose the contingency of the heterosexual premises on which binary sex difference depends.

Although she disagrees with Wittig's clear split between hetero- and homosexuality and the "separatist prescriptivism" of some of her politics, Judith Butler,

¹⁰ Un noyau de nature qui résiste à l'examen

¹¹ Interprétation totalisante ... la pensée straight

¹² Au-delà des catégories de sexe ... ni économiquement, ni politiquement, ni idéologiquement.

queer theory's most lauded scholar, was interested in Wittig's analysis of the straight assumption underlying theories on sexual difference (*Trouble* 163, 175). This is evident in Butler's meticulous destruction of the 'natural' basis of sex and gender in *Gender Trouble* (1990), which starts from a similar unpicking of the heterosexual matrix, and moves to a theory of subjectivity as performance. Butler describes how sex is constructed along the channels of the heterosexual matrix, meaning that dominant cultural understandings of gender are dependent on causal correlations between sex, gender and sexuality (*Trouble* 30-31, 208). Therefore, to be culturally intelligible, being male (biological sex) causes someone to be a man (cultural gender) and to desire women (sexuality), with heterosexuality being the cornerstone which organises the dichotomy between sexes. However, this framework cannot account for configurations which do not hold together the sex/gender/sexuality triumvirate, for example a female (sex) who is a man (gender) and desires women (sexuality) troubles the heterosexual paradigm which fixes sexual difference. In this way, when links in the heterosexual matrix are broken it becomes clear that there is no necessary connection between sex, gender and sexuality, rendering the discursive construction of all elements evident. Butler confirms that identities, or gender performances, which problematize the heterosexual matrix show up the hegemonic cultural constraints on what we constitute as "normal" or "natural", and expose them as "fundamentally phantasmatic" (*Trouble* 200). Accordingly, Butler affirms a radically constructivist view on sex *and* gender, stating:

Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'pre-discursive' (*Trouble* 10)

In other words, Butler views gender as a “regulatory fiction” which causes, or produces, sex (*Trouble* 44). Therefore, sexual difference as two meaningful biological categories is an illusion created through discourse. This perspective on sex as discursive and insubstantial relates closely to Butler’s post-structuralist understanding of identity. Much of Western thought has relied on a humanist, Cartesian notion of a subject. Descartes’ famous proposition, “I think, therefore I am”, posits the individual, self-knowing subject as the empirical basis for all knowledge. A person in this view is real, knowable and whole. Post-structuralist approaches such as queer theory and psychoanalysis have since challenged this notion of a unified subject. Following a Nietzschean critique of the Cartesian subject, Judith Butler’s deconstructive approach contends that a subject has no substance, but comes into being only through doing. She specifies that there is no “‘doer behind the deed’, but that the ‘doer’ is variably constructed in and through the deed” (Butler *Trouble* 195). Instead of stable, coherent material entities, people are nothing but discursive constructs. She clarifies however that:

to claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes, rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. (Butler *Bodies* 10)

Thus, she does not deny the materiality of the body (nor sexed features), only that we can access it without cultural, discursive mediation. This should provide an idea of the theory of subjectivity which underpins Butler’s performative theory of gender. This theory contends that we uphold the myth of a stable and knowable ‘self’, and

particularly gendered self, through repeated acts and speech. Although performance connotes a theatrical mode of being, Butler's concept refers more to the mundane, ingrained habits which shape the way we move, talk, and represent ourselves. It is the sum of these acts and signs that constitutes our (gendered) identity. She states that performativity is "a repetition or a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalisation in the context of the body" (Butler *Trouble* xv). Moreover, gender performance is ratified through "institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin" (Butler *Trouble* xxxi). These cultural forces authorise the behaviours and features which comprise intelligible gender; these formations then solidify and are presented as natural and pre-given. Citing a productive conception of power, Butler affirms therefore that "juridical power inevitably 'produces' what it claims merely to represent" (*Trouble* 3). In other words, to be recognised as a woman a person must conform to certain modes of speech, dress, comportment, behaviour and so on. This gender performance is, usually, achieved with such regularity that it is not perceived as a contingent pattern, but as a natural expression of sex. Yet, these gendered codes are not absolute or natural, given that they are open to parody and appropriation, thus there is nothing beyond, or underlying, sex and gender, other than the social standards of their reception. In summary, sex and gender emerge from Butler's analysis as constructed, and subject to regulatory discourses authorising their meaning.

Following from this understanding and in order to challenge harmful gender dogma, queer theories seek to destabilise and transgress fixed categories of sex, gender and sexuality, through individual acts of resignification and displacement (Jagose 97).

That is, they push for incremental social change by bending and breaking foundational blocks of social meaning. This strategy of queering normative ideals has however often come under fire for being apolitical or ineffective. For example Christine Delphy in a conference speech reproached queer theory for “focussing on discursive and symbolic elements at the expense of the material” (in Costello 116). Furthermore, Claire Colebrook, in her useful textbook on gender, points out how difference feminists may contest that the discursive view of bodies as generic and unmarked is “an inherently totalising (and masculine) refusal of difference and otherness” (11). Indeed, even if we accept its theoretical viability, perhaps the most dissatisfying element of a deconstructive view of sex and gender is that it cannot adequately accommodate that which escapes or eludes signification. It enacts a mind/body split where our bodies are always processed through our consciousness and denies any unmediated impulse, drive or feeling. Thus, in feminism more recently there has been a return to the body, with attempts to give it a positivity of its own (see for example Grosz *Volatile*). Corporeality is a dangerous ground for feminism though, given the fears of being returned to the restrictive pigeonholes of yesteryear, and the androcentric biases which shape scientific ‘fact’. However, Fausto-Sterling highlights how newer theories, such as “developmental systems theory” could provide a useful framework for breaking down the mind/body or nature/nurture impasses that feminist arguments sometimes end in.¹³ These biologists

¹³ Sonia Kruks’ recent reading of Beauvoir’s writings on the body represents another potential means of theorising the simultaneous material and social nature of embodiment. Kruks highlights how, for Beauvoir, “each of us is this strange amalgam of consciousness and fleshly materiality, of freedom and constraint” (33). She argues that maintaining this ambiguity of existence, between seemingly opposing poles, is a moral imperative in Beauvoir’s philosophy, as to deny either is to deceive oneself and live inauthentically.

“deny that there are fundamentally two kinds of processes: one guided by genes, hormones, and brain cells (that is, nature), the other by the environment, experience, learning, or inchoate social forces (that is, nurture)” (Fausto-Sterling 114). This means that they understand that nature and nurture are mutually constitutive, and impact upon one another, thus any analysis along one angle alone cannot provide any answers. An intersectional approach to understanding human development, if you will. Undoubtedly, as queer theories have vividly illustrated, our understanding of sexual difference is contingent, normative and constructed. However, it is worth noting that this standpoint is itself monolithic, in its exclusive focus on the discursive production of the subject. Whilst a true understanding of the vast network of variables which exert influence on our sexed subjectivities is perhaps beyond our current reach, feminisms continue to interrogate, debate, embrace and reject the thorny categories of ‘woman’ and ‘man’.

1.2.2.2 Differences between Women and Collective Identity

In the above discussion, two theories of subjectivity were briefly sketched. The humanist, Cartesian idea of a pre-given and rational self, and a post-structural notion of self only existing through its enactment. Identity in the humanist sense would be a knowable, coherent, and relatively fixed sense-of-self belonging to a substantive individual, whilst in the post-structural sense it becomes a more problematic and fluid concept changing based on the “available cultural models of understanding oneself” (Jagose 8). In this section, the challenges post-structuralism has presented to the

humanist model of identity will be briefly outlined, before relating this to collective identity and the possibility of a universal shared female identity or experience.

Despite accusations of being blind to differences among women, psychoanalytic approaches are keenly aware of differences *within* the self through their theories of the unconscious. Anne-Marie Jagose stresses that “the theory of the unconscious has radical implications for the common sense assumption that the subject is both whole and self-knowing” (79). Freud’s theories split the personality into three largely unconscious components, the id (instinctive impulses), the ego (the mediator between the id and the external world), and the superego (the locus of internalised cultural norms). Hence, there is a fundamental internal rift in psychoanalytic models of the psyche. Moreover, into adulthood, the unconscious continues, with its repressed drives and memories, to disrupt the illusion that we have full conscious control of our actions and thoughts. Thus, the psychoanalytic representation of identity undermines the foundational stone of rationality and self-knowledge that anchors the Cartesian subject, and makes identity a more elusive and divided proposition.

Furthermore, deconstructive approaches to subjectivity, such as Butler’s, reveal the regulatory myths of ‘nature’ and ‘normal’ which uphold the idea of a substantive subject. Identity in this post-structural sense cannot be a property of a subject, as the subject is baseless, having no existence outside of its representation. Identity is rather a shifting construction produced within a complex matrix of social and institutional discourses. With psychoanalytic and post-structural challenges to identity in mind, the existence of the entity ‘woman’ that feminism has long championed becomes slippery

and unstable. The epistemological carpet which underlays feminist identity politics has been swept away. Nonetheless, certain feminisms, including material feminisms, advocate rallying around the subject of 'woman' as a metaphysical and inessential category. They attest that the social existence of such a subject position has material consequences, and therefore women should work from this position to either positively revalue it, expand it or destroy it. Yet, such movements, which recognise a universal, subject position have been greatly criticised due to their exclusionary tendencies, hegemonic viewpoints and single focus. These arguments will now be put forward.

To posit gender as a discernible, extricable and consistent category for analysis, fails to take account of the multiple and profound differences between women. Indeed, a single axis approach ignores how gender is shaped so significantly by other factors that it is constituted, understood and embodied completely differently, even oppositionally, by different people and in different contexts. Gender is not an independent variable with a stable pattern of signification, rather it becomes coherent through interaction with other discursive positions. The mutually constitutive nature of gender and race was persuasively articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her totemic studies on the interaction between sexism and racism, in which she coined the term 'intersectionality' to cover this indivisible relation. One of the examples Crenshaw provides relates to domestic violence in Los Angeles. When she approached authorities to find out rates of violence against Black women, she was told that figures on domestic violence are not published by ethnic profile. This prohibition stems from an admirable impulse to avoid any stigmatisation of racial groups, however it has the effect of hiding the fact that domestic violence is an

issue which proportionally affects more Black women than white. Moreover, Crenshaw noted that Black women were also more likely to be in a lower socio-economic bracket, and thus have less financial resources available to them to escape abusive situations. Feminist campaigns around domestic violence, on the other hand, usually follow an ‘it could happen to anyone’ rhetoric, again to take away stigma from groups, and also to widen the demographic appeal of fundraising campaigns. Thus, the vulnerability of Black women to domestic violence and their increased need for support to leave abusive relationships, cannot be accounted for by reference to their race or gender alone and has been overlooked by the “strategic silences” of feminist and antiracist agendas (Crenshaw 1253). Feminism’s predominant colour-blindness had in fact been called out well before Crenshaw’s 1989 and 1991 articles, for example bell hooks and Hazel V. Carby, amongst many others, were writing in the early 1980s about the implicit white biases shaping feminist thought. There was a tendency among second-wave feminisms to extrapolate from their own experiences of being a woman to theorise the universal ‘woman’, placing their own (unacknowledged) situated, partial views and goals as the norm, and submerging or marginalising other voices. For example, Hazel V. Carby flags up the differing attitudes to family between Black feminisms and materialist feminisms such as those expounded by Delphy and British theorist Michèle Barrett. In the materialist account, the family unit is perceived as the primary site of women’s oppression, the place where women’s dependency is cemented and their labour appropriated. Yet, the family is viewed by Black feminists as additionally, “a site of political and cultural resistance to racism” (Carby 87), bestowing it with a value that did not resonate with white feminists. Carby also claimed that in the context of high rates of

unemployment amongst men in ethnic minority communities at the time of writing, conditions meant many Black women were often the main breadwinners or headed households alone (*ibid*). They thus had different perspectives on the family unit which were not understood or accepted by mainstream feminism. The feminist rejection of family added to the governmental disdain for non-normative family arrangements in prejudicing against Black women's familial relations. Carby states, "Black family structures have been seen as pathological by the state and are in the process of being constructed as pathological within white feminist theory" (88). White feminist concerns over domestic oppressions remain valid, but the issue is when one opinion becomes fixed as 'truth' and absolute, that debates become dogmatic and prescriptive.

From another perspective, as mentioned earlier, challenges to the dominant paradigm for conceiving 'woman' also came from queer or lesbian theorists such as Butler and Wittig who exposed the heterosexual biases underlying feminist analyses and theory. Their work, amongst others, has shown how heterosexuality and the existence of two sexes as a pre-given premises much feminist thought and activism (Butler *Trouble* ix). Indeed, feminist movements, through a fixed conception of 'woman' or feminist objectives, can marginalise other gender and sexual identities, and normalise the dichotomous dominant gender system. In Nicaragua as with other Latin American countries, the women's movement has historically had a strong awareness of class differences amongst women due to the movement's links with the socialist uprising and revolution (Alvarez et al. 565). Nonetheless, there has been a blindness to how sexuality and gender identity impact on experience, and the needs of groups who are not cis-

gendered, heterosexual women.¹⁴ More recently however, these issues have gained traction, and in Nicaragua debates around trans inclusion in feminist spaces has come to the forefront of debates. In 2017, academic Silke Heumann chaired a roundtable debate between transfeminist and feminist campaigners in Nicaragua. From the discussion, there emerged a reluctance between some feminists to include transwomen in feminist groups because they feel there is a clash of priorities. For example, feminists view themselves as struggling against a culture which valorises certain, restrictive, feminine beauty ideals. They aim to reject the emphasis on appearance, whereas they interpret transwomen, who often embody an overtly feminine mode of being, as directly countering this objective (Heumann et al. 171). In response to these comments, Heumann underscored that, “we have to avoid putting forward another normative way of being a woman within feminism because this can be equally oppressive” (172). Indeed, these examples demonstrate how conceiving gender as a pure, absolute and universal category for analysis, without attention to how race, sexuality, age, class, ability and many other factors profoundly impact upon it, often leads to exclusionary and hegemonic viewpoints and practices.

This section has intended to illustrate how the representational basis of identity politics centred on the feminist subject of ‘woman’ has been radically challenged by post-structural approaches. Both in terms of the theoretical instability of the subject, and the exclusionary and totalising nature of claims which speak from the universal

¹⁴ cis-gender, in contrast to transgender, refers to people whose gender identity matches their biological sex at birth.

standpoint of 'woman'. In a 2007 monograph, Rosalind Gill sums up these deconstructive critiques as incredibly valuable in un-weaving the complex normative workings of power, but leaving feminism in an "epistemological crisis", where "any overarching sense of who 'we' are has become problematic and contentious" (*Media* 66, 69). In the decades since these arguments were first put forward, theorists and activists alike have been grappling with finding new ways to move forward on this less stable ground. The question then arises of how we account for differences between women and create an inclusive model of feminist politics. Further, with individual identity now so fragmented, and dangers of exclusionary universalism so vividly brought to the fore, it becomes necessary to ask whether any notion of collective identity is still possible, desirable or necessary.

If the reference to a shared identity is at once illusory and potentially ignorant of in-group differences, feminists are left without a foundation on which to base claims and to organise around. As noted, the political outcome of approaches which problematize identity, including queer theory, is that they tend to promote instead an individualistic strategy of disrupting categories through acts of transgression and resignification. However, these have come under criticism for being ineffective, and for effacing 'women', 'lesbians', 'transwomen' and so on as political rallying points (see for example Boyle 267; Costello 139). The concern is around post-structuralist and deconstructive approaches being politically unproductive, or even worse, inadvertently furthering the neoliberal and post-feminist focus on the individual, and hindering alliances, community and collective action. Queer theorists, for example Judith Butler,

would contest that claim, and her anti-foundationalist political strategy is incorporated into the discussion below. Yet, it remains true that we find ourselves in a time when, as Angela McRobbie using Deleuzian terms observes, “chains of equivalence” between groups are being “disarticulated” due to neoliberal structures which displace “possible solidarities with a re-instated hierarchy of civilisation and modernity” (McRobbie 27, 29). In the Global North, paternalistic attitudes to women outside ‘liberated’ societies, means that now more than ever the need to establish viable links across contexts. For feminisms in Nicaragua, there are still major injustices to address, particularly around violence against women, and finding a way to work together will be crucial in achieving changes.

Furthermore, the problems with identity categories highlighted above must be balanced with the appeal they hold, and the influence they assert. Kate Bornstein remarks that identity is a concept which is important for belonging and self-respect, and will not be easily renounced, “the need for a recognizable identity and the need to belong to a group of people with a similar identity, these are driving forces in our culture” (3). For marginalised groups, a political identity is also important for confronting the state and lawmakers in terms that they can understand and act upon. Thus, identity cannot be easily dismissed, and continues to have currency in mainstream discourses with identity labels both being positively appropriated and harmfully designated. However, deconstructive approaches do not claim that identity categories, although instable and constructed, do not have a forceful and meaningful impact on people’s lives, it only demands that these categories be historicised and constantly re-

evaluated (Jagose 18). With this in mind, one may consider whether it is possible to create provisional, strategic identities as temporary speaking positions to meet specific ends. As noted earlier, Rosi Braidotti puts forward the concept of “a nomadic subject” which she defines as “a myth or a political fiction” (*Nomadic* 26). This is her attempt to recode the feminist subject, “not as yet another sovereign, hierarchical and exclusionary subject, but rather as a multiple, open-ended, interconnected unity” (Braidotti *Nomadic* 150). By conceiving the subject as nomadic, she aims to break open monolithic ‘woman’ into a flexible point of convergence between women. The key to the idea is that women can unite behind the mythic and fluid *political* subject whilst retaining different *personal* identities. At one stage Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also argued for uses of strategic identity, that is “a strategic use of a positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (214). Her comments were made in the context of the creation of a rebel, subaltern consciousness for the specific purpose of countering hegemonic colonial discourses. This idea of a strategic essence, or identitarian locus, was taken up and championed by certain US academics, and uncomfortable with its transference and proliferation outside of its original context, Spivak later denounced the term. She argued that it was not a theory, but a strategy, and suited to the situation in question but not applicable more widely. Spivak felt the term had given “a certain alibi to essentialism” and was “too risky a slogan in a personalist, academic culture, within which it has been picked up and celebrated” (Spivak and Rooney 155). This highlights the danger that, although in certain circumstances and for certain objectives the strategic creation of an identity may be pertinent, adopting this as a default position, especially for such an enormous grouping as ‘women’, leads back the same exclusionary and hegemonic issues

as with other configurations of identity. Admittedly, Braidotti's 'nomadic subject' is non-essential given that it is characterised through its lack of boundaries and its contingency, and differentiated from a personal conception of identity by its political nature. It therefore avoids the same charges held against any identity which is based on fixed notions or on individual similarity. Nonetheless its indistinctness also makes it a harder concept to harness as a political starting point.

Perhaps then, feminist politics can be envisaged without the necessity of a shared identity, rather based on shared interests or on an issue basis. This is the type of action that Judith Butler argues for with her "anti-foundationalist" approach. She outlines that this is a coalitional model which "assumes neither that 'identity' is a premise, nor that the shape of meaning of a coalitional assemblage can be known prior to its achievement" ("Contingent" 21). Indeed, feminist groups do coordinate on an issue basis in practice. For example, *La Red de las mujeres contra la violencia* [The Network of Women Against Violence] in Nicaragua provides a platform for feminist and women's groups to campaign together against violence against women. Although, this is an alliance of smaller groups which each have their own shared identitarian understandings. A coalitional or network approach has also been championed by Nira Yuval-Davis, and unlike Butler, she does go some way to sketch how this kind of transversal, rather than universal, politics would work however. Yuval-Davis contends that successful, inclusive feminist politics requires: a recognition of one's own speaking position; the promotion of difference among women which should encompass, but not replace, equality; and a commitment not to represent or speak for others but to work together on an issue basis

(“Transversal” 94). Indeed, the lack of a direct identity-based connection with issues does not preclude supporting them. For example, responding to the claims that transwomen are not interested in abortion rights because it does not directly affect them, one of the participants in the Nicaraguan round-table discussion, Juana clarified, “of course, it concerns me! ... it’s a human rights issue and a matter of demanding respect for women’s lives and bodies” (Heumann et al. 175). As such, action can be motivated by convictions rather than having to be directly implicated, in an associative way, with the cause in hand.

An approach which aims to balance the prevalence and power of social identities with a keen attention to in-group and intra-group differences is intersectionality. As touch upon earlier, an intersectional approach sustains that identity creation takes place through a prism of factors including gender, ethnicity, location, age, sexuality and so forth, and that these axes are “mutually reinforcing” and thus cannot be considered separately (Crenshaw 1283). Kimberlé Crenshaw intended that, “intersectionality might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics” (1296). Positioning identity as intersectional prevents any monolithic assertions of femininity, and allies feminism with other fights for social justice. Many feminist groups now promote an intersectional approach including the *Encuentros* in Latin America.¹⁵ This is evident in the tag line from their conference in 2017 #diversasperonodispersas [diverse but not divided] and

¹⁵ *Encuentro Feminista de Latino América y el Caribe* [Feminist Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean].

statements of intent from their conference proceedings, “we are a plural movement, with a commitment to fighting patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, racism, homo/lesbo/transphobia, and with an intercultural perspective and appreciation of intergenerational dialogue” (Celiberti et al. 94).¹⁶ In a recent review article, Jennifer Nash confirms that intersectional and transversal approaches are now well integrated into the academy (118). However, an intersectional analysis can be difficult to carry out, the workings of power are intricate and multiple, and mapping various intersections and influences on identity presents a complex challenge. As such, Nash fears the term has come to stand-in as racial alibi, claiming that often, “the invocation of intersectionality is performed instead of actual intersectional labour” (*ibid*). Furthermore, she highlights how these approaches are being challenged by Deleuzian inspired theories of fluid identities which are always in the process of becoming. This contrasts with a position-focussed approach which looks to examine an identity as a complex, but more or less knowable entity. Jasbir Puar agrees that “intersectionality demands the knowing, naming, and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time” (212). However, we then loop back around to how to make political use of such unstable and intangible notions of identity, or whether any politics based on identity should be regarded with extreme suspicion, or even abandoned altogether.

The unresolved conflicts over notions of ‘woman’ as the subject of feminism, and the relation between identity and collective action continue to stimulate debate. And

¹⁶ somos un movimiento plural, que nos proponemos que sea al mismo tiempo antipatriarcal, anticolonial, anticapitalista, antiracista, contra la homolesbotransfobia, con una perspectiva intercultural y de valorización del diálogo intergeneracional

pertinently for this thesis; literary utopias provide fertile ground for exploring these issues. They create a space where the possibilities or pitfalls of collective organising can be played out, and conceptions of sexual difference can be affirmed or defamiliarised. This thesis will examine how the texts in question contribute to feminist debates on the feasibility, desirability and dangers of collective identity. Will all-female groups be presented in a dystopian light, as totalitarian, conformist and silencing the individual? Or will the collective enable eutopian emancipation and empowerment? Will group membership rely on shared identity? And, if so, how will this feminine identity be conceived, as fluid and open, or concrete and defined? Or, perhaps other possibilities for feminist association will be imagined. It is this nexus between group dynamics, feminist politics, and the utopian space that will interrogated throughout the chapters that follow.

1.2.3 Conclusion

This section has outlined the theoretical issues which will inform the analysis in the chapters that follow. An insight into each context was provided to highlight their differing perspectives on femininities and feminism. Then critiques of sexual difference and female identity were foregrounded to expose how the epistemological ground for collective identity and action has been severely undermined in recent years. Some avenues and negotiations out of this impasse were suggested, although disagreements over identity and political strategies emerged as open and unresolved. It is this territory into which the thesis enters and into which the texts unfold their eutopian and dystopian explorations of female collectivism.

3.1 Critical Linguistic Approach to Narrative Point of View

Point of view is not unique to narrative fiction, rather it is a basic component of language use. Even through the most straightforward of statements we inevitably take up a point of view in relation to the world around us. For example, if someone asserts that, “I went to the shops”, they reveal a temporal distance from the event, establish a relationship with the listener of provider vis-à-vis receiver of information, and imply that the information offered is true. Applied to fiction, point of view positions the narrator in relation to the characters and events of the story, and in doing so constitutes the reader’s window into the text-world. As Gérard Genette underlines, narrative viewpoint regulates how the reader receives information: from what distance, angle, and how much (*Discourse* 62). Yet, narrative perspective encompasses more than just spatiotemporal relations; it includes the way evaluations and attitudes mediate experience. The reader accesses the story through the unavoidable filter of narratorial and character ideology and psychology. Thus, the significance of narrative perspective stems from how it configures conceptual, attitudinal and spatiotemporal information, and the influence this has on reader interpretation.

In the chapters that follow, a critical linguistic analysis of narrative point of view will be carried out to evaluate how female identity and groups of women are represented across the corpus. To explain and justify the choice of methodology, this section will define the key concepts, examine its theoretical suppositions, and delineate its benefits. After an initial overview of narratological formulations of point of view, critical linguistics will be introduced in relation to stylistics and to the linguistic model it relies

on: systemic functional grammar. It will then be possible to return to narrative viewpoint and expand our understanding of it to include the attitudinal and ideological dimensions highlighted by critical linguistics.¹⁷ To conclude, careful attention will be paid to theoretical issues implicated in this approach, including its account of the communicative situation.

1.3.1 Narratology and Point of View

In narratology, perhaps the most revolutionary development on point of view was made in the 1970s by French critic Gérard Genette in his highly influential essays on narrative discourse. One of Genette's main contributions was to distinguish between voice and focalisation. In a renowned passage, Genette laments that most previous studies suffer from:

a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* And the very different question *who is the narrator?* – or more simply, the question *who sees?* And the question *who speaks?* (*Discourse* 185)

He promotes instead reference to voice and focalisation, with focalisation relating to the consciousness which focalises, or orients, the narrative (*Discourse* 189). When approaching voice, we are examining who is responsible for the word and syntax choices. Most typologies of narrative voice classify the identity of the speaker by firstly

¹⁷ For sake of variety, viewpoint, point of view and perspective will be used interchangeably

distinguishing between narrators who participate in the *fabula*¹⁸ (homodiegetic in Genette’s terms), and those who are positioned outside of the story (heterodiegetic) (*Discourse* 244-45). Homodiegetic narrators, referred to by literary theorist Mieke Bal as character-narrators, can then be positioned along a scale of involvement ranging from peripheral witnesses through to central protagonists (Genette *Discourse* 245). Heterodiegetic narrators, on the other hand, can be further classified along the axis of perceptibility. That is, whether a sense of opinion and personality can be attributed to the voice, or if their identity remains opaque, explicit comment is suppressed, and events appear to be unmediated.

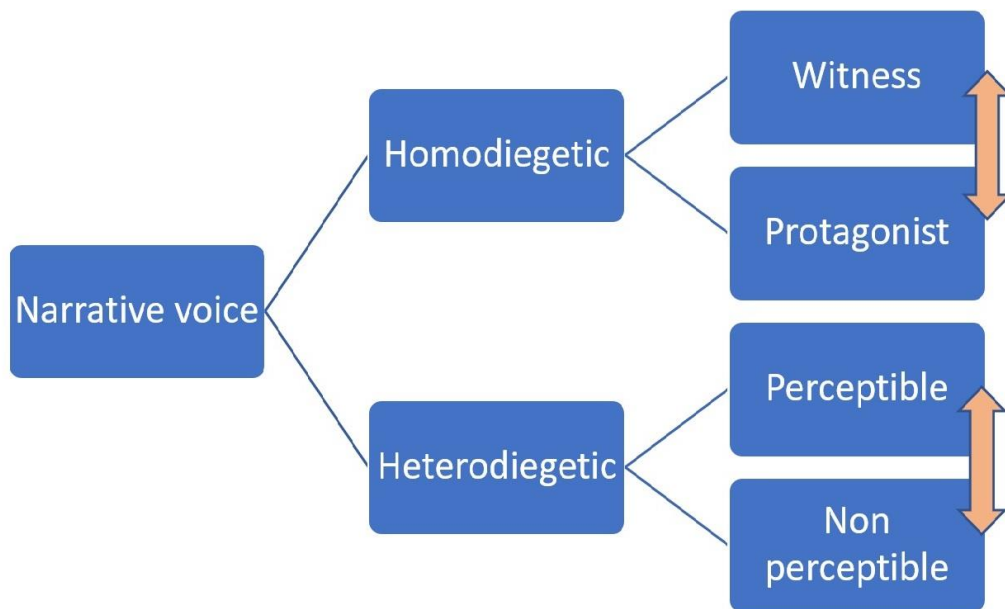


Figure 1.1 Basic Typology of Narrative Voice

¹⁸ I am using *fabula* and story interchangeably and in contrast to *szjuhet*, discourse or text. Narratologist Shlomith Rimmon-Kennan defines story as “narrated events [in chronological order] and participants in abstraction from the text” (7). The text on the other hand is the written discourse which organises and angles the story (6).

Clearly, sustained commitment to narrative voice is not necessary, and many narratives contain multiple narrators with varying characteristics. Similarly, focalisation may shift regularly throughout a text. As above, focalisation relates to the perceiving consciousness which orients the narrative, and encompasses the visual perspective but also the “cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation” of the text (Rimmon-Kenan 73). Often voice and focalisation coincide, for example a heterodiegetic narrator may describe a scene from their own perspective. However, at other times, they may perceive events through the mind of a character (internal or “embedded” focalisation in Bal’s terms, because character perceptions are embedded within the “all-encompassing vision” of the narrative agent), or as if looking over their shoulder (“double focalisation” (Bal 161-63)). What’s more, whilst at times the identities of the narrative voice and the focaliser may be clear, at others the boundaries between speaker and perceiver may blur. Of course, these roles can only be realised through voice, and, as such, it tends to be instances of free indirect discourse where vocal and focal ambiguity predominate.¹⁹ Yet, despite its slippery nature, focalisation is a crucial narrative structure because it pertains to the relationship between the narrative agent, the characters, and the events. In recognising that with internal focalisation the narrator’s text is primary and character’s text is “embedded” within it (hierarchically arranged like main and subordinate clauses are related), Bal is in fact underlining the importance of mediation (57). That is, we may have insight into a character’s thoughts but this is often controlled by a separate focalising agent who can frame this content and therefore influence reader response to

¹⁹ Free indirect discourse is a narrative technique whereby character thoughts and speech are focalised through a narrative filter but without discourse markers. See Glossary for further details.

characters and story. Bal confirms that, “focalisation has a strongly manipulative effect” (*ibid*). It is this relationship and mediation that critical linguistics is particularly well equipped to address.

Owing to their descriptive precision some narratological terms will be retained in the thesis. Dan Shen, in a chapter on the interrelation between narratology and stylistics, notes that the two approaches are complementary. He argues that both are interested in the form of text, but concentrate on different aspects. Narratology, according to Shen, looks at the macro-organisation of information, whereas stylistics investigates linguistic expression (Shen 204). Moreover, the approach adopted in this thesis aims to bridge between both macro- and micro-levels of text, and indeed, between a text and its context (Simpson *Ideology* 38). As such, critical linguistics avoids the text-bound ahistoricism for which narratology has come under scrutiny. That is, often narratologists seek to classify narrative structures with reference only to their textual incarnations. However, in recent decades, focus in literary studies has moved towards an emphasis on the reader and the larger communicative situation involving traditions, discourses, and socio-cultural influences (this will be explored in more detail in a later section). In essence, text is no longer seen as a transparent entity to be objectively assessed, rather as a site where meanings are contested, and which can only be approached from a situated and partial perspective. Narratology can tell us much about the structures of texts, but less about their implicit values, their effects in context, and their cultural import. Hence, this thesis selects a linguistic framework which focuses on meanings in context. Indeed, critical linguistics provides a way to marry the desire for systematic rigour evident in

narratology with an account of other participants in the communicative situation, and contextual and co-textual factors which impact on interpretation.

1.3.2 Stylistics

With regards to literary studies, stylistics is the collective term for methodologies which analyse the language of literature (Mills *Stylistics* 4). It is a field which has adapted over time in step with theories of language which evolved to account for the radical context-dependency and multiplicity inherent in language. Nowadays, it is a varied discipline which can be broadly subdivided along the lines of which linguistic methods critics employ. Linguistic paradigms which have been applied to literature include John Searle's speech acts, Michael Halliday's systemic functional model that critical linguistics utilises, and a recent 'turn' towards cognitive linguistics.

The critical linguistic strand was first developed in the 1970s by Roger Fowler and colleagues with an explicitly political outlook (see for example Fowler *Novel*). Their aim was to defamiliarise the assumptions implicit in language use. Fowler explains that, "linguistic codes do not reflect reality neutrally: they interpret, organize and classify the subjects of discourse. They embody theories of how the world is arranged: worldviews or ideology" (*Criticism* 40). Yet, given the range of variables at play in the communicative situation including the subjective critic (see section 1.3.5.2), stylistician Paul Simpson confirms that the approach does not claim to access a single 'correct' interpretation of literary meaning (*Ideology* 3). However, although multiple meanings and diverse reading positions can often be traced, stylistics runs counter to a purely

subjectivist stance. It proposes instead that some interpretations will hold more validity than others through their explanatory weight. If an understanding of text can be reached which accounts for inferences, connotations, cultural references and roles, and so on, then it should be preferred over one without textual evidence and situational corroboration. Peter Stockwell remarks that within this intersubjective approach interpretation is free to the extent that findings are accessible and, “can be offered to other readers for inspection and possible disagreement” (15). That is not to say that literature cannot be ambiguous and open, because it frequently is, only that it does not transcend the conventionalised meanings and naturalised beliefs concealed within its medium: language. Critical linguistics therefore approaches literature as inescapably social and political, whether the text displays an explicit rhetorical agenda or not.

1.3.2.1 Feminist Stylistics

As a politically engaged approach which can unpick how gender is signalled and constructed in language use, linguistic analyses have become popular amongst feminist theorists within literary studies. Research which focuses on speculative fiction by women writers, as the present study does, has included work on neologisms, metaphor and mind style.²⁰ Deirdre Burton’s 1985 paper analyses linguistic innovation in novels by Gilman, Le Guin, Piercy and Lessing. She identifies the defamiliarisation of material-world practices and beliefs as the main purpose of these linguistic creations. Ellen Peel’s

²⁰ Mind style: this concept will be described later. It relates to “the linguistic projection of distinctive minds in prose fiction” (Nuttall 2).

2002 monograph, on the other hand, examines the use of “protean metaphor” and “belief-bridging” in novels by Lessing, Le Guin and Wittig. Peel finds that these narrative devices are used persuasively in the novels to encourage readers to align with the feminist values she ascribes to the text. Most relevantly, Louise Nuttall has published a comprehensive text which evaluates mind style in contemporary speculative fiction, including one work of feminist dystopianism: Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Through her study of “the strange minds and worlds encountered in the genre of speculative fiction”, Nuttall aims to develop the application of Langacker’s cognitive grammar to narrative. With reference to *The Handmaid’s Tale*, her work “offers an explicit, psychologically plausible explanation” for how the oft-commented ‘stream-of-consciousness’ effect is created in the novel, as well as outlining how readers attribute discourse to narrator, characters, and author (Nuttall 86). There are some points of comparison between Nuttall’s study, and this thesis. Firstly, her linguistic theory “shares many fundamental concepts and assumptions with systemic functional grammar” (Nuttall 16). She also focuses on mind style, an aspect of what will here be called, ‘ideological point of view’. Nonetheless, there is a key difference in emphasis between the studies. Nuttall notes how cognitive approaches focus on “the biological and cognitive grounding of language as opposed to its sociocultural grounding” (52). As such, her study is interested particularly in “reader processing of literary discourse” (Nuttall 60). Critical linguistic approaches, on the other hand, favour the sociocultural aspect. Whilst the importance of the reader in co-producing meanings cannot be downplayed, this thesis will not focus on the mechanism of reading in relation to the real reader, rather on the reading positions texts make possible within their contexts. The

choice of a critical linguistic approach, over the current trend towards cognitive frameworks, can thus be attributed to a preference for politically engaged sociocultural analysis, over study of the reading procedure.

Otherwise, the current research distinguishes itself from previous feminist stylistic studies in speculative fiction by its choice of framework, interest in identity politics, and in its cross-linguistic comparative framework.

1.3.2.2 Stylistics and Narrative Viewpoint

There is a plethora of stylistic research which, like Nuttall's analysis, develops an aspect of narrative point of view. In particular, mind style, deixis, and modality have been subject to intensive study (see for example Boase-Beier; Neary; Semino "Mind style"). Fewer studies have attempted to create an overall framework for all dimensions of narrative perspective. Aside from the critical linguistic model adopted here, notable exceptions are Lanser, Banfield, Ehrlich, Short and McIntyre. Susan Lanser's 1981 study applies speech act theory to build a taxonomy of point of view based on the narrator's authority, and attitude to the content and narratee (80). These three aspects are then subdivided into thirty variables which are assessed along sliding scales. Her work has the advantage of nuance, yet, the result is a very complex and unwieldy descriptive poetics, which will not be advanced here. Susan Ehrlich's 1990 research aims to explain how readers makes judgements on whether a character or a narrator is focalising the narrative. Using insights from Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, she adds to the

features that Ann Banfield identified in her 1982 study *Unspeakable Sentences* to include cohesive and referential linking devices between sentences. These works represent excellent close readings of the linguistic factors which construct point of view, nonetheless they are limited to questions of *how*, without consideration to the effects or political implications of choice of point of view. This thesis will aim to address the *what* and the *why*, as well as the *how*.

In a 1996 stylistics textbook, Mick Short outlines a checklist of indicators of narrative viewpoint, which Dan McIntyre later refined in his 2006 monograph on point of view in plays. Both Short and McIntyre eschew attempts to “arrive at a definitive typology of narration”, preferring instead to proceed by “looking at small-scale linguistic features and considering their potential to act as indicators of a particular point of view” (McIntyre 30, 54). Short lists deixis, value-laden language, and given versus new information amongst his markers of viewpoint shifts (chapter 9). By applying theories from cognitive linguistics, McIntyre develops the consideration of how deixis involves readers in the fictional world. These important contributions work towards a bottom-up model which highlights key linguistic markers in the textual construction of perspective, and their functioning. However, in this study, reference to a structural framework will be maintained. One reason Short and McIntyre reject the typological categories of critical linguistics is that they are not exhaustive and cannot account for all configurations of narrative voice and focalisation, such as second person narration (McIntyre 30). This issue is overcome here by treating the categories not as absolutes, but as benchmarks. Moreover, the tripartite labelling of the critical linguistic approach is

preferred given that it offers a clear organisational framework for analysing smaller linguistic components, and emphasises the political, social workings of the text. This contextual emphasis stems from the theory of language which underpins it: systemic functional linguistics.

1.3.3 Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic Functional Grammar is a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, grammar developed to analyse language as, “a system for making meanings in context” (Eggs 144). Rather than concerning itself with whether language use is grammatically correct or incorrect, it seeks to create “an account of how speakers actually use the language” (*ibid*). The model outlined here was first developed by Michael Halliday in the 1970s and has since been extended by others in the field (see for example Halliday *Grammar*; Halliday and Hasan; Martin). This thesis will work most closely with Susanne Eggs’ textbook which explains the SFG approach.

Eggs highlights that SFG’s approach to language makes four main claims, namely:

- a) we use language functionally;
- b) its function is to make meanings;
- c) these meanings are “influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are exchanged”;
- d) and these meanings are made by choosing. (2)

There is an emphasis therefore on *choice* as the basis of meaning. This relates not so much to conscious choice, as we often make habitual and instantaneous decisions, but to how utterances gain significance against the background of other potential syntagmatic and paradigmatic means by which the same content could be expressed (Eggins 14). For example, ‘yup’, ‘affirmative’ convey very similar propositional content, but by realising it in different ways, different meanings are created. Meaning in language does not therefore reside only in words and structures, but through the oppositions between them.

Moreover, proponents of SFG claim that context and text are so intricately interrelated that it is often possible to predict context from text, and deduce context from text. That is, we have expectations of what is likely to be said or written in a particular context, and these expectations affect how we interpret speech or writing. For example, if you walk into an interview, or pick up a collection of lyric poetry, you will have expectations of how language will be used, so if it differs from expectations then the text or speech will appear noticeable, or marked, to you. Even with poetry, a genre defined by marked language use, in a volume of seventeenth century religious sonnets the phrase, “this site uses cookies for personalized content”, would be wildly unexpected. In addition, not only does context shape text, but text bears traces of context, or as Eggins succinctly summarises: “context is in text” (7). Indeed, for example, a phrase such as, “a lucky dip for Friday, please”, infers a situation and a genre. In terms of the situation, it relates to a referential subject (the lottery), implies an interaction (between customer and shop attendant), and suggests a face-to-face mode of contact. Furthermore, we may be able to ascertain that it belongs to a genre, one of transaction and specifically the

everyday genre of ‘buying a lottery ticket’.²¹ Yet, these deductions cannot be made with reference to the text alone, we require knowledge of cultural codes and conventions to identify the interaction.

The centrality of context to SFG represents one of its major strengths as a framework for literary analysis, given that it allows us to relate text to, “the cultural and situational contexts of which they are the realization” (Eggins 307). In the fictional setting, this context-text interrelation can be construed on three levels. On the diegetic plane, it relates to how the fabric of the story-world is created through the particular situations the text constructs, with their own attendant expectations. It can also be viewed as connecting the diegetic and extradiegetic, relating to the ways text dialogues with its extratextual environment by borrowing, reworking or subverting recognisable registers and genres from its culture. Or, it could be considered along the lines of the text as a whole and its status as literary communication, whether it is a marked or unmarked example of a literary genre.

Adherents to SFG claim that there are three metafunctions, that is, “three kinds of meanings that language is structured to make” (Eggins 76). These functions (experiential, interpersonal and textual)²² express different aspects of meaning respectively: namely, the field (the subject), tenor (roles and relationships of the

²¹ In SFG, a genre is the recognisable schemas or frameworks established within a culture for social interactions.

²² Michael Halliday’s three metafunctions are in fact the ideational, interpersonal and textual. Ideational is subdivided into experiential and logical. Logical relates to the expression of relations such as coordination, apposition and so on. In language it is expressed through features such as polarity and conjunction (“Inheritors” 333). Due to space restraints it will not be covered in this chapter, and experiential will be used in lieu of ideational.

participants) and mode (the means of communication, e.g. face-to-face, or written). For instance, *experiential* function is the linguistic realisation of the *field*. Put another way, the choice of how to represent the subject matter creates meanings about the content. Halliday holds that, typically, every phrase simultaneously displays all three metafunctions, although one or another may be more central (“Inheritors” 334). For example, the choice of the word “yup”, tells us basic information about the subject (confirmation), but on the interpersonal level its casual tone suggests a close relationship between speaker and listener, and on a textual level it implies that it is a response to a question, and perhaps pertains to spoken rather than formal written communication. More detail on these metafunctions will now be provided.

As noted, the experiential metafunction relates to how reality is represented in language (Eggins 220). Or, with literature, how fictional reality is constructed in the text-world. Broadly, it deals with the structuring of *who* is doing *what* to *whom*. The main framework for analysing this dimension of meaning is through a transitivity analysis. In SFG, a transitivity analysis involves identifying and labelling the processes and participant types within a clause to uncover how the subject matter is being constructed. The first step is to ascertain what kind of process is taking place, and then label the other constituents functionally according to their role in this process. The 6 process types are *material* (the most common and relating to processes of ‘doing’, for example ‘to kick’), *mental* (processes of ‘sensing’ for example, ‘to think’ or ‘to hear’), *verbal* (processes of ‘saying’ for example ‘to assert’), *relational* (processes of ‘being’ for example ‘X is Y’), *behavioural* (a hybrid of the physiological and psychological, for

example, ‘to glare’), and *existential* (realised by the impersonal construction ‘there is/was’) (Eggins 242-54). The process type determines the role of the participants, and the other components of the clause provide the circumstances for the process. Eggins confirms that:

In selecting which process type to use, and what configuration of participants to express, participants are actively choosing to represent experience in a certain way (270)

For example, in the first phrase below, the poem is a product created by an intentional act on the part of an unnamed actor. In the second, however, the poem takes on agency and the author is only involved as a ‘circumstance’, a site of action, not a participant.

She	wrote	the poem
Participant: actor	Process: material	Participant: goal

The poem	flew out	of her
Participant: actor	Process: material	Circumstance: location

Broadly, we can say that these phrases present two different meanings about the creative process. In the first ‘she’ has control and, as such, the act is presented as purposeful with the author in the eponymous authoritative position. The second, on the other hand, depicts the poem as self-generating and uncaused, and thus makes a meaning about the writing process as inspired and quasi-mystical, with the writer as conduit rather than creative agent. Thus, it is through the lexicogrammatical transitivity choices evident in a

clause that we build a picture of what type of actions are taking place, who is responsible for them, and who or what is being acted upon.²³ Hence, transitivity patterns construct a particular view of the world, the actors in it, and their interactions. Or in other words: they build a worldview or ideological point of view. In fiction, this relates to the conceptual and evaluative perspective of the narrator or character.

The interpersonal metafunction relates to how the relationships, identities and attitudes of the participants are expressed. Eggins argues that through lexicogrammatical choices speakers participate in the, “maintenance of hierarchic, gender and idiosyncratic social roles” (96). Moreover, through this function of language, the speaker “intrudes” into the text and implicitly or explicitly expresses their attitude to the subject matter (Halliday “Inheritors” 333). In SFG the interpersonal metafunction is interrogated through an analysis of mood structures, speech functions and modality. Modality, those features and forms of language which communicate opinion, is the most relevant here. Modality can be divided into modalisation which conveys probability or frequency, and modulation which relates to obligation or inclination. A question with an interrogative structure such as “Have you read it?” is not modulated or modalised. Whereas, “Would you like to read it, Madam?” and the statement “You should totally read it, sweetie” have modulated verbal elements, and the mood adjuncts of “totally”, “Madam” and “sweetie”. In the latter example, the modal elements “should” and “totally” work together to emphasise that the speaker advocates for the action. Furthermore, not only does modality convey a speaker’s attitude to the subject matter (how certain, necessary,

²³ See Glossary>Lexicogrammatical for definition of this term.

desirable, and so on that they feel the proposition to be) it also contains interpersonal meaning and functions to signal interactants' recognition of the power relations, affective involvement and contact between them (Eggins 195). Vocatives such as 'sweetie' or 'Madam' indicate a certain relationship between participants, and in the above example the modulated formulation "would you like to" belongs to a more polite and formal register than the use of a non-modulated finite "do you want to". These kinds of linguistic choices therefore represent, "grammatical resources for 'tempering' what we say" (Eggins 190). In a literary setting, a study of interpersonal meaning pertains to characterisation, and the attitudes and relationships of narrators and characters to each other and to the story.

The final metafunction is the textual function. According to Halliday, textual meanings relate to how "language makes links with itself and with the situation" ("Inheritors" 334). It is through this function that coherence and cohesion with surrounding discourse is established, and information is foregrounded through its position in the clause. A thematic analysis involves identifying the theme and the rheme of a clause. The theme is, quite simply, the "starting-point for the message" and the rheme is the development of this theme (Halliday and Hasan 39). In this example, similar information is conveyed about a dislike for Mondays, but the ordering of the material creates different textual meanings, one where the personal nature of the opinion is highlighted, and one where the day takes prominence.

Mondays	aren't	my	thing
THEME: topical	RHEME		

I	don't	like	Mondays
THEME: topical	RHEME		

In terms of its application for literary criticism, Roger Fowler sustains that the textual function should also encompass deixis given that this feature structures the spatiotemporal relations relevant to mode (*Criticism* 77). Deixis is the collective name for all the orientational aspects of language such as pronouns, determiners, verb tense and aspect, adverbs of place and time, prepositions and locative expressions, which position speaker/writer in relation to others and the world around them (Simpson *Ideology* 13). In the following examples temporal deictic markers have been underlined, and spatial ones italicised, “Suddenly, she sees *the bird landing right here on this fence post*” and “that day, she saw *a bird fly off from a fence post*”. In the first example, narrator and narratee are placed together by a specific fence post in the same temporal moment as the events. Whereas in the second example, narrator and narratee are a temporal and spatial remove from the narrative and the references are generic. Thus, through control of deixis, authors can structure the distance between narrator, reader, and narrative; building a text-world and positioning participants within it.

This section outlined some tools for approaching the metafunctions including evaluations of transitivity, modality and deixis. The next section will focus on how the critical linguistic model of narrative point of view integrates these concepts from SFG.

1.3.4 Critical Linguistic Approach to Point of View

To develop the critical linguistic model, Roger Fowler related the SFG metafunctions to a schema first proposed by Russian critic Boris Uspensky. Since then, Paul Simpson has played a role in elaborating the critical linguistic framework. Insights from his 1993 work *Language, Ideology and Point of View* will be integral to the discussion below.

1.3.4.1 Spatiotemporal Point of View

Spatiotemporal point of view (sptPOV) refers to the management of the spatial and temporal relations between the narrative voice and the characters and events of the story. Simpson calls it the “camera angle” which is significant because it provides a “vantage point” for the reader (*Ideology* 12, 15). A word now on the reader will be useful to clarify between a textually constructed reading position, and actual readers. When discussing the reader’s vantage point, this refers to a rhetorical position created by the text. The reader’s viewpoint is constructed by, and restricted to, the sum of narratorial information provided (which will be studied here on the ideological, psychological and spatiotemporal planes), and represents the point at which the text-world is accessed. However, just as there is no obligation to accept the dominant value scheme of a text,

there is no obligation for a *real* reader to align themselves uncritically with the linguistic position of the reader. Nor indeed any guarantee that linguistic triggers will be interpreted uniformly. It is more the linguistic basis from which the reader is invited to imagine the text-world. Reader imagination may well expand beyond these indicators to, for example, picture a character who is not verbally described in the narrative, or disagree with an evaluative comment. However, the verbal positioning of the reader as narratee remains a baseline ‘window’ into the characters and story. Further discussion on authorship, readers and the communicative situation will be included later to highlight contextual variables in production and reception of text.

Returning to spatiotemporal viewpoint, in terms of spatial organisation, a character-narrator will likely anchor the visual perspective, but for heterodiegetic narrators Uspensky sketches a typology of narrator positioning vis-à-vis character with three broad distinctions (57). The narrator can borrow a character’s spatial perspective, as if they are seeing through their eyes (as with internal focalisation), or a narrator may accompany a character and view events with them, as if they are looking over their shoulder. This is a key distinction to make, because in the first the narrator adopts the character’s spatial *and* psychological viewpoint, but in the second the character acts as the visual, but not the psychological or evaluative focaliser. Thus, the value of differentiating between layers of narrative point of view is that it allows for greater precision in describing the relation between narrator and character. Alternatively, the narrator may adopt a discrete sptPOV in the text-world. From these visual angles, scenes may be described from a range of distances including bird’s eye view or in microscopic

detail. Management of narrative time has its own array of potentialities which have been comprehensively described by Gérard Genette (see chapters 1-3 *Discourse*). He accounts for the frequency, duration and order of narrative time, and his concepts will be explained and referenced where necessary in later textual analysis.

From this structural organisation, we move to the question of how the illusion of space and time is constructed in language. As mentioned earlier, sptPOV is principally realised through deixis. In this example from Belli's *El país de las mujeres*, temporal deixis has been italicised and locative deixis underlined.

Miró a su alrededor. Se veían muchachas arriba de las terrazas de los edificios circundantes, muchachas encaramadas en los árboles del parque vecino y hasta sobre el techo de la glorieta al centro, hombres sentados sobre la escalinata del palacio presidencial. Alrededor de la tarima, las policías del cordón de seguridad se bamboleaban bajo la presión de la multitud. (Belli país14)

[She looked around her. Girls could be seen on the balconies of surrounding buildings, girls perched in the trees of the nearby park and even on the roof of its central bandstand, men sat on the steps of the presidential palace. Around the platform, the police women forming the security cordon were swaying from the pressure of the crowds.]

In this extract, the narrator has a distinct spatial perspective given that the protagonist, Viviana, is an object within the narrator's visual field; we see her looking around. Yet, Viviana's gaze orients the ensuing visual description, we are seeing with her, as if looking over her shoulder. The narrative agent is positioned with the character and objects are located in relation to this shared deictic centre: the buildings surround their location, the park is nearby, and there is a cordon around the platform they are on. The temporal viewpoint is indicated through the verbal past tenses employed, and signals that the narrative instance occurs at a point in time after this episode from the story.

However, the use of the past imperfect tense, *se veían/se bamboleaban* (analogous with the English past continuous rather than the preterite), aids in creating a sense of ongoing action and immediacy. The narrative temporal perspective is thus formally distant from character and the scene, but mimics, or overlays, the character's temporal perception of continuous action within the story-world through its choice of tense. Together with the anchoring of the narrative spatial perspective with the character and within the scene, an overall effect of spatiotemporal proximity to the protagonist is created.

This brief discussion demonstrates how sptPOV functions to situate narrator and characters in relation to each other and to the story-world. It also links closely with the other dimensions of narrative viewpoint, and this study will interpret how psychological and ideological perspectives interact with management of space and time to build the reader's window into the text-world.

1.3.4.2 Psychological Point of View

In the critical linguistic framework, psychological point of view refers to the attitude expressed in the narrative, and relates to the SFG interpersonal metafunction. It deals with how the narrator presents material to the reader, as definite, possible, positive, negative, obligatory and so on, and how much information the reader receives about the characters' psychology and attitude. It is therefore important in influencing reader's perception of character and story-world.

Uspensky and Fowler described categories of psychological perspective, but it is Paul Simpson's version that will be described here as his typology has greater descriptive precision than its predecessors. Simpson's first division of psychological viewpoint relates to the identity of the narrative voice. He distinguishes between character-narrators (category A) and heterodiegetic-narrators (category B) which he describes as typically "an invisible, 'dis-embodied', non-participating narrator" (*Ideology* 55).²⁴ Category B narrators may then move between two positions; they may either narrate in "narratorial mode", B(N), where they adopt a perspective outside of any character's consciousness, or in "reflector mode", B(R), where the narrator moves, "whether momentarily or for a prolonged period into the active mind of a particular character" (*ibid*). Like Bal's notion of "embedded focalisation", Simpson's B(R) position effectively captures the formal subordination of character psychology within a narratorial frame in heterodiegetic internal narration.

²⁴ Simpson uses first-person and third-person instead of the terms character-narrator and heterodiegetic-narrator. However, I have adapted this to be character-narrator, for a participant in the *fabula*, and heterodiegetic-narrator, for a narrative voice positioned outside of the *fabula*. My rationale for this relates to Bal's rejection of first- and third-person as inadequate descriptors for narrators, because "from a grammatical point of view, this narrating subject is always a 'first person'" (21). The first-person pronoun is rather an indicator of self-reference and does not provide information on the narrator's relation to the text-world. For example, a perceptible heterodiegetic-narrator may refer to themselves and their opinion and still remain outside the story, whilst a witness-narrator, positioned in the *fabula*, may speak primarily in the third person as they relate events which happened to other characters.

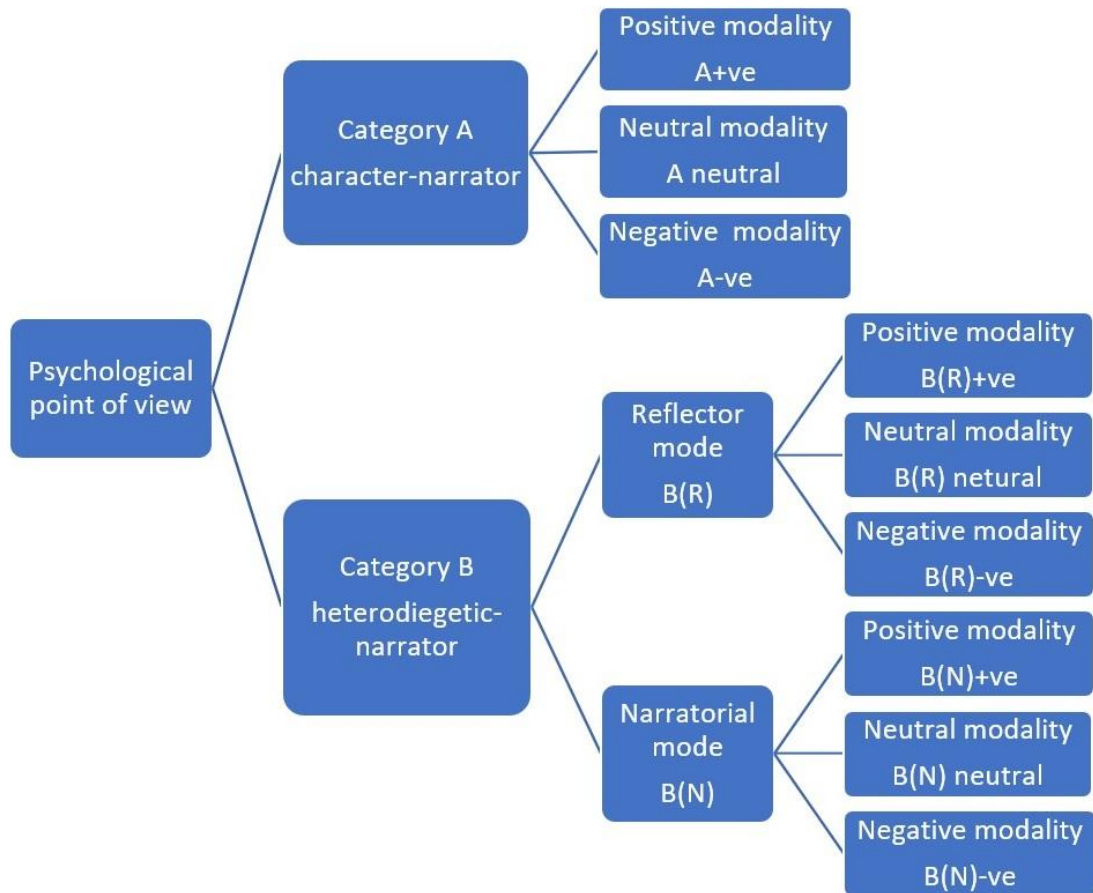


Figure 1.2 Simpson's Model of Psychological Point of View, adapted from *Language, Ideology and Point of View* pages 56-60.

Both narrators and characters will make interpersonal meanings through their selection, or rejection, of modality. Simpson classifies these psychological attitudes to the subject matter according to whether the narrative voice employs positive, neutral, or negative modality. 'Positive' modality relates here not to the optimistic sense of the word or to judging material as 'good', rather it refers to the act of making definite judgements. A narrative which displays positive modality will be characterised by *verba sentiendi* (verbs which indicate mental processes such as 'to love'), evaluative adjectives

and adverbs (such as ‘excellent’), prominent deontic and boulomaic modality (linguistic resources for expressing obligation, requirement, desire and permission), and generic sentences. Typically, these narratives will not contain words of estrangement (such as ‘as if’ or ‘seem’), and epistemic modality will be suppressed (this expresses likelihood, belief, cognition and perception, for example, ‘perhaps’ or ‘it could be’), which helps to build an appearance of certainty and conviction (for further definitions of the above terms, see Glossary). Positive modality conveys the preferences and opinions of the narrator or character, or in other words: it communicates a personality. Narrators which use positive modality will be perceptible in the text, display assurance, and the reader will be able to construct a sense of their psychology. For example, in this example from Alderman’s *The Power* (2016), the heterodiegetic narrative voice in narratorial mode B(N) displays positive modality through the repeated use of generic sentences:²⁵

Every day one grows a little, every day something is different, so that in the heaping up of days suddenly a thing that was impossible has become possible. This is how a girl becomes a grown woman. Step by step until it is done. (31)

This aphoristic style positions the narrative voice as authoritative and omniscient. Positive narratives also tend to be, “cooperatively orientated towards the reader”, creating an ordered and meaningful text-world which is understood by the narrator and explained to the reader (Simpson *Ideology* 56).

²⁵ Generic sentences express regularities, or generalised truths (irrespective of truth value). Statements of opinion expressed as fact, maxims and aphorisms would also come under the heading of generic sentences. See Glossary for further detail.

Neutral modality does not indicate neutrality in a moral sense, but refers instead to an, “absence of narratorial modality” (Simpson *Ideology* 60). The lack of modal elements often coincides with the suppression of conjunctions and references to emotions, foregrounding instead physical description and resulting in a, “flat, almost ‘journalistic’ feel” (*ibid*). Phrases which are not modalised are presented as matter of fact and undebatable. Eggins highlights that, paradoxically, lack of modality indicates greater certainty than statements which reference their truth claim (182). For example, “it was a sunny day” is more assured than, “I was certain it was a sunny day”. Psychologically neutral narratives *appear* impersonal and unmediated as they refrain from explicit judgements, however there are implications behind these ostensibly ‘objective’ stylistic choices. Indeed, “neutral” shading should not be mistakenly attributed as value-free given that worldview can be communicated by other means in a text than explicit comment (see section on ideological viewpoint).

Narratives displaying negative shading foreground uncertainty through prominent epistemic modality, words of estrangement, and comparative structures such as metaphors and similes. Negative modality may express self-questioning, unreliability, confusion or be used to highlight alienation from the world or other characters whose thoughts and motivations cannot be known, only supposed. In this example from *Moi qui n’ai pas connu les hommes*, negative modality, in the form of an epistemic verb in italics, introduces doubt into the narrator’s understanding of the group: “they *looked as though* they didn’t understand what was happening” (64).²⁶ Cumulatively, negative

²⁶ Elles *avaient l’air de* ne pas comprendre ce qui se passait

modality can convey an uncertain grasp on the world and others. Or, in extreme cases, “the exaggerated refusal to go below the surface, the ostentatious guesses at what unimaginable motives might lurk beneath, present the characters as inhuman, beyond the comprehension of an ordinary human belief system” (Fowler *Criticism* 143). In general, the epistemic doubt created by negative modality emphasises psychological distance between narrator and/or character and other participants in the narrative, or generates the impression of an alienated consciousness or an alienating world.

When the three narratorial positions (character, heterodiegetic-narratorial and -reflector) are combined with the three kinds of modality (positive, negative, neutral), Simpson’s typology produces nine possible categories of psychological point of view. His schema benefits from distinguishing between narratorial and focalised character’s psychological viewpoint, and developing further the link between modality and the “feel” of a text; the personality it exhibits (Simpson *Ideology* 46). It is important to clarify, however, that these classifications are not intended to be absolute or sealed. Passages may shift rapidly between forms of modality or narrative positions, and the line between narratorial and reflector mode may be blurry at times. Moreover, the modal categories are more general trends than definite groupings. Narrative may well mix characteristics from both the positive and negative modal poles. Indeed, although anticipated by Simpson, these potential issues were raised by Mick Short who voiced concerns that there was a danger of overgeneralising when attributing classifications with the critical linguistic model (314). However, the fact that the categories may be blurry, overlap or incomplete does not necessarily present a stumbling block if they are

used as standardised reference points, rather than absolutes. That is, the framework should be treated as an analytic tool, not as an end in itself. Thus, when applying the psychological model from critical linguistics, the aim in this thesis is not to *classify* a novel, or sections of text, as exemplars of a particular type of point of view. Rather, it is to exploit the benchmarks set by the framework to better understand how text functions to promote particular readings. Furthermore, effects or meanings are not ingrained in structures or categories. Thus, as always, interpretation of linguistic structures must be carried out with reference to content, context and co-text. As such, judgements on linguistic effects will not be made only in relation to their ‘type’ or ‘category’, but with close consideration of the particular textual instance. Overall, then, the view here is that Simpson’s model holds valuable descriptive potential as a standardised point against which to evaluate how each text mediates its subject matter, presents characters, and structures the relationship between narrator and character.

1.3.4.3 Ideological Point of View

Ideological point of view, here, will refer to both the way experience is constructed in narrative, as well as the evaluative perspective. Both relate to ideology or worldview, although the former relates to *how* the world is viewed (or perceived), and the latter the value scheme and judgements of a narrator or character. Ideology here then exceeds the conventional definition of a system or set of beliefs, it also entails the way events and

experience are understood and portrayed by a narrator or character.²⁷ Indeed, it is through the experiential metafunction, as noted earlier, that a writer, “embodies in language [her or] his experience of the phenomena of the real world” (Halliday “Inheritors” 332). In a fictional setting this concerns how the text-world is conceived in narrative, as well as how it is judged by narrators and characters.

For critical linguists, ideological viewpoint can be manifested explicitly in a text (words and comments which attribute value or express a position) or symptomatically through structures and how they are linked (Fowler *Criticism* 166). In terms of paradigmatic markers of ideology, Fowler lists evaluative comments and word choices (including collocations, naming, epithets, and over- or under-lexicalisation) as potential indicators of experiential meanings (*Criticism* 214-18). For example, the choice to describe an anti-abortion group as “pro-life” reveals a sympathy with that position by centring the debate on the rights of the foetus rather than the woman. What’s more, degrees of specificity or generality may reveal differing experiential perspectives. For example, to describe a car as a “V8, turbo-charged, Spider Ferrari”, or “shiny red box on wheels”, provides information about a character’s way of seeing the object, and calls on the reader to imagine the object in very different ways. Fowler suggests that greater specificity may have the effect of conveying pedantry and obsession, and under-lexicalisation may demonstrate a restricted understanding of the events due to naivety

²⁷ To use ideology in this way may at first sight seem problematic. However, it helps to remember that it is linked to Halliday’s ‘ideational’ metafunction of language, with ideational relating to the *formation* of ideas and concepts.

(Fowler *Criticism* 216). Of course, these are only tendencies and there is no direct correlation between textual structure and effect.

The “symptomatic” structures that Fowler details as indicative of worldview include transitivity and conjunction. Conjunction, linking between clauses, builds a system of logical relations between participants and events. It pertains to how cause and effect, hierarchies or equivalency, conditions, and purposes are established in text. Consistent patterns of conjunction in a text may reveal a (ideological) view of events and actions as radically disconnected, or purposeful and linked. Transitivity refers to the way language encodes experiential reality and expresses who is doing what to whom. In an extract from *The Power*, taken from a scene where a character’s ‘power’ or electric force awakens, a transitivity analysis highlights how linguistic choices portray the power as agentive but indeterminate, and the character as overtaken by the mysterious phenomenon.

Something’s happening. The blood is pounding in her ears. A prickling feeling is spreading along her back, over her shoulders, along her collarbone ... Roxy feels the thing like pins and needles along her arms ... There’s a crackling flash and a sound like a paper snapper. She can smell something a bit like a rainstorm and bit like burning hair. The taste welling under her tongue is of bitter oranges (9).

Something	's happening				
Actor	Material process (intransitive)				
The blood	is pounding		in her ears		
Actor	Material process (intransitive)		Circumstantial: location		
A prickling feeling	is spreading		along her back,		over her shoulders,
Actor	Material process (intransitive)		Circumstantial: location		along her collarbone.
Roxy	feels		the thing like pins and needles		along her arms
Senser	Mental process		Phenomenon		Circumstantial: location
There	's		a crackling flash and		a sound like a paper snapper
	Existential process		Existent		Existent
She	can smell		something a bit like a rainstorm		and a bit like burning hair
Senser	Mental process		Phenomenon		Phenomenon
The taste welling under her tongue	is		of bitter oranges		
Carrier	Relational process (attributive)		Attribute		

The character, Roxy, appears in this extract twice as a ‘senser’ experiencing a phenomenon, but is more often represented by her fragmented body parts which are listed as the sites where material processes are taking place. She is not responsible for the power nor is the power happening to her (she is not the goal of any of the material processes), but in and around her. The spontaneity of the phenomenon is conveyed through the existential process “there is”, a structure which does not entail an actor only an uncaused ‘existent’; showing the power as appearing impromptu. Moreover, the power seems decentred given the indirect allusions to it in the metonymical “the taste”, “the blood”, “flash”, “sound”; creating a sense that it is everywhere at once, internal and external. Its strangeness is stressed through under-specificity of “something” and “thing” and the repeated comparative structure “like...”.²⁸ Moreover, the power, or its synecdochal stand-ins “a prickling feeling”, “something”, “the blood”, are the only entities carrying out material actions, demonstrating that the power should also be considered a motive force. These processes are however intransitive, they are not acting *on* others, rather taking place autonomously. In this way, the power emerges from this sample as active, uncontrolled and self-generating, appearing without a cause. This short example shows that a transitivity analysis can help to explain how a worldview is built into narrative; that is, how text structures interactions and attributes cause, effect, responsibility, properties, and intentionality.

²⁸ On a separate note, these similes and *verba sentiendi* characterise the passage as displaying a B(R) negative psychological perspective.

In addition to the features that Fowler lists, Simpson argues for further inclusions, such as motifs and themes, and this leads him to claim that ideological point of view is something of a “bucket category” (*Stylistics* 78). Yet, even if an exhaustive taxonomy remains elusive, the link that holds ideological viewpoint together is its relation to the experiential metafunction of language. If an analysis probes how the subject matter (the field) of discourse is structured and expressed in narrative, then it is investigating the ideological perspective.

This connection to the SFG framework is one of the reasons that this thesis rejects the individual/social split between ‘mind style’ and ideological viewpoint that some critics suggest.²⁹ Elena Semino in particular has argued that mind style on one hand is “an individual’s characteristic cognitive habits, abilities and limitations and any beliefs and values that may arise from them” (“Cognitive” 97), whereas ideological point of view refers to “more socially shared aspects” (“Mindstyle” 168). The idea is that mind style refers to a *particular* way of seeing the world, whereas ideological perspective relates to value and ethical judgements *shared* by a community. However, Semino acknowledges that this divide is “difficult to operationalise in practice” (“Mindstyle” 169). Plus, of course, seemingly individual ‘ways of seeing the world’ are culturally influenced, and a mind style may only seem particular or pronounced to a reader if it differs from their own. Moreover, for this politically engaged analysis, the emphasis remains on how *every* view or perception of the world is partial. As such, the metric here will not be social/individual, rather preference will be given to Fowler’s

²⁹ Roger Fowler originally used the terms synonymously.

explicit/symptomatic cline and its relation to more-or-less conscious judgements at one end and more implicit understandings of the world on the other. The proposed model below is not intended to be exhaustive, but to capture some of the main aspects of ideological viewpoint. This dimension will be central in interpreting the representations of individual and collective identities in the novels.

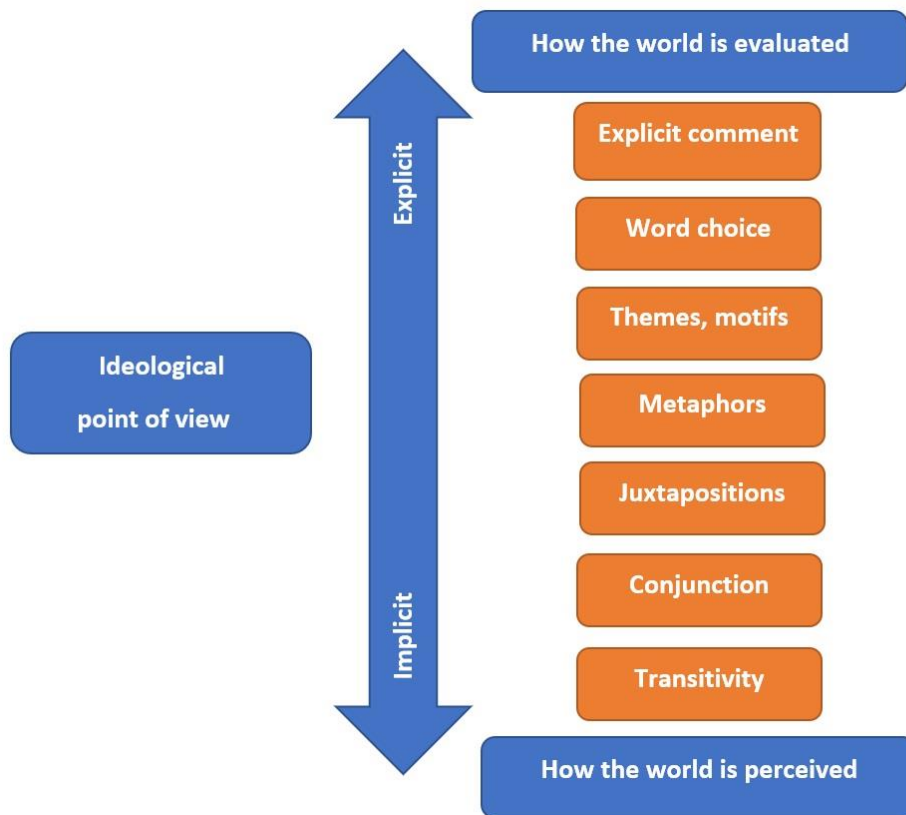


Figure 1.3 Model of Ideological Point of View

Overall, then, a key benefit of this critical linguistic approach to narrative viewpoint is how it allows the relationship between narrative voice and characters and story-world to be differentiated on three distinct levels, providing nuance to the description. Alignment or divergence between character and narrator along these perspectival dimensions may lead to effects such as irony, humour, empathy and so on. Critical linguistics also provides a consistent metalanguage for describing how narrator and character psychology is constructed or obscured (through modality) and how their particular world-view is developed (through transitivity and naming choices, conjunctions and so on). Moreover, with its attention to meanings implicit in language use, critical linguistics attempts a process of “demystification”, to bring to light the “practices by which language is used to present partial and slanted concepts as if they were innocent and natural” (Fowler *Criticism* 51). The objective of making explicit what is otherwise implicit is relevant to the study of all planes of point of view given that subtle spatiotemporal distancing and psychological colouring of the story-world and characters will affect reader interpretation, but is particularly relevant in relation to the ideological perspectives which implicitly guide reader response. Therefore, through its systemic functional theory of language and context, critical linguistics provides a sophisticated framework for approaching the narrative point of view on a micro-level whilst assessing its implications for the work as a whole.

1.3.4.4 Application

There will be two stages to the analysis of each novel. Firstly, the novel will be interrogated to evaluate how female identity and group dynamics are represented in the text. Next, these textual findings will be assessed in relation to the wider social and theoretical context to discover how the texts interact with feminist debates and with the paradigms of utopian fiction.

In terms of text analysis, given that this approach necessitates close reading of the cumulative effect of linguistic choices, passages will be selected for detailed analysis. These sections will be chosen based on their content; scenes which focus on collective action, pivotal interactions, and female characters will be most pertinent. Moreover, any linguistic trends which recur throughout the novels will be noted and discussed. Attention will be paid to spatiotemporal, psychological and ideological viewpoints, but subjective judgement will be used to determine which aspects are most relevant to the research questions at any particular point. The analysis will aim to expose the implicit values which underpin the work, and how the textual positioning of the reader guides response. Care will be taken to provide textual and contextual evidence to support interpretation, and to outline any multiple meanings or alternative reading positions.

1.3.5 Theoretical Considerations

1.3.5.1 Across Languages

This thesis works with three novels, written in three different languages, from different parts of the world. Given this diversity, it is important to pay close attention to each specific theoretical and cultural context without imposing a hegemonic Eurocentric evaluative framework onto the research. Against this background, and especially considering the feminist nature of the research questions, it seems an anomaly to adopt a methodology that has been developed with reference to the English language, in Anglophone institutions, and by a group of, mainly, white men. Some may argue that as a critical tool it will bear traces of its context of creation and of the implicit biases that an Anglocentric focus entails (for example, other languages may have structures and components SFG has not captured). However, an idea should not be rejected solely because of its provenance, and critical linguistics has the potential to usefully interrogate how texts make meanings and interact with their context. Moreover, it is not prescriptive, but descriptive, and as such its categories and labels can be adapted to the material a different language provides. The signifiers and structures may change, but the key propositions about language (as a system of choices, made in context, to make meanings) apply across languages. It is Halliday's opinion that the three SFG metafunctions (textual, interpersonal, and experiential) are relevant to all languages (Halliday and Hasan 23). It is not necessary for this thesis to prove its universal relevancy, only that it is suitable for dealing with French and Spanish. This has already been evidenced by the appearance of contrastive textbooks, and the use of SFG in

translation and Francophone and Hispanic literary studies (see for example Banks; Bosseaux; Lavid et al.; López Maestre). Indeed, the French and Spanish languages have modal systems, deixis, analogous parts of speech (conjunctions, prepositions and so on) and transitivity structures. Although importantly, French and Spanish do have different unmarked mood and transitivity structures to English, for example in terms of how questions are formed or the use of passive constructions. They also have different conventions around how interpersonal meaning is conveyed in language, especially in relation the two forms of the second person (tu/vous and tú/usted) and grammatical genders. However, when analysing *El país de las mujeres* and *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes*, language use will not be compared against English as a standard, rather against the other choices their own language allows and the register and genre conventions specific to that language community. It is therefore not anticipated that the systemic functional approach will encounter problems working across languages, and indeed this thesis will contribute assessing its comparative potential.

1.3.5.2 Communicative Situation

As has been stressed throughout this chapter, choice is central to the systemic functional view of language. Yet in the fictional setting, the question of choice becomes more complex because the identity of the 'chooser' is not as straightforward as in the referential setting. Since Wimsatt and Beardsley's influential paper on "The Intentional Fallacy" in 1946, and subsequent insights from post-structuralism, Saussurian linguistics, and psychoanalysis, it has become almost taboo in Anglo-European criticism

to link between textual choices and the intentions of the real author. Not only are we not always conscious of the meanings we make, but language is indeterminate. That is, meanings are not contained in the signifier, but contingent and conventional, and thus text will create different meanings for different readers. Furthermore, the author should not be invoked as a guarantor of the meaning of the text, as this validates a single 'correct' reading that sets up an epistemic hegemony and invalidates other perspectives.

However, although it is important to underline the divide between an author and their work, and that indeed there is no guarantee it represents their own ideology, there is still the issue of accountability. For example, a position that views language as radically indeterminate and interpretation as free, à la Barthes; "only language acts, not 'me'" (142), diminishes an author's responsibility for their work to that of a parent over an unruly child. As mentioned, the critical linguistic approach sees literature not as a special case, but as political as any other social discourse. With this in mind, it is important to retain the author in the communicative situation, as they are still to some degree responsible for the text's values and meanings, as plural, ambiguous and debateable as they may be. For example, with the case of a novel which promotes sexist views, the author may not have intended these, or may not believe in them, but should still hold some responsibility for them. All the same, Sara Mills points out that if a text which is sexist is seen as the responsibility of the author alone then this cannot account for systemic sexism as it portrays it as an individualised problem (*Stylistics* 34). Indeed, it is clear we need to open out the communicative situation, not just to the reader who is active in negotiating meanings, but to other participants who play a role in shaping a

novel and its reception including publishers, editors, translators, retailers, reviewers, and the media. A text is a cultural artefact which is produced and received through an interplay of influences in a particular context (Bourdieu 139).

Sara Mill's feminist model of text captures effectively the array of factors which impact on meaning-making.

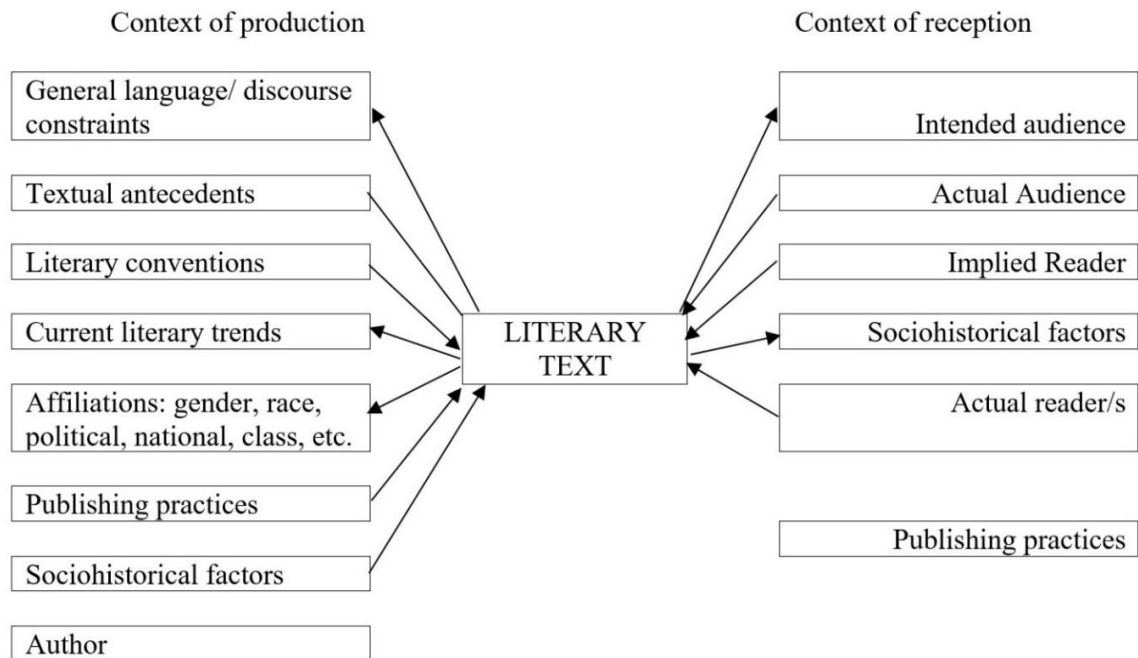


Figure 1.4 *The Communicative Situation*, redrawn from Mills *Stylistics* p.31

We can see in this model that the author's role is not one of a free, unimpeded creator determining a text's meaning, but influenced by context, and meaning is negotiated by readers within their own cultural and social environment. Yet, this contextual and subjective variance does not mean that all interpretations are equivalent. Stylistics works from the assumption that linguistic communities share interpretative frameworks and references, therefore, despite individual differences, common understandings are

possible. With reference to cultural and social conventions and models, conclusions can be drawn about which meanings are more or less likely in context. Mills defines a dominant reading as, “the most likely to make sense of the text” (*Stylistics* 67). However, there is not always one dominant interpretation, but multiple. Mills emphasises that there can be, “a range of possible readings which the text negotiates with a reader and which that reader accepts or resists” (*Stylistics* 38). Indeed, the reader does not have to accept all of the meanings a text promotes, rather they may carry out an oppositional reading. Audiences are not homogenous, so differences of response can be expected, not just between individuals, but between groups defined by ideological or cultural affiliation. Thus, in this thesis, efforts will be made to open up potential readings of the text, which account for different communities and elements of the communicative situation, particularly the feminist and literary environment.

1.3.6 Conclusion

Narrative point of view has emerged from this chapter as the textual positioning of participants, and structuring of relationships between narrator, character, and the story-world. The critical linguistic approach to narrative perspective distinguishes three planes of analysis which encompass spatiotemporal distancing, psychological attitude and ideological assumptions. Together these aspects construct a window into the text-world, and shape and shade the representation of characters and story. In this thesis the focus will be on female identity and collective female identity, and the three dimensions of

point of view provide a systematic basis for evaluating how these identities are constructed and presented to readers.

Critical linguistics is an appropriate and effective analytic framework given its consistent metalanguage, attention to the relation between context and text, and pragmatic theory of language. The political motivations of critical linguistics, to uncover implicit worldview and values, align well with the feminist orientation of this thesis. Its toolkit for bringing to light habitualised or ‘common sense’ social meanings tacit in language use will be productive in uncovering the beliefs and assumptions predicating the representations of female identity in the novels in question.

Chapter Two. *El país de las mujeres*: Eutopian Femininity

Gioconda Belli's 2010 eutopian novel *El país de las mujeres*³⁰ narrates the story of a group of women who form a political party to combat the corruption and mismanagement of their country's government. Aided by the fantastical intervention of a volcanic eruption whose gases lower the testosterone levels of the men in the country, the all-female party win the elections and are able to implement radical reforms, including temporarily removing all men from civil service so that their specifically female ethics of governance have a chance to flourish.

It is a bold and playful text which builds a eutopian vision of how a so-called 'female' power could transform social relations and national prosperity. Its thematic focus on women in politics, concern with gendered roles and attributes, and imaginative use of metaphor, word-play and perspective, provide excellent material for interrogating the representation of women and female solidarity.

The central questions this chapter seeks to answer are: how are individual and collective female identities constructed and framed in the text? How do these representations align with, or challenge, feminist thought in Nicaragua? And, how do they interact with the paradigms of feminist utopianism? These questions will be addressed in order, with the chapter taking a three-part background/analysis/discussion structure. As such, after a brief overview of the author, the novel and its criticism,

³⁰ The country of women. N.B There is no published English translation of the novel. All translations are my own.

attention will turn to the text itself. An analysis of narrative viewpoint will be carried out to determine how ‘woman’, and women acting collectively, are conceived in the novel. Once these visions of gendered identity and group dynamics have been clarified, the following section will contextualise these findings against the beliefs and aims of the Nicaraguan women’s movement, as well as the situation of women in the country. To conclude, the novel’s relation to other feminist eutopias, from both the Latin American and Anglo-European setting, will be considered. The aim is to understand the significance of the novel’s portrayal of femininity and collectivism by situating it in its wider literary and political context.

2.1 Background: The Author, the Novel and its Criticism

Introduced in a recent interview as “poet, writer, activist, feminist” (Maldonado n.pag.),³¹ Gioconda Belli is known as much for her political opinions as her literary contributions. Born to a wealthy Managuan family, Belli was educated in Spain and the United States before returning to Nicaragua, and starting a career in advertising (Belli “Biografía”; *piel*).³² It was through her professional connections that she became involved with the Sandinista movement at the start of 1970s. Passionately committed to the cause of national liberation, once enlisted she was responsible for carrying messages, gathering information, and sheltering combatants. At that time the movement worked

³¹ poeta, prosista, activista, femenista

³² Bibliographic details are compiled from: Belli *El país bajo mi piel*; Belli “Biografía”; and interviews in Krakusin; Maldonado; Sotorrío.

underground and members were regularly tortured or killed by the Somoza regime for their association with the Sandinistas. Therefore, after her name was publicly linked to a Sandinista attack in 1974, Belli was forced into exile. From her base in neighbouring Costa Rica, she continued to work for the Sandinistas undertaking diplomatic work as well as missions to transport arms. After the eventual success of the revolutionary uprising in 1979, Belli returned to Managua and formalised her role with the FSLN³³ taking on positions including assistant to a party leader, then overseeing the FSLN electoral publicity campaign in 1984. From the mid-1980s however, she began to dedicate herself to writing full-time. Moreover, around this time Belli became increasingly disillusioned with the direction of the FSLN, going on to leave the party in 1993, and is now an outspoken critic of former revolutionary leader and current Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega (see for example Belli in Lakunza n.pag.). Nowadays, she divides her time between Nicaragua and the US and continues to write poetry, novels and newspaper articles.

Since her first published collection in 1972, Belli's poetry has been lauded as revolutionary, not only for its portrayal of the struggle for national liberation, but also for its celebratory vision of female sexuality (see for example March; Urtecho). Eroticism, nature and political life link together to form a vital force running through her poems. This erotic energy, and the motif of self-realisation through political and sexual awakening, extends to Belli's fiction. Whereas her poetry treats these themes in a

³³ Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional [Sandinista National Liberation Front], otherwise known as the Sandinistas.

fragmented form, her novels have more overtly narrated a character's journey to personal autonomy and active participation in socio-political life. Within Belli's corpus, *El país de las mujeres* stands out for its emphasis on women as a group, and their collective efforts to transform the country, although its connection between political and personal liberation, celebration of female corporeality, and focus on female identity formation mark its thematic continuity. Of Belli's eight published novels, *Waslala: Memorial del futuro* (1996) has particular relevance to *El país* for its utopian themes. The 'Waslala' of the title is a legendary Arcadian idyll where a group of intellectuals went to establish a eutopian, egalitarian society – never to be seen again. The protagonist Melisandra embarks on a search through the dystopian land of Faguas, filled with rubbish dumps, toxic waste and gangster overlords, to find Waslala, where her parents had travelled years before. With Faguas read as “a global metaphor for any Third World country today” (Layh 47), the narrative shines a critical light on the exploitation of workers and natural resources to the advantage of ruling elites. When Melisandra finally finds Waslala, it is in ruins having been unable to sustain itself and only her mother remains. Yet, despite the bleak Faguan landscape and collapse of Waslalian society, the novel is not anti-eutopian. The eutopian impulse is retained as necessary and irrepressible; through an ending which points to “eternal hope” (Fernandez Carballo 63). In his study, Carballo reads Melisandra's mother's speech at the end of the novel as encapsulating the eutopian defence. The mother argues:

The greatest achievement of *Waslala* is that we were able to imagine it ... Imagining reality continues to be just as important as building it. (Belli *Waslala* 319)³⁴

Here, the social function of utopia as a means to drive change is championed, closing the text on a hopeful note.

Whereas in *Waslala* eutopia is an unrealised dream, in *El país de las mujeres* (2010) the eutopian project moves to the foreground and the narrative details the implementation of social plans. Set once again in the subtly alternate country of Faguas,³⁵ the novel opens with the President Viviana Sansón, leader of the all-female *Partido de la Izquierda Erótica* [Party of the Erotic Left] (PIE for short),³⁶ addressing the crowds on a national holiday (13). Before the scene is out however, an unknown man attempts to assassinate her, shooting her in the head and torso. From this dramatic opening, Viviana's survival hangs in the balance until the closing pages. One strand of the narrative moves forward in time from that day and focuses on the search for the culprit, the repercussions of the attack on the nation, and on Viviana's family and colleagues. This content takes the form of chapters focalised with individual characters

³⁴ Lo más grande de *Waslala* es que fuimos capaces de imaginarla ... Imaginar la realidad sigue siendo tan importante como construirla.

³⁵ Many of Belli's novels, including *Waslala*, are set in Faguas. Linda Craft claims that it is "a fictitious name for Nicaragua" (161). This contention is supported by Belli herself who confirms Faguas is a composite of 'Fuego' [Fire] and 'Agua' [Water] which represent the volcanos and lakes of Nicaragua (Belli cited in Camargo, n.pag.). Parallels between Faguas and Nicaragua are emphasized in *El país* underlining the text's function as social critique. However, it is also important to remember that Faguas remains a *speculative* space where an alternate reality is acted out; the 'what if' of an all-female government.

³⁶ This abbreviation, PIE, is the Spanish word for foot. This is relevant as much of the party's propaganda revolves around the image of moving forward, one step at a time, or women standing on their own two feet, and so on.

in turn, and a selection of “historical materials” such as interview transcripts, newspaper clippings, and official party documents.

The other narrative thread enters into Viviana’s subconscious as, lying in a coma, she revisits certain periods in her life. Through these analeptic episodes, the reader learns of her biography and personal journey to the presidency, as well as how PIE formed and won the elections, and their first years in office. It transpires that, when working as a journalist, Viviana exposed a high-profile sex-trafficking ring, which led many women to come forward with similar stories of abuse and exploitation. This new awareness drove Viviana into action, and together with a group of friends, she created a political party: *el Partido de la Izquierda Erótica*. Bolstered by the magical side-effect of a volcanic eruption which sees men’s testosterone levels plummet and apathy spread among the male population, PIE’s provocative election campaign brings them victory. Motivated by *felicismo* [happy-ism] (improved quality of life) rather than profit (131), PIE’s policies include putting ecology at the centre of the economy, harsher punishments for sexual violence, legalisation of abortion, and, centrally, “to reform the workplace to end the division of work and family life” (132).³⁷ To push through their reforms, they decide to remove all men from civil service, sending them to work in communal kitchens and the home instead, and fill the vacant positions with women. These measures begin to improve the country, and Viviana travels internationally to deliver speeches on PIE’s revolutionary policies. However, their plans for eutopian social transformation are not unanimously welcomed and resistance builds, particularly after

³⁷ Reformar el mundo laboral para terminar la segregación familia-trabajo

men's testosterone returns to normal, leading to the assassination attempt which opens the novel.

Compared to the wealth of critical material on Belli's first novel *La mujer habitada* (1988), and autobiographic *El país bajo mi piel* (2001),³⁸ her other prose works have received less attention (Barbas Rhoden 89). However, a small number of studies on *El país de las mujeres* have appeared since its publication in 2010. They include: an article by Castro Solano (2016) which situates *El país* in relation to previous "waves" of feminism; Sophie Large's study (2015) of the political function of eroticism in the novel; Joel Postema's 2015 research into ecological undercurrents in *El país*; a short dissertation by Olga Roussou in 2012; and a 2011 article by Natalia Barrionuevo which explores *El país* as a counterpoint to a real-world 'man's town' (the Argentinian oil town of Comodoro where the vast majority of workers and civil service positions are filled by men). Perhaps the most comprehensive treatment of the novel occurs in Valeria Lafita Fernández's thesis on Belli's prose writing. Her chapter dedicated to *El país* concentrates on the text's use of parody, and argues that it "corrosively" subverts "discourses and texts inherited from patriarchal culture" (186).³⁹ Whilst agreeing with her analysis of the subversive function of parody, this thesis will contest her assertion that the novel is ultimately deconstructive of sex binaries. Fernández holds that the narrative results in "the abolition of any type of dichotomy" (205),⁴⁰ whereas my argument will be that the conceptual categories of male and female remain untroubled

³⁸ *The Inhabited Woman; The Country Under my Skin*

³⁹ corrosivamente ... discursos y textos heredados de la cultura patriarcal

⁴⁰ la abolición de cualquier tipo de dicotomía

throughout. Indeed, there is a strongly essentialist current in the novel, and critics working on Belli, including Fernández, often fail to distinguish sex and gender. This tends to result in troubling claims, for example, that the novel does not deny the “feminine body ... nor characteristics which pertain to its *gender* such as maternity, its connection with nature, emotions” (Lafita Fernández 266) [my emphasis],⁴¹ with these aspects of course relating to (an interpretation of) biological sex, rather than socially constructed gender. Indeed, no critic has commented on the tension that arises from the novel’s assertion of impactful sexual difference, *and also* of the socially constructed nature of gender roles and behaviours. This is a tendency that Barbas-Rhoden has identified in Belli’s other prose, which “both reflects and challenges gender stereotypes” (81). Barbas-Rhoden does not, however, fully examine the implications of this rejection *and* reinforcement of the traditionally ‘feminine’. This study will therefore enrich the existing body of work on female identity in Belli’s novels by unpicking, then contextualising, the contradiction in her representation of sex and gender that has been not yet been addressed by critics.

Agreements with previous criticism will be underlined in the discussion, with Large and Postema’s work on eroticism and nature particularly relevant to the portrayal of female identity. Further disagreements will also be drawn out, and in particular, this chapter will bring into the question the feminist ‘plurality’ which Castro Solano (26), Roussou (ii) and Barrionuevo attribute to the novel, with Barrionuevo, for example,

⁴¹ cuerpo femenino ... ni las características que son propias del género como la maternidad, su contacto con la naturaleza, los sentimientos

asserting that in the text “the feminine world is heterogeneous and complex” (114).⁴²

Here, differences between women will be accounted for, but it will be argued that these are secondary to the unified, and even potentially exclusionary, vision of womanhood which emerges from the novel.

Moreover, this study will be the first to consider how the novel interacts with trends in feminist utopianism, a key aspect of the novel which has so far been overlooked. It will also break new ground through its attention to Belli’s literary technique. To date, her prose has not been subject to detailed stylistic study, although Arturo Arias (322) and Linda Crafts’ research on her early novels does touch on her use of voice and focalisation, with Craft highlighting a predominance of “indirect free style” (171). The critical linguistic analysis of narrative viewpoint undertaken in this chapter will therefore represent the first substantial treatment of Belli’s use of this important narrative structure, and will contribute significantly to the understanding of her literary style.

⁴² el mundo femenino es heterogéneo y complejo

2.2 Analysis

2.2.1 *Mujer/Woman*

The aim of this section is to detail how female identity is represented in the novel, through an analysis of narrative point of view. In some regards, ideas of femininity in *El país de las mujeres* are not hard to retrieve, because it is a novel which wears its politics on its sleeve. The reformative mission of the *Partido de la Izquierda Erótica* resounds loudly and clearly from the pages, and their views on womanhood are often delineated explicitly. With this in mind, point of view on the ideological plane will be the most important aspect for studying how the novel represents femininity and sexual difference. Yet beyond these surface indicators, the critical linguistic approach enriches the understanding of this portrayal, as it provides means for opening up implicit meanings created through transitivity choices and spatiotemporal positioning.

To clarify how the novel negotiates ideological perspectives on womanhood, however, it will first be necessary to analyse the relationship between narrator and characters in the novel. This study of psychological perspective will allow us to understand whose ideological viewpoints are presented, how they are mediated, and whether they are authorised and sanctioned in narrative discourse.

2.2.1.1 Psychological Point of View

Aside from two homodiegetic chapters towards the end of the novel from Viviana and PIE member Juana, and 13 short “historical materials” chapters which consist of

(pseudo)testimonial documents such as emails, interview transcripts, and newspaper articles, a considerable majority of the novel (39 out of 54 chapters) is narrated by a heterodiegetic narrative agent. In Paul Simpson's schema of psychological viewpoint, the narrator evident in these 39 chapters belongs to category 'B', defined as "an invisible, 'dis-embodied', non-participating narrator" (*Ideology* 55). This narratorial position is most evident in the locative expressions which tend to open each chapter. For example, "José de la Aritmética went back to his neighbourhood pushing the chiller bin for his *raspados*, leaving a trail of melted ice behind him" (27), or "With a smile, Leticia Montero got up from the sofa where she was watching television" (249).⁴³ These statements serve to establish the narrator with a distinct (retrospective) temporal perspective to the *fabula*, an undefined spatial location within the scene, and a particular psychological perspective separate from the characters who, in these examples, are the objects of focalisation. Also, there is reason to believe that the identity of the narrative agent remains stable throughout these 39 chapters, given the continuity of reference. For example, in the chapter "Pisapapeles" [Paperweight] which narrates one of Viviana's memories, the carbon bonds scheme is outlined over two pages (194-95). The next chapter is reflected through another PIE member, Rebeca, and discusses PIE's other economic policies, including a passing mention of carbon bonds: "with these three projects, as well as the oxygen one, they were sufficiently provided for" (204).⁴⁴ The inclusion of information from a previous chapter as a known referent in the next

⁴³ José de la Aritmética regresó a su barrio empujando su carrito de vender raspados, dejando a su paso el rastro de agua del hielo derretido. / Leticia Montero se levantó con una sonrisa del sofá donde veía la televisión.

⁴⁴ Con esos tres proyectos, más el del oxígeno, estaban provistas de lo suficiente

demonstrates continuity between narrator and narratee in their shared knowledge of the story-world. This is significant because it indicates a single, omniscient narrative agent is responsible for organising the story and framing characters within their overarching narrative discourse.

Simpson's next criteria for analysing the psychological viewpoint of a category B narrator is whether they are functioning in "narratorial" (N) or "reflector" (R) mode (for further detail see section 1.3.4.2 or Glossary). The examples above, from the beginning of chapters, show the narrator in B(N) mode, that is, external to the consciousness of any character. However, a prominent feature of *El país* is the frequent and sustained periods of narration in "reflector" mode. This is Simpson's B(R) category where the narrator moves, "into the active mind of a particular character" (*Ideology* 55). With the layering of perspectives entailed in B(R) mode, the structure of point of view becomes more complex. In narratorial mode, the worldview implicit in evaluative comments and transitivity structures belongs to the narrator, as does the attitude relayed through positive, neutral or negative modality. However, when the narrator "reflects" or gives voice to the thoughts, perceptions and feelings of a character, they are in effect adopting their psychological and ideological perspectives. For example, this transition between B(N) and B(R) modes is evident at the beginning of a chapter focalised with Viviana:

Viviana looked at the mug. It had the logo of her programme A Bit of Everything on it. It said:

A BIT
OF EVERYTHING

over two lines with her name around the edge: VIVIANA SANSÓN. Shame not to find coffee in the mug. She breathed in to imagine the smell of so many mornings in her life. (89)⁴⁵

The extract opens with a heterodiegetic narrator, with a distinct temporal perspective, focussing the narrative *on* a character, and then *with* her as the narrator looks over her shoulder to focalise the object she is looking at. Then, with “shame not to find coffee in the mug”, there appears to be an intrusion, or reflection, of Viviana’s thoughts; her psychology and worldview. Of course, opinions such as these are expressed through voice – that is, simply put, word and syntax choices – and, as such, narration in “reflector” mode is often characterised by the vocal ambiguity of free indirect discourse (FID, see Glossary for further detail). Due to its mix of features, FID is often read as the composite voice of the narrator and character. Indeed, in this example, the use of the infinitive “encontrar” [to find] rather than a past tense such as “no había café” [there was no coffee], clouds the temporal perspective of the sentence. It could stem both from the narrator’s retrospective position, or the character’s position in the temporal present of the story. This opens the door to an interpretation of the sentence as free direct discourse (FDD); the character’s voice alone, which would slip into category A, homodiegetic, mode. However, given its location surrounded by narratorial discourse, a reading of the statement as the narrator’s voice reporting the character’s thought seems more

⁴⁵ Viviana miró la taza. Tenía el emblema de su programa *Un poco de todo*. Decía:
UN POCO
DE TODO

en dos renglones y a todo el derredor su nombre: VIVIANA SANSÓN. Lástima no encontrar café en la taza. Aspiró para imaginar el aroma de tantas mañanas de su vida.

convincing. Nonetheless, in this case, although it seems clear that the opinion belongs to the character, there remains a certain, characteristic, vocal ambiguity.

At other times in *El país*, B(R) mode leads to focal ambiguity, that is, uncertainty over whether the narrator or the character is the source of the opinions and attitude and thus ideological and psychological viewpoints expressed. This is the case in a section from a chapter reflected through the character Martina:

With Eva and Rebeca, she had worked on a dictionary that would substitute the masculine “o” for the neutral “e”. So “todos” would be “todes”, “ricos”, “riques”, “cuanto”, “cuante”.

It didn't sound bad. They would often use it in official communications, aware that it was a transformation that would take a long time. (44) [emphasis mine]⁴⁶

Here, in narratorial discourse, an opinion is expressed: “it didn't sound bad”. This type of evaluative judgement is representative of what Simpson classifies as “positive” modal shading (*Ideology* 55). Cumulatively, positive shading creates the sense of a personality, a consciousness which is experiencing and evaluating the world. In the example above this opinion appears to be expressed in the narrator's voice, due to the use of the imperfect tense, “oía” [was sounding], placing the source as the narrator's temporal perspective rather than the character's. However, whether this judgement has been made by the narrator (B(N)+ve), or is a reflection of the character's (B(R)+ve) is somewhat ambiguous. This extract falls within a longer passage of what could be described as a

⁴⁶ Con Eva y Rebeca habían trabajado un léxico que sustituiría la "o" por "e". Así "todos" sería "todes", "ricos", "riques", "cuanto", "cuante".

No se oía mal. Lo usaban a menudo en las comunicaciones oficiales, conscientes de que era una transformación que llevaría largo tiempo

stream of *reported* consciousness. The chapter starts by placing Martina in a bathroom at the hospital where she has come to visit the injured Viviana, before moving to an internal view of the character's thoughts and feelings, B(R) mode:

In the bathroom, at that moment, Martina missed the little lake beside the Bed and Breakfast she had managed in faraway New Zealand, the sheep, the hiking, the silence. She regretted coming back to Faguas, having signed up to PIE's mission. Shit, how did I let Viviana convince me? Coward, she scolded herself. (43)⁴⁷

The use of the preterite (simple past) tense in “missed” [extrañó] and “regretted” [arrepintió], rather than the imperfect, along with the deictic anchor of “at that moment”, highlights that these are the punctual, specific thoughts the character is experiencing in (pseudo)real time, rather than generalised feelings that the narrator is summarising. The evaluative diminutive suffix “lag-*uito*” [lake-little] suggests this is Martina's expression, and indicates FID. Moreover, the verbatim free direct discourse (“Shit, how...”) and direct discourse (“Coward ...”) of the following sentences serves to mark the ‘authenticity’ of the thoughts as direct from the character, rather than filtered by the narrator. The next paragraphs then link together logically in a stream of thought moving from a comparison of Faguas and New Zealand, to the policies PIE have tried to instate in Faguas, before finishing with the interruption of a knock on the bathroom door. Together, these elements encourage a reading of the intervening passages as a continuing internal view of Martina's thoughts and feelings – the reflection of her

⁴⁷ En el baño, en ese momento, Martina extrañó el laguito al lado de su negocio de *bed and breakfast* en la lejana Nueva Zelandia, las ovejas, las caminatas, el silencio. Se arrepintió de regresar a Faguas, de embarcarse en la aventura del PIE. Mierda, ¿cómo dejé que Viviana me convenciera? Cobarde, se reprendió.

psychology and worldview. Thus, whether “it didn’t sound bad”, although arguably in the narrator’s voice, is the judgement of the narrator or character is not unequivocal. Put another way, throughout most of the passage the narrator orients the spatiotemporal perspective and therefore appears as the source of the words. However, because the chapter is set up to imply that it is faithfully reflecting the character’s thoughts in succession, what the words are expressing (their attitudinal and ideological content) seems attributable to the character. In terms of relationship between the character and the narrator therefore, this strategy of stream of *reported* consciousness, promotes an interpretation that the narrator either agrees, coincides ideologically, with the character, *or* at least the narrator does not intervene, explicitly, in their presentation of the characters’ perspectives. Thus, for the most part, in *El país de las mujeres* the narrative agent does not distance themselves from the character by contesting their attitudes or opinions, rather, through vocal and focal ambiguity, they step so firmly into the shoes of the character that ideological and psychological perspectives become blurred and indistinguishable.

Interestingly though, chapters reflected through characters who oppose PIE and their policies are also included, and ostensibly mediated in a similar way. For example, three chapters exploit the same extended B(R) narration with Leticia Montero, the wife of the opposition candidate who plots to assassinate Viviana. Leticia is highly critical of PIE, yet her opinions are given voice within the narrative without being *explicitly* undermined by narratorial comment. Her worldview is revealed through evaluative statements, such as describing PIE’s policies as “disparatadas” (53) [ridiculous] and the

fact that they managed to come to power was “madness. Collective madness” (54).⁴⁸ To a degree, therefore, *El país* allows dissenting voices to be heard. However, on balance it appears as a more tokenistic inclusion of other perspectives, than a veritable tendency to polyvalence. For instance, although the narrative agent does not distance themselves explicitly from PIE’s ideology, the legitimacy of Leticia’s views *are* undermined by ironic juxtaposition. For example, a lengthy passage detailing her resentment of the monotony of her domestic situation and frustration with how her husband treats her, is quickly followed by her refusal to fall into the “snares of feminism” (191).⁴⁹ This hasty denial of feminism placed beside the very conditions that Faguan feminism combats in the story, undercuts the validity of Leticia’s opinion. Or, in another chapter, Leticia lists off the policies that she has just branded “ridiculous” as including “compulsory literacy classes for illiterate women” and “workshops in ‘power and respect’ for domestic violence victims” as if these were self-evidently negative initiatives (54).⁵⁰ Given that these programmes would generally be considered positive social contributions, Leticia’s off-hand labelling of them as crazy emerges as unfounded. Thus, although the narrative voice does not insert any independent assessment of Leticia, the structuring and partial representation of her perspective leads to it appearing unjustified and contradictory.

Moreover, in terms of how the narrative discourse is weighted and framed, the ideological perspectives of Viviana and PIE dominate. For example, only 4, fairly short, chapters are reflected through a conflicting standpoint, whereas the remaining 35

⁴⁸ Era la locura. Una locura colectiva

⁴⁹ las trampas del feminismo

⁵⁰ la alfabetización obligatoria para las mujeres analfabetas / los talleres de "respeto y poder" para las parejas víctimas de violencia doméstica

chapters present perspectives from PIE members or their supporters. What's more, the novel is bookended by Viviana's psychological perspective. The first chapter opens with narrative focalised with her, and the novel ends with her waking up and speaking in the first person, addressing the narratee in the present tense to let them know "our happy-ism has worked" (276).⁵¹ In this way, she is privileged with having the final, defining, word. Chapters focalised with Viviana also, more or less, alternate with chapters focalised with other characters. Her point of view therefore establishes the dominant frame within which other perspectives are understood. Consequently, although other voices are given space, they remain ultimately subordinate to the main ideological thrust of the novel.

So, from the above discussion, what can we say about the narrative agent? For most of the narrative, there is a single, consistent category B heterodiegetic narrator, who organises content and reflects characters' thoughts, attitudes and worldviews. The narrator's own personality and autonomous ideology, however, become somewhat obscured as they act as a chameleon: changing their 'colouring' or subjective perspective to match the characters'. Indeed, there is, usually, minimal distortion in how the narrator reflects back characters' psychology, and so characterising elements such as modality appear to be the property of character rather than narrator. Yet, despite the narrator's latent personality, it was shown that the narrator is not impartial. They provide significantly more floorspace to PIE and Viviana, and do not undermine their perspectives. Other viewpoints, such as Leticia's, are given voice but are restricted and

⁵¹ nuestro "felicismo" ha funcionado

ironically distanced. This tactic effectively lends the text a stronger argumentative stance, because it accounts for potential opposition to PIE and their policies, and diffuses it. Overall, therefore, a dominant ideological stance can be discerned through the quantitative and qualitative mediation of characters' psychology and worldview. These dominant views, that are sanctioned and amplified in narratorial discourse, are those of Viviana and *El Partido de la Izquierda Erótica*.

It is important to establish the nature of the relationship between narrator and character ideology and psychology in the novel: to understand whose viewpoints are presented and whether they are undermined or promoted in the narration. Thus, when analysing views on the nature of womanhood and the collective, it is clear who they can be attributed to and whether they form part of the dominant ethos of the novel.

2.2.1.2 Ideological Point of View

It will be argued that there are two conflicting portrayals of femininity in *El país de las mujeres*, both of which stem from PIE's ideological perspective. First, evidence will be provided to support a reading of female identity as an innate correlate of biological sex, and as characterised as maternal, caring, erotic, and instinctual. However, another reading will then be proposed which foregrounds how the novel simultaneously promotes femininity as a constructed concept. Contextualisation of this double vision of femininity, however, will be reserved until the discussion section 2.4.1, when it will be

understood in relation to the Nicaraguan women's movement and parallels drawn with feminist discourses from Europe and the US.

2.2.1.2.1 Universal Difference

As noted, *El país* is a novel filled with opinions and ideas, many of which are about 'woman', and the characteristics of this figure. One of the ways these notions are expressed is through generic sentences. Generic sentences are (unmodalised) categorical assertions which present their content as a timeless and universal truth (for further detail see Glossary). Often, examples in linguistic textbooks come from the sciences, such as "oil floats on water" or "dogs have four legs" (Michaelis 232; Tessler and Goodman 79). Although the 'truth' of such claims can still be contested, they tend to represent consensus views. However, this structure can also be employed to represent particular beliefs or opinions as universal 'facts'. For example, "volcanic eruptions in Nicaragua occur on Tuesdays". It is this exploitation of the grammar of generic statement to gain authority, masking a particular view of the world as undisputed fact, that is interesting for literary study.

In *El país*, there are several generics which focus on "mujer" [woman] as a coherent totality. In English, use of the singular "woman" to refer to the whole class of women is nowadays highly marked to the extent that it can read as a parody. However, in a contrastive analysis of Spanish and English, Lavid et al. (using the example of *mujer/mujeres* [woman/women]) observed that whilst it is more common to use the

plural in Spanish, the singular is still acceptable and “typical of a formal and academic style” (382). Thus, although references to the undivided group “la mujer” or a representative of this group “una mujer” echo a formal, authoritative, register, they are not as defamiliarising as they are in English. Yet, on a conceptual level, it does create the idea of ‘woman’ as a whole and indivisible entity. Thus, in the very use of singular generics, such as “woman is a creature of habit” (71) or “a woman’s body doesn’t respond or open when handled roughly” (67),⁵² *El país* begins to build an ideological view of female identity as unified and universal. These statements fall in sections of stream of *reported* consciousness, reflected through the character Viviana, and can be interpreted as her opinions, albeit ones which are uncontested and therefore sanctioned within narratorial discourse.

Further generic statements on shared female experience include those when Viviana is reflecting on the situation of women in Faguas:

Insecurity, which turned the tendency to bow to male authority into a compulsion, seemed to be imprinted in the female psyche, like alcoholism in the children of alcoholics (153)

and

Even when in equal employment, woman wore heels of clay, fragile and likely to crack. (197)⁵³

Here, the statements are in the past tense, indicating that these were not timeless or inevitable behaviours but specific to circumstance. This implies the origins of alleged

⁵² La mujer es un animal de costumbres / un cuerpo de mujer no responde ni se abre ante la rudeza

⁵³ La inseguridad que convertía en compulsión la tendencia a ceder ante la autoridad masculina parecía estar impresa en la psiquis femenina, como el alcoholismo en los hijos de alcohólicos / Aun en posiciones de igualdad, la mujer era la de los tacones de barro, frágiles y proclives a quebrarse.

female insecurity and competitiveness are more sociological than innate. Nonetheless, the grammar universalises them, positing them as the determined outcomes for the whole of the gender. The use of generic statements on “woman” and the body, behaviour and experience of this unified entity therefore aid in establishing an ethics of female character as universal.

Moreover, the borderlines between the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘man’ are sharply drawn in the novel. This is relevant to how women are conceived as a group and collective solidarity is established, as well as to the nature of female identity, given that ‘woman’ as a category is defined through its difference from ‘man’. Indeed, sex-polar language conceives men and women as two opposing teams, an “us” and a “them”, for example, in conversation with her colleagues Viviana states:

Men have had their turn. They alone have led the world of business and politics. They have shown what they are capable of by themselves. We have always been in their shadow or by their side. We deserve to have our turn. (156)⁵⁴

This paints an image of male team which must stand aside for the female team. Due to the extent of B(R) narration with Viviana and the other PIE members, the inclusive “nosotras” [us/we (f)] of shared womanhood dominates much of the text. Other instances, in Viviana’s dialogue, include: “we have let ourselves be blamed for being women” (101), and “confidence in ourselves ... it’s the hardest battle for us women”

⁵⁴ Los hombres la han tenido. Han dirigido solos el mundo de los negocios, de la política. Han probado de lo que son capaces por sí mismos. Nosotras siempre hemos estado a su sombra o a su lado. Nos merecemos hacer la prueba.

(175).⁵⁵ “We” or “Us” in these contexts is not limited exclusively to the characters in the scene, but intended to include all women in Faguas. This binary divide is also affirmed in PIE’s manifesto, one of the “historical materials” included midway through the novel and a key site where their worldview is expounded. Here again we see a partitioning of “los hombres” [the men] (who have failed), and “las mujeres” [the women] (who must now step up):

Men have governed with minimal involvement from women ... their management has been a failure ... We have put up with men that speak well and others that speak badly; fat, thin, old, young ... None of them have been able to run things properly, and us, the women, we are fed up of dealing with the mess ... to save this rundown country we women must act (109-10)⁵⁶

Personal pronouns, verb tense and conjugations are key linguistic resources in creating spatiotemporal viewpoint. In the manifesto, the deictic centre, the source point in relation to which events and characters are positioned, forms around the “we” of first person plural verb forms *hemos/estamos/tenemos* [we have/are/must] and the pronoun *nosotras* [we (f)] in a temporal present which continues to be affected by past bad governance. This temporal relation is expressed through the present tense *estamos*, *tenemos* [we are, we must] and repeated present perfect *han gobernado*, *hemos sufrido*, *ha podido* [have governed, have suffered, have been able], a verb tense which emphasises the continuity of past into present. Given the emphatic addition of “nosotras,

⁵⁵ Nos hemos dejado culpabilizar por ser mujeres / Confianza en nosotras mismas. ... Esa es la batalla más ardua para nosotras las mujeres

⁵⁶ los hombres han gobernado con mínima participación de las mujeres ... la gestión de ellos la que ha sido un fracaso ... Hemos sufrido hombres que hablaban bien y otros que hablaban mal; gordos, flacos, viejos y jóvenes ... Ninguno de ellos ha podido encontrarle el modo a las cosas y nosotras, las mujeres, ya estamos cansadas de pagar los platos rotos ... para salvar este país las mujeres tenemos que actuar

las mujeres” [us, the women] and that *ellos* [they] is third person closed reference, it implies that *all* women are encompassed within the collective “we”. In this way, with the gendered “we”, the manifesto addresses a female audience, extending the deictic centre to incorporate the narratee/reader and position them as a woman. Of course, whether the reader accepts or rejects this positioning will depend on whether they can identify with this vision of “woman”, or not. What’s more, the “we” becomes representative, a voice which, through its enlarged reference, speaks for the whole. PIE speak not as individuals, but for the entirety of their sex. In the novel, the recurrent plural subject positions PIE as the voice of Faguan women, and creates women as a coherent and unified group.

There is also clear antagonism in the representation of a male/female divide. This is particularly clear in a passage which deals with gender relations in the early days of the PIE government (152-53, reproduced and translated in Appendix 2). An analysis of the transitivity structures used here reveals a predominance of material and causative processes with the collective “los hombres” [men] or male stand-ins such as “their comments” or “male intellect” positioned as actors and agents which either impede women “no dejaban volar” [did not let fly] or place women as the recipient or goal of men’s actions. These structures posit the relationship between the sexes as a unidirectional one of men impacting on women and women resisting or defending themselves.

la realidad de siglos	se	les	venía encima
The reality of centuries		them (women)	came on top [was bearing down on]
actor		recipient	Process: material

los hombres	no dejaban	volar	la iniciativa femenina
the men	would not let	fly	female initiative
agent	Process: causative	Pr: material	actor

en las reuniones	sus comentarios	caían	como baldes de agua fría
in meetings	their comments (m)	would fall	like buckets of cold water
circ:loc	actor	Process: material	Circ: manner

[ellos]	Las	achicaban
They (men's comments)	them (women)	would shrink
Actor	Goal	Process: material

[ellos]	hacían que	[ellas]	se cerraran	como anémonas asustadas
They (men's comments)	would make	them (women)	close themselves up	like frightened anemones
Agent	Pr: causative	Actor	Pr: material	Circ: manner

Si bien	ellas	no se dejaban	apabullar	por	la sapiencia masculina
Even if	They (f)	did not let themselves	be crushed	by	male intellect
	agent / goal	Pr: causative	Pr: material		actor

ellas	se vieron forzadas	a reducir	la longitud de sus horizontes
they (f)	saw themselves forced	to reduce	their horizons
actor	Pr: causative	Pr:material	Goal

It is striking that many of these phrases employ language figuratively. That is, they use the tangible language of physical actions “apabullar” [crush], “cerrarse” [close up], “achicar” [shrink], “caer” [fall], “volar” [fly], “venir encima” [come on top], to express intangible interpersonal experience. This renders male dominance as powerful and substantial, emphasising its material impact. Even though this paragraph is only referring to a specific period at the beginning of Viviana’s government, it does create an image of the gender relations as enduringly hierarchical with women repeatedly

subjected to men's actions. The permanency of this situation is accentuated through the use of the imperfect tense which indicates the habitual nature of events: for example, *hacían* [they would make], *las achicaban* [they would shrink them], *caían* [would fall] and so on. In addition, the reflexive "ellas se vieron forzadas" [they saw themselves forced], is a supervision process – where the agency is obscured and the process as presented as something that "just happens" (Simpson *Ideology* 89). With similar effect, phrases such as, "la realidad de siglos..." [the reality of centuries...], portray processes as 'events' rather than 'actions' by placing an inanimate concept in the instigating role. These structures, which attribute causality to abstract or elided entities, generate a sense of inevitability in the portrayal of gender relations making them seem pre-determined and unavoidable.

Furthermore, in this passage, it is not always the *hombres* [men] themselves who are seen to act. Rather, gendered traits such as "masculine intellect" take on agency. This tendency is repeated at other points in the novel, for example "the macho gaze to weigh on them" (196) or "to give in to male authority" (153).⁵⁷ By substituting a man's or a group of men's agency with qualities allegedly pertaining to the whole gender, it amplifies their influence into a greater, more pervasive force than which could be exerted by individuals. Moreover, by employing characteristics to metonymically stand-in for men, these structures equate men to the traits. It ties all men to *machismo*, authority, intellect and so on. Rather than the qualities simply serving to characterise, in

⁵⁷ el ojo del macho para sopesarlas / ceder ante la autoridad masculina

this passage they replace men and so men, all men, *become* the behaviour. Here, male identity is inherently intellectual, *machista*, authoritative.

So, what then of the other half of this divide: female identity? It may seem from the above example that women are doomed to occupy a position on the receiving end of male aggression. However, women in the passage are not depicted as helpless, their resistance is documented, (“they did not let themselves be crushed”), and Viviana closes the scene by ordering the men to comply “don’t try to tell us what to do; watch, help and learn.” (153).⁵⁸ These imperatives rhetorically position men as subordinate, watching (rather than demonstrating), helping (not leading), learning (not teaching). Their communicative force is supported by the rhythm created by three, three-syllable words each with the middle syllable accented: *observen* [watch], *ayuden* [help], *aprendan* [learn], which incidentally also works well in English with the one-syllable translations. Indeed, although women’s victimhood at the hands of men is explored in the text,⁵⁹ it is also challenged by PIE policies, and by counter-narratives of female identity which focus on women’s strengths and contributions. These positive aspects of femininity are linked to traditional roles and the female body in the novel. In particular, recurrent metaphors function in the text to establish conceptual links between women in general, the *Partido del Izquierda Erótica* specifically, and the acts of cleaning, caring, and mothering. The party’s policies hinge on a promise to “clean up” the country, and the comparison of women caring for the country as a mother cares for her child or her house

⁵⁸ ellas no se dejaban apabullar / no intenten dirigirnos; observen, ayuden y aprendan.

⁵⁹ In the stories of male on female exploitation and abuse that Viviana uncovers, and that a PIE member Patricia has experienced, as well as the domestic violence that another character, Ernestina, is subjected to.

form a leitmotif weaving through the novel. When she first suggests the political enterprise, Viviana states that

I'm picturing a party that proposes to give to the country what a mother gives her child, care for it like a woman cares for her house; a 'maternal' party. (101)⁶⁰

PIE take up this theme and in their manifesto assert that, "we women must act and restore order to the dirty and rundown house that is our homeland", and "we promise to clean this country, brush it, mop it, dust it down, and wash off the mud until it shines in all its splendour" (110).⁶¹ As part of their publicity, they spread this "feminine ethics of care" (159) through messages on household products and in gendered spaces such as women's fitting rooms, including one inside soap boxes proclaiming: "If we don't clean up corruption, who else is going to do it? Take the first step, join with PIE" (120).⁶² In targeting male voters, they promote the mothering aspect of their proposal. Viviana, when outlining her ideas for the government, affirms that the country needs "someone to soothe it, someone to spoil it, someone to treat it well: a 'yummy mummy'" (101)⁶³ and that this is what PIE should offer men. The success of the dissemination of this metaphor is attested in the direct discourse of José de la Aritmética. José was an eye-witness to the assassination attempt and helps the government to uncover the plot to attack the President. He also serves in the text as an everyman, representing the voice of the people

⁶⁰ Yo imagino un partido que proponga darle al país lo que una madre al hijo, cuidarlo como una mujer cuida su casa; un partido "maternal"

⁶¹ las mujeres tenemos que actuar y poner orden a esta casa destartalada y sucia que es nuestra patria / prometemos limpiar este país, barrerlo, lampacearlo, sacudirlo y lavarle el lodo hasta que brille en todo su esplendor

⁶² ética femenina de cuidado / Adentro del jabón en polvo: Si nosotras no limpiamos la corrupción, ¿quién lo va a hacer? Da el primer paso, veníte con el PIE

⁶³ Si hay algo que necesita este país es quién lo arrulle, quién lo mime, quién lo trate bien: una 'mamacita'

both for PIE and for the reader. In these examples, he shares his opinion on PIE's analogy of care and mothering, "I liked the idea that you were going to mother all those in need" (19-20) and "you were offering what we all needed: a mother's care" (222).⁶⁴ In the framework of this metaphor, PIE (*as women*) are to the country and the population, what a mother or housewife is to the home and her children. The analogy overlays the role of housewife onto women, the home onto the country, and children onto the population. A cognitive approach to metaphor, developed by linguist and philosopher George Lakoff amongst others, maintains that "the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another" (Lakoff 203). That is, metaphors involve "mapping" one concept onto another; to understand one thing in a relationship of correspondence to another. In the case of PIE's promises to mother the citizens and clean up the country, we are dealing with a type of metaphor that Gerard Steen labels a "deliberate metaphor" (17). Deliberate metaphors are used purposefully, and have "a linguistic and rhetorical structure of comparison that is functional" (*ibid*). Therefore, unlike some figurative language uses and conventional metaphors which are not necessarily operational, deliberate metaphors prompt the active mapping of one concept onto another. Readers conceive one concept through another, and the fusion of these two notions informs their understanding of the former (Lakoff 230). In this way, the qualities associated with the target domain in a metaphor (housewife, home, children) are imbued into the source domain (women, the country, the citizens). Thus, women as a whole are conceived in terms of the attributes

⁶⁴ me gustó esa idea de que iban a ser las madres de todos los necesitados / ofrecieron eso que todos necesitamos: el cuidado de la madre

attached to a housewife such as caring, supportive, self-effacing, and so on. In this metaphor, women become, rhetorically, bound to the position of housewife. Similarly, citizens are conceived as children and are positioned as in need of looking after, and the country becomes conceived as a home and takes on those qualities, with social relations equating to familial relations, the household budget to GDP, and so on. Clearly, there will be subjective differences between the nature of this mapping. Nonetheless, the cumulative effect of these repeated and well-defined metaphors of women as carers and housekeepers is to reinforce the traditionally 'feminine' as female, and bind gender to sex. As such, they add to the portrayal of sexual difference as biologically founded and non-arbitrary. However, it is worth noting that these metaphors also act to revalue these cultural ideals of womanhood as useful beyond the domestic sphere. Viviana argues that qualities such as "sensitivity, emotivity" have been "disparaged" (101),⁶⁵ and indeed predominant political discourse would conceive these traits as weaknesses, favouring instead a rhetoric of defence, stability, and strength.⁶⁶ By integrating characteristics that have been previously excluded from public discourses into social policy, PIE champion a re-evaluation of attitudes to both politics and the traditionally 'feminine'.

Continuing with the exploration of the ideological plane of point of view, attention now turns to the connections established between women, nature, instinct, the

⁶⁵ la sensibilidad, la emotividad / desprestigiada

⁶⁶ In Nicaragua, see for example Daniel Ortega's slogan "las calles son del pueblo, y el pueblo debe defenderlas" (the streets belong to the people, and the people must defend them) or a 2018 speech which speaks of "nuestro esfuerzo" [our strength] and that "este pueblo no se rendirá jamás" [the people will never surrender]. Ortega, Daniel. "Batalla Por La Paz." *La voz del Sandinismo* <https://www.lavozdelsandinismo.com/nicaragua/2018-07-07/presidente-comandante-daniel-en-caminata-por-la-seguridad-y-la-paz-07-07-2018-texto-integro/>. Accessed 27 April 2019.

body, and eroticism. In the novel, these notions are interwoven in a web which provides the conceptual fabric of female identity.

In *El país*, the female body is portrayed as a life-giving site of potency and potential, not just in terms of self-realisation, but placed in relation to politics and the social. For example, when the characters deliver public speeches in the novel, they stand on a platform encircled by supporters. The circle becomes a motif of their campaign and is associated with the feminine. The narrator notes, echoing Viviana's words, that:

the circle was an embrace ... and the magic word of her administration was T-O-U-C-H; everyone in contact: touching one another, feeling one another. The circle was equality, participation, the maternal, feminine womb (14)⁶⁷

Here, physicality takes on female form, and femininity equates to the corporeal. In another example, Viviana's physical features are enumerated with a focus on her large breasts, and her attitude to them is described as follows:

she ended up thinking that she should celebrate them and turn them into a symbol of her commitment to provide the people of the country with the rivers of milk and honey that the men's mismanagement had denied them (15)⁶⁸

The female body becomes a signifier for plenitude, sustenance, and social power. In both examples female embodiment exceeds the borders of the individual into intersubjective communication and communal identity. In one sense this could be seen as passing ownership of the female body into the hands of society, however it also

⁶⁷ El círculo era un abrazo ... y la palabra mágica de su administración era C O N T A C T O; todos en contacto: tocarse, sentirse. El círculo era la igualdad, la participación, el vientre materno, femenino.

⁶⁸ Terminó pensando que debía celebrarlas y convertirlas en sinónimo del compromiso de darle a la población de aquel país los ríos de leche y miel que el mal manejo de los hombres le había escatimado

serves to break the public/private binary and destigmatise and exult female corporeality as positive and powerful. Also, in relation to the body, Sophie Large's study on eroticism in *El país* found that there were two forms of erotic energy evident in the text in binary relation. Again, it is the male/female divide that determines this difference. For Large, the eroticism attributed to female characters and PIE is creative both in a reproductive and imaginative sense (101), whereas this is contrasted with "bestial sexuality, marked with a negative and masculine seal" (99).⁶⁹ The link between female sexuality and life is highlighted by exposing the etymology of 'erotic'. The *Partido de la Izquierda Erótica* manifesto explains why they chose their name:

We are erotic because *Eros* means LIFE, which is the most important thing we have and we women have not only always responsible for giving life, but also with conserving it and caring for it. (110)⁷⁰

In this example, women are the possessors of life, it is something that "we have", and the tie between sexuality and procreation is also underlined. What's more, PIE's name entails an explicit intertextual link to the poetry of Guatemalan writer, Ana María Rodas, who published a volume of *Poemas de la Izquierda Erótica* in 1973.⁷¹ This reference is discussed in the text with one of the PIE members, quoting a line from a Rodas poem: "I make love and then / I talk about it" (102).⁷² This association functions to place PIE and their policies firmly within the current of feminist writing in Central America (including

⁶⁹ l'erotisme créatif / la sexualité bestiale, marquée d'un sceau négative et masculine

⁷⁰ Somos eróticas porque *Eros* quiere decir VIDA, que es lo mas importante que tenemos y porque las mujeres no solo hemos estado desde siempre encargadas de darla, sino también de conservarla y cuidarla.

⁷¹ Belli also notes in the acknowledgements at the end of the novel that PIE was the name of a real group of women who used to meet up in the 1980s to discuss the situation of women in the country and support one another (277). It thus has a metafictional link as well.

⁷² Hago el amor y después / lo cuento

Belli's poetry) which used revelation and provocation as a strategy to liberate women, and which paints eroticism as a creative force. Moreover, male sexuality, outside of Viviana's consensual relationships, is depicted as exploitative, violent and harmful. This is evident in Patricia's rape and sexual slavery (135-37), the sex-trafficking ring that Viviana exposes (95), and the violence in Ernestina's marriage (260). Large interprets the narrative as staging a battle of positive female eroticism versus negative male sexuality (103). Male sexuality, embodied by testosterone levels, by dint of the magical intervention of the volcano, is subdued. This therefore allows female, life-giving, creative, erotic space to flourish. In this way, the dichotomous sexual schema stems from a biological and innate basis in the text.

Another way femininity and the physical are approximated is through the elaboration of a 'female' instinct at various points in the narrative (including 126, 204, 176). Many of Viviana's decisions, personally and politically, are taken based on what she calls her "infallible intuitions" (162).⁷³ For example, Viviana trusts Patricia because she "sensed" [intuyó] she was not lying (91), and decides to remove men from civil service because:

My body tells me to. And I admit it: I'm acting as a woman, listening to a voice that doesn't come from reason, rather from an overall feeling, from what someone called *emotional intelligence* (175)⁷⁴

⁷³ intuiciones infalibles

⁷⁴ el cuerpo me lo dice. Y te lo admito: estoy actuando como mujer, oyendo una voz que no me viene de la razón, sino de una percepción del todo, de lo que no sé quién llamó *inteligencia emocional*

In this case, instinct is linked to ‘woman’, and the same is true for other examples which refer to intuition as “maternal” (126), and the way a male character exhibits “an almost feminine intuition” (67)⁷⁵ implying the sexed nature of the attribute. The text therefore reinforces a two-way connection between women and bodily perception that evades rationalisation. The link between women and the body, as opposed to men and rationality, is of course a dualistic characterisation which has been attributed to the sexes for centuries. Moreover, one which has been used to exclude and discriminate against women. Yet, promoting non-rational experience as a political tool and bringing the body into the public sphere does serve to revalue and recuperate these disparaged properties.

Another thread woven through the woman/instinct/body/eroticism/life matrix in *El país* is nature. In his 2015 article on ecological undercurrents in the novel, Joel Postema identifies a “substantive” link between “the female body and landscape” (4), a well-established trope in Latin American writing.⁷⁶ He finds that Viviana’s breasts are compared to “volcancitos” [little volcanos] (66), her vagina to a flower (146), and cites the character’s names as building an ecological link, for example Eva Salvatierra [Eva Earthsaver] which evokes Eve from Genesis (positively revalued) as well as the crusade to save the planet, and Rebeca de los Ríos [Rebeca of the Rivers] has a natural reference in her name. In addition, PIE’s policies to protect forests (196), grow flowers (204) and refresh dilapidated parks (198) are environmentally motivated (Postema 6). These transformations turn Faguas, the country of women, into “the empire of the lily” (54),⁷⁷

⁷⁵ una intuición casi femenina

⁷⁶ see for example Neruda’s *Veinte Poemas de Amor y una Canción Desesperada* (1924) which is rich in imagery linking the female form and the natural world.

⁷⁷ imperio del lirio

iterating again the female/flower analogy. Indeed there are many image metaphors which conceive women in terms of natural phenomena, such as “the shaded parks of female brains” (196), “she felt like a felled tree teetering on the point of collapse” (116), and the women, “closed themselves up like frightened anemones” (152)⁷⁸ to name a few. These integrate a harmony with the natural world into female identity. Furthermore, nature is feminised through reference to “la madre naturaleza” [mother nature] (33), as well as the volcano acting as to further the female protagonist’s cause. The unity of women and the natural world in the text acts to naturalise the other qualities with which they interrelate in the novel: the body, procreation, motherhood, eroticism, and instinct. The result is the overall representation of female identity as predicated on a ‘natural’, biological difference, which is set against male rationality and aggressive sexuality.

To summarise this section, then, it has shown how metaphor, generic sentences, transitivity structures, metonymy, deixis, and explicit comment work together in *El país de las mujeres* to construct a clear sex-polar, and often antagonistic, vision of gender relations and sexual difference.

2.2.1.2.2 Commodified Femininity

Despite this seemingly monolithic conception of natural femininity, the novel is not one-dimensional and the creation of gendered identity in the text is not as conclusive as the earlier examples would imply. In fact, the narrative frequently enacts a double move,

⁷⁸ los parques umbrosos de los cerebros femeninos / se sentía como un árbol talado a punto de caer desplomado / se cerraran como anémonas asustadas

where the dominant vision of womanhood is undercut by humour and hyperbole. The novel is playful and often it is not the feminine that is evoked, but the *hyperfeminine*, that is, a version of femininity pushed to the point of burlesque.

In the section above, stereotypically feminine roles and attributes were shown to be integrated into and bound to the female sex, thus merging sex with gender and carving out a clear innate sexual difference between male and female subjects. However, the text also acts to separate gendered positions and qualities from any sexed incarnation, exposing them as constructed and positing a more sex-neutral stance. The detachment of femininity from its embodiment is evident in the way it becomes a product, a brand that is used provocatively by PIE to achieve their political goal. More specifically, this commodification of the feminine is taken to such extremes in the novel that it has the effect of defamiliarizing it. This tactic is a conscious one, expressed by Viviana as “we are going to take every feminine stereotype and push it to its limits ... to the ridiculous” (46).⁷⁹ Here femininity is not something that they ‘have’ but which they take hold of [tomar], bring [llevar] and do [hacer] – an independent concept. Explicit statements in direct discourse referring to PIE’s approach, such as “this way of being and acting feminine” (101)⁸⁰ demonstrate their understanding of the contingent nature of their chosen representation. The exaggeration of the feminine can be seen in their plans to hold military parades with the tanks and weaponry painted baby pink (105), or to appear on television together and all crying in an outpouring of emotion (46). Indeed,

⁷⁹ vamos a tomar cada estereotipo femenino y llevarlo hasta las últimas consecuencias ... hasta el ridículo

⁸⁰ esa manera de ser y actuar femenina

PIE leverage hyperbolic femininity pragmatically to cause a stir and gain publicity. Noting that “scandal is so important” (102),⁸¹ their party’s name and marketing had the result that “in no time at all, there was no one in the country that didn’t know who PIE were” (113).⁸² Examples of femininity as a campaign tool in PIE’s transgressive and tongue in cheek propaganda include the PIE banner of a footprint with toenails painted red (242) and the placement of stickers of lipstick red kisses over the faces or crotches of the other candidate’s campaign posters (122).

Furthermore, the contingent, artificial nature of gender identity is emphasised in the novel. There are a number of scenes where women are seen dressing up before press conferences or speeches to assume their public ‘feminine’ personas. For example, for PIE member Ifigenia, “the clothes helped her to embody the sensual, rebellious and intelligent character they wanted to project” (112) and before a speech Viviana “thought of the woman she wants to embody. Visualised her, covered herself with the image” (147).⁸³ In these cases, femininity is a costume, something that is ‘put on’ rather than represented as an authentic mode of being. Moreover, the distancing of character identity from politicised femininity is achieved through the management of spatial viewpoint. That is, the reader is positioned behind the mask as it were, rather than as a member of the public viewing the totality of PIE’s public façade. The reader is placed in scenes as a silent observer in PIE meetings or within the consciousness of characters to access their psychological perspective. In this way, the reader is privy to PIE’s strategy,

⁸¹ El escándalo es importantísimo

⁸² En un dos por tres, no hubo en el país quien no supiera lo que era el PIE

⁸³ La ropa le ayudó a encarnar el rol sensual, desafiante e inteligente que se proponían proyectar / Pensó en la mujer que quería encarnar. La visualizó, se cubrió con su imagen

the construction of their image, and therefore witnesses the gap between public persona and private individual. Hence, with the processes of assuming gendered identity foregrounded, its basis as an absolute or fixed notion is undermined.

In fact, and above all, the central premise of the novel switches traditional gender roles: women become social and political leaders and men transfer to the domestic sphere. This shift is enormously successful in the text with the country flourishing under the new management and men gaining insight from the change (195, 204, 210-12). The process of men learning the so-called feminine qualities which the text specifies as organisation, care and emotivity is detailed in the novel (101). For example, PIE launch a reality television show called “Champion Househusbands” (211)⁸⁴ which follows five men who have recently taken on domestic duties since the government’s decision to replace all men in civil service with women. With their partners now out at work, these men must learn to care for the children, clean and cook. After a week, “in general, the participants managed to do the job well” (212),⁸⁵ highlighting that although women may have historically more experience in these matters, their aptitudes are acquired not inherent. Furthermore, women learn how to direct and manage public affairs. For instance, during the first session of the National Assembly following the attack on the President, Juana del Arco (the moniker Patricia adopts after her escape) who acts as Viviana’s secretary and normally takes a back seat in meetings, steps up to call order and begin the meeting, displaying her growing confidence and leadership (233). As

⁸⁴ Los campeones caseros

⁸⁵ en general, los participantes lograban hacer bien el trabajo

such, the novel indicates that traditionally gendered positions and qualities can be learnt, should be open to all and be uncoupled from historic cultural norms. Thus, implying that there is no necessary link between sex and behaviour or character.

From the analysis of the text so far it has emerged that femininity in a traditional and unified form, whilst embraced and valued positively in the novel, is also seen as performative, as learnt, and is estranged by the creation of an exaggerated, commodified hyperfemininity.

2.2.1.2.2 Deconstructed Dichotomy?

The discussion above on the two different readings of the portrayal of gendered identity, as innate or socially constructed, assumes that there is such a thing as ‘natural’ biological sex and the social understanding of it: gender. However, as was outlined in the introductory chapter on feminisms, this view, although commonly held, has been fiercely contested by certain strands of materialist feminism and queer theory. Scholars such as Christine Delphy and Judith Butler convincingly argue that the very idea that there are two clear biological sexes is not a pre-given or neutral fact (Butler *Trouble* 8-10; Delphy “Rethinking” 68-69). Indeed, there is no necessary basis for the way we group physical characteristics or why sexual features are viewed as the defining divide between bodies. Rather, sex itself is a discursive construct, and one based on a heteronormative framework of complementarity. In this schema, gender cannot be truly distinguished from sex, instead it is the “principle of partition” by which a hierarchical

and dualistic notion of sexed identity is created (Delphy “Rethinking” 3). From this perspective, both the sex-polar/essentialist and sex-neutral/constructivist accounts of sex difference align in that they are premised on an unquestioned belief in pre-discursive binary biological sex. Where they differ, is in their understanding of this sex difference. A sex-polar position claims that biological sex is functional in that it impacts on our behaviours and proclivities. A sex-neutral position on the other hand would say that biological sex does not influence our character, rather apparent differences stem from social structures. Either way, neither challenge the ontological basis of ‘man’ nor ‘woman’, and leave this dichotomous framework intact.

Whereas *El país* plays with the nature of sexual difference, there is little evidence to suggest that it challenges the binary division itself. The only hint that male and female biology may not be so neatly separated is when Martina, PIE member and the only non-heterosexual character, commenting on her lack of libido, remarks with a smile that “I must have been affected by the volcano’s smoke” (177).⁸⁶ However, it is not presented as a serious proposition, and although the novel portrays a reversal of gender roles, this is a straightforward switch of positions which does not trouble the two underlying sexes the roles conventionally attach to. Therefore, when Lafita Fernández argues that the novel serves to “desarticular” [take apart] any type of dichotomy (186-89, 205), I must disagree. PIE work within existing cultural codes in order to revalue women, not to deconstruct their conceptual basis nor challenge heteronormative, dichotomous sexual difference.

⁸⁶ Me debe haber afectado el humo del volcán

2.2.2 *Mujeres/Women*

As became clear in the analysis, the sexual difference divide is clearly drawn in the text, with ‘women’ and ‘men’ emerging as stable categories, and women thus portrayed as a default biological and social group. However, this does not tell us how characters in the novel relate to this shared female identity, nor function as a collective. It will be argued here that although attributes of the feminine subject (such as care, organisation, instincts, sensuality) were simultaneously depicted as stemming from nature, and as conditioned and learnt, they nonetheless serve as a model with which women in the novel associate and around which they unite. In particular, it will be shown that the group forms through association with the archetypal ‘woman’ embodied by Viviana Sansón, the leader of PIE and the President of the titular “Country of Women”. This kind of union is forged through what Gregory Claeys, in his study of dystopia and collectivism, terms, “vertical vicarious enhancement” (*Dystopia* 46). That is, upwards affiliation to a charismatic leader, rather than horizontal connections with the crowd. Claeys explains that with this model, “we gain individual strength through identifying with the particularly heroic qualities of our leaders. Their valour, their passions, their strength, become ours” (*ibid*). Group cohesion stems from the “gravitational pull” the leader exercises on the others (*ibid*). The interpretation of Viviana as a quasi-superwoman who typifies the female paradigm, and acts as the force around which the collective assembles will now be presented.

The reader is introduced to Viviana on the first page: the novel opens as she finishes delivering a public speech, waving her hands in a triumphant gesture as the crowds applaud (13). Viviana is positioned in this scene as a conductor to an orchestra, except her orchestra (the crowds) are not generating music but “aplausos” [applause], “energía” [energy] and “ánimo” [energy/spirits] (16). She is depicted, through material and causative transitivity processes, as exercising a physical influence on the crowds. The movements of her body result in calming or exciting the assembled people. For example, “she only needed to wave them [her arms] for the whole plaza to erupt in renewed applause” (13)⁸⁷ (here she is the agent causing the crowd’s action), or “she would whip the masses up to fever pitch excitement” (15)⁸⁸ (here the crowds are the goal of her material action). Throughout the whole passage she only says a few words to the people, rather she communicates by “changing rhythm”, “gently waving her arms”, “relaxing”, “walking slowly” (15).⁸⁹ The energy of the group ebbs and flows in response, for example, “the public’s energy started to subside” or “the applause momentarily increased” (16).⁹⁰ The narrative explicitly states that what Viviana is exploiting is, “the hypnotic effect of a voluptuous physique” (15).⁹¹ Moreover, her body is not powerful as a generic body, but as a gendered body. Her sexed corporeality is indicated through stereotypically feminine curves, long hair, big eyes and sensual lips (14), and she is connected to maternity given that, for example, she feels a compulsion

⁸⁷ Le bastaba agitarlos para que la plaza entera prorrumpiera en renovados aplausos

⁸⁸ llevaba a las masas al paroxismo del entusiasmo [she would bring/take the masses to the fever pitch of excitement]

⁸⁹ cambiaba ritmo / agitando suavemente los brazos / se relajaba / caminando despacio

⁹⁰ el ánimo del público empezaba a decrecer / Los aplausos subieron momentáneamente

⁹¹ el hipnótico efecto de un físico voluptuoso.

to soothe the crowds by singing a lullaby to them as she would to her daughter (15), there is an emphasis on her “abundant breasts” as the source of life-giving sustenance for the country (15), and the space she creates around her is “feminine” and “maternal” (14). The appearance of such a rich descriptive passage on Viviana and her relationship to the crowd at the beginning of the novel is significant as it acts as a foundation for the interpretation of the rest of the narrative. It sets up an image of Viviana as an exalted, powerful and *female* leader, and gives the reader a window into popular opinion which is overwhelmingly positive towards the President. Although no other episode in the text pictures Viviana addressing the Faguan public, their continued support and adoration of her is alluded to through the flowers that accumulate in front of the hospital, which “if this wasn’t a poor country, would compete with the sea of flowers that were left for Princess Diana” (190).⁹² This is one of two comparisons which link Viviana to Princess Diana (221), an analogy which serves to indicate the degree of affection the public feel for her, and again places Viviana as an iconic (female) figure. In all, at the beginning, Viviana is established as an archetypally feminine, popular leader who from a position of maternal authority exercises a hypnotic influence over the citizens.

Furthermore, the identity of other characters in the novel is tied to Viviana’s. They depend on her to underwrite their sense of self and to be the lynchpin which holds their political enterprise together. For example, in narration reflected through PIE member Ifigenia, the narrator states that since the attack on Viviana, Ifigenia feels like

⁹² Si no fuera este un país pobre, competiría con el mar de flores que le pusieron a la princesa Diana.

“a tree without faith in its roots” (116),⁹³ this image of instability highlighting how Viviana secures Ifigenia’s sense of identity. Plus, Juana del Arco recounts her feelings when Viviana begins to wake up, she declares, “by getting her back, I will get myself back” (258),⁹⁴ again expressing a close connection between selfhood and Viviana. Further, B(R) narration with Martina explains how, “She couldn’t imagine PIE without Viviana. It’s a lie that no one is indispensable. She was.” (46).⁹⁵ Here, PIE, the all-female party which proclaims an ethics of maternal care, is equated to Viviana herself, emphasising the centrality of Viviana to PIE’s mission and identity. As such, she is represented as embodying the instinctual, maternal, erotic ‘feminine’ of PIE, and becomes the paradigm for ‘woman’ in the novel. Beyond PIE, Mercedes, the wife of José de la Aritmética, functions in a similar way to him in the text to signify ‘public opinion’ as a whole. Thus, when she remarks of Viviana that, “it’s awful they shot a woman, it’s as if they had shot us all” (29),⁹⁶ it serves to demonstrate the affiliative links Faguan women feel to their President. Indeed, that woman are “semejantes” [similar] (127), and the bond between women is one of resemblance is accentuated by how PIE dress in the same style for events and television appearances, either in all-black rock star attire (112), or in matching slash neck satin suits for their inauguration (166). Linkages are therefore established in the novel which bind women together in a relationship of similitude to the archetypal ‘woman’ Viviana.

⁹³ un árbol sin fe en sus raíces.

⁹⁴ al recuperarla me recuperé a mí misma

⁹⁵ No imaginaba el PIE sin Viviana. Mentira eso de que nadie era indispensable. Ella lo era.

⁹⁶ Grave que le disparan a una mujer, es como si nos hubieran disparado a todas

The elements outlined above, which pertain to the ideological plane of point of view, are supported by the management of psychological perspective in the text. This relates to how Viviana is viewed from the perspective of other characters, the extended reflector narration with Viviana herself, and the narrator's mediation of her psychology. The privileging of Viviana's perceptions and experience place her, for the reader, as the affective centre of the novel around which the events rotate. In this way, she has a similar gravitational pull for the narrative discourse as she does in her role as Faguas' leader. Through extended, positively shaded, reflector narration with Viviana, the reader receives insights into her character and psychology. For example, phrases such as "sometimes she would chastise herself for her exhibitionism, but whatever worked, worked" (15)⁹⁷ characterise Viviana as pragmatic, and others such as, "take care of life, the home, emotions, this damned planet that we're ruining, is what we all would have to do" (102),⁹⁸ with its use of the emphatic adjective "pinche" [damned/lousy] and emotive "arruinando" [wrecking/ruining], portray her as passionate and committed. As demonstrated earlier, generally in *El país* narratorial psychology and ideology recedes to such an extent that it is either indiscernible or aligns with the characters'. This coincidence between narrator and character worldview and psychology promotes an interpretation of the narrative as reliable and characters as sincere. Given that the narrator steps into the character's shoes, the reader is encouraged to do so too.

⁹⁷ A veces se recriminaba su exhibicionismo, pero que funcionaba, funcionaba.

⁹⁸ cuidar la vida, la casa, las emociones, este pinche planeta que estamos arruinando, es lo que todos tendríamos que hacer

Moreover, although 20 of the 39 chapters of B(R) narration are not reflected through Viviana but other characters such as Emir (her partner), José, and PIE members, much of their narrative is focalised *on* Viviana. She is evaluated from their psychological perspective and their judgements reveal the high regard they hold her in. For example, Emir thinks of her as “The most beautiful erotic creature in the world, his woman amongst all women” (162),⁹⁹ venerating her with superlatives (albeit in a vocabulary own ownership). Or, Juana expresses the debt of gratitude she owes to Viviana:

If we knew just how transformational a single gesture of solidarity could be for another human being, we would have to rethink our whole lives, because that’s what Viviana’s involvement meant for me. (255)¹⁰⁰

Juana thus positions Viviana as her saviour. Along with flattering comments, such as Martina’s reference to Viviana’s “infinite grace” (231),¹⁰¹ the narrative reflected through other characters further aids to glorify and elevate Viviana to a position of almost mythic status. If this hyperbolic view of Viviana was built purely in narratorial discourse B(N) mode, with claims such as “Viviana was the most beautiful woman in the world”, it would create a sense of a personalised, authoritative narrator with a tone that would stray into the realms of fairy tale. However, that these opinions stem from characters’ subjective viewpoints, lends them an air of realism and verisimilitude. Therefore, whilst Viviana is constructed as a heroic figure in the novel, it is done in a such way that it

⁹⁹ El animal erótico más bello del mundo, su mujer entre todas las mujeres.

¹⁰⁰ Si tuviéramos plena conciencia de cuán trascendente puede llegar a ser para otro ser humano un solo gesto de solidaridad, tendríamos que repensar toda nuestra vida, porque hay que ver lo que significó para mí la intervención de Viviana.

¹⁰¹ infinita gracia.

promotes a certain believability. The reader is encouraged to look up to her through the eyes of her supporters, and see her as they do: exceptional but accessible.

Yet, despite Viviana's prominence and pivotal role in the narrative, the positive portrayal of female solidarity goes beyond her individual allure. The small group of women who constitute PIE also receive much attention in the novel, and these characters' experiences of participating in collective action is represented in a eutopian light. Supported by one another, they rise to the challenge of governing and are shown to take pleasure and fulfilment in their association. This is evident in the characters' development, with the narrative detailing the impact that PIE has in their lives. For example, in a chapter reflected through Ifigenia, we are told that before PIE she felt empty inside, and to compensate she strictly controlled her household routine. However, her life changes:

PIE became the harbour in which she anchored her existential search. This resolved and, through contact with the others, she relaxed. Her playful side showed through ... she stopped worrying about shoes left out of place (111, 114)¹⁰²

Here, we can see that PIE's mission gives her purpose, and the influence of other women transforms her from neurotic to laid-back. Indeed, the mutual support that PIE members offer one another is communicated on an interpersonal level through gesture, speech, and its register. Specifically, an intimate relationship between the women in PIE is constructed in the narrative through the tenor of their discourse. Tenor relates to the

¹⁰² El PIE pasó a ser el puerto en el que ancló su búsqueda existencial. Resuelto esto y en contacto con las demás, se relajó. Afloro su ser lúdico ... dejó de preocuparse por los zapatos fuera de lugar.

interpersonal function of language, and is the linguistic expression of “social role relationships” (Eggins 63). How we use language will vary depending on our relationship to the person we are speaking to, and there are three aspects of this relationship which exert influence: the power balance (whether it is equal or unequal), the frequency of contact, and the affective involvement (whether high as with family or low as with strangers). On the informal end of the scale with equal power, frequent contact and high affective involvement between participants, it would be expected that there would be reciprocal use of “diminutive forms of names and terms of endearment”, fewer “politeness phenomena” and modulation, and more colloquial and attitudinal lexis (Eggins 65-67). With PIE members, this informality and intimacy is established through their reciprocal use of affectionate diminutives, for example “chicas” [girls], “hermanita” (207) and “mamita” (176) meaning ‘little sister’ and ‘little mother’, but equating to terms such as ‘sweetie’ or ‘my dear’. Closeness and equality are also expressed through their mutual use of the informal *tú* or *vos* [you] rather than the formal *usted*, even after Viviana becomes president (see for example 176, 231). Moreover, there is a tendency to cooperative turn taking in conversations, with each member contributing to discussions and suggesting policies. This style is explicitly outlined, for instance, it is described how “they took turns discussing the route of the electoral [campaign] tour” (34).¹⁰³ It is also evident in their contributions during the gathering where PIE is founded, Viviana speaks the most as she is detailing her vision for a creating a party which “breaks all the blueprints” (100).¹⁰⁴ She speaks 12 times, but the others regularly

¹⁰³ tomaban turnos discutiendo la ruta de la gira electoral

¹⁰⁴ quiebre todos los esquemas

add their own ideas with Eva speaking 6 times, Martina 9, Ifigenia 5 and Rebeca 7 (100-06). In addition, they are direct with one another, with informality stripping out the need for tempering disagreement. For example, in the same session, an idea Ifigenia puts forward is dismissed outright by Eva with an imperative structure:

- They could build schools or nurseries in their districts ... - suggested Ifigenia ... do community work.
- That's madness – declared Eva – let's not be crazy (105)¹⁰⁵

This way of challenging one another without modulation to attenuate it, is another indicator of their intimate relationships. It also signals that there is room for debate and differences of opinion within their group. Thus, even though Viviana is clearly the leader and takes the lion's share of conversation, the others are presented linguistically as of equal status and remain individuated in the group.

Furthermore, support is expressed in advice and encouragement they offer each other. For instance, when Viviana has doubts, Martina reassures her: “Calm, did you hear me? ... if your instinct tells you that this is what must be done, then get to it, kiddo” (176)¹⁰⁶ (imperatives and nicknames also mark the close relationship between them). Later, when Eva has just given a speech to the crowds, Martina congratulates her: “you're magnificent, she told her” (213).¹⁰⁷ This is indicative of the high esteem they hold one another in, and which becomes clear often in reflector narration. For example,

¹⁰⁵ podrían construir escuelas o guarderías en sus barrios... -sugirió Ifigenia- ... hacer trabajo comunitario.

-Es locura eso -sentenció Eva-. No seamos locas

¹⁰⁶ Tranquila, ¿me oíste? ... Si tu olfato te dice que es lo que hay que hacer, pues manos a la obra, la niña

¹⁰⁷ sos magnífica, le dijo

Viviana thinks of Ifigenia as “an organisational genius” (73) and of her team as “magnificent women” (152).¹⁰⁸ They express support through caring physical contact as well. For example, even when in an office environment they hug each other often (182, 186, 213, 236) and reach out to comfort one another, for instance, when the volcano erupts “Martina takes her hand [Viviana’s]. She squeezed it tightly” (35). Intimacy is also evoked through the description of the space and how the group physically inhabit it. Initially they are depicted congregating in bars (74), and in Ifigenia’s garden, where PIE is established, the scene is described as follows:

they all laughed. They were sat, barefoot, rocking in rocking chairs, smoking and drinking rum or wine, beside the little garden of curly ferns at Ifigenia’s studio, with the discreet fountain at the bottom and two beautiful fig trees which gave shade (100)¹⁰⁹

The water, fig trees, and enclosed, shady garden are all heavily evocative of female (and biblical) tropes, with a casual atmosphere built through their bare feet and smoking and drinking. It is a domestic, feminine space, yet one into which they bring political, social concerns. When they formalise their political party, the intimate and casual attitude remains, not just through their speech but the spaces. For example, initially their party headquarters is an old residential building, with the family lounge becoming their conference room (34). Then, even when in the Presidential palace, they inhabit it in a relaxed manner, for instance, when arriving in the Presidents’ office, Eva “let herself fall

¹⁰⁸ un genio organizativo / magníficas mujeres

¹⁰⁹se rieron todas. Estaban sentadas, descalzas, meciéndose en las sillas de balancines, fumando y tomando ron o vino, al lado del pequeño jardín de helechos crespos del estudio de Ifigenia, con la discreta fuente al fondo y dos hermosas higueras que daban sombra.

onto the sofa” (177).¹¹⁰ Overall, therefore, just as they bring the body and sexuality into the public sphere, they also carry over their informal, personal mode of interrelating into the professional domain. This warm and personable approach, in contrast to the formal and more distant stance of traditional political discourse is another way PIE transgress the boundaries between private and public, and marks their caring dynamic.

Although there remains room for debate within the group, there is harmony, if not conformity, of worldview between them. This ideological alignment is clear in how they agree policies and, as discussed earlier, speak regularly using a communal subject position of the second person plural (‘we’ and ‘us’), which establishes their unity and univocality. On a psychological level, however, characters’ individuality is built through the chapters which reflect their perceptions with positive modal shading. Each member of PIE focalises at least one chapter, and in addition to biographical information provided, the evaluative and attitudinal lexis present here characterise them and one another. For example, in a section reflected from Viviana, Martina is described as “such a joker” (33).¹¹¹ From these insights we learn of a complementarity between group members, with each having their own strengths and interests. For Viviana it is leadership, Rebeca maths and finance, Eva law and order, Martina human rights, and Ifigenia organisation, which is reflected in their ministerial roles. In some ways though, these differences are superficial and minor, and this will be discussed more fully in the following section on the feminist implications of the text. The key point here, however,

¹¹⁰ se dejó caer en el sofá

¹¹¹ tan bromista

is that the representation of the group dynamic emphasises complementarity over conformity in personal, if not ideological, terms.

From the above analysis, it is again important to keep in mind that the positive portrayal of the collective of women relies on a proximal positioning of the reader. The reader is taken behind the scenes, and approaches the group through the psychological perspective of its members. For example, in the scene where a PIE meeting is interrupted by the volcanic eruption, the narration states:

they were laughing when they heard an earthquake sound rising from the soles of their feet. They stiffened in unison, ready to head for the door (35)¹¹²

A feeling of unity is generated by the heterodiegetic narrative agent which: is spatially proximate to them (the directional “for [or towards] the door” indicates a location in the same room); is narrating in the past tense but creates a sense of temporal immediacy through the gerund “ascendiendo” [rising] and imperfect continuous “estaban riendo” [they were laughing]; has an internal view of their collective psychology (clear in their synchronous perception “they heard”); and emphasises their simultaneity with the temporal phrase “in unison”. That group’s unity is perceived as harmonious and not unnerving, relates to the narrator and thus the reader’s positioning *with* them, within the group and their consciousnesses, as opposed to an alienating external perspective.

Overall, then, the depiction of affirmative small group dynamics within the *Partido de la Izquierda Erótica* is built through explicit comment on characters’

¹¹² Se estaban riendo cuando oyeron un sonido de terremoto ascendiendo desde las plantas de sus pies. Se envararon al unísono, listas a enfilarse hacia la puerta

development and mutual support, intimate gestures, settings, and tenor of discourse, and psychological insight and spatial positioning of the reader within the group.

2.3 Discussion

2.3.1 Feminisms

The analysis has shown that *El país de las mujeres* advocates a brand of feminist identity politics based on traditional ideals of femininity. In this way, the novel appears to reflect the ethos of the main thrust of the Nicaraguan women's movement which campaign within a traditional gender framework. As noted in the introductory chapter, historically, women's organisations across Latin America have undertaken political activity *from* their roles as wives and mothers (Santaella 21). Yet, whereas these groups search to improve their conditions without challenging the gendered division of labour as such, *El país* clearly calls for gendered roles to be reconsidered. This agenda places it more in line with the *feminist* movement in Nicaragua who also, like the novel, support both lesbian rights and access to abortion.¹¹³ Alyssa Howe's 2003 research into women's activism in Nicaragua found that these two topics marked the "stark" divide between those who class themselves as feminist and those are affiliated to the women's movement in Nicaragua (211). Being "feminist" in Nicaragua entails supporting both propositions, whereas the women's movement may support one or other but not both. So, from that perspective, the narrative discourse of *El país* pushes the text under the

¹¹³ For example, abortion is legalised by PIE (162), and the "Ministerio de Libertades Irrestringidas" [Ministry of Unrestricted Freedoms] (42) is created to promote tolerance and improve rights of the citizens.

umbrella of Nicaraguan feminism. However, a couple of issues remain with that classification. Firstly, Viviana and other PIE members prefer to self-define as *hembrista* [female-ist] (107, 179), and the feminist label is distanced through references to “the feminists” as a separate and potentially hostile group (101). Moreover, this “female-ist” designation indicates an attachment to a biological basis for shared female identity. In research carried out by a Nicaraguan feminist group into women’s activism in the country, the authors argue that the women’s movement, “base themselves on a ‘female’ subject which shares a common experience of subordination” (Blandón et al. 12).¹¹⁴ On the other hand, their branch of feminism purports the “the de-naturalisation of sex and gender” (22),¹¹⁵ which goes further than *El país* in exposing the discursive creation of sex as well as gender. The novel thus evades easy classification into the divisive schema of Nicaragua women’s and feminist movements, although it shares key elements with both. Namely, it corresponds with the feminist movement in its liberal approach to sexuality and fierce critique of the traditional division of labour. However, it shares with the women’s movement a belief in a communal ‘female’ subject position as a site from which to base their activism.

In terms of transnational links, clearly, the novel’s positive representation of women’s creative, life-giving powers is strongly reminiscent of cultural and difference feminisms from the US and Europe. It is worth commenting on some of these correspondences before pinpointing the particularities of the Central American context

¹¹⁴ se basan en un sujeto “mujer” que comparte una experiencia común de subordinación

¹¹⁵ des-naturalización del sexo y el género

which problematise straightforward equations between the novel and these theories from the Global North. Notable parallels can be drawn with the work of academics such as Gilligan, Cixous, and Braidotti amongst others. For example, the dynamic between PIE members and their political agenda recall US psychologist Carol Gilligan's analysis of women's moral judgements in her 1982 study *In a Different Voice*. Gilligan, who challenged androcentric bias by revaluing gendered differences in applied ethics, found that (generally, and due to developmental differences) women's psychology displays "greater orientation towards relationships and interdependence" (22), and therefore their moral decision-making centres on "the concepts of responsibility and care", whereas men focus on self-integrity and individual freedoms (105, 157). As such, women conceive their identity through their connections with others, and, in contrast to men, have a non-hierarchical ideal of social relations preferring a "vision that self and other will be treated as of equal worth" (Gilligan 63, 159-60). This egalitarian and caring outlook chimes with the tenor of PIE's supportive interrelations, and ethic of care and social responsibility. Reading PIE's strategies through Gilligan's research, gives greater insight into the conventional links between femininity and care, and makes explicit the value in PIE's other-orientated mode of political and interpersonal functioning. The novel's moral orientation could also be read through H  l  ne Cixous' notion of the gift. One of Cixous's main contributions is her theory of the masculine and feminine libidinal economies, which aims to repudiate the link between femininity and lack in traditional psychoanalysis (43-45). The 'gift', or feminine libidinal economy, centres on giving without return and is non-exploitative. Whereas, the 'proper', or masculine libidinal economy, relates to property, classification and systemisation, and infers exchange and

ownership.¹¹⁶ This feminine, giving energy aligns closely with the portrayal of Viviana as source of bountiful sustenance for the people, PIE's rhetoric of care and their policies of communal interdependence (such as community kitchens to feed the whole neighbourhood (30)). Indeed, many aspects of female identity in *El país* resonate with the theories of Cixous, and Irigaray and Kristeva. For example, the use of instinct and the non-rational to challenge masculine dogma, the link between feminine libido and creativity, emphasis on female-to-female solidarity, and the quest to positively revalue female sexuality, bodies and experiences. It is this last aspect that particularly unites the novel with difference feminisms from around the world. That is, its promotion of female identity as a political tool; an inspirational and legitimising icon, which tells women that they are valuable, connected to others, and owners of their body and sexuality. For instance, this championing of the feminine is akin in certain respects to contemporary difference theorist Rosi Braidotti's call, in *Nomadic Subjects*, for "the extreme affirmation of sexed identity as a way of reversing the attribution of differences in a hierarchical mode" (*Nomadic* 161). For Braidotti, there is no denying the material weight of 'woman' as an active concept in society, nor the relevance of sex differences to how we conceive our lived experience (162, 95). Thus, she calls for the political appropriation of the "female feminist subject" to advance women's causes (150). The archetypal model embodied by Viviana, and marketed by PIE, very much falls in line with this female figure. It should be noted however, that Braidotti does differ from Belli

¹¹⁶ Evident, for example, in the possessive way Emir refers to Viviana as "his woman" (162).

in emphasising the ‘nomadic’ nature of this subject as fluid and non-unitary (5), rather than the more eternalised image created in *El país de las mujeres*.

Moreover, notions of mimesis (Irigaray), parody and performance (Butler), and masquerade (Riviere, McRobbie) also provide a way of understanding the double attitude in the novel, which both estranges and advocates for the traditionally feminine. In a 1920s paper, psychoanalyst Joan Riviere discussed a tendency in professional women to act coquettishly and seek reassurances from father figures, after highly competent academic performances. She interpreted this as them assuming “a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men”, as they encroached on so-called masculine domains and skills (303). From this perspective, female speech and intellect is threatening, as it signifies “an exhibition of herself in possession of the father's penis, having castrated him” (Riviere 305). To diffuse this threat, women hide behind a (deferential) feminine mode of self-representation, as Riviere describes of her subject, “she chooses particularly feminine clothes” and “she becomes flippant and joking” (308). This characterisation transfers remarkably well on to PIE’s ludic tone, hyperfeminine dress and imagery. In the novel, men are effectively castrated, emasculated through the lowered testosterone, discredited by PIE’s campaign and replaced in the seats of power. Almost as camouflage, to defuse their dominating manoeuvres and to win votes, PIE take on feminine masks and a playful demeanour. More recently, Angela McRobbie applied this notion of masquerade to the postfeminist setting. She discusses how women are now well-integrated into workplaces and politics, but this participation entails a “social compromise” (McRobbie 72). The compromise is

that women's place in the public sphere is predicated on a post-feminist masquerade of vulnerable, fragile, (hetero)sexual femininity, which expresses a tacit agreement not to challenge patriarchal structures. Femininity in this context is "openly acknowledged as fictive", given widespread beliefs on the social construction of gender, and thus adopted ironically (McRobbie 59). That's not to say, however, that although perceived as chosen, parodic, and pleasurable, femininity is not a prescriptive force woven into commercial and cultural discourses through which people understand themselves. In fact, McRobbie notes that this masquerade establishes "new ways of enforcing sexual difference" and reinforces a conservative, normative vision of womanhood (59). Certainly, some aspects of the post-feminist masquerade resonate with *El país*, in the same way it does with Riviere's version: the light-hearted and affirmative assumption of traditionally 'female' roles, despite an awareness of their contingency, as a strategy for acceptance and success. However, the mapping of McRobbie's study onto Belli's work does not fit absolutely. Whereas McRobbie stresses that the masquerade involves the "implicit abandonment of critique of masculine hegemony in favour of compromise" (72), this is one end of the bargain that PIE do not hold up: they overtly criticise male rule and reverse masculine domination. Furthermore, although very much within an aesthetics of sexual desirability, Viviana and PIE's brand of femininity would not be best described as evoking fragility or vulnerability. There is another level of iconography which they are accessing, which is specific to the region. Their femininity feeds from a religious and revolutionary mythos of warrior mothers, earth goddesses and sacred fertility, which relates to historic struggles for national liberation blended with indigenous *cosmovision* and Catholic idolatry (for academic discussion see Cupples 152; Destrooper 13;

Santaella 141, and for a fictional example see the character of Itzá in Belli's *La mujer habitada*). These influences can be discerned in the novel's ecological focus, natural imagery, and portrayal of Viviana and PIE as powerful, heroic, and commanding (as with the opening scene). Of particular relevance, Katherine Isbester explains how in Nicaragua, during the 1970s, the image of proud, strong, armed female revolutionary fighters featured on propaganda and permeated the collective unconscious, shattering preconceptions of "the meek and ineffectual female" (4). It is these distinct influences which distinguish *El país* from unqualified comparison with the post-feminist masquerade. Indeed, the difference in cultural imaginaries of motherhood, a position which is arguably more charged with divine potency and vigour in the Latin American setting, problematizes its reading through psychoanalytic accounts which tend to have derived from study of family structures and power dynamics in the West. Thus, even though there are compelling and useful parallels, the novel has a different entry point on sexual difference than European or North American theories.

Furthermore, the current, precarious, situation of women in the country sets it apart from straightforward comparison with the Global North, and is a factor which, arguably, helps the novel to withstand the critiques that affirmative feminist identity politics often face. Namely, that universalising any notion of 'woman' runs the risk of becoming exclusionary. In *El país de las mujeres*, it was shown that the female archetype relates to the maternal, instinctive, erotic figure of Viviana. Therefore, from one perspective the novel could be read as proposing a hegemonic, heteronormative ideal of female embodiment. The problems associated with defining a singular unified

version of female identity are well-rehearsed. Other axes of identity such as class, race, and sexuality significantly alter lived experience and understandings of gender, and if these differences are not acknowledged and accounted for then the interests and voices of non-dominant groups become marginalized or even attacked as threatening.

Indeed, it is worth commenting at this stage that the central characters who make up *El Partido de la Izquierda Erótica* represent a fairly narrow subsection of society. They are all middle class, some are mestiza but none are indigenous, all are able-bodied and cis-gendered, and all but one are straight. Thus, when the novel presents the experience of being a woman as universal and shared, it does so from a specific (and privileged) viewpoint. When PIE speak as women, they speak as a certain kind of woman, subsuming all others to their model. Within the fictional world of *El país de las mujeres* therefore, an elite and homogenous group of women become representative of *all* women. With this in mind, it is possible to critique the novel as universalising a hegemonic vision of womanhood and eliding operative differences between women.

Yet, other studies have found diversity in the novel. In her analysis, Barrionuevo comments that, “the feminine world is heterogeneous and complex, inhabited by a variety of women with diverse representations and practices” (114).¹¹⁷ Castro Solano agree that the novel exhibits a “pluralist spirit” (27).¹¹⁸ There is some evidence to support a more plural reading of the novel. For example, there *are* (limited) differences between characters: some of PIE have children, but others do not; some have partners,

¹¹⁷ el mundo femenino es heterogéneo y complejo, habitado por una variedad de mujeres con representaciones y prácticas diversas.

¹¹⁸ un espíritu pluralista

others are single; Martina is a lesbian, so they are not all heterosexual. Indeed, PIE do champion a rhetoric of inclusivity and are not prescriptive in how women should live their lives. This is evident in their creation of:

A Ministry of Unrestricted Freedoms, an institution dedicated to promoting laws, behaviours, educational programmes, and whatever else necessary to instil respect for the inviolable freedom of women and men within society (180)¹¹⁹

This is representative of their live and let live attitude which seeks to make room for different dispositions, preferences, and experiences. When encouraging women into the workplace, they advertise jobs with an open call for:

women ready to work, with or without experience, with or without ‘good presentation’, with or without children, married or single, straight or gay, pregnant or not, with or without further education, young or old, all are welcome. There is room for everyone. (181)¹²⁰

As such, the aim of PIE is not to (purposefully) exclude. What’s more, concern with how poverty may alter women’s position is explored through Patricia’s narrative. Patricia is the young girl who comes to Viviana to ask for help escaping from a sex-trafficking ring, and then goes on to become integrated into PIE, transforming herself into the phoenix-like Juana del Arco. From the rural north of the country, Patricia was sent at a young age to work for her uncle, however when she turns thirteen, he begins to rape her and then ends up selling her into forced prostitution (93). Her character arc

¹¹⁹ un Ministerio de las Libertades Irrestringidas, una institución dedicada a promover leyes, comportamientos, programas educativos y todo cuanto fuera necesario para inculcar el respeto a la inviolable libertad de mujeres y hombres dentro de la sociedad.

¹²⁰ se buscan mujeres dispuestas a trabajar, con o sin experiencia, con o sin ‘buena presentación’, con o sin hijas, casadas o solteras, heteros o gays, embarazadas o no, con o sin educación superior, menores o mayores, todas son bienvenidas, hay lugar para todas

takes her from suffering victimhood to recovery, agency and self-fulfilment via the quasi-divine intervention of a do-gooding saviour. Whilst this journey is a little too neat and glossy to represent a serious confrontation of the issues it invokes, its inclusion nonetheless acknowledges how social class may impact on women, with those from poorer backgrounds more vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

Yet despite this, significantly, no challenge to the natural, instinctual, maternal, erotic image of female identity is proposed. Although an inclusive message is espoused, at no point is the brand of femininity constructed by the text questioned. There is no one who feels alienated by the female ‘feminine’ stereotype; no one who transgresses that mould. All female characters align behind a singular vision of their gender. In this schema, women may have differences but they are secondary to the universal condition of gender which towers as a monolith over the story-world. More specifically, the problem with universalising this model of biologically-based femininity is the very real risk that this ‘natural’ female subject could become a weapon to brandish against any person or group who cannot, or do not want to, conform, leading to, for example, discrimination against trans people. This is not just a theoretical danger, in Nicaragua, as elsewhere, transwomen experience prejudice and violence, including from feminists, (see Heumann et al.'s article on the topic), demonstrating how such female-ist notions can activate hateful marginalisation.

Nonetheless, when criticising *El país de las mujeres*' adherence to a totalising female identity, consideration must be given to the novel's extratextual context.

Womanhood has been consistently and significantly devalued in the, often dystopian,

reality of dominant *machista* culture in Nicaragua. Whilst careful not to overgeneralise, Alyssa Howe recognises *machismo* “as a dynamic” which is “deeply implicated in the political and social processes that are part of Nicaraguan culture” (24). It is understood differently between groups; for feminists “machismo” is a toxic and aggressive form of masculinity that must be defeated, but for others it is perceived as a ‘natural’ expression of male dominance and libido that serves as a licence to maintain the status quo (Cupples 153). Yet, its discursive creation does not lessen its material impact, and certainly it is a force that the author, Gioconda Belli, views as operational in Nicaraguan society. Commenting on the role of *machismo* in relation to high levels of gender-based violence in Latin America in a 2016 newspaper article, she asserts that, “Latin American men, in general, have been raised in cultures that diminish women and objectify their sexuality” (Belli “Guardian” n.pag.). *Machismo* and concordant deprecatory and prescriptive attitudes to acceptable expressions of female sexuality still have currency in Latin American social discourse, and are often related to socio-political actualities such as the lack of legal provision for abortion in Nicaragua (even in the therapeutic setting), ongoing gender inequalities in terms of education and work, and the proliferation of violence against women (for examples of statistics to corroborate these statements see Human Development Reports; UN Women “Nicaragua”). Furthermore, the result of women’s devalued social status becomes internalised and impacts on women’s confidence and self-worth (see for example Blandón et al. 130; Cupples 163). Overall, it is fair to say that women are, in general, precariously placed and disempowered in Nicaraguan society. Against this background, an affirmational brand of identity politics,

which assumes and champions the feminine, can be defended for its potential to empower women and gain material change.

What's more, it must also be remembered that this bold ideal of femininity is shown to be constructed in the text. I would argue that the paradox of representing female identity as simultaneously fabricated and replicative of cultural norms is born of pragmatism. Sophie Large argues that in Nicaragua the majority of women continue to view "feminist" theories with mistrust (99). This is a finding echoed by many other scholars working on Latin American feminisms, including Kaminsky (18), Howe (210) and Gramlich (170). Maxine Molyneux understands this resistance as related to a perceived disjunction between "strategic" and "practical" interests. Feminists tend to focus on "strategic" interests, which are priorities derived deductively from a structural analysis of women's subordination (Molyneux 43). For example, it may be in women's strategic interests to end the gendered division of labour, because it overburdens them. However, such strategic policies may fail to gain support amongst the wider community, "because such changes realised in a piecemeal fashion could threaten the short-term practical interests of some women" (Molyneux 44). Practical interests are those linked to a specific position and formulated in "response to an immediate perceived need" (*ibid*). Practical and strategic interests can come into conflict. For example, it may be in women's strategic interests to stop participating in cultural beauty ideals as these objectify and act as a financial and energy drain on women. However, on a practical and personal level, a woman may feel this impacts on her ability to succeed or be valued within the setting in which she operates. In Nicaragua, women's identities and self-

worth tend to be tied to their status and roles as wives and mothers (Isbester 15). These roles are not devalued but seen as vital and worthy. With this in mind, Cristina Santaella claims:

it should be entertained whether or not a feminist theory more specific to Latin America can be articulated without implementing, or at least initially considering a womanist (perhaps even essentialist) thrust as a precondition to the establishment of more politically and economically oriented plans. (152-53)

It is her view therefore that to gain popular support for reforms, ideals of femininity should not be undermined. Any de-naturalisation of sexed identity and challenge to the female/feminine/mother nexus, would likely be received as threatening the practical interests of women across the country who view their power as located in their reproductive potential. From this perspective, in order that support for “strategic” alterations to gender relations (such as shared parenting) can be garnered, women’s practical interests must be considered. Viviana expresses a similar sentiment when she argues that feminism is missing something “very female” (107).¹²¹ The text thus demonstrates an ambition to popularise feminism through feminising it. Overall, then, the construction of female identity in *El país* is built against a background of deeply held gender norms. Its portrayal of a female feminism does not alienate those who feel a fundamental attachment to traditional roles. However, the text does not preclude a social constructivist interpretation of gendered aptitudes and behaviours either, thus allowing a space for Nicaraguan feminists to find common ground with the narrative discourse. Here, we loop back to the beginning of this section, where the novel was found to

¹²¹ muy hembra

incorporate aspects from both feminist and women's movements in the country. In this way, the novel includes an appeal to readers across both sides of the feminist and women's movement divide. With humour and warmth, it carves a pragmatic, if contradictory, space where these viewpoints can commingle.

2.3.2 Genre

In its presentation of a speculative space (Faguas), specific social reforms (47, 132-33), and focus on the collective, the novel clearly participates in the paradigmatic eutopian genre. Even taking Darko Suvin's narrow definition, that in the text, "socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community" (132), the novel fits comfortably under this heading. That Faguan society under the *Partido de la Izquierda Erótica* is "more perfect" than before, is clear not only from the negative characterisation of the previous state of affairs but the positive light in which the changes are presented. As discussed, the management of narrative viewpoint in the novel favours PIE, with the narrative agent effectively sanctioning their messages and mission. This entails that when they class the old regime as, for example, displaying "perverse corruption and audacity" (75),¹²² these judgements are presented as valid. Beyond that, the success of their government and its policies is underlined through unequivocal statements such as reference to it as "an unprecedented success" (195), "fabulous success" (210), or

¹²² perversa corrupción y descaro

definitively that “our happy-ism has worked” (276).¹²³ Thus, in its detailed creation of a decidedly “more perfect” world *El país* subscribes to the traditional eutopian literary genre.

From another perspective, Ruth Levitas’ broader definition classifies utopia as “the desire for a better way of being”, and identifies three common functions of utopia: to critique, to compensate or to catalyse change (9, 230). Here, Faguas as a thinly-veiled referent for contemporary Nicaragua, sheds a defamiliarising light back on the real-world political situation. Clear parallels are established between Faguas and Nicaragua, such as topography of the capital city encircled by volcanos (72), and the description of the government as ruled by a nefarious “pareja” [pair], even though “a ella nadie la eligió” [nobody elected her] (167), which is likely to be a reference to Rosario Murillo, the wife of current President Daniel Ortega, who is always by his side. Therefore, these connections allow the reader to lift the veil and interpret comments on the wasteful, to the point of criminal, habits of the Faguan government as a harsh critique of the Ortega administration (168). In its portrayal of the dystopian, corrupt and exploitative former government, and masculine violence, *El país* demonstrates a clear critical purpose.

Yet, is the eutopian vision of the ‘Land of Women’ created by PIE mere fantastical compensation for the unsatisfactory present, or does it catalyse with a call to action? Whilst certain aspects are far-fetched and implausible (for example, the volcanic effects), I would argue that the novel does represent an effort to seriously promote its central vision of a female feminism and political tenets of gender reform. This is

¹²³ un éxito sin precedentes / un éxito fabuloso / nuestro felicismo ha funcionado

because, despite its fantastical elements, the realist mode predominates and there is an emphasis on process. For example, PIE's ascendency to power is not depicted as instantaneous, rather the process of their formation and campaign is detailed. Through episodic, but non-chronological, chapters the story is charted from the initial thought of running for government (76), to the first meeting of the party (99-107), their campaign publicity (113), election win (39), inauguration (166), cabinet meetings (179), the attack on the President (17), PIE's interim measures (236), to the end of the novel where PIE are still in government (276). This step-by-step account of their trajectory pays attention to the features of the democratic system and national administration. Further, the inclusion of "historical materials" such as a *New York Times* article in the English 'original' and in translation, emails sent to PIE members, and interview transcripts provide pseudo-verification of its alleged authenticity, positioning the novel as testimony in realist mode. These details help to root the novel to the material world, signalling that PIE's eutopian schemes are viable and, perhaps, even within reach.

Its critical and process-focussed dimensions also align it with certain trends in postmodern utopianism. Lucy Sargisson's influential study on Anglophone feminist utopias from the 1970s and 80s found that in these texts "progress, movement and the perpetuation of struggle take the place of finality" (20). That is, rather than a fixed 'blue print' solution, an evolving society is presented in these texts. As discussed on PIE's development, *El país de las mujeres* displays this forward momentum. The final lines also sum up the revisionary and ongoing nature of their project: "we're not a perfect society ... there will always be new battles and challenges, but still, we move forward."

One foot in front of the other” (276).¹²⁴ In this sense, the novel remains open-ended. To an extent, *El país* also fulfils Sargisson’s critical criteria, both in terms of enacting a critique of “sexual power relations” (17), which it clearly does, but also in its critical attitude to a universal eutopian vision (228). Indeed, *El país* does reveal an awareness of the dangers of totalitarian schemes. For example, criticism is voiced in protests (240), questioning from Viviana’s partner Emir (174-75), anti-government blog posts (237) and of course the plot to assassinate Viviana. Nevertheless, these ideological contentions are limited and neutralised within the narrative, and do not ultimately detract from its dominant political ideology. For example, the protest is controlled and diffused by government forces (246-47) and Viviana gives a speech to the UN to defend her decision, convincing the crowds and receiving a standing ovation (229). The integrity of PIE’s political mission therefore remains intact, and although critique is included in the narrative discourse, it is also resolved.

In consequence, although containing some open-ended tendencies, the concept of eutopia is not held at the same suspicious distance in *El país* as in Sargisson’s corpus, and rather than authentic multiplicity, one dominant worldview prevails. Another key element for Sargisson is transgression, which she defines in two ways. She finds the feminist eutopian texts she studies to be conceptually transgressive “of the dualist position of either/or” (98). She also remarks that they tend to effect a transgression of “social codes of normality” (201). Indeed, to an extent, *El país de las mujeres* can be

¹²⁴ no somos una sociedad perfecta ... siempre habrá nuevas luchas y retos, pero bueno, avanzamos. Un pie delante del otro

thought of as transgressive in both these senses. In terms of the latter, it makes female sexuality visible and thus transgresses conservative Nicaraguan social norms. It also incorporates eroticism into a holistic portrayal of female characters and so subverts the dualistic sexual/sinful, chaste/saintly tropes. In the former sense, the main conceptual transgression that the novel enacts is to disrupt the barrier between public and private spheres. PIE adopt explicit policies, such as installing maternity cubicles in offices, which trouble this division of personal matters from public, professional spaces. The novel also enacts this private/public transgression on a structural level. The story of a public, national, political change is told largely through personal memories, intimate relationships and in domestic spaces. The reader is positioned not as a disinterested member of the public, but as a confidant sharing in the personal lives of political leaders. These transgressions of dualistic thought on female sexuality and public and private spheres multiply the subject positions available to women from one or other (home or work, sexual or pure) to an additive logic of this *and* that. This reconfiguration destabilises the connotations attached to each binary position, unhooking women from stereotyped labelling. Therefore, *El país* does share some elements of transgressive feminist eutopianism as defined by Sargisson. However, it does retain and reinforce other dualisms, including notably gender binaries. Therefore, the novel also stabilises certain fixed concepts, and its consideration as ‘transgressive’ must be qualified.

In regards to the Latin American setting, two pertinent research projects on feminist eutopianism by Lila McDowell and Marisa Pereyra both applied Sargisson’s findings to their respective corpora of contemporary Chilean and Mexican, and feminist

Uruguayan, Argentinian and Chilean eutopian narratives (McDowell 21; Pereyra iv). Both found Sargisson's concepts resonated, but also determined certain features which were particular to the works and contexts they investigated. For McDowell, the novels she studied maintained "a tension between nostalgia and disenchantment" in their quest for eutopia (221). This disenchantment stems from their alienation from dominant capitalist, neoliberal discourses (2-3), and fuels the eutopian desire for improvement. However, the eutopian impulse is nostalgic in its backwards glance "to recuperate consoling aspects of the past" (4). In relation to *El país*, through its consistent critique of a country, "stuck in an interregnum between the Middle Ages and modernity" (140),¹²⁵ the novel certainly expresses disenchantment with the status quo. It also could be viewed as expressing a certain nostalgia, in that many of PIE's policies are uncannily reminiscent of Sandinista communitarian social plans. For example, the Sandinista promise to empower local communities to take care of their environment appears translated for the multimedia age into PIE's televised "Clean Neighbourhood" competition which encourages residents to care for their communal spaces (*Belli país* 155; Ortega Saavedra 193-99). On the other hand, *El país* does not reveal disenchantment with participation in a globalised economic system per se, given that PIE trade flowers and carbon bonds internationally. Moreover, although it retains the revolutionary, socialist drive to community-led action and communal living, the novel as a whole could not be described as nostalgic. It aims to radically depart from the past, a past which it views as led by men, into a future created by women. In a motivational

¹²⁵ Su país permanecía en un interregno entre la Edad Media y la modernidad

speech to PIE, Eva proclaims that their efforts will prevail to show, “another way, a new way of camaraderie, collaboration, mutual respect” (235).¹²⁶ Eva projects PIE into the future as new and different, an orientation which recurs throughout and which sets the novel as firmly forward facing and distinct from McDowell’s corpus.

Pereyra’s comparative study of eutopian novels, written between 1984 and 1996 by authors Cristina Peri Rossi, Alina Diaconú, Reina Roffé, and Marcela Serrano, remarked that the (female) protagonists “find a voice of their own and insert themselves into family and social history” (146-47).¹²⁷ In common with Belli’s other works this process is also recorded in *El país* with the trajectory of Viviana’s first job, promotion, political awakening, and growth as a leader emerging from the episodic chapters. She moves from a young unemployed widow at home (70), to a journalist addressing the country (76), to heading a political party (110), to the President speaking at the United Nations (228). In this way, she is portrayed as developing personally and politically, becoming instrumental in her nation’s future. Furthermore, Pereyra also notes that the protagonists in the feminist eutopias she studied “establish relationships based on equality, respect and love” (147).¹²⁸ This too is true of Viviana whose close friends become her colleagues, whose intimate, supportive relationship was described in detail earlier. Viviana’s relationship with her partner Emir is also depicted as equal and filled with mutual respect. For example, when they meet the reciprocal form “rondarse y seducirse” (142) is used to show they “seduce one another”, that they “pursue one

¹²⁶ otro camino, un camino nuevo de camaradería, de colaboración, de respeto mutuo.

¹²⁷ las protagonistas encuentran una voz propia y se insertan en la historia familiar y social

¹²⁸ ellas también desarrollan relaciones basadas en la igualdad, el respeto y el amor.

another”. His love for her is demonstrated in his bedside vigil in the hospital (218), and even when they disagree over Viviana’s decision to send men home from civil service, Emir still recognises the bravery and daring for her to carry out this plan (162). Therefore, the novel does share the tendencies that Pereyra identified of the protagonists’ self-realisation and loving relationships.

Yet, there is a key difference between the texts that Pereyra investigated and *El país de las mujeres*. Pereyra comments that in the novels she studied, “one political discourse is not privileged over another” and, pointedly, “it is not a collective utopia, because if it were, it would mean imposing one mould on everyone, rather it is individual and non-transferable” (148).¹²⁹ Whereas, in Gioconda Belli’s novel, the eutopian vision *is* collective and shared, represented as “enriching for men and women” (235).¹³⁰ There are clear policies outlined and the means to achieve them is unequivocally put forward as a feminised ethics of governance, predicated on a universal conception of the female subject. This is the crux of how *El país* differs from other contemporary feminist eutopias, Latin American or otherwise, including those identified by Sargisson, Mohr, McDowell, Pereyra, Goodwin and Jones, and many others. Whilst there is a similar focus on personal and individual experience, there is also an ambitious attempt at the top; at big P, rather than little p, politics. The consistency and clarity of the text’s political message does foreclose on ambiguity, on fluidity, on openness to an extent. It does not trouble gender binaries, but confidently re-values and re-asserts them

¹²⁹ no se privilegia un discurso político por sobre el otro / no es una utopía colectiva, ya que si lo fuera, tendría que imponer un molde para todos, sino que es individual e intransferible

¹³⁰ enriquecedora para hombres y mujeres

in the cause of social change. This bold move does bring it into dangerously hegemonic territory; however, this dominant vision is counterpoised with self-critique, an awareness of totalitarian thought, and a desire for freedom and inclusivity. Ruth Levitas noted that ambiguity in utopia may be exploratory, but it is also “unconfident” (17). *El país de las mujeres*, stands out for its unashamedly proud and positive eutopia. In light of its context and intended readership, the novel’s representation of embodied, powerful, mythic femininity can be defended for its potential to empower women and achieve material change.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, it was shown how psychological, ideological and spatiotemporal perspectives work together in *El país de las mujeres* to create a shared female subject, and positively frame female solidarity. The collective of women is characterised by support, intimacy, equality, and mutual empowerment in the text. Moreover, female identity is built through a logic of likeness, specifically, likeness to the archetypal protagonist Viviana. She forms the gravitational centre of the narrative, and is symbolically bound to traditionally feminine qualities. Yet, a double attitude to female identity as innate *and* performed was uncovered, and considered in the Nicaraguan context. It was proposed that this dual aspect entails a pragmatic appeal across the theoretical divide between feminist and women’s movements in the country.

Additionally, in widening but not threatening the subject positions available to women, this vision of womanhood aims to gain popular support and be exploited as a means to

improve women's lives. These findings significantly nuance previous work on female identity in the novel. Moreover, the analysis of Belli's use of narrative viewpoint contributes meaningfully to research on her oeuvre, deepening understanding of the empathetic mechanisms at work in her extensive use of a stream of reported consciousness narrative technique.

Regarding the genre, this novel marks a departure from a trend for more conceptually transgressive, but less assured, contemporary feminist utopias. Its clear utopian vision troubles social norms, has a critical spirit and promotes tolerance, yet in its assertion of a better political reality, and in privileging gender above other axes of identity, it does inevitably veer towards a monopolistic account of nation- and womanhood. However, given that a deconstructive drive to mutability and inconclusivity is not likely to be politically useful, justification lies in its potential as a catalytic force to unite women and inspire action.

Chapter Three. *The Power*: Feminine Domination

Gender is a shell game. What is a man? Whatever a woman isn't. What is a woman? Whatever a man is not. Tap on it and it's hollow (Alderman *Power* 338)

Published in 2016 and hailed as “an instant classic of speculative fiction” (Jordan n.pag.), *The Power* by Naomi Alderman imagines a scenario where women and girls develop an electrostatic power and can administer electric shocks at will. This reversal in the apparent physical differential between the sexes leads not, however, to a positive societal overhaul. Instead, women abuse this power, growing corrupt, violent and totalitarian, culminating with an unspecified cataclysm, ostensibly a nuclear conflict, brought on by war-mongering and deluded female leaders.

Underlying this bold power-swap storyline is a postmodern polyvocal text which opens multiple reading positions and creates ironic interplay between them. Viewpoints shift and processes of discursive construction are foregrounded, resulting in a complex narrative ethos. The aim of this chapter will be to unpick this web of evaluative, psychological and temporal perspectives to reach an understanding of how individual and collective female identities are depicted in the novel. The wider significance of *The Power*'s representations of women and women working together will be interpreted in relation to feminist discourses on identity and sexual difference throughout the discussion.

To ground the analysis, the chapter will start with an overview of the novel, its reception and critical responses, and structure of point of view. Focus will then turn to

the collective, arguing that its portrayal shifts from eutopian solidarity to dystopian mobility, before moving on to examine individual gendered identity in the novel. To finish, a generic lens will be applied to position the text in relation to contemporary works of feminist utopianism and evaluate its status as social criticism.

3.1 Approaching the Text

3.1.1 Reception

The Power (2016) is the fourth novel published by London-based author, computer game writer, and journalist Naomi Alderman. In general, the novel garnered positive reviews, and in 2017 was the first ever science fiction novel to win the Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction in the UK, with judges praising the work as "bold, accessible and beautifully written" (Penguin n.pag.). It also enjoyed success in the United States, being included in the New York Times Top Books of 2017 list, and has been translated into over 30 languages (Alderman "About" n.pag.). In terms of the "feel" of the narrative, which Paul Simpson argues is the product of point of view (*Ideology* 46), reviewers noted a gradual slide from realism to horror throughout the novel (Armitstead n.pag.; Dittum 51). This is an aspect which this chapter will investigate, analysing the linguistic means by which this change in atmosphere is created, and underlining how this relates to the attitude towards the collective.

To date, only two academic articles have been published on the text. Christine Jarvis's 2019 publication takes a pedagogical perspective, questioning how *The Power* functions as a piece of feminist adult education. After a study of real-life reader responses in online forums, her conclusion is that the novel prompts readers to ask questions and re-consider their own lives against the themes in the book, specifically, gendered power dynamics in society. Moreover, Jarvis finds gender in the novel to be represented as both systemic, enforced by top-down practices, *and* performative, produced through repeated bodily acts. She reads the text as moving between, "a critical materialist understanding of experience and post-structural recognition of the discursive and tangential nature of that same experience" (Jarvis 4). This assertion will be examined more closely in the section on individual identity, against this chapter's own findings on the novel's portrayal of the relations between biology, gender and power.

The other article on the novel, by José Yebra, takes a different angle, focussing on violence and its justification in the text. He interprets the novel with reference to Slavoj Žižek's conception of 'subjective' and 'objective' violence. Subjective violence relates to acts committed by identifiable individuals and groups, which is conspicuous and penalised in society. Objective violence, on the other hand, involves symbolic and systemic violences, which can be just as harmful, but which are instituted as part of language and the social set up, and are thus normalised and invisible. For Yebra, "the novel's fantasy consists in exposing and reversing the symbolic and the systemic violences that insidiously harass (young) women" (6). He argues that the first acts of violence committed by girls who have newly developed the power, could be considered

justifiable retaliation against oppression. However, as Yebra highlights, there is an ethical shift in the novel, when the scale and proportion of subjective violence outsteps any justification, becomes totalitarian, passing subtly into the realms of objective violence, when new laws are passed to oppress and discriminate against men. In this sense, through reverse engineering, *The Power* implicitly provides a critical materialist teleology of male hegemony, with physical power producing hierarchies which solidify into naturalised systems, laws and structures.

This chapter will deepen Yebra and Jarvis's examinations of sex and gender in *The Power*, and provide substantiation for some of their claims, such as what features cause violence to be interpreted as "joyful" at certain stages but associated with "terror" at other points (Yebra 2, 12). What's more, it will represent the first study of Alderman's narrative style, and the first to focus on *The Power*'s portrayal of collectivism.

3.1.2 Summary

The eponymous 'power' of the novel relates to the text's exploration of gendered power relations, but also more obviously to the electrostatic power that women develop. According to an inserted "archival document", the power was caused by the build-up of a chemical released into the water system during the Second World War (122-23). As the substance proliferated, it caused the growth of a new organ on the collarbone of girls and women called a "skein" (125; 20). The skein generates electric currents which are released through the hands, with the strength to maim or kill.

The story begins as characters experience or encounter this new power for the first time, and focuses on how four protagonists negotiate and profit from this change. Allie is a North American teenager; abused by her foster-father, she uses her power to kill him and escape, taking sanctuary at a convent under the pseudonym “Eve”. From this base, she uses her unusual powers of electrical based mind-control to form a new female-orientated version of Christianity. She adopts the name “Mother Eve” for her religious persona, her following grows throughout the narrative, and by the end she is placed as the architect of the cataclysm, using her influence to provoke war and “begin again” (328). Then there is Roxy, illegitimate daughter of the head of a London-based organised crime gang, who, after a revenge killing, goes into hiding in Mother Eve’s convent. Later, she is betrayed by her family who forcibly remove her skein and transplant it onto her brother. She barely survives this experience, but continues to rescue Tunde and bear witness to the escalating war and violence. Tunde is a Nigerian journalism student who captures the first footage of electrostatic attacks. Selling this video, he sets himself up as a roving reporter and travels the world documenting the uprisings and social upheaval. Tunde becomes a target for sexual attacks and violence, although he is repeatedly saved from these situations by female allies. Margot is the fourth central character. In the beginning, she is a Mayor of an unspecified city in the US, however after a successful initiative to set up training camps for girls with the electrostatic power, she wins the gubernatorial race and becomes influential in White House policy. Finally, it is worth mentioning Tatiana, a more marginal character but one which is important to the plot. Tatiana was married to the President of Moldova, a country where civil war ensues following the development of the electrostatic power.

When the President dies under suspicious circumstances, Tatiana takes over as de-facto leader of Bessapara, a breakaway state, whilst the remainder of the country is under the control of rebel, male forces financed by the exiled King of Saudi Arabia. Bessapara transforms into this novel's 'country of women', formalising matriarchal supremacy in law and discriminating against men. Bessapara serves as the stage for the final chapters of the novel, where characters converge and which lead to the meltdown in global diplomacy and civilisation.

3.1.3 Macrolevel Arrangements of Narrative Viewpoint

The central narrative covers a ten-year period from when the power first manifests to the cataclysm, and is framed by two sets of letters between the stated author of the work, Neil Adam Armon, and Naomi Alderman, a fellow author who is providing him with feedback on his writing. Both Neil and Naomi inhabit the same text-world as the narrative, but at a point in time around 5,000 years after the cataclysm. In this schema, the main story represents the draft of a novel which historian Neil has compiled based on research. It comprises a fictionalised narrative of events leading up to the cataclysm, presented in chronological order, interspersed with archival materials from that pre-cataclysm period: such as blog posts, adverts, and reports. In addition, documents from the intervening *post*-cataclysm period are included, specifically excerpts from the "Book of Eve" (the main religious text) and artefacts from archaeological digs, such as religious figures and carvings. With information from the letters, the materials, and the narrative, the reader can deduce that post-cataclysm society developed from the

remnants of the old world and based its understandings, especially of gender, on a belief in the immutability of women's dominance. The world that Neil and Naomi inhabit is revealed as a female hegemony that very closely parallels the ways in which many contemporary societies can be considered male hegemonies: marginalisation of and discrimination against men, and devaluation of 'masculine' qualities.

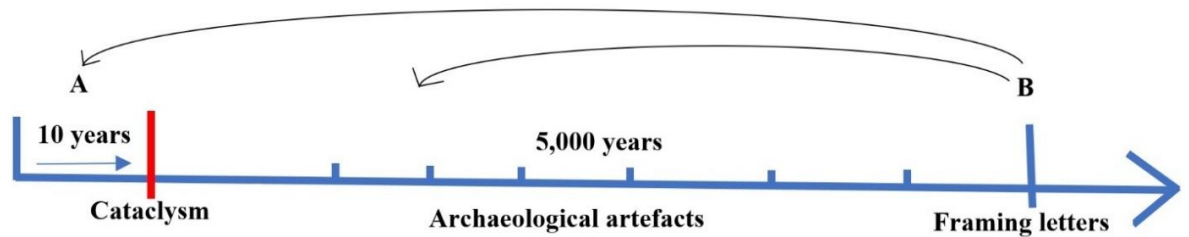


Figure 3.1. Schema of temporal perspectives in relation to story-world chronology in *The Power*.

This framing device involves a layering of temporal viewpoints. From the approximated schema above, we can see there are two main temporal instants: period A of the 'fictionalised' story and point B of the 'real' framing letters and location of the narrative agent. During the central story, the narrator (whether we read it as "Neil Adam Armon" or not) predominately takes a retrospective perspective with regards to events from period A and the interspersed artefacts, images of which are provided and captioned according to their distance from the narrator's present, for example, "Rudimentary weapon, approximately one thousand years old" (72). At times, however, the narrator renounces this retrospective position to linguistically step into the story-time present, the relevance of which will become clear later in the chapter.

Furthermore, it is notable that the novel includes numerous markers which temporally stamp both periods A *and* B as analogous with the twenty-first century. For example, in the main narrative (A) there is reference to budget retailer “Primark” (9), the video-sharing site “YouTube” (12), and *Powerpuff Girls* (22), a children’s cartoon show. These cultural references act as relatively specific temporal pinpoints, and are backed by more generalised signals of contemporary discourse, such as set phrases, for instance “zero tolerance” (88) or “collateralised debt obligations” (155). Interestingly, the framing letters *also* recall twenty-first century culture and language. For example, swearwords such as “dicks” (337) and “bloody” (ix) belong to a modern-day British English informal register, and social allusions including “everyone claims to be an atheist now, anyway” (ix) or to the discipline of “evolutionary psychology” (333) provide parallels to contemporary Anglo-European attitudes and institutions. The discursive alignment of periods A and B to the reader’s own position enacts a form of temporal circularity, encouraging point B to be read, not as a progression away from twenty-first century equivalent point A, but as its inversion.

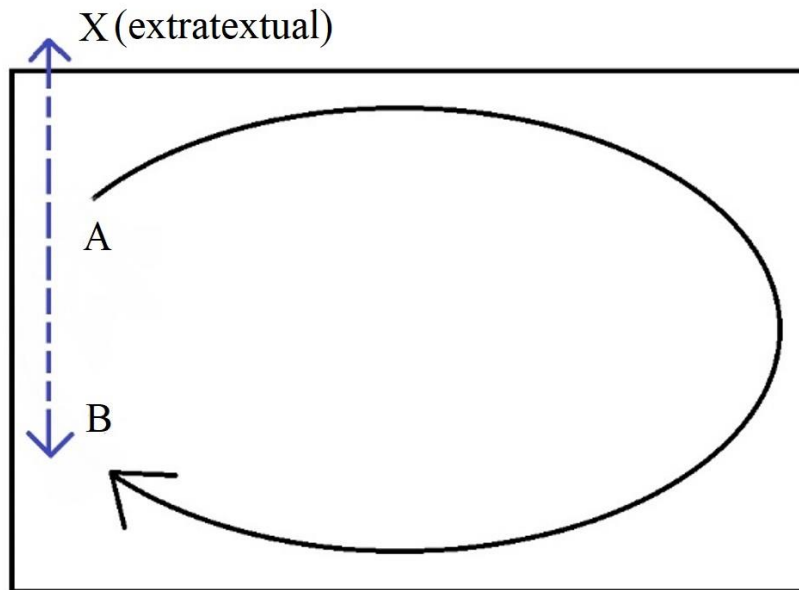


Figure 3.2 Discursive temporal circularity in The Power

In this schema, Neil and Naomi’s world becomes an upside-down version of twenty-first century society, provoking the reader to reconsider their own social set up against its fictional counterpart. Indeed, this self-reflective positioning is strengthened by the realisation that “Neil Adam Armon” is an anagram of Naomi Alderman. This metafictional device, of the author carrying out correspondence with a version of herself, draws attention to the text’s constructed nature, and in doing so promotes a one-foot-in, one-foot-out stance where the reader holds fiction and reality in satirical tension.

Moreover, as well as sharing discursive similarities, it could be argued that a twenty-first century ideological perspective permeates narrative discourse. Take the following example where the narrator states:

In those days there was a great fever in the land, and a thirst for truth and hunger to understand what the Almighty meant by making this change in the fortunes of mankind. (80)

The distal deictic marker “those days” and past verb tenses are consistent with the narrator’s alleged temporal positioning. However, “mankind” is a label which is unlikely to be consistent with the purported narrator’s worldview: given that Neil is located in a matriarchal society, the default term would be “womankind” or “humankind”. It could be argued that the narrator is adopting a pre-cataclysm perspective; however, this does not sit well with their partial understanding of pre-cataclysm technology and culture at other moments. Indeed, there are often discrepancies between what the narrator *should* know and what they *do* know. In her review, Amal El-Mohtar remarks that, “it’s jarring that someone 5,000 years in our future would be able to extrapolate gmail addresses from archaeological artifacts but not recognize a tablet” (14). El-Mohtar views these inconsistencies as issues with world-building (*ibid*). A more generous interpretation would be that the novel wears its premise lightly, almost winking to the reader and creating an ironic space from which to read the text. For Hatim and Mason, identifying irony requires “a second-degree interpretation achieved by matching the view expressed with any discordant view expressed co-textually” (99). In *The Power*, one way this “discordant view” is generated is through the gap between the stated narrator’s supposed positioning and outlook, and the narrative agent’s actual vocabulary and knowledge. “Neil” is exposed as a straw-man and a second, knowing, narrative presence is revealed through the twenty-first century perspective which spans the framing letters and the main narrative.

Moreover, it is more than just temporal viewpoints that generate irony and troubles narratorial identity. The next section will demonstrate how switches in register and tone, and intertextuality create the enunciative dissonance necessary for irony and lead to a fluid and ambiguous narratorial personality.

As should have become clear from the discussion above, the narrator does not participate in the main narrative, and can be classified therefore as a category B narrator in Simpson's schema of psychological viewpoint. Moreover, the narrator is personalised through the 'positive' modality of evaluative judgements, which claim authoritative knowledge of the story and characters. This apparent omniscience is evident in these categorical assertions from narratorial discourse:

She thinks she needs to ask forgiveness ... She's wrong. (167)

She doesn't know it, but she's missed the Day of the Girls completely. (37)

and

Tunde's nothing if not determined. (12)

These phrases lack epistemic modality,¹³¹ and therefore indicate certainty and imply that the narrator has a clear and 'correct' view of the story. They also reveal a psychological perspective, a guiding consciousness, organising the content. However, despite this evidence of narratorial agency, during passages of reflector narration in *The Power*, the

¹³¹ see Glossary>modality for further details.

narrator often cedes to (in free direct discourse) or merges with (free indirect discourse) the characters' thoughts and perceptions. For example, the opening passage of the novel is articulated from an independent narrative voice, but also reveals an anchoring in Roxy's ideological and temporal perspective:

The men lock Roxy in the cupboard when they do it. What they don't know is: she's been locked in that cupboard before ... There are two men, one taller with a face like a rat, the other shorter, square-jawed. She doesn't know them. (7)

A distinct narratorial presence is clear in the third person references to the characters, and omniscience implied with the knowledge of prospective events which are contracted into the pronoun "it". However, the present-tense temporal perspective aligns with the characters' positioning, and the limited knowledge revealed by designating the other characters "men" rather than by name, implies that the scene is interpreted through Roxy's worldview. Given this layered perspective, character experience reflected through a narrator, it becomes unclear whether it is the narrator or Roxy that deem the men rat-like and square-jawed. This blending of voices and perspectives is characteristic of reflector narration, and results in considerable ambiguity over which, if any, beliefs and attitudes pertain to the narrator, and which stem from the character.

Moreover, even in passages which read as B(N) narration, where the narratorial voice does not appear to be filtered through a character's perspective, there are regular switches in tone and register. For example, over-lexicalisation, repetition, and descriptive metaphor render certain phrases lyrical, romanticising the narrative, such as, "she sends it into him right there, in the place where human beings are made of electrical rhythm" (32) (over-lexicalisation) or "the sky is pale blue-grey as a pebble and feathered

with cloud, the sound of the ocean is quiet as a mother shushing her baby” (78) (metaphor), or “there are days that follow one after the next after the next” (326) (repetition). This poetic register is reinforced by occasional archaic vocabulary and turns of phrase such as “five and twenty” (92), to describe a twenty-five-year-old, or “he barely feels the pain at all, so great is the delight” (61).¹³² Yet, at other points, a more informal, conversational register emerges, for example: “The police force all across the state gets worse after the video of what Allie and Roxy did goes up online. They felt humiliated, of course they did. They had something to prove” (115). Of possible synonyms for “to get worse” such as “to become worse” or “to worsen”, get worse is at the more informal end of the spectrum, as is “goes up online” in relation to the passive “is posted” or “is published”. “Of course they did”, also belongs to a more familiar register and obliquely addresses the reader. Indeed, as well as frequent variations in tenor,¹³³ the narrative often echoes specific registers, particularly a religious one. Extracts from the “Book of Eve” closely resemble early-modern translations of Biblical texts in the use of now obsolete pronouns, prepositions and verb forms. For instance, from an epigraphic passage:

An order might issue from the palace, a command unto the people saying ‘It is thus’ ... As it is written: ‘She cuppeth the lightning in her hand. She commandeth it to strike.’ (4)

¹³² A google search of “so great is the delight” brings results which include, on the first page, a 1910-14 translation of Don Quixote, an 1899 psychology text, a 1791 collection of theological tracts, and a publication on 17th century “Mystical Theologies”.

¹³³ As a reminder, tenor is the register variable which relates to the relationship between participants, such as their status, frequency of contact, and affective relationship. For further details, see Glossary>register variables.

This antiquated religious register is not isolated to archival exerts, but woven into the narrative, and presented without quotation marks. The following example recalls the language of the “Book of Eve”, but appear interjected into passages voiced by the narrator:

Isaac whispers, ‘I think she is going to hit him with a ‘mango’.
Canst thou direct the lightning bolts? Or do they say to thee: ‘here we are’?
Tunde is recording when she turns around (17)

By echoing these religious intertexts, the narrative opens the potential for parody. In re-creating a discourse, any slight variation, even just a change in speaker, can cause the original to be reconsidered in a new light. In an edited collection on irony, Paul Simpson notes that “it is this echoic dimension in (inter)textual formation that imbues satirical discourse with its ‘spoof’ or parodic quality” (“Irony” 37). Indeed, religious dogma does come under scrutiny in the narrative. Yet, much of the pseudo-religious discourse is woven into the ideological fabric of the work in more or less straight-faced manner, whilst acting to further problematize any notion of an ‘authentic’ narratorial voice.

Overall, then, due to intertextuality, switches in tone and register, and ambiguous shifts between narrator voice and character voice, psychological and ideological viewpoints expressed in the text often blur, and therefore any search for an ‘authentic’ narratorial identity is futile. Moreover, any interpretation of textual values must be made with awareness of the ironic instability produced through its echoic vocal status. This is not to say, however, that the text is truly polyvocal, in the sense of presenting multiple ideologies with equal weighting, and this chapter will argue for a particular reading of the novel in relation to sex and gender.

3.2 Getting to Grips with *The Power*

3.2.1 From In-Group Solidarity to Mob Mentality

In the first half, a positive framing of the collective and female solidarity is created through recurring themes, motifs and imagery. These elements function on the ideological plane to convey a sense of joy and parity in communal identity and action. Equally, management of psychological and spatiotemporal perspectives construct a proximal and associative reading position vis-à-vis the group, which is likely to engender an empathetic stance. Yet, as the novel progresses, a darker edge creeps into these images, and the narrative position adopted with respect to the collective becomes increasingly estranging, to the point that the depiction of women working together becomes the anti-utopian epicentre of *The Power*. This section will uncover these processes and postulate an interpretation of the representation of collectivism in the novel.

In terms of themes, the family is a key paradigm through which female solidarity is imagined in the text. An investigation of the novel's treatment of the family unit reveals a two-sided portrayal of the concept. On one hand, birth or foster families are often sites of abuse and betrayal. For example, Allie is sexually abused by her foster-father while her foster-mother turns a blind eye (30-31) and had been passed around 12 different families before that point (109-10). For her, family is a harmful situation which must be escaped from. Also, Roxy, as her father's illegitimate daughter, has been marginalised from his legal family and shunned from their house (105). This exclusion

is compounded when her half-brother, Darrell, and father later betray her, luring her into a trap so they can steal her skein (237). Here, family is depicted as destructive and precarious, built on unstable foundations. However, on the other hand, at times the family, and particularly the notion of *chosen* family, offers comfort and protection in the narrative. Bonds between female characters are expressed through the vocabulary of kinship and domesticity, and sisterhood becomes a metaphor for commitment and trust between women. Much of this relates to the milieu in which the relationships are formed: a convent. At the beginning of the story, Allie takes shelter in “The Sisters of Mercy Convent”, an institution which has taken in many other runaway or ostracised girls (41). Here, the girls develop firm friendships based on shared confidences (42), play (43), humour (75) and care (77). For example, mutual support and companionship is conveyed through touch (“she reaches over and puts her hand on top of Allie’s, and they sit there like that for a long time” (111)), solidarity through defending one another against the nuns’ reprimands (76), and acceptance through compassionate listening to one another’s stories (42). When Roxy joins the girls here, her first impressions represent the convent as a welcoming sanctuary:

There’s chatter and the smell of good warm food. It’s a stew with clams and mussels and potatoes and corn. There’s crusty bread and apples. Roxy has a feeling she can’t quite name, can’t really place. It makes her a little bit soft inside, a bit teary. One of the girls finds her a change of clothes: a warm knitted jumper and a pair of sweatpants all worn and cosy from being washed so often, and that’s just how she feels, too. (104)

The itemised foods evoke a rustic and homely atmosphere with connotations of well-being and nourishment. The comparison of Roxy’s emotions with worn but comfortable clothing further evokes the household space and a sense of safe refuge. And, more

explicitly highlighting the link between their group and family relations, following the nuns, the girls begin to refer to each other as “sister”. Similarly, Allie, when speaking as Mother Eve, shares the parable of Ruth, “the most beautiful story of friendship in the whole Bible” (104), with the assembled girls. She emphasises Ruth’s loyalty to her mother-in-law and friend, and rewords the original to fit their context, proclaiming “We have each other. Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, my sisters” (105). Here, bonds of solidarity are understood through a framework of familial fidelity and companionship. This analogy also places the young women in a relation of equal status with each other, as siblings subordinate to the guiding mother figure. The novel thus positions the collective as an enlarged sisterhood, with this family connection thematically linked to positive values such as nourishment, acceptance and support.

Another way that women working together is positively framed in *The Power* is through the motif of laughter which weaves through passages focussed on the collective and renders their cooperative endeavours joyful. For example, in a scene set in Riyadh which follows Tunde as he reports on the women’s uprising against discriminatory laws, within a three-page stretch of text there are 9 references to the women laughing or smiling as they roam the streets, including:

The young women around him laugh and point at them and make a crackle pass between their fingertips (58)
and

They are going from car to car, setting the motors revving and the engine blocks burning ... they send lines of power out from their bodies and they are all laughing. (59)

What's more, the power and pleasure are linked through laughter in the descriptions of teenage girls practising their "jolting" together. For example, "Margot watches the girls on the screen playing with their power. Screaming as they take a hit. Laughing as they deliver one" (86), and at the convent "they practise it on each other on the lawn, giggling and hurling water about" (109). Laughter as a marker of enjoyment in the electrostatic power is also evident on pages: 61, 64, 69, 83, 102, 109, 110, and 157. Laughter in the above examples functions to bond the women, and colours their actions as morally positive and emancipatory. Moreover, coupled as it is with exercising their newfound bodily powers, the women's laughter here has subversive force. In a sense, it recalls Cixous' "Laugh of the Medusa" in which she entreats women to reclaim their physicality which has been "more than confiscated" by its construction in patriarchal myths and discourses (880). For Cixous, femininity in the phallogocentric order is associated with death and lack (885). The Gorgon Medusa symbolises this dark, threatening, castrating femininity. Yet, when confronted, in Cixous' account, it is discovered that, "she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (885). The prototypical dangerous woman is inversed and defamiliarised, becoming instead a source of mirth and beauty. Thus, laughter acts to defuse and deconstruct socio-cultural formations of 'woman'. In her essay, laughter is explicitly equated with excess, with exploding the constraints of symbolic representations which "frigidify" female bodies, sanctioning women "to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter" (888). An analogous, exultant, destructive impulse echoes throughout the early phases of *The Power*. In the convent where the girls eventually chase away the nuns (symbols of dogma and authority) (83) and in Riyadh

where women “happily” fuse soldiers’ weapons and topple the government (69), women are empowered not just by their bodily potential but by their subversive laughter which undercuts the mythic figure of the monstrous woman.

Additionally, for Cixous, women’s writing is linked to the body and to power. By writing *from* the body, giving voice to it and its drives, women will reclaim their bodies, pleasures and inner force (880). Although not through the medium of writing, in the novel the awakening of the power in the body is connected to the notion of recovery and repossession. When Margot first experiences the electrostatic power, she thinks, “maybe she has always known it and it has always belonged to her. Hers to cup in her hand. Hers to command and strike” (25). This sense of seizing corporeal ownership evokes Cixous’ appeal to extricate the female body from internalized negative images and expectations.

However, laughter changes in the text from being a signifier of subversive, righteous, bodily pleasure, to become a marker of truly terrifying inhumanity. When these ‘Medusas’ turn around later in the novel, they are still laughing but are no longer beautiful. Instead, they embody the dark, mysterious, engulfing archetype and laughter has the effect not of deriding the myth but securing it further. This shift is enacted by changes in point of view which will be discussed shortly. Moreover, in the first half, women laugh when they play, destroy property, or harmlessly release their jolts, but latterly, they laugh as they rape, harm, and kill. For example, a woman and her accomplices laugh as she rapes a man in a refugee camp, “her mates are laughing now and she’s laughing too as she pumps herself up and down on him ... they all pat her on

the back, and she's laughing and smiling still" (281-82). Laughter here indicates a callous disregard for conventional morality. Therefore, although strongly associated with bonding and empowerment in the first half, shedding a positive light on the collective, laughter is an unfixed symbol whose interpretation depends on the co-text and viewpoint from which it is presented.

Returning to elements which contribute to a positive framing of the collective, recurring imagery of networks and active linking portray women as interconnected and equivalent. In the opening extract from the "Book of Eve", the way the electrostatic power works in the body's nervous system is described through comparison to the structuring of natural phenomena such as trees branching, roots extending, lightning forking and rivers converging, concluding that "the power travels within us as it does in nature" (3). Then, the electric power is equated to social power structures: "power travels in the same manner between people; it must be so. People form villages, villages become towns, towns bow the knee to cities and cities to states. Orders travel from the centre to the tips" (3). By drawing a line of analogy between social relations, the electrostatic power and natural formations, it has the effect of naturalising the former aspects, painting those too as organic and pre-given. Furthermore, the way that the electrostatic power is awoken in women is through physical connection: "the younger women can wake it up in the older ones" (59). This process is described between Margot and her daughter Jos (24), and between women in Riyadh (59), and Moldova: "the power was passed from hand to hand among the women" (94). Here, women physically connect to spread the electrostatic power between them, and create a chain of

transmission. There is a pay-it-forward logic to this connecting process, and its naturalisation through the foundational bifurcating tree, river and lightning imagery binds women together in organic union. There is also a sense that this is an egalitarian and horizontal linkage between women. Once bestowed with the power, a woman then has the power to confer it to others. Each woman can give a hand up to another onto the plateau of shared electrostaticity.¹³⁴

Moreover, this bifurcating imagery paints the association between women as based on a genealogical connection. That is, the root, river, or lightning bolt allows flow along its pathways because they share a common property and antecedent. Thus, through this comparison, the representation of women physically passing the power between them takes on a filial dimension. The women can connect because they are of the same genus, they have a shared, essential, aspect of identity. Through this mutuality, women are organically interconnected and have the ability to empower one another.

Importantly, in addition to explicit labelling or implicit connotations, one of the central factors determining how themes or imagery are interpreted, as positive or negative, is the management of psychological and spatiotemporal points of view. These perspectives create the reader's window into the story-world, and have the potential therefore to influence their opinion of the narrative and characters. In *The Power*, no narratee is openly identified or directly appealed to. However, at points an indeterminate audience is obliquely addressed, through the impersonal use of the second person

¹³⁴ However, beyond this egalitarian imagery, there is in fact much inequality in strength and quality of the power between women. Some such as Roxy or Allie have a particularly enhanced ability or special control, whereas others, such as Jos have a faltering and uncontrollable power.

pronoun and rhetorical questions. For example, in narratorial mode, questions are posed and left unanswered: “what can ever be more seductive than to be asked to stay away? What draws people nearer than being told they are unwelcome?” (115). Or, in passages of reflector narration, a generalised ‘you’ is invoked, for example:

It gives you an itchy feeling in your skein to watch a lightning storm ... it’s just that there’s something exciting about the storm (76)

You can see it in her face on the footage when she feels it inside her (59)

Feels a little bit like being drunk, in a good way, in a strong way. Like that feeling you get when you’re drunk that you could take all comers (297)

The impersonal use of ‘you’ is also evident on pages: 59, 70, 109, 156 and 159. In a certain regard, these questions and pronouns create a discursive role for the reader. They invite them to personalise the impersonal reference, imagining what an “itchy feeling” in their skein would be like, or comparing the character’s emotions with their own experiences of drunken bravado. Of course, the reader may not actively engage with this role, or may not be able to (if they have never been drunk for example), but nonetheless it builds an open-ended space for response and association with character psychology.

Moreover, the use of the impersonal ‘you’ for generic reference belongs to a more informal register than other paradigmatic options such as ‘one’ or a passive structure. For example, “it is evident on her face” is more academic or formal than the conversational, “you can see it on her face”. Additionally, in the phrases above, a familiar tenor is implied through the adverbial “just”, fragmented sentences (“feels like...” instead of “it feels like”), and contractions (“you’re” and “there’s”). Through these linguistic clues, the speaker, here an ambiguous “reflected” composite of narrator

and character voice, constructs an informal relationship with their addressee. Cumulatively, this language constructs the effect of a close affective relationship between narrator, character and reader. This is enhanced by the internal view we are provided of character psychology in passages of reflector narration, where we have access to their thoughts and perceptions. Taking account of both these interpersonal aspects, psychological perspective and informal tenor, the reader is often positioned as almost a friend or, in passages of stream of reported consciousness, as an extension of the character's self. In this way, the reader becomes almost a member of the group, being placed amongst them as a silent witness, or even confidant.

It is worth remembering, however, that register does switch regularly in the text, and so these positions are transient rather than enduring. Furthermore, it does not follow that the readers will be sympathetic to characters, just because they are positioned rhetorically close to them. For example, readers are unlikely to view Darrell positively, given that he betrays his sister; however, there are nonetheless passages where he is the narrative 'reflector' and we hear his inner voice in FID for example: "He's still got *loads*. No wonder blooming Roxy always looked so pleased with herself. She was carrying this round inside her. He'd've felt pleased with himself, too" (303). In this way, value judgements on characters and events, although influenced by psychological perspective and reader positioning, relate also to content, narratorial comment, framing, co-text, and, naturally, subjective interpretation.

Yet, in relation to the collective, it is significant that whilst the reader is allowed an internal view of communal psychology early in the novel, potentially engendering a

more associative reading, in later sections the group are only viewed externally. This intimate view into shared feelings and perceptions is evident in many of the convent scenes, particularly this passage where the girls are baptised into the new female-centric religion by Mother Eve:

Eve says, ‘Then God will show us what She wants of us’
And this ‘She’ is a new teaching, and very shocking. But they understand it, each of them. They have been waiting to hear this good news.
The girls wade out into the water, their nightgowns and pyjamas sticking to their legs, wincing as their feet find sharp rocks, giggling a little, but with a holy feel that they can see on one another’s faces. Something is going to happen out here. The dawn is breaking.
They stand in a circle. They are all up to their waists, hands trailing in the cold, clear brine.
And each of the girls around the circle suddenly feels their knees buckle under them. As if a great hand were pressing on their backs, pushing them down, ducking their heads into the ocean to rise up, water fountaining from their hair, gasping and knowing that God has touched them and that this day they are born anew. (78-79)

Here, gerunds and present tense create a ‘real time’ effect of the scene unfolding before the reader, positioning them with a contemporaneous view of events. A proximal spatial position is also constructed through deictic prepositions such as “out here”, and the directional “around the circle”, placing the reader amongst the group. Moreover, through narration in reflector mode, the reader is given access to the girls’ thoughts and feelings. The collective reference to “the girls” and “they” presents them as unified, or at least analogous, with the emphatic “all”, “each of them” and “each of the girls” stressing the similarity in consciousness. Certain fragmented phrases could be read as giving voice to the girls’ collective thoughts, for example “very shocking” appears to be their specific appraisal of the teaching, and “something is going to happen out here” could also be their phraseology. However, these are embedded in narratorial voice, so the source of

the wording is ambiguous. In any case, the frequent *verba sentiendi* (such as “understand”, “see”, “feels”, “knowing”) are indicative of ‘positive’ modality, that is language which conveys definite opinions and a reliable grasp on the world. Simpson notes that positive modality tends to be “co-operatively orientated” towards the reader (*Ideology* 57). That is, it facilitates reader interpretation by stating explicitly what a character or narrator thinks and feels, rather than omitting or speculating on their psychology. Positive modality also eschews doubt or alienating structures to promote the evaluative perspective of the narrator or character as accurate and truthful. In the above example, the characters’ experiences are therefore depicted as authentic and comprehensible, and the reader is positioned spatiotemporally and psychologically close to them. As noted, this proximal construction does not invariably entail a sympathetic response; but tied as it is with the homely, supportive, and filial connotations of the convent, it does create optimal conditions for an associative move on the part of the reader. At very least, the unity of the group in their shared sentiments is likely to be interpreted as harmonious, rather than uncanny, because they are elucidated rather than estranged by the informative inner viewpoint.

Internal perspective of group psychology, informal register, and spatiotemporal positioning narrow affective distance between reader and the collective, and work with metaphors of interconnectivity, the motif of joyful laughter, and theme of sisterhood, to portray women working together as organic, pleasurable, egalitarian and ultimately, eutopian, in the opening stages of *The Power*. However, as the narrative progresses, there is a marked change in the representation of the group. The harmony of the early

passages turns to eerie unity, the emancipatory and subversive laughter becomes heartless and scary, and solidarity gives way to mob mentality. In addition to the increasing violence and brutality of the collective's actions, a key factor effecting this shift in attitude towards the collective is the psychological perspective from which they are viewed. Whereas we often see and perceive *with* the group in the first half, towards the second half they are increasingly approached from an alienating external viewpoint, which constructs the female collective as inhuman, obscure, and strangely unified. The next section will provide examples to substantiate this claim, before going on to contextualise the novel's dystopian depiction of women working together with reference to the genre and feminist debates.

The following example appears towards the end of the novel. Darrell, Roxy's brother who has stolen her skein and taken over her drug manufacturing business, has just fought and seemingly killed a US soldier revealing to the on-looking (female) factory workers that he has a skein. This extract involves the women turning on Darrell. The full section is reproduced in Appendix 3, with relevant phases copied below:

He sees the dark eyes of the women watching him from the factory. He knows something then ... The women are not glad to see what he has done or that he could do it. The fucking bitches are just staring at him: their mouths as closed as the earth, their eyes as blank as the sea. They walk down the stairs inside the factory in orderly file and march towards him as one. Darrell lets out a sound, a hunted cry, and he runs. And the women are after him.

... he knows they can see him, and they are making no sound, and he lets himself think – maybe they've turned back, maybe they're gone. He looks behind him. There are a hundred women and the sound of their muttering is like the sea, and they are gaining on him, and his ankle turns and twists and he falls.

... there's a look on their faces that he cannot read.

... They are calling to each other. He cannot hear precisely what it is they're saying. It sounds like a collection of vowels, a cry from the throat: eoi, yeoui, euoi.

... He knows he is speaking, but he cannot see any recognition in their faces.

... And they're on him. Their hands find bare flesh, their grasping, pulling fingers on his stomach and his back, the sides of him, his thighs and armpits. (305-07)

This passage displays B(R)-ve psychological perspective. That is, a category B (heterodiegetic) narrator independent of the characters (evident in the third person references to them), reflects the thoughts and perceptions of a character through prominent negative modality. It is Darrell's psychology which orients the narrative and is the source of the estranged attitude towards the women. Narratives displaying negative shading foreground uncertainty through prominent epistemic modality, words of estrangement, and comparative structures including metaphors and similes. This atmosphere of uncertainty tends to present the world or other characters as unpredictable, unknowable or vague, and can promote effects such as horror, estrangement or the grotesque.

In the above extract, comparative structures feature heavily, for example "their mouths as closed as the earth", "their eyes as blank as the sea", and "it sounds like a collection of vowels". In this context, comparisons create a sense of alterity and impenetrability, given that the sound or feature cannot be described exactly, only approximated. Moreover, the metaphorical association of the women (or fragmented parts of them) with the sea and the earth, construes the group through the network of qualities linked with these inert but powerful expanses. As such, the women take on sea-

and earth-like connotations of vastness, depth, darkness, and thus are represented as concordantly engulfing, overwhelming and inhuman. Furthermore, epistemic doubt is expressed in the repeated “maybe” (“maybe they’ve turned back”, “maybe they’re gone”) and negated perception verbs (Darrell “cannot hear”, “cannot read” and “cannot see”). These create a sense of disorientation and, overall, the exaggerated external view of the women created by the negative modality estranges them, placing them as an unknowable, monstrous entity. Darrell can only guess at what they are saying and intending. This representation of the collective is corroborated by other elements such as synecdoche and parataxis. For example, on a few occasions parts of the women (“the dark eyes”, “their hands”, “their grasping, pulling fingers”) stand in for the whole and take on the agency. This structure disconnects the body from the controlling mind, and parts appear uncannily animated by a force beyond reason. Additionally, the repeated use of the conjunction “and”, rhythmically builds momentum, for example: “There are a hundred women *and* the sound of their muttering is like the sea, *and* they are gaining on him, *and* his ankle twists *and* turns *and* he falls” [my emphasis]. The final section of the extract, from “and they’re on him”, also shows a paratactic construction in its lack of subordinating conjunctions. Here events are connected by an additive logic, and cause and effect are obscured. Both instances create a sense of inevitability in the accumulating actions. These linguistic features, along with the description of them moving “as one”, create an image of the women as a single mass, unstoppable and sinister.

This is not an isolated example however; similar language and negative modality is evident in most later scenes featuring the collective, including when Tunde observes a ritual between women from his hiding place in the Bessaparan forest (268-70), during Tunde's description of women "rampaging" in Delhi (133-38), the narrator's description of women protesting against an assault and arrest of a woman (116-18), and in this extract from Tunde's capture by a band of women in Bessapara:

There's a noise in the bushes to his right. He whirls around. But the noise is on the left, too, and behind him; there are women standing up in the bushes, and he knows then with a terror like a springing trap – they've been waiting for him. Waiting all night to catch him. He tries to break into a run but there's something at his ankles, a wire, and he falls. Down, down, struggling and someone laughs and someone jolts him on the back of the neck. (271)

Again, the narrative is in reflector mode, this time with Tunde, and there is also evidence of negative modality with the comparative "terror like a springing trap". The sense of confronting an entity or phenomenon that exceeds representation, which negative modality tends to create, is reinforced in this extract by under-specificity, existential processes and elision of the subject. These features shape how experience is conveyed in the narrative, and as such pertain to the ideological viewpoint. For example, the fragmented "down, down, struggling", mimics Tunde's limited and confused perceptions of direction and action. The repeated "someone" and "something" indicate a gap in comprehension, the presence of an unknown and thus unnameable entity. It resists construal or visualisation; "someone" acts as a mask over the women, blanking out individuality and leaving an empty gap behind it. In this way, no picture or psychology is available, and the women are thus rendered obscure and indistinguishable. In addition, this incorporeality is underpinned by placing "noise" as a stand in for the women at first.

Their presence is indicated by a sound, rather than referred to directly. This mechanism of externalising agency or identity has a similar effect to metonymy, and occurs at other points in relation to the collective. For example, in a crowd scene, instead of describing the women as talking more loudly amongst each other, the narrative states that “a great muttering rises up in the crowd” (117). Structures which place inanimate features or outputs as agentive, decentre the women presenting them as diffuse and intangible. This mirrors character disorientation, but also serves to depersonalise the collective.

Furthermore, in the extract above, there are three existential processes.

Existential processes are one of SFG’s six transitivity systems (material, mental, verbal, behavioural, existential or relational). Transitivity choices shape how participants, objects and interactions are represented, and, importantly, reveal a particular view of the world and of experience. There is no necessary way to represent content. For example, in the case of “There’s a noise in the bushes” (existential), the same situation could have been expressed as “he hears a noise in the bushes” (mental) or “a noise comes from the bushes” (material). Although referring to the same event, each of these re-phrasings puts an emphasis on different elements (the situation – existential, Tunde – mental, and the noise – material) and depict it as a different kind of process: one of existence, perception and action respectively. In terms of existential processes, Eggins notes that they encode “states of being” and are phrases “where things are simply stated to exist” (254). There is no interactional aspect to them, and they provide no information on cause and effect. In this way, the noise is not portrayed as stemming from someone or something; rather in this structuring it exists independently. The other existential processes in that extract

(“there’s something at his ankles”, and “there are women standing up in the bushes”) similarly contain no information on how “something” came to be at his ankles or who put it there, or how or why women are in the bushes, they are simply there. Again, this is not an isolated use of this transitivity structure, it occurs with relative frequency in relation to the collective. For example, when women go to a police station to demand the release of a prisoner:

There are more women arriving every minute ... There are maybe two hundred and fifty here now ... there’ll be several hundred women outside it within one half-hour. (117-18)

In the scene of Darrell’s death, analysed above:

There are a hundred women and the sound of their muttering is like the sea ... There’s a look on their faces that he cannot read (306)

And in Riyadh:

There is a ripple through the crowd ... the others are on him like a tide. There is a sound like eggs frying ... There are so many of them; they are so numerous and so angry. (60-61)

In these examples, rather than portraying women and their actions as conscious and purposeful, they are instead presented as “existents”. Consider “there are more women arriving every minute”, in comparison to an alternative structuring “more women arrive every minute”. In the latter, this is something the women are doing, in the first this is just a state of affairs, as if it were a spontaneous occurrence. The repeated use of these existential structures has the effect of obscuring agency, disassociating the actions and effects from the source, and makes the collective’s actions appear self-generating and so inevitable, almost predetermined. Another notable aspect of transitivity in terms of the

novel's treatment of the collective, is intransitive structures. These are processes where there is only one participant and so no goal, range, beneficiary or recipient of the action, speech or perception (Eggins 230). In the following examples, there are no objects or adverbial prepositions accompanying these verbs: "the women are gathering, shouting and marching" (56), "they take the women with them as they gather and grow" (60), "the crowd is surging and chanting again" (135). As a result, these actions and behaviours have no limits, directions, substance or targets. For example, they are not surging towards anywhere, and no information is given on what they are shouting or chanting. This creates the impression of boundlessness, indeterminacy and inexhaustibility. Coupled with the existential processes, inanimate and externalised agency, and metonymy, it contributes to the representation of the collective as a depersonalised and unstoppable force.

Another way the collective takes on a dystopian shading in the novel, is through dehumanising imagery which creates an (ideological) link between the group of women and animals or natural phenomena. For instance, collective nouns and verbs are applied to the group which carry connotations of dogs and insects: the group are described as a "pack of women rampaging" (133), and that "they swarmed through the city" (56). Explicit analogies are also made with Margot comparing the onset of the electrostatic power in girls with a plague of winged ants all taking to the air at once (21), and in narratorial discourse, women's conversation is compared to "a crowd of murmuring birds" and the sound of wind through grass, "The noise again, like grass stalks blowing" (118). Nature imagery recurs in the scene of Darrell's downfall as well as on other

occasions, in particular sea and wave analogies for the group: “the others are on him like a tide” (60), “the tide of women grows” (297) “eyes as blank as the sea” (305) “their muttering is like the sea” (306). They are also associated with the destructive natural phenomena such as tsunamis (133), hurricanes (286), and strong winds, “like the wind stripping the leaves from a tree, so inexorable and so violent. They pull the skein” (307). This naturalistic and animalistic imagery implies senselessness, savagery, and force, and portrays the women as out of control, unthinking and overwhelming.

Furthermore, vocabulary of simultaneity and unity binds the collective into a single undifferentiated mass. To begin with, for example in the baptism scene, due to reader positioning as outlined earlier, the plural subject, “they” creates a sense of communal experience and accord. However, later in the novel, the emphasis on shared subjectivity becomes more menacing, not only through its connection to violent acts, but because it is not experienced *with* the collective but filtered through the consciousness of an external observer. In this example, Roxy is in hiding watching a group of women raid a refugee camp in Bessapara:

She knows when she sees the single flash of that gleeful and hungry face that they’re not here to raid for what they can find. They’re not here for anything that can be given.

They start by rounding up the young men. They go tent to tent, pulling them down or setting them on fire so the occupants have to run out or burn. They’re not neat about it, not methodical. They’re looking for half-way decent-looking young men (280)

Here, Roxy interprets the group’s motivations from external clues, their behaviour and appearance, and it is her evaluation of them as “gleeful and hungry” that colours their presentation. Thus, although an idea of the women’s psychology is included, it is

distanced and approximated through the mind of another, precluding any associative moves on the part of the reader. Moreover, the marked repetition of “they” at the beginning of phrases foregrounds the unity of the women and posits them as a monolithic entity. At other points, the women’s co-identity is underlined through adverbs and adverbial phrases of simultaneity and concurrence: for example, after the police station protest the women “walk away as one” (118), in Riyadh “they understood their strength all at once” (56), Darrell thinks that “they’re sinister fuckers, the way they move together” (297), then they “march towards him as one” (305) and in Moldova when sex-trafficked women escape their captor “they fall on him all at once” (93). Overall, latterly in the novel, the thematic stress on the totality of the group in the recurring use of “they” to begin phrases, the adverbs of oneness, and external perspective present the collective as uncannily and threateningly unified.

To summarise then, as well as the escalating violence of the collective, women working together is portrayed in an increasingly dystopian light in *The Power*. This negative vision relates to the external and alienating viewpoint which is adopted in relation to the group, and stylistic features such as: epistemic modality, parataxis, synecdoche, animalistic and natural analogies, under-specificity, existential processes, foregrounded third-person plural references and adverbs of simultaneity. These elements combine to generate a sense of horror and to depersonalise the collective, representing the women as an inexorable, homogenous and ultimately monstrous mass.

It is notable that private, intimate spaces correlate with a positive attitude to the collective in the novel, whereas public spaces play host to the most negative portrayals.

For example, the reader is more spatiotemporally and psychologically proximal to the group in the scenes which take place in the convent and its grounds. However, an alienating, distal perspective is adopted towards them in street scenes of protest (Delhi, Riyadh, at the police station) and in the forest and refugee camps in Bessapara. This change in setting and stance chronologically coincides with the expansion from small groups of women and girls banding together to larger scale social, political and religious movements of women. The transition also corresponds with an escalation in the level of violence. In this way, eutopian solidarity becomes linked with closed spaces and dystopian mob rule with public spaces, implying that there is a bounded limit to where harmony can flourish, and contact with the external sphere leads to bloodshed and corruption.

So how do we make sense of this textual shift in relation to the collective? To start with a generic lens, prominent political historian Gregory Claeys' recent monograph on the topic claims to provide "a new theoretical account of how dystopian groups function" (*Dystopia 3*). To understand the dystopian collective, Claeys surveys theories of group dynamics, including works by Le Bon (1896), Freud (1928), Ortega y Gasset (1930), Fromm (1941 and 1973) and Canetti (1960). These writings responded to world events, stemmed from sociological and psychological insights, and in turn influenced dystopian writing from the twentieth century to date. From his research, Claeys identifies certain recurring themes. In the early studies particularly, the crowd is posed in binary opposition with the rational individual. As is the case with other hierarchical dualisms, the crowd was assigned the negative qualities which were

excluded from the ideal of 'self'. That is, the group was associated with irrationality, the unconscious, destruction and portrayed as infantile and uncritical (Claeys *Dystopia* 48). For example, Le Bon's "psychological law of the mental unity of crowds" holds that individual personality and psyche cedes to the collective mind-set; by "mental contagion" the mood of the group takes over all within it (in Claeys *Dystopia* 20). This is the basis for ideas of 'herd mentality' and of the loss of self and personal morality in the crowd which still persist today. Le Bon also argued that images and words became mantras and ingrained in the group's subconscious, cementing into fixed ideas which "no longer needed any connection to reality" (Claeys 21). In *The Power*, the women become fixed on revenge against men, losing any sense of proportionality. The characteristics of the crowd, as theorised in the twentieth century, are evident in the negative representation of the "rampaging", uncannily unified, and estranged collective outlined above. In this sense, Alderman's novel can be understood as subscribing to these views on mob mentality and depicting a classically dystopian vision of collectivism.

However, not all groups are crowds, and, as Claeys points out, those theorists were approaching the subject from a broadly anti-proletarian and elitist position. Claeys acknowledges that groups are necessary for protection, a sense of purpose and they "provide us with a socially constructed definition of the self. Like it or not, 'I' am produced by 'we'" (34). If groupings are a necessary part of our social fabric, why then do groups of women in *The Power* become so destructive, homogenous, and dogmatic? Claeys suggests that, "when groups reach a certain size our ability to function as

individuals is increasingly constricted” (39). This certainly aligns with the trajectory of female solidarity in the novel, with its move from the individuated and intimate group, to the homogenous, depersonalized crowd. Yet, even so, there is no absolute requirement for large groupings to lead to totalitarian conformity and merged identity. Big organisations, countries, and international diplomatic unions *can* (although not always) subsist without individual members sacrificing their own opinions and sense of self. Or, even if some concession must be made as regards autonomy in order to receive the benefits of group membership, this does not have to be an all-encompassing submission or an overall net-loss. It is not therefore inevitable, as *The Power* may have us believe, that as groups grow and gain power they will become dystopian. Certainly, in *El país de las mujeres*, the text’s overall ideological structuring favoured a positive interpretation of the nation under women’s governance. Still, if that novel had privileged the dissenting voices, such as the disgruntled men who had been ejected from the workplace, the all-female government may have taken on a different shading. Similarly, in *The Power*, if the narrative continued with a proximal rhetorical position vis-à-vis the crowds of women, then they may have retained a eutopian sense of liberation, righteousness and individuality.

This reinforces the importance of the point of view from which the group is perceived, and the comparison between the two novels draws out the key factor underpinning in-group identity: sexual difference. In *The Power*, the affinity that binds the mob is previous experiences of gender-based victimhood, whether that be harassment, rape, assault, discrimination or secondary treatment, and this, universally, in

Riyadh, Delhi, Moldova, the United States and Britain drives them to rise up and take revenge. The women share in a narrative of vengeance and reparation, which is made explicit in the narrative, with groups named “revenge bands” (251) and “a vengeance gang” (242), and in the rhetoric of Mother Eve’s teachings (187, 228). Claeys notes that “hostility to enemies, or negative groupishness, while not essential, commonly strengthens in-group identity” (*Dystopia* 42). Thus, the dominant paradigm for in-group identity in the novel is structured around a binary axis of female/male gender, which correlates with a (directly inversed) victim/oppressor framework. Women unite to fight their mutual enemy: men. Taking a critical perspective, this direct connection between gender and victimhood is universalising and does not engage with how different axes of identity such as race, class, and sexuality impact on experience of gender and gendered oppressions. Although there is an amplification of the women’s backlash depending on geographical location and, ostensibly therefore, the level of repression. For example, in the US and UK there are individual attacks but little large-scale civil disobedience, and women are counselled to do “breathing exercises” (102) or join the North Star camps for supervised training (88). However, in Delhi, Riyadh, and Moldova, where women’s conditions have been more restricted and precarious, there are street protests, destruction, war and killing sprees. The logic to this is that women’s oppression varies between societies, but this difference only exacerbates, rather than alters, the backlash when the scales swing from misogyny to misandry. The text also only deals with international rather than *intra*-national variations. In this way, *The Power* isolates a single scale for evaluating gendered power relations; from oppressed to oppressor. It therefore could be challenged for erasing the diversity of female experience. However, that is not

to say that it does not still have force and value in a feminist context. Its bold and uncompromising vision of the female collective certainly contributes to feminist discourses on collective action and association. As discussed at length in an earlier chapter, issues of collective identity and activism are a central concern of contemporary feminisms. It will therefore be illuminating to consider the portrayal of the collective in *The Power* against this background.

As outlined above, the horror attached to the female collective is marked in the text; groups of women are monstrous and overwhelming. The novel expresses, particularly on a symbolic level with sea analogies and dark eyes, a fear of boundaries of Self being blurred and lost in the Other. On one hand, this portrayal echoes essentialising tropes of womanhood, relating women with the traditional binaries of darkness, the irrationality, and destruction, similar to Freud's designation of women's sexuality as a "dark continent" or the classic Medusa figure which Cixous undermines. It also, at points, recalls Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection. Abjection is a sensation, according to Kristeva, of horror or disgust mixed with fascination, a form of "sublime alienation" (*Powers* 9). It can be provoked by rotten food, refuse, corpses or bodily fluids, not because they stand for death or decay but because they straddle the boundary between life/death, clean/dirt and health/illness. This transgression is key to the concept; Kristeva confirms that it is "not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order" (*Powers* 4). Tunde's reactions to the electrostatic power and to the women in the Bessaparan forest express a tension between repulsion and attraction reminiscent of Kristevan abjection. The first time he encounters the power

is when a friend, Enuma, releases a pulse into his arm as she kisses him. His reaction is described as follows:

He is afraid. He is excited ... The thought is terrifying. The thought is electrifying. He is aching hard now and does not know when that happened ... The things are tangled together now in his mind: lust and power, desire and fear (15-16)

Then, when he watches a ritual sacrifice of a man by a group of women in the forest, he feels a similar stimulation, masturbating as he watches the killing: "In that moment, he longed to be the one with his wrists clasped ... And when she killed him it was ecstasy" (270). In the first example, the antithetical parallel statements depict his experience as encompassing the conflicting emotions characteristic of the abject. Moreover, his arousal in both situations evokes the *jouissance*, the pleasure, which "causes the abject to exist" and entails that "so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims" (Kristeva *Powers* 9). To understand the pleasure of the abject, it is necessary to clarify how Kristeva relates the concept to psychosexual development.

For Kristeva, the abject stems from a breakdown of, or revelation of the fragility of, categories and laws. The self/other boundary is perhaps the most fundamental of these divides, being a primary distinction within, as Kristeva eloquently puts it, "our personal archaeology" (*Powers* 13). In her developmental schema, infants begin life in a period of undifferentiated unity with the mother, this is the pre-linguistic *chora* (a state of dynamic "non-expressive totality"), where they have no sense of self or boundaries, only of drives (Kristeva "Revolution" 93). Then they transition through a stage of "narcissistic crisis" where they begin to have a sense of their own self as a separate

entity, whilst still attached to the maternal body which therefore becomes a threat to their burgeoning boundaries (Kristeva *Powers* 14). The infant is thus caught in the border space between fully realized selfhood and union with the Other. Kristeva characterises this process as “a reluctant struggle against what, having been the mother, will turn into an abject” (*Powers* 13). The mother becomes abject, because although still associated with pleasurable fulfilment of drives, she also represents a fearful pull back towards the *chora* which has the potential to re-engulf and annihilate the new subject. Tunde’s sexualized death-drive, evident in the sacrifice scene, embodies the urge towards self-oblivion in the *jouissance* of fusion with the Other. In this way, the portrayal of the collective as unified, de-personified, making unintelligible sounds, and, in Tunde’s eyes, inducing horror and fascination, symbolically links them to the abject, particularly the threat/pleasure attached to dissolving ego boundaries. In this symbolic framework, groups of women in the novel become signifiers for the mother, the Other, death and masochistic pleasure. What’s more, they are objectified through their emblematic role, with their voices obscured into non-signifying sea-like muttering, cries “eoi, yeoui, euoi”, and silence, “they are making no sound” (306). Thus, from the abjection expressed in relation to shared womanhood, it would be possible to read the dystopian collective in the novel as serving to re-mystify the feminine and reinforce damaging binary associations with darkness, irrationality, undifferentiation, and non-signification. Yet, this latter earnest interpretation of the text’s imagery should be balanced with the ironic distance engendered by the temporal layering, metatextuality and the framing device. It could be argued that the one-foot-in, one-foot-out reading position that was identified earlier in the chapter, allows a reading of the collective as

parodying classic anti-feminist stereotypes of the 'angry' or 'man-hating' woman. The exaggerated monstrosity *could* be construed as satirical. This interpretation is dependent, however, on the individual reader making a second order inference of the text's self-awareness, and is offset by the narrative perspective which, through Tunde, Roxy and Darrell's psychology, reflects a sincerely scary picture of the mob.

Overall, then, the destructive female crowd does activate, rather than challenge, reductive tropes. That is not to say, however, that this annuls the feminist ethos of the work. Through defamiliarising reversal, placing women in the aggressive roles normally reserved for men, the novel estranges violence against women. Alderman is quick to point out in interviews that women do nothing to men in the novel that is not happening to women in the world today ("FAQ" n.pag.). Indeed UN Women calls violence against women and girls "a human rights violation of pandemic proportions" and their website on the topic notes that one third of women worldwide experience gender-based violence (UN Women "Violence" n.pag.). This figure illustrates the scale of the issue, which, in comparison, receives relatively little coverage. In this way, to a greater or lesser extent and accounting for cultural variations, violence against women across the world is normalised and often invisible. In most established frameworks of gender norms, even if illegal or socially unacceptable, it is effectively par for the course that men, as 'naturally' virile and aggressive, will be violent. Male-on-female violence does not unsettle the naturalised gender order, whereas *The Power's* reversal of victim/aggressor roles does serve to de-habitualise them, revealing their contingency and exposing male violence as non-natural. From that angle, one reason the women appear so monstrous is

that aggression, violence, and rape *de-feminise* them, because they do not fit with current cultural ideals of how women should behave. In traditional, but still prevalent, notions of the female gender, women are associated with pacifism, empathy and loving care. By splitting women from these 'feminine' traits, the group troubles gender binaries. They are acting as men are assumed to do in crowds and in war, whilst retaining their female form. This transgression reinforces their abject status, and explains, over and above the language and imagery, how they trigger fascination and fear. In this sense, their violence is marked because it is carried out by women.

Whilst this is a valid interpretation, it relies on an assumption that if the collective, empowered by an electrostatic strength, were men then it would not engender the same horror. However, it has been shown that the horror stems, not just from their actions but from the perspective from which they are viewed and the language and imagery which renders the group opaque, homogenous and inexorable. The external, alienating viewpoint would ensure that the collective in this novel would be fearful whatever their gender. Following this line of thought, the most patent conclusion to be drawn from the portrayal of the collective is that it surpasses gender, to speak to human nature. It emerges as inevitable, emphasised especially through the exponential branching imagery and experiential processes, that power corrupts, that the stronger group will dominate the weaker. There is no other path for women to take, other than to repeat the violence inflicted on them. Therefore, the text advocates that there are no differences between women and men in their innate behaviour, which is shaped instead by circumstance. However, as a correlate to this anti-essentialist stance on gendered

identity, the novel affirms human relations as inherently antagonistic, almost akin to a Hobbesian state of nature where violence predominates and people live in “continuall feare, and danger of violent death” (Hobbes i. xiii). More detail on the novel’s view of the subject and shared human nature will be covered in the next section on individual identity. For now, it suffices to remark that, as much as the novel levels out characteristics, behaviours and tendencies between the genders, it still holds a universalist vision of humanity, and one which is overwhelmingly negative.

3.2.2 Individual Identity: Gender Masks over the Drive to Dominate

The plot of *The Power*, where girls and women take on the traditionally ‘masculine’ qualities of aggressivity and dominance once the electrostatic power develops, clearly exposes cultural ideas of gender to be contingent and mutable. To investigate further the novel’s representation of sex, gender and human nature, this section will chart how the text foregrounds the construction and maintenance of gendered identities, and contextualise this against linguistic, poststructuralist and feminist theories.

As noted, in *The Power*, gendered stereotypes are established then systematically reversed; so-called ‘feminine’ qualities and positions are mapped onto men and ‘masculine’ ones on to women. This involves the inversion of the perceived power dynamic between genders, namely the dominant/marginalised and victim/oppressor paradigms, as well as the characteristics attributed to each side of the binary divide, such as strong/weak and intelligence/beauty with their attendant clichéd conventions. Without

expanding on them all, it suffices to state that a large number of these gendered tropes are reversed throughout the novel, including men being objectivised (219, 228), men becoming perceived as more emotional than women and being advised to “calm down” (90), women dating younger men (175-76), girls being valued for their strength and boys for their looks (258), men’s work being devalued and appropriated by women (267), men playing the naïve ingenue role to women’s authority and wisdom (as with Neil and Naomi, and a newsreader, Kristen, who changes from simpering sidekick to expert), even to the point where it is explicitly discussed on the news that “men are less intelligent” (278). In fact, the systematic inversion of binary gendered conventions is painted in such primary colours in *The Power*, that it becomes a rather heavy-handed mechanism for dealing with the subtleties of gendered identity. This is because any reversal contains the latent assertion of the original stereotype. For example, to understand the inversion present in Roxy’s view of herself as cowardly involves inferring clichés of male and female characteristics: “here she is. Hiding. Like a man. She’s not sure what she is any more” (284). Here, a reader will note that the association of men and cowardice as marked, only if they accept that it is usually women who are perceived as cowardly. Thus, this textual strategy, which aims at defamiliarisation, relies on exaggerated, sexist and, often rather outdated, female archetypes. The idea of women as objects, weak, unintelligent, submissive, marginalised, victims and so on, is a spectre which is summoned in order to be renounced. Yet, given that the stereotypes are so straightforwardly defined, this clichéd vision of female identity in a male hegemony becomes something of a straw-woman which does not correspond to most contemporary gender regimes. Undoubtedly, women still fight against discrimination and

pigeonholing; however, the concept of ‘feminine’ behaviour and qualities are complicated not only by other, intersecting axes of identity, but by ongoing commodification and re-appropriation in Anglo-American society. For example, strength as a physical attribute has become a desirable facet of contemporary feminine identity. This has come about by a growth in fitness and wellness culture which idealises a lean, strong body type and valorises endurance and strength. This ideal of ‘feminine’ strength is still gendered and sexualised, but does demonstrate that prevalent conceptualisations of gender are not as neatly polarised as they once were.

Nonetheless, although transformed and much contested, stubborn and operative traces of dichotomous gender identity do remain ingrained in the cultural imaginaries of the Global North. The fact that, for example, women’s patronage and men’s deference *is* marked shows how habituated we are to the connection of women and men to certain positions. Even more subtle cases, such as when Naomi mentions her assistant (“I’ll ask my assistant if he’ll sort out some dates for us to have lunch” (338)), do stand out, because female bosses with male assistants are still unusual. In this way, the strategy of gender reversal does still have estranging force, calling for the reader to notice how pervasive gendered stereotypes and roles are even in so-called progressive, liberal countries. Moreover, the unfixing of gender from behaviour acts to de-naturalise the cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity. If non-essential or non-natural, these gendered ideals are therefore arbitrary and can theoretically be changed. As such, the novel at once exposes how active gendered conventions continue to be, and implies that these should be challenged.

Furthermore, *The Power* also usefully examines how notions of gender are established and maintained through a matrix of language, law, religion, science and consumerism. In the text, these discourses are shown to work both top-down through formalised systems of power, such as the church and legislature, as well as bottom-up from habits, and mutual regulation. In terms of institutional structures, in Bessapara laws are established to cement the new gender ideology with men, for example, “no longer permitted to vote”, “own businesses”, “drive cars”, or “gather together” (243). Flouting these laws entails strict punishments, demonstrating how state apparatus can, and indeed *does* in many countries, function to secure gender hierarchy. Moreover, in the same scene, Tunde learns that: “police here no longer investigate the murder of men; that if a man is found dead it is presumed that a vengeance gang had given him his proper reward for his deed in the time before” (242). This highlights how it is not only the written content of the law which influences lived experience of gender, but also how it is implemented and what remains permissible.

Also, science emerges in the novel as a confirmatory tool of dominant worldview. For example, in the closing correspondence Naomi invokes evolutionary psychology to justify the gender status-quo, “men have evolved to be strong work homestead-keepers, while women – with babies to protect from harm – have become aggressive and violent” (333). Equally, in the main narrative, it is stated that:

pregnancy hormones increase the magnitude of the power – perhaps a side effect of a number of biological changes during this time, although people say now, very simply, it’s to protect the baby” (173).

In most cultures, motherhood is regarded as causing women's supposed caring nature, and this belief is often supported by biological or evolutionary rationale. Inverting this notion attracts attention to how science can interpret the same material in different ways, depending on questions posed and study design. In this way, scientific practice emerges, not as neutral, but as a means of naturalising the cultural.

Another discourse which the text explores in relation to gender roles is religion, in particular the Judeo-Christian tradition. Allie, as Mother Eve, selectively re-works Biblical teachings to build a new woman-centric order. From the traditional (patriarchal) figureheads of God and father which preside over the spiritual and domestic domains, the new religious order instates a feminised God and mother to oversee society. Although acknowledging God's metaphysicality, Allie reverses the generic reference to a female pronoun, stating "She wants us to know that She has changed Her garment merely. She is beyond female and male, She is beyond human understanding" (114). She also explicitly alters the gender hierarchy: "They have said unto you that man rules over woman as Jesus rules over the Church. But I say unto you that woman rules over man as Mary guided her infant son, with kindness and with love" (83). Parables and teachings are re-told from a different viewpoint, or outright rejected. For example, Mother Eve proclaims to her followers "You have been taught that you are unclean, that you are not holy, that your body is impure ... But you have been taught *lies*. God lies within you" (115). Or, Easter, from a time to mark Jesus' death and resurrection, becomes, "the festival of eggs and fertility and the opening of the womb. Mary's festival" (81). In this way, the Bible is an intertext which is subject to a process of re-appropriation and

resignification in the novel. This process is clearly outlined in the text, for example, in the convent the girls are depicted, “finding Scripture that works for them, rewriting the bits that don’t” (104), and windows in a Bessaparan church “have been replaced and reimagined according to the New Scripture” (225). By foregrounding the creation of religious truths, *The Power* shows religious dogma solidifying through partial and motivated human intervention to reinforce existing gender paradigms.

Another cultural mechanism that subtends the gender regime in the novel is capitalist consumerism. For example, adverts serve as a site for habituating gender norms, and this, again, is explicitly acknowledged:

There are advertisements on hoardings now, with sassy young women showing off their long, curved arcs in front of cute, delighted boys. They’re supposed to make you want to buy soda, or sneakers, or gum. They work, they sell product. They sell girls one other thing; quietly, on the side. Be strong, they say, that’s how you get everything you want (258)

The publicity industry works to construct shared notions of the ideal. However, these visions are, to an extent, consumer led and therefore respond to, as well as shape, gender identity. Indeed, the novel does also examine how individuals and groups have a role in re-producing and sustaining gender. This top-down *and* bottom-up dynamic relates to the novel’s representation of power.

In general, materialist second-wave feminisms favoured a top-down conception of power (see for example Moi 98-99 for a critique of this tendency). That is, the belief that humans are subject to social forces which influence how we behave and control ideas of ‘normal’. In this vein, patriarchy was seen as an issue of systemic repression,

created and maintained through state and institutional apparatus. In this schema, changes occur by collective action aimed at structural and legal entities. However, poststructural thought, for example the work of Foucault, has contested this unidirectional model of power, arguing that power is multidirectional and productive. This means that individuals actively participate in reproducing and upholding norms. Moreover, this conformity must be experienced as agreeable rather than coerced, otherwise it would not be accepted (Foucault 199). In relation to gender, Judith Butler's work (notably *Gender Trouble* from 1990 and *Bodies that Matter* from 1993), influenced by Francophone poststructuralism, looks at how gender is created in the context of the individual body. She concludes that not only do we reproduce gendered norms, but gender consists of nothing but this reproduction; there is no substance, or authentic 'sex', underlying it. Her famous example is of a drag artist's routine through which, "we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity" (Butler *Trouble* 188). That is, a man (sex) assuming a feminine identity (gender), not only destabilises the concept of a natural gender but of *any* sexed identity because gender is the mechanism through which the illusion of natural sex is created. Butler affirms that this performance parodies "the very notion of an original" (*ibid*). Indeed, with this view, political action which challenges mechanisms of power can be carried out at an individual level. Butler advocates for the disruption of the "the regulating practices of cultural coherence" (178). According to this stance, networks of power can be challenged from the bottom-up. Namely, individuals can participate in changing discourse, and fixed ideas of gender specifically, by acts of resignification and parody.

Jarvis calls *The Power*, “a particularly contemporary novel” for the reason that it has a conception of power which emphasises the importance of both ‘official’ codes and doctrines *and* personal performance and pleasure in the construction and maintenance of gender roles. In this way, a materialist critique of culture and society is combined with an understanding that culture and society are themselves constituted through the accumulation of individual acts. This dual aspect can be appreciated in the attention paid to language in the novel. In one sense, language is regulated by institutions with prescriptive grammars and dictionaries delimiting correct usages. It is also an intersubjective medium which relies on mutual recognition between users. This communal and rule-based dimension provides the potential to break with standard use and thereby create a marked effect. For example, until recently, the use of the male generic was standard practice in the English language (although this has now changed to a singular ‘they’ or ‘their’ for generic reference in informal contexts, with a range of alternatives possible in formal writing (Purdue OWL)). Thus, when in *The Power*, the generic reference moves to a female pronoun as the gender power balance flips, it remains comprehensible but stands out as unfamiliar to a contemporary reader. For example, the narrator describes Tunde as thinking “there must be someone out there, someone making a stand. Some idiot calling the hurricane to descend on her” (286) and towards the end the narrative muses about the impending cataclysm: “when a person has taken a wrong turn, must she now retrace her steps, is that not wise?” (328). Here, in an illustration of top-down power, language is represented as responding to cultural changes, the female generic emerges because society is becoming female dominated.

In another sense, language evolves *through* use, and this is where the choices of individual users and communities can, over time, influence norms and social understandings. A noticeable linguistic strategy in *The Power* is the adjectival insertion of ‘men’ and ‘male’ in the framing letters. Unlike the male generic pronoun, this parodies a linguistic habit that continues in twenty-first century usage. Often, given that women have been marginalised from certain roles, a specifying adjective will be added to clarify their gender, otherwise they would have been assumed to be men. For example, a recent headline notes: “female astronauts politely corrected Trump mid-spacewalk” (McFall-Johnsen). This type of usage is unmarked in relation to women, but is effectively defamiliarising for a contemporary Anglophone reader when inverted in correspondence between “Naomi” and “Neil”. Naomi refers with surprise to: “male soldiers, male police officers, and ‘boy crime gangs’” (x) that appear in Neil’s narrative, and Neil writes from an address at the “Men writers association” (ix). Critic Sarah Ditum, in her review of the novel, remarks that “even that casual use of ‘Men’ as an adjective is shocking, so unfamiliar that it feels like a breach of grammar” (51). With this tactic, the narrative calls attention to how men remain the default and women the latent Other in society, with this imbalance naturalised in our language use. There is no need to remark on a man’s gender because our first vision of an astronaut, or police officer, or doctor, and so on, remains, unfortunately, male. It also demonstrates the possibilities of bottom-up change through politically motivated language use, illustrating how estranging linguistic habits can reveal hidden biases.

Additionally, the framing letters underscore how individuals perform their gender through language use. This performative view holds that, although there is no innately gendered way of speaking, gender is signalled through repetition of particular linguistic habits which are conventionally linked to feminine identity. Linguist Sara Mills confirms that, although these gendered frameworks are context dependent, they are nonetheless operational: “feminine gender identity is largely constructed around notions of “nice”, supportive, co-operative behaviour” (“Impoliteness” 263). Thus, when we communicate, largely unconsciously, we make choices that conform to or flout ideals of feminine or masculine speech. Mills affirms that, “individuals negotiate with what they assume are community-of-practice norms for linguistic behaviour” (*Politeness* 3). Thus, we become gendered through our language use in context.

In *The Power*, so-called feminine mannerisms, including self-deprecation and effusiveness, are performed by “Neil” in the framing letters. For example, after a section about his “historical novel” filled with questions for “Naomi”, he adds the apologetic and deferential, “anyway, sorry, I’ll shut up now” (ix). This overstated politeness is mirrored in the gratitude which frames his other correspondence, such as “Thank you so much for this. I am so grateful you could spare the time” (x), “thank you, first of all, for taking the time and trouble to read the manuscript” (334), and “thanks again for reading it. I really do appreciate it” (335). In her study of gender and politeness, which is aimed at deconstructing such fixed ideas, Sara Mills notes that femininity is commonly associated “with politeness, self-effacement, weakness, vulnerability, and friendliness” (*Politeness* 203). Indeed, this notion is also intersected by class, given that “at a

stereotypical level politeness is largely associated within Western countries with middle-class women's behaviour" (*ibid*). Neil's exaggerated politeness parodies this conventional middle-class 'feminine' characteristic, highlighting that it is only contingently linked to the female gender.

Moreover, Neil's letters are filled with exclamations such as "I'm sure many will!", italics to add emphasis such as "the 'miracles' really *are* explicable", intensifiers such as "terrifically" and "really", and expletives such as "bloody" (all ix). In his overview of systemic functional grammar, Halliday argues that the main function of swear words is to "reinforce the 'you-and-me' dimension of the meaning" (*Grammar* 134). That is, they serve on the interpersonal plane to build a relationship between the participants. The same could be said of the emphases created by italics, exclamations and intensifiers: these expressive elements create a sense of the "friendliness" that Mills notes is seen as stereotypically feminine. They also provide the letters with a cooperative orientation, indicating where the stresses should fall and, with the exclamation marks, signalling a light-hearted tone. In this way, they conform to supposedly 'feminine' cooperative language-use (for more on women's so-called 'rapport talk' see Mills *Politeness* chp 4). For a reader immersed in contemporary Anglo-American culture, Neil's letters read as if a man were voicing 'women's speech'. Yet, this very act, that a man can speak as a woman, functions satirically to denaturalise the connection between gender and linguistic behaviour. Alderman's employment of this defamiliarising device entails a performative attitude to gender, and as such contradicts notions of a fixed or authentic female character. Furthermore, *The Power's* treatment of gender and language,

including introducing the female generic and male descriptive adjectives, has a political effect in that it intervenes to disrupt commonly held stereotypes of gender identity.

The novel also dramatises how gendered discourses are propagated at a local level through derogatory language, violence, and stereotyping. For example, girls and women who do not conform to the new gender ideals are subject to bullying and name calling: “there are nasty names now for a girl who can’t or won’t defend herself. *Blanket*, they call them, and *flat battery*. Those are the least offensive ones. *Gimp*. *Flick*. *Nesh*. *Pzit*” (64). Here, peer pressure has a regulative function, coercing compliance to dominant models. Moreover, although the reader is initially told that the electrostatic power is universal (67), it later turns out that skeins are not so neatly mapped onto biological sex: “about five girls in a thousand are born without” and “there are a few boys with chromosome irregularities who have it, too” (171). Indeed, one character, Ryan, who Margot’s daughter Jocelyn (Jos) dates, has a skein. However, Jos is teased by other girls for liking a boy with a skein (206), and her mother engineers their break-up to avoid any scandal damaging her political career (191-92). Men with skeins are considered “deviants and abnormal”, and so men start to hide their skein because “they don’t want to be associated with this. With *weirdness*. With chromosomal irregularity” (153). Again, othering through language, categorisation, and exclusion police what is considered ‘normal’. Violence too has a role in this process, with transgressions severely punished: “there are boys who’ve been murdered for showing their skein in other, harder parts of the world” (153). In her article on the novel, Jarvis argues that, “skeins may appear to define women physically, and their lack to define men, but these demarcations

are socially constructed, as the few men born with skeins are shunned and punished” (Jarvis 4). In her reading, the skein “is material but also symbolic and discursive” (*ibid*). Certainly, it is a physical feature which has a particular output: an electrostatic shock. And, how this is understood and interpreted is shown to be through a web of interacting discourses, with the skein’s relation to gender enforced through social mechanisms. Thus, in *The Power*, the skein is shown to be inducted into the hall of sexed features through discursive and material means. It is not absolutely correlative with ‘female’ or ‘male’ sex, but society acts to create its connection with sexual difference and police the updated categories.

On one hand then, given the attention paid to the mechanisms by which gender difference is naturalised into binary categories, the novel appears to align with a radical constructivist position. Christine Jarvis certainly reads the novel, “as a neat literary example of Butler’s configuring of sex as something that we do/perform, rather than something that we are” (4). However, although I agree with that *The Power* does render gender identity as a performed illusion, rather than an innate character, I note differences between Butler’s theory and the ideological positioning of Alderman’s novel. Firstly, Butler’s argument contests the Cartesian notion of the rational human subject. That is, for Butler the idea that there is a pre-given thinking-self subtending our knowledge and experience is false. She states, “there is no recourse to a “person,” a “sex,” or a “sexuality” that escapes the matrix of power and discursive relations that effectively produce and regulate the intelligibility of those concepts for us” (Butler *Trouble* 44). In this view, there is no human nature, and no access to self or identity, that precedes or

evades discursive construction. It is not that the body does not have materiality, just that we cannot conceive of it directly, without apprehending it through our learnt frameworks. *The Power* diverges from this stance, as it contains a strong thread of universalist humanism in the aphoristic appeals to human nature and the seeming inevitability of the outcome. It also does not seriously challenge binary sexual difference, and even entails a form of biological determinism.

So firstly, although the text reads as an emphatic rebuttal of the idea that any attribute such as care or empathy is innately ‘feminine’, it does still express a definite view on how humans act in general. Thus, despite gender being demonstrated as contingently influential on behaviour, shared human nature emerges instead as an operative and necessary force. In part, this vision of timeless and fixed nature is created through passages of B(N)+ve narration: the heterodiegetic narrator (B) narrating from a position external to any character (N) with positive modal shading (+ve). Positive modality is a textual marker for subjectivity, given that modality is “the grammar of explicit comment”, relating to attitudes and beliefs (Simpson *Ideology* 39). However, Simpson’s ‘positive’ category is neither homogenous nor absolute. When positive shading suppresses *verba sentiendi* in favour of frequent generics, it serves to masquerade opinion as fact. Rather than emphasising narratorial personality, it accentuates instead authority and objectivity. As discussed earlier in this chapter, there are many switches in register in the text, and therefore no clear narratorial identity. Register relates to word choice and structures, so modality, or lack thereof, also plays a role its interpretation. For example, timeless generic statements echo the certain and

commanding tone of official texts such as religious or legal documents. The narrative agent in *The Power* often borrows this type of unmodalised sentence structure to deliver maxims on shared human experience and nature. Examples include: how the Goddess cult is stoked “by the imaginations of young people, which are now what they have always been and ever shall be” (86) and “it is that time in life when children start to wear their adult faces” (44). Here, categorical assertions with timeless and generic reference create a truth effect. Thus, through the grammar of objective fact, human relations and behaviour are portrayed as predictable, pre-given and supra-cultural.

It must be kept in mind, however, that text opens up the potential for irony through its temporal layering, framing device, and shifting registers. In one sense, these statements could be interpreted as echoing, and so parodying, the authoritative discourses which serve to construct ideas of the human condition. If we read these examples as ironic rather than sincere, they illuminate processes of naturalisation and truth creation. Yet, when examined in textual context, these generics do not appear to trigger an ironic interpretation. For example, on page 31, Allie is being subjected to a violent rape by her foster-father. The context is therefore serious and the narrative tone accordingly frank, focussing on details such as Allie’s positioning with her “head cricked against the headboard” (31). As such, the reader is not primed in this passage to expect insincerity and, instead, is likely to view the narrative agent as speaking genuinely. Therefore, when Allie’s retributive electrostatic attack on her foster-father is introduced, as follows, the second order interpretation required to read the narrative voice as ironic is unlikely to be made:

Nothing special has happened today; no one can say she was more provoked than usual. It is only that every day one grows a little, every day something is different, so that in the heaping up of days suddenly a thing that was impossible has become possible. This is how a girl becomes a grown woman. Step by step until it is done. As he plunges, she knows that she could do it. (31)

Rather, these aphorisms *do* contribute to building the novel's humanist ethic. This interpretation is supported by the text's structuring, epigraph, and story, which also construct a vision of shared human nature. For example, the chapters in the main narrative are presented in chronological order and grouped into periods based on their distance from the cataclysm, starting with "Ten years to go" (5), up until the final headings "Can't be more than seven months left" (249) and "Here it comes" (291). Narrative time is therefore explicitly arranged in a countdown structure, with each section moving closer to the cataclysm. This creates a sense of inevitability from the outset, implying that there could be no other result. In this way, it suggests that, if given power, it is pre-determined that women will dominate, oppress and provoke war. Not because of their gender, but because these behaviours are depicted as necessary correlates of power.

This absolute connection between power and corruption is established in the first instance by the epigraph which appears after the dedication but before the framing letters. It is a Biblical extract, a version of 1 Samuel 8, which involves Samuel warning the people against appointing a king. Samuel claims a king would unfairly subjugate and profit from the people to the extent that they would "cry out for relief from this King" (viii). However, the people insist on a king and Samuel, on consulting with God, gives them a king. In this Biblical chapter, kings, as people who hold power, are inevitably

corrupt, and people, without power, are inevitably exploited. Narratologist Gérard Genette in his work *Paratexts*, asserts that the most ‘canonical’ function of an epigraph “consists of commenting on the text, whose meaning it indirectly specifies or emphasizes” (*Paratexts* 157). Here, the epigraph and story mutually reinforce the premise that power corrupts and rulers become tyrannical, as a result of universal human nature. As such, this is a canonical epigraph, serving to favour a particular reading of the story: of history repeating itself except with the genders reversed. As discussed, at other points in the novel, Biblical register and references function as a medium to be reworked to meet Allie and the group’s purposes. This highlights how the original *and* updated texts are products of human intervention, created to uphold particular viewpoints. Interestingly, the main narrative, after the framing letters, also has a religious epigraph, this time from the Book of Eve. This parallel positioning of extracts from the Book of Eve and the Bible puts them in discursive alignment. The comparison between the two texts places them as equal in terms of status, and so, in a certain respect, presents them both as political fabrications. However, more pertinently, their equivalence also posits human action as predictable, implying that groups will always create texts to assert their authority and corroborate their worldview. Whether in real-world history, or in an alternate world, the message is that humans will be humans. Hence, with the 1 Samuel 8 epigraph, the contingent nature of the text is not the focus, rather, its truth value as a warning about human proclivity to tyranny emerges in retrospective analysis as its primary function.

Furthermore, the story itself belies a deterministic view of human nature. When given a physical power advantage, women take on exactly analogous behaviours and roles as men display in our world where they have, generally, greater physical strength. For example, instead of female genital mutilation there is male “curbing” (337), women carry out war crimes and gang rape (194, 282), and women curtails men’s rights (242-44). Not all characters become tyrants, but all exploit their power over others to a greater or lesser extent. For example, even Jocelyn, who has a weaker skein and therefore has trouble with assuming the new updated version of powerful female identity, still ends up murdering a male character and using her mother’s influence to sanitise and justify her act. Literary critic and author Amal El-Mohtar agrees *The Power* implies that, “the horrors of our times are inevitable” (14). In its vice-versa strict reversal of gendered roles, the novel does suggest that individuals are inexorably bound by shared humanity and tainted by the species’ flaws. As such, *The Power*’s central plot device, epigraph, authoritative narrative discourse on human nature and temporal structuring, all rely upon a notion of a pre-given human subject and nature. This distinguishes it from a radical constructivist position on gender identity.

In addition, biology plays a key role in character behaviour and serves as the foundation of the action. The skein is not inert material in *The Power*, but a feature which acts on the women to determine their behaviour. The skein is portrayed as agentive and causal. For example, the relationship of biology to behaviour is dramatized by giving voice to the feature: “it’s [the skein] saying: you can do it. It’s saying: you’re strong” (9), “the skein whispers to him: She’s only one soldier. Go out there and give

her a fright” (296) and “to the woman with a skein, everything looks like a fight” (328). In these instances, the character acts because of a biological imperative from the skein. It is the skein which is the cause of their strength and aggression. This representation of direct bodily drives differs from Butlerian view of sex as discursively constructed, given that in the above examples, body and mind are in unmediated communion. As noted, Jarvis holds that in *The Power* “maleness and femaleness are both material and discursive.” (4). By this she means that the novel portrays biological sex as both a physical reality and as a social construct. But does it, as Jarvis claims, hold discursivity and biology in tension when it comes to sexual difference? Or does it rather retain sex as pre-discursive, as per the classic social constructivist view of gender as the social meanings of sex? Certainly, *gender* emerges as constructed in the novel, but I would argue that the novel does not posit sex difference as discursive. Although not all women and girls develop the electrostatic power, it does largely correlate with biological sex. The ‘natural’ and dichotomous categories of female and male are not troubled by the emergence of the power, even though some males have skeins and some females do not. Skeins do not substitute for sex, rather they are overlain onto pre-existing and unchallenged sexual difference. For example, men who develop the skein are still sexually males, women who do not have a skein are still sexually female, they simply have a “chromosomal irregularity” (153). The equations are male+skein≠man, female+skein=woman, male-skein=man, female-skein≠woman, as such the identity which the skein disturbs is one of gender, not sex. The novel is therefore not concerned with deconstructing the binary sex divide.

Furthermore, and importantly, it is physicality which brings about the change in social relations. The order is crucial, because it entails implicit cause and effect. Biology changes *then* discourse changes, thus cultural understandings of gender difference are portrayed to be *the result of* a physical power imbalance between two clearly-defined sexes. This view of the cause-and-effect behind gender relations, relies on the same narrative as classic, mainstream sex-neutral social constructivism. Namely, that women's physicality entailed that men, as the stronger group, were able to assert their dominance and define women as the Other. For example, Simone de Beauvoir's iconic introduction to *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) places this relation, not as a cultural or historical event, but as a state of affairs that has existed as long as there have been humans. She argues that "there have always been women; they are women by dint of their physiology; as far as history goes back, they have always been subordinated to men", and as such, "sexual difference is a biological given, not a moment in human history" (Beauvoir *Tome I* 6-7).¹³⁵ According to this view, sex belongs to nature, and male dominance and female oppression is a binary, and inevitable, outcome of this biology. It differs from an essentialist stance, however, in that sex difference is not determining in character or behaviour, rather these differences are conditioned through the pre-existing sexed hierarchical framework. Given that *The Power's* storyline places the cause of gender inequality as biological differences, it aligns with this social constructivist position and accordingly is vulnerable to the same criticisms that post-

¹³⁵ il y a toujours eu des femmes ; elles sont femmes par leur structure physiologique ; aussi loin que l'histoire remonte, elles ont toujours été subordonnées à l'homme / La division des sexes est en effet un donné biologique, non un moment de l'histoire humaine

structural, queer, Black, and post-colonial theories brought to bear on mid-twentieth century views of sex and gender. For example, Jean Elshtain takes issue with how this origins theory of a fixed gender regime portrays women as universal victims of the “sex-gender system”, overlooks differences between women, and entails a “narrative of closure” which takes the conclusion that women are oppressed by men as a pre-given fact and so can only reinforce this proposition (7-10). Elshtain proposes that the only logical way out of the systemic victimhood for women in social constructivist view of gender relations is to do away with nature: “women will be ‘free’ only when ‘nature’ is *aufgehoben*” [cancelled] (11). That is, both cultural ideas of women’s innate nature, and our human nature to oppress and dominate, must be altered before gender hierarchies can be rendered obsolete. In *The Power*, biology is not cancelled but altered. However, human nature remains implacable and thus rather than destroying the gender regime, biological changes simply reverse it. Indeed, it is striking how quickly women cast off social conditioning in *The Power* to radically reverse their character and actions. Within a few short years, women move from stoically enduring abuse, or being submissive to male superiors, to victimising men, waging wars, and carrying out acts of extreme violence. The implication is that all that is keeping women from acting in so-called ‘masculine’ aggressive and bullying ways, is opportunity. As soon as they have the chance, they dominate and oppress, despite having been raised in a culture which would, supposedly, have discouraged these characteristics in the female gender. Yet, if ‘femininity’ can be discarded as easily as a plastic mask, then it follows that there must be a human nature or biological imperative that is driving behaviour rather than learnt and conditioned habits. Human nature emerges as so dark, overwhelming and consistent

in the novel, that as soon as a physical advantage is gained the stronger group will inevitably look to crush the other. With this view then, it seems inevitable that men, with the advantage of being strong enough to gain the initial advantage, will continue to dominate, because it is in human nature to do so. That is a rather bleak outcome, and *The Power*, in that sense, certainly does not prescribe any solutions or course for feminist activism. José Yebra agrees that “it can only respond to patriarchy and violence – both objective and subjective – with irony” (11). Yet, perhaps it is not the role of literature to provide answers or take a didactic stance. The novel does shed defamiliarising light on gendered disparities and violence, and its function as a piece of utopian fiction will be considered in the next section.

3.3 Critical Anti-Eutopia

When asked how to categorise her text, Alderman has quick-fire answer that she provides in interviews, stating that “if my novel is a dystopia, we’re living in a dystopia today” (“Dystopian” n.pag.). Although this seems to downplay the ending of the main narrative, which culminates in a near-apocalyptic cataclysm, it does speak accurately to the époque of the framing letters which provides a recognisable, but reversed, social set up and gender relations. Indeed, different periods in the story display different shadings, from a version of the real-world, there is a time of eutopian liberation when women free themselves from oppression, which quickly turns to abuses of power, and a dystopian civilisation-ending war, before returning to a civilised, but reversed, version of contemporary society. In some respects, the novel does display characteristics of the

classic dystopian genre. Keith M. Booker, a prominent utopian theorist, argues that “the principal technique of dystopian fiction is defamiliarisation” which serves to “provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable.” (*Impulse* 19). Certainly, *The Power* exploits this same strategy, estranging gender relations, to shed light on the scale of violence and oppressions against women. Yet, when it comes to defining the genre, Booker feels that a novel must be “oriented toward highlighting in a critical way negative or problematic features of that society’s vision of the ideal” (*Impulse* 22). Here, I would argue, is the nuance which prevents the classification of the novel as a dystopia, in the traditional sense at least. The target of the novel’s critique is not our “society’s vision of the ideal”, because gendered violence and constrictive gender stereotypes, although normalised, are not held as an *ideal* in twenty-first century Anglo-American culture. Rather, eradicating these gender inequalities is the explicit target of mainstream campaigns, policies and laws (for just one example see new regulations against gender stereotyping in adverts; Committee of Advertising Practice). In this way, as Alderman suggests, the novel is not straightforwardly dystopian.

The novel may then find more resonance within the more ambiguous and postmodern critical and transgressive eutopias and dystopias that have been theorised by Moylan, and by Sargisson, Baccolini and Mohr in the feminist setting. Although taking slightly different foci, their research identifies very similar features in the novels they study, including transgressions in terms of form and content, narrative self-awareness and -reflexivity, open-endedness, a critical gaze on society and on dogmas, a blending

eutopian and dystopian impulses and incorporation of elements from other genres (Baccolini 18; Mohr 67; Moylan 10, 44-46; Sargisson 20, 201). Undoubtedly, as noted, dystopian and eutopian impulses both surface during the novel. Moreover, in terms of formal transgressions, *The Power* demonstrates a certain narrative fragmentation as the text is punctuated by many registers and perspectives, and interspersed with documents and images. As such, genre borders are crossed with the integration of epistolary (the framing letters), pseudo-testimony (the archival documents and archaeological artefacts), fantasy (the electrostatic power itself), and satirical (burlesque of gender stereotypes) elements, creating a polyvocal text and transgressing generic absolutes.

From a conceptual perspective, the personas “Naomi Alderman” and the anagrammatical “Neil Adam Armon” trouble the concept of authorship and narrative identity, and to an extent, the boundary between fiction and reality, with the real-world author taking on a text-world role. This metafictional device also demonstrates the self-reflexivity that Moylan views as characteristic of these critical texts, defining it as a “commentary of the operations of the text itself” (46). Moreover, continuing with conceptual transgressions, the self/other binary is also disturbed through the portrayal of the abject crowd which menaces and thrills as it threatens to engulf the individual. Additionally, non-standard language use in the novel denaturalises the masculine default and with that the cultural androcentric bias. As such, our shared conceptual framework on gender is transgressed and challenged. Sargisson remarks that transgressive feminist utopianism, often disturbs “stereotypes and codes of social normality” (201). Evidently, *The Power* breaks and renders visible gendered conventions. Yet, Mohr refines

Sargisson's definition of transgression, to describe it as "fluid moments of suspended binary logic" (67). Can this blurring then be achieved through reversal? The suspension that Mohr outlines requires a dis-establishment of binaries, but not their re-establishment. Under this light, the novel does question gender stereotypes, but does not unsettle binary sexual categories, because dichotomous difference is re-affirmed through its inversion. Indeed, the text does not quite have the transgressive force of Sargisson or Mohr's corpora, given that it does not destabilise the notion of order itself, for example hierarchies, only their content.

The other feature of contemporary feminist utopianism that is widely remarked upon is open-ness and lack of closure. This would be expressed by avoiding a return to the status quo at the end of the narrative arc, and by eschewing fixed political or social models. The latter can be seen in the fact that *The Power* does not propose solutions to gender inequalities. It limits itself to a critique rather than a generative vision, which means that no totalising scheme or system is proposed by the narrative. Furthermore, it could be argued that there are different ideological perspectives privileged in the text, creating space for multiple interpretations rather than a singular, dominant moral message. For example, the reader could adopt Mother Eve's fatalistic position in believing that the only hope for change is to raze everything to the ground and start over with women in charge: a form of pro-female millenarianism. Or, the reader may take a nihilistic view, based on the brutal portrayal of human nature, and view the novel as a pessimistic tale, closing down the hope for change. Alternatively, they could read with Neil as he writes to Naomi, that this story can teach us to "choose differently ... we can

think and imagine ourselves differently once we understand what we've based our ideas on" (338). He stresses that an awareness of our tendencies to dominate and oppress allows us to overcome them. However, these readings are not equally supported by the narrative. For example, Mother Eve is depicted becoming crazed and unstable, she "comes to pieces" (318), and her position is debunked when the resulting re-built civilisation turns just as corrupt as the material world, only reversed. Neil's outlook, although having the weight of explicit narrative comment, does not tie in with the storyline which reinforces dominance and submission as inherent and perpetual features of human relations, rendering any effort to think differently futile in the face of monolithic human nature.

Critic Boris Uspensky argues that a text can only be truly open and dialogic if all ideological viewpoints have equal status (9-10). In *The Power*, Mother Eve's eutopian millenarian perspective is included only to be refuted. Neil's hopeful impulse is tacked on as an afterthought. They are thus subordinate to the main negativistic ethos. Structurally, the text does also enact closure: from a chronological starting point akin to the twenty-first century material world, the narrative journeys through disruption, rebellion, change, chaos and cataclysm to the reestablishment of order and civilisation. As such, the status quo is upended, but then reinstated, albeit in a reversed form. This implies that, even if thrown in the air, there is an inevitable return to unequal social structures. In this way, the dominant reading of *The Power* is as an anti-eutopian text. Peter Fitting argues anti-eutopia consists of a "critique of utopianism" (Fitting "Utopia" 141). The narrative arc of the novel explicitly bursts the bubble of eutopian feminist

schemes to change world, and by default (for lack of an alternative) affirms the status quo as at least inevitable, if not desirable. The direct reversal of gendered oppressions contends any claim that we may be better off if women were in charge. In this way, it positions itself in opposition to the eutopian all-female governance, such as that proposed by *El pais de las mujeres*, or Mother Eve's own female-centric religion. It also disputes any affirmational championing of women's difference, and instead asserts a strong sex-neutral attitude, positing human nature as shared and ungendered. On the level of plot and outcome, it could be argued that the purpose of the novel as a whole is to systematically rebuff notions of innate femininity.

Nevertheless, the ironic attitude established through the metafictional framing letters, temporal structuring and shifts in register and tone must also be taken into account. The emphasis these features place on the text's constructed and speculative nature allows a satirical reading. On this level, the critical function of the text is foregrounded and, although not quite fully embodying Sargisson and Mohr's transgressive genre, does place the novel as a *critical* anti-eutopia. That is, a text which denies eutopian thinking, but retains a critical attitude to the present moment, and even, to its own ideology. The text's ironic status makes possible a distant and satirical reading position vis-à-vis the work as a whole. The reader may judge that the narrative is not meant to be taken at face value, despite the gravity of the issues it addresses. Rather, they may read the novel as serving to provoke thought and debate on gender in society, and not rigorously standing by the deterministic views it contains. Irony undermines narrative closure, and promotes instead a certain ambiguity. Ultimately, then, *The Power*

can be thought of as an open novel because it leaves a space to question its own conclusions. A brief survey of reader responses in online reviews, confirms that there is no single consistent interpretation. Some find the novel broadly open and interrogative, and others emphasise the social critique, although many do view it as anti-eutopian and nihilistic. For example, Amazon reviews show anti-eutopian readings:

Basically women are just as awful and power hungry as men, so the world's f****d either way. (18 May 2018)

Ultimately I found it disappointing and sad in its outcome (27 July 2017)

Alderman chose to focus on showing women as aggressive, cruel and power hungry, out for revenge on all men ... it would have been good to have had a more positive picture (15 April 2019)

Readings which focus on social criticism:

It also holds a mirror up to rape culture in our society which makes for some uncomfortable but still very well written reading. (14 June 2019)

It is sobering in its criticism of society and gender, especially in its reference to rape culture. (21 December 2018)

this may seem a dystopian genre but in fact it is a mirror image, in my view, highlighting the atrocities women face today and everyday at the hands of men. (26 October 2019)

Readings of the text as provocative and open:

The concepts were very thought provoking. A bit open ended I suppose but perhaps that is deliberate. (7 August 2019)

[I] wondered exactly where the author was heading and what she was trying to say ... in the end it was the last few pages that really got me thinking. It seems likely that we are indeed all asking the wrong questions (3 June 2018)

Although, this is a just anecdotal rather than scientific sample, it does highlight the range of responses to the novel, and demonstrate that the narrative accommodates multiple reading positions.¹³⁶ Thus, as a critical anti-eutopia, *The Power*'s ironic, multi-layered textuality allows it to activate a social critique of gendered inequality, a rejection of feminist essentialism, as well as an open interrogation of how to change dominant paradigms.

3.4 Conclusion

To summarise then, *The Power* displays an ambivalent attitude towards female collectivism. The representation of women working together in the novel turns from eutopian solidarity to dystopian destruction, as the scale of their uprising grows. Most clearly, this narrative outcome acts to counter pro-female feminist projects to valorise the 'feminine', and posits instead a shared, ungendered human nature which drives all individuals and groups to exploit power and dominate. From one perspective, this anti-eutopian attitude to feminist methods of emancipation and negativistic vision of the human condition results in a nihilistic and bleak narrative ethos.

¹³⁶ I have chosen to elide the usernames of the contributors, as some used full names rather than pseudonyms. Following Christine Jarvis (6), I have decided that it is ethically appropriate to include these reviews without the permission of the contributors, given that they posted on a public forum, and I am respectful of their opinions. The full reviews are accessible on Amazon: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Power-WINNER-BAILEYS-WOMENS-FICTION/product-reviews/0670919969/ref=cm_cr_getr_d_show_all?ie=UTF8&reviewerType=all_reviews&sortBy=recent&pageNumber=1

However, metafictionality, temporal circularity, register shifts and fluid narratorial identity open an ironic reading position and emphasise the satirical function of the text. As such, the gender inversion tactic does serve as a powerful social critique, foregrounding the varied mechanisms of power which enforce and reproduce harmful gendered norms and normalise violence against women. This systematic de-naturalisation is effective in rendering gender as a contingent cultural, rather than essential, attribute. Without a necessary basis, there is, in theory, potential for change. The text leaves questions unanswered on how women can “think differently”, how they can work their way out of the paradox of needing to associate based on similar experiences, whilst avoiding the dangers of dogmatic identity politics.

However, its deconstructive rather than generative attitude, whilst open-ended, does also embody, perhaps, a certain frustration present in British feminist movements at the time of its production. Utopian theorist Ruth Levitas points out that whilst openness and ambiguity has the benefit of eschewing prescriptivism, it is nonetheless also “disillusioned and unconfident” (227). This assessment could well apply to the state of Anglo-American feminisms, before re-popularisation courtesy of online movements and women’s marches in response to the Weinstein scandal, the Trump presidency and other cases which have brought misogyny and sexual harassment into the spotlight (Banet-Weiser 1). Certainly previously to this upsurge, and arguably still nowadays, the incorporation of “elements of feminism” into political and institutional discourses works to de-validate feminist demands, taking on their agendas but diluting and re-appropriating them in the process (McRobbie 7). Angela McRobbie, amongst others,

argues that mainstreaming women's rights into neoliberal systems in fact serves to "reinstale hierarchical gender norms" given that social change is limited to "the implementation of limited repertoire of policies whose effectiveness is doubtful" (135). However, given the widespread adoption of gender equality, this ineffectiveness becomes invisible and radical feminist critiques are delegitimised as unnecessary, replaced instead by an emphasis on choice and individualistic ideals of female success within dominant consumer culture (McRobbie 13). McRobbie confirms that "gender retrenchment is secured, paradoxically, through the wide dissemination of discourses of female freedom" (52). In her opinion, this postfeminist environment has resulted in disillusionment within the feminist ranks, and a "forced abandonment of a new feminist political imaginary" (McRobbie 81). I would argue that this abandonment is evident in *The Power*, which, though keenly aware of the need for change, can only substitute eutopianism with a blank space.

Chapter Four. *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes:* Femininity Made Unfamiliar

On reading *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* [I Who Have Never Known Men] (1995) by Jacqueline Harpman, the reader embarks on a quest for meaning analogous to that of the character-narrator.¹³⁷ That is, the drive to make sense of events, circumstances and identities propels the reading process, as it does the narrator's journey and eventual life writing. Yet, just as the narrator's search is never resolved, the reader's efforts to reach an understanding of the novel's post-apocalyptic scenario are similarly thwarted.

Due to its narrative and ideological indeterminacy, *Moi qui* differs from the other texts in this corpus which actively inscribe themselves into a tradition of feminist or women-centric writing through intertextual reference and explicit engagement with sexism. Whilst *The Power* and *El país de las mujeres* could be uncontroversially labelled "feminist fabulations" in Marleen Barr's term for speculative literature which addresses "woman's place within the system of patriarchy" (22), Harpman's novel resists straightforward classification under this heading, as it eschews didacticism or unequivocal critique, feminist or otherwise. Nevertheless, *Moi qui* does deal with themes central to this thesis and to feminist debates. In particular, the relationship between body and gender identity, processes of identity formation, and group membership. Its inclusion in this corpus relates specifically to its focus on the relationship between a female character-narrator and the larger collective of women, providing useful material

¹³⁷ From here on referred to as *Moi qui*.

for an analysis of the paradigm of the individual versus the collective in speculative fiction.

This chapter will begin with an overview of the author, the novel and its critical responses, to position this study amongst extensive previous scholarship. Then, the representation of individual and collective female identities in the novel will be examined. The analysis will continue to focus on narrative perspective, working with a critical linguistic framework. These findings will be contextualised against feminist debates on identity and difference. Then, in a final section, the work will be considered under a generic lens to evaluate how it participates in the utopian tradition.

4.1 Harpman and *Moi qui*: Out of the Ordinary

Without embarking on a biographical reading of her work, it is still possible to draw some lines of comparison between Jacqueline Harpman and the protagonists who populate her fictional worlds. Leading Harpman scholar, Jeannine Paque calls attention to the recurring figure of a female dandy in the author's oeuvre, through whose narrative "the big existential questions are explored" and who takes on "a self-emancipatory role which goes beyond the ordinary" (*Harpman* 153).¹³⁸ Certainly, Harpman's life could also be considered 'out of the ordinary', in that it traversed geographies, spaces, cultures and disciplines, including a multifaceted professional life spanning the domains of literature and psychoanalysis. Indeed, Harpman combined a successful career as a

¹³⁸ les grandes questions existentielles / un rôle autoémancipateur qui sort de l'ordinaire.

novelist with practising as a qualified Kleinian psychotherapist. Harpman denies that her psychoanalytic grounding exerts a conscious influence on her writing (Andrienne 202); however, her specialist interest in the psyche does seem to have informed her literary production. Susan Bainbrigge, who hosted an international symposium on Harpman in 2010, notes that she “privileges the inner worlds of her characters” (*L'aventure* 3), with Paque agreeing that she writes “only one type of story: the psychological novel” (*Harpman* 149).¹³⁹ The thematic concern with consciousness is evident in the persistent focus on identity throughout her oeuvre. However, interestingly, a sense of a fixed or unified subject does not solidify in the texts. Critic Fabrice Schurmans has noted that the quest for self-knowledge runs parallel with a continual destabilisation of identity in Harpman’s narratives (83). *Moi qui* shares this aspect with her other novels, and, as will be shown in this chapter, gender identities and boundaries are centre stage in the text.

Yet, despite thematic continuity between *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* and Harpman’s other literary texts, the 1995 novel “contrasts markedly with the rest of her oeuvre” (Bergeron n.pag.).¹⁴⁰ It is not her only work which could be considered as participating in the speculative genre. *La lucarne* [The Skylight] (1992) is retrospective, offering alternate histories of Antigone, Joan of Arc and the Virgin Mary, and *Orlanda* (1996) is similarly permeated with ontological uncertainty and the fantastic. However, *Moi qui* is the only one to depart so drastically from shared social reality, with its alternate setting outside the recognisable material world. Its bleak

¹³⁹ privilégie les mondes internes de ses personnages / un seul type de récit: le roman psychologique

¹⁴⁰ Contraste singulièrement avec le reste de son œuvre

landscapes and absurd spaces mark it out as a slice of grey post-apocalypse amongst the beaches, cities, homes and gardens that subtend her other writings.

Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes, published in 1995 and shortlisted for French literary award the *Prix Femina*, has been translated into multiple languages including English, Dutch, German and Turkish. The novel opens with the narrator's description of her current circumstances, impending demise, and decision to write about her life. She then goes on to recount her life story, from as far back as she can cast her mind. Her first memories are not of events, but "the feeling of existing in the same place, with the same people, doing the same things" (12).¹⁴¹ That *place* is a large cage in an underground bunker surveyed constantly by guards, the *people* are the 39 other women in the cage with her, and the *things* are: eating, excreting, and sleeping (12).¹⁴² None of the women know how they came to be there, one day confusedly supplanted from their old lives following a "catastrophe" that none can remember clearly, although they speculate about wars or being drugged (37, 57-58). Nor do the women understand how the narrator came to be grouped with them as she was only a small child when first imprisoned, unlike the rest who were adults with families, work and homes. This stage of the narrative, which spans almost a third of the text, ends abruptly when, one day, a siren sounds and the guards depart hurriedly. By chance, this happens when food is being transferred into the cage, so a set of keys are abandoned in the lock, allowing the women, led by the narrator, to escape. On their emergence from the bunker, the group find themselves in

¹⁴¹ Le sentiment d'exister dans un même lieu, avec les mêmes personnes, faisant les mêmes choses. [Although the novel has been translated into English, all translations here are my own.]

¹⁴² manger, excréter et dormir

the midst of a vast plain punctuated by undulating slopes, sparse vegetation and occasional streams. From here they embark on a journey to find civilisation. After years traversing the wilderness, however, they encounter nothing but featureless terrain and other, similar, bunkers. The inmates of these other sites have not been so fortunate, and remained locked in their cages after the unexplained disappearance of the guards. The women make the macabre discovery of their counterparts, always single sex groups of 40, always deceased, in the numerous bunkers that they reach on their travels.¹⁴³ Then, after the eldest member sickens and dies, the group decide to halt their journey and build a more permanent camp, where they stay until dwindling supplies demand that they move to a new location. As the years pass, the group inevitably shrinks as the women age, until finally, the narrator is left as the apparently sole inhabitant of the endless plateau. When alone, she continues the search onwards, eventually happening upon the hidden entrance to a more luxurious underground dwelling; a house with a bed, bath, toilet, books and mirror (175-76). This becomes her base, and where, after severe pains and bleeding, she realises she must be dying and decides to write the autobiographical narrative that constitutes the main part of the novel.

Whilst there *is* a narrative of development (a form of nihilistic *bildungsroman* as the narrator learns, grows and adapts) the attendant notions of progress and improvement are undercut by the un-resolvability and in-comprehension that enshrouds the narrator and her life. Perhaps due to this intriguing indeterminacy, of all Harpman's novels, *Moi*

¹⁴³ Once, there are only 39 bodies, but they deduce that one must have died before the alarm sounded, as there are 40 mattresses (98).

qui is one of the ones that has attracted most critical attention (Nodot-Kaufman 245). Key studies include: Jeannine Paque's article which picks out eutopian strands and highlights the text's challenge to "les idées reçues" [received ideas] ("Vie" 96); Susan Bainbrigge's analysis of the novel under a generic lens and against the historic context of *fin-de-siècle* malaise; Lorie Sauble-Otto's consideration of writing and creativity as linked to "survival and humanity" in the work (65); Sylvie Vanbaelen's study of the novel's symbolic register and its construction of femininity; Claire Nodot-Kaufman's inclusion of the text in her thesis on representations of menstruation in contemporary French literature; and the more recent articles of Patrick Bergeron and Laurence Pagacz which consider the novel alongside other post-apocalyptic fictions and the interrelation between self and environment in the text respectively.

There is a consensus throughout this critical corpus on the importance of the quest for knowledge, particularly self-knowledge, to the narrative, as well as an appreciation that this quest is left inconclusive. Moreover, as signalled by the title, the gendered aspect of the narrator's identity is the basis of particular interrogation in *Moi qui*. In the literature, the narrator is often conceived as challenging gendered stereotypes (Paque "Vie" 96), or as exceeding or transgressing the binary categories of sexual difference. Bergeron describes her as representing a kind of "pseudo-androgyny" (n.pag.),¹⁴⁴ whilst Sauble-Otto positions her "outside the boundaries of the two-sex system of gender" (61). This marginality or threshold position of the narrator vis-à-vis

¹⁴⁴ une pseudo-androgynie

the group of women, and notions of femininity, will be closely examined in this chapter, and theorised through psychoanalytic, deconstructive, and existentialist frameworks.

Bainbrige's study on the novel moves beyond consideration of the narrator to argue that liminality characterises the work as a whole. She outlines how the text transgresses generic models, mixing familiar imagery with the fantastic, and eutopian undercurrents with its dystopian ethos. Bainbrige's article will be a key reference point for the later section on *Moi qui*'s generic status and significance. Indeed, where relevant, insights from all cited publications on the novel will be integrated into the discussion in this chapter. As such, this contribution will serve to synthesise, to an extent, previous analyses on the novel, particularly those which have commented on the construction of identity in Harpman's text. However, this investigation will take an original approach by concentrating on the construction of identity in the work through the paradigm of the individual versus the collective. Furthermore, these findings will be derived from critical linguistic analysis, representing the first detailed evaluation of style in the novel, and read against feminist debates on identity and difference.

Before moving onto the main argument of the chapter, it is worth summarising the macrolevel arrangements of narrative viewpoint in the novel, so that later findings can be understood in this wider frame. In overarching terms, temporal perspective alternates between two main positions in the novel: the time of writing, and the past chronological progression from the bunker, to the journey across the plain, until the time of writing is reached again. The novel thus starts and ends with a character-narrator writing in the story-world present. This position embodies Simpson's homodiegetic

category A of psychological viewpoint, which are texts or passages “narrated in the first person by a *participating character* within the story” [original emphasis] (*Ideology* 55). However, this narrative position is complicated when the metadiegetic life-story narrative begins, and the narrator’s textual presence doubles. Although the voice still stems from a single source and is still labelled as “je” [I], this signifier stands for two distinct psychologies with different ways of thinking and judging, and who inhabit different temporal instants: the younger and older versions of the narrator. Often the two are indistinguishable, with the older self stepping into the shoes of the younger self and relaying retrospectively her thoughts and perceptions from that time. For example, on discussing a reconnaissance trip to a new settlement site, she states: “It was an enjoyable expedition” (118).¹⁴⁵ In cases such as these, there is not an evident psychological or ideological gap between the views of the narrator now and then. The view that the trip was pleasant could have been her feeling at that time, or in retrospect, or both. There is no indicator to set apart her current and past evaluation. Yet, at points the split becomes manifest. For example, “I already thought they were stupid but I didn’t admit it to myself in so many words. When I think about it today, what a horrid little idiot I was!” (25).¹⁴⁶ Here, there are two consciousnesses; the younger self is an object of evaluation within the field of the older narrator. Only the judgement that “they were stupid” stems from the younger self, the other elements of the sentences, such as “already” or “I didn’t admit it to myself” require a retrospective and more reflective understanding of the

¹⁴⁵ Ce fut une agréable expédition.

¹⁴⁶ Je trouvais déjà qu’elles étaient stupides mais je ne m’étais pas souciée de me le dire si clairement. Quand j’y pense aujourd’hui, quelle affreuse petite pécore je fus.

situation than was available to the narrator at the time. Thus, the activity of the older self in mediating the presentation of the younger self becomes apparent.

On one hand, it is important to retain the distinction that this is a character-narrator (type A), rather a voice external to any character (type B). This narrative mode signals a first-hand, internal view of the character's thoughts and a view of the story-world through their eyes. Of course, this does not imply that their perceptions and opinions are more genuine, unified, or reliable because they come from the subject in question rather than filtered through a third-party. Nonetheless, in terms of announcing authenticity to the reader, the perceived identity of the narrator does exert influence. On the other hand, it is important to recognise that the older and younger narrators *are* psychologically and ideologically distinct, because at times there is dissonance between their opinions and evaluations. During the metadiegetic life-story narrative, the older narrator effectively *reflects* the thoughts and perceptions of her younger self, as well as relating events, commenting on them and her younger self, and adding in analysis from her current position. In this way, the knowledge and perspective of the older narrator is broader than the younger self whose perspective is encompassed within the larger speech act of the older self. In this respect then, in Simpson's schema of psychological point of view, during the metadiegetic central narrative, the relationship between older self and younger self resembles more closely a type B (heterodiegetic) position in reflector (R) mode, or rather a composite A(R) mode of self-reflection. The older narrator is now both 'outside' or 'beyond' the majority of the life-story narrative she tells, and yet has experience of being 'inside' the story. However, there is continuity to

the story-world as the past leads into the present, and so she does not truly adopt a heterodiegetic position.

On considering the threshold position of the older narrator in relation to her self-narrative, the question arises of whether Simpson's framework can accommodate such nuance of split-self narration. That is, the doubled textual presence of retrospective self-narration does not easily sit within the binary categories of participating/not-participating or homo/heterodiegetic, especially when the older narrator intervenes in the story through active evaluative and reflective comment. There are two consciousnesses present and one embedded within the other, as with B(R) narrative mode, but in this case they are both facets, or stages, of the same identity. However, Simpson's schema is not intended to be a fixed, absolute or exhaustive system. He states, "at best, it can be considered a relatively systematic method of accounting for dominant patterns in different text types" (*Ideology* 82). These 'dominant patterns' then become "handy points of reference by which styles can easily be measured" (Simpson *Ideology* 83). In this way, the categories are best treated as positions in relation to which narrator/character relations can be thought through. Thinking through, therefore, the prevailing narrative mode of *Moi qui* in these terms, it seems apparent that type A narrators can also switch between narratorial and reflector modes, with the psychology and perceptions reflected being their own at another point in time. In other words, that would be a type A narrator in self-reflector mode, A(Ra), with the small a representing their previous self, rather than a type B narrator in reflector mode, B(Rx), with x standing in for a character's thoughts and perceptions. The advantage of continuing to

work within this framework is that it maintains an emphasis on the relationship between the two psychological perspectives present in the text. It allows a way to visualise the embedding and hierarchy, with the older narrator (A) playing a major role in framing and colouring the representation of the younger self (a)'s perspective. The mediating activity of the older narrator A on the life-story narrative and self-portrayal is relevant to the analysis of identity in the novel.

Moreover, as well as narrator/character relations, Simpson's outline of psychological perspective includes consideration of the attitude expressed in the narrative through assessment of modality. Modality, and particularly negative shading, is central to *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* and how critics have read it, because the use of language in the novel reflects, or interrelates, with uncertainty as a plot driver and thematic preoccupation. As noted above, most studies remark on the quest for knowledge as motivating the narrative, reading process, and as representing one the key topics explored in the text. A high-level analysis of certain cognition verbs such as *savoir* [to know] and *comprendre* [to understand] reveals that uncertainty and doubt permeate the language of the novel.

Savoir	Affirm	Negate	Qualify	Question
Je	40	55	12	6
Tu	4	4	0	0
Elle/Il	9	9	2	7
On	1	9	2	1
Nous	10	19	0	2
Vous	1	0	0	0
Elles/Its	5	6	3	3
Total	70	102	19	19

Comprendre	Affirm	Negate	Qualify	Question
Je	32	33	5	1
Tu	1	3	0	0
Elle/Il	6	5	1	0
On	0	0	0	0
Nous	3	2	0	0
Vous	0	0	0	0
Elles/Its	1	1	2	2
Total	43	44	8	3

Figure 4.1 Cognition verbs in *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes*

Both these verbs, in all forms and conjugations, are negated more often than they are affirmed in the novel. *Savoir* is affirmed 70 times in the text, negated 102 times, appears in a question 19 times (for example, “comment saurai-je où commencer ?” (75) [how will I know where to start?]), and ‘qualified’ 19 times. ‘Qualified’ here refers to when the verb is not negated, but its affirmative meaning is undermined by the context, for example, “je ne veux pas que les femmes sachent ce qui se passe” (46) [I do not want that the women know what is happening]. The women do not yet know “ce qui se passe”, and so their knowledge is hypothetical/potential rather than actual; hence the use of the subjunctive mood (*sachent*). Equally, *comprendre* is affirmed 43 times, negated 44 times, appears in a question 3 times and is qualified 8 times. Overall, then, things are *not* known or understood, or their epistemological status is questioned or qualified, almost 60 times more frequently than they *are* known or understood in the novel. Whilst this crude quantitative analysis is a rather blunt tool for addressing the nuances of literary prose, it does begin to create a picture of how style creates an atmosphere of uncertainty, and relates to narrative and thematic observations.

Despite the epistemic doubt generated through the predominance of negated cognition verbs, the whole text cannot be classified as negatively shaded. Rather, there is evidence of a constant transition between positive, negative, and neutral modal categories, with the attitude adopted responding to the content. Sometimes, in fact, negative and positive modal shadings blend, to create a sense of subjective estrangement. That is, the narrator’s feelings and judgements are presented as definite and clear, indicating that her grip on herself and her perceptions is stable and reliable,

yet other characters and the external world remain opaque or indefinite, mediated by estranging negative shading. This is in contrast to other cases of A-ve modal shading, which create a sense of personal confusion or incomprehension. For example, here, the narrator's description of the final days of her last remaining companion, Laurette, mixes positive (in bold) and negative shading (italicised), vacillating between certainty and uncertainty:

Laurette remained beside me, *as if* she couldn't think what else to do. It *seemed* to me that she was swaying: it was **hardly** noticeable and I *wasn't sure* ... I watched her **closely**: her face was **absolutely inexpressive** and it was **without doubt** my own unease that meant I **thought** she *looked* confused. Her gaze was clouded over, her arms hung by her sides. I **wanted** to put them on her knees ... I **realised** that I was **sure** that she was dying (136-37)¹⁴⁷

In this way, the text incorporates different modal shadings to simultaneously convey the narrator's estrangement from Laurette, alongside her more confident analysis of her own desires, judgements and thought processes. This dual attitude is interesting because it represents an inner/outer split between the baffling and irreducible nature of the other, conceived both as other consciousnesses and the material world, and the comparative reliability or stability of experience, thought and reason. This self/other, internal/external, division relates to how the text values rationality, and will be key to the analysis of identities in this chapter. Now, following on from this overview of

¹⁴⁷ Laurette restait à côté de moi, comme si elle ne concevait pas que faire d'autre. Il me sembla qu'elle vacillait : c'était peu marqué et je n'en fus pas sûre ... Je la regardai attentivement : elle avait le visage absolument inexpressif et c'était sans doute mon propre trouble qui me faisait lui trouver un air égaré. Son regard était voilé, ses bras pendaient à ses côtés. Je voulus les poser sur ses genoux ... je me rendis compte que j'étais sûre qu'elle se mourait

overarching structures of narrative point of view in the text, the next section will evaluate in greater detail the relations between the individual and the collective.

4.2 *Vive la Différence*: Identities in the Novel

In the sections that follow, identity will be explored through the protagonist-narrator's relationship to the group. This is because the reader accesses the collective from the narrator's perspective, but also because the group serves as a point against which the narrator defines herself. Although these identities evolve throughout the work, there are stages through which they pass. The discussion will therefore be ordered along the broad lines which define the relationship between the self and the collective. The first of these relates to the narrator-protagonist's first ideas of selfhood in the unusual setting of the cage, without broader social or familial references. This stage, titled here "defensive solitude", is characterised by alienation from the group. However, before their time in the bunker is over, there is a shift in the dynamic between the narrator and her companions as she begins to re-integrate into the collective. During this period of "necessary solidarity", which is sustained throughout their years traversing the plateau, the narrator and the group are bound by the necessity of surviving in this strange world. Yet, despite her increasingly central position within community life, the narrator struggles to consider herself in the same terms as the others, being a stranger to their previous experiences, and physically distinct. Her gendered identity will be of focal interest here. In the final stage, "enforced solitude", the narrator finds herself alone as

ostensibly the final member of the human race. This section will explore her self-representation in relation to ideas of humanity and human relations.

4.2.1 Defensive Solitude

The character-narrator's autobiographical narrative opens when her indistinguishable memories are punctuated by a prompt awakening: "the days unfolded in exactly the same way, then I started to think and everything changed" (12).¹⁴⁸ This sudden entry into conscious awareness is prompted by rage, and coincides with the beginnings of her imaginative life and nebulous sexual desire. The rage she feels is directed against the women with whom she shares the cage, and arises as a response to their refusal to answer her questions on their lives before, love and the human body. The narrator states, "I was furious, I felt looked down upon, as if I were incapable of understanding the answers to the questions" (14).¹⁴⁹ As a result, she isolates herself from the group (14), and in retaliation, refuses to share her thoughts with them, insulting them when they approach her (23, 26, 32). In her narrative, the information that both sides withhold (their experiences and her new imaginary life respectively) become coded as "secrets", highlighting the value of knowledge in their restricted environment. Indeed, for the narrator, it develops into a battle of wills, a stand-off, with the group demanding that "the secret is extracted from me" (26).¹⁵⁰ Yet, despite the bitterness the narrator feels,

¹⁴⁸ Les journées se sont déroulées de façon exactement semblable, puis je me suis mise à penser et tout a changé

¹⁴⁹ J'étais furieuse, je me sentais traitée avec mépris, comme si j'eusse été incapable de comprendre les réponses aux questions

¹⁵⁰ Qu'on m'arrache le secret

there is a catalysing benefit to her emotions (Paque “Vie” 96; Vanbaelen 70). The rage galvanises her conscious awareness of herself as an individual, and her isolation provides her with the opportunity to develop an inner imaginative world and to reflect on their situation.

As a result of her hostility towards them, there is a sense in which the narrator’s burgeoning identity is defined in binary opposition to the collective of women. Rather than becoming an individual amongst others with many points of difference or similarity, she becomes an ‘I’ in contrast to a homogenous ‘them’. Her desire to separate herself is clearly stated: “they treat us as if nothing could tell us apart. Me, I am me. I am not a fortieth of the flock, one head of cattle among the others”.¹⁵¹ Often this distinction takes the form of ‘what they are, I am not’. For example, the parallel structure of this description places the narrator and the group in contrasting spheres: “they went back to their prattling and me to my story” (23).¹⁵² The informal and potentially derisory “bavardage” [prattling/gossiping/chattering], or at another point “jacassant” [chatting/jabbering] (29), marks the women as belonging to mindless materiality, whereas the narrator occupies a mental space. This image of the women unthinkingly carrying out mechanical tasks, or speaking senselessly, is reinforced throughout the first section. For example, the narrator describes the women’s conversation as follows:

¹⁵¹ Ils nous traitent comme si rien ne nous différencierait les unes des autres. Moi, je suis moi. Je ne suis pas un quarantième de troupeau, une tête de bétail parmi les autres

¹⁵² Elles reprirent leur bavardage et moi mon histoire

I was shocked by how much they spoke, the energy they put into saying the same thing ten times over in different ways yet without realising that they had, at the end of the day, absolutely nothing to say to one another (29)¹⁵³

Conversely, the narrator portrays herself as surpassing this mundane existence, by her entry into the realm of the imaginary and the intellectual. Not only is she capable of creating stories (romantic fantasies involving the youngest guard), but greatly enjoys outwitting the women. After purposefully confounding a member of the group, the narrator feels triumphant: “I felt a wonderful shiver, it was, I think, my first intellectual pleasure” (23).¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, whilst the narrator begins to question and rebel against their situation, she portrays the women as passively accepting of the status quo, wondering how they can live “with your vegetables, without prospects” (38).¹⁵⁵ At another point, she compares them to “automatons on repeat” (32),¹⁵⁶ whereas she is driven to reason through their circumstances. Again, this maps them onto an active/passive binary with the narrator taking the role of instigator. Overall, the narrator stakes claim to mental activity and rebellion, describing women as shut in the quotidian and passive automation.

This split between I and them along intellectual and material lines relates to management of ideological and psychological perspectives. During this first section, often the women are viewed from a marked external perspective, and when their

¹⁵³ Je fus étonnée par l’abondance de leur parole, l’ardeur qu’elles mettaient à redire dix fois la même chose sous une autre forme pour ne pas s’apercevoir qu’elles n’avaient, en fin de compte, absolument rien à se dire

¹⁵⁴ J’eus un délicieux frisson, ce fut, je crois, mon premier plaisir intellectuel

¹⁵⁵ Avec vos légumes, sans perspectives

¹⁵⁶ Automates à répétition

thoughts and feelings *are* mentioned these are speculated upon rather than known. This manifests itself on the ideological plane in a tendency to material and behavioural processes in descriptions of the women. These transitivity choices place a focus on their actions and habits, rather than their thoughts and emotions. Michael Halliday explains that behavioural processes “have no clearly defined characteristics of their own; rather they are partly like material and partly like mental” (*Grammar* 249-50). This in-between status relates to their ‘outer’ description of ‘inner’ experiences. Whilst mental (sensing) and relational (being) processes can portray inner states (for example “she believes” (mental) or “she is delighted” (relational)) and material processes ‘outer’, observable, experience (such as “she walks”), behavioural processes straddle both by implying an inner state through describing something that is visible. For example, “she laughs”, “she stares”, or “she nods” infer a consciousness behind the act, but do not give further psychological insight. Evidence of behavioural processes to describe the group have already been seen in the reference to their “chattering” noted above, and other examples include:

[material processes in italics, behavioural in bold]

I had never seen them **speak** seriously for such a long time, normally after ten minutes they **would burst out laughing** (19)

It was another woman who *rose* and *came towards* me ... she **sat down** and **watched** me pointedly. (19)

She **mumbled**, *fidged* slightly on the spot, then **signalled** for two of the younger women who *came* to help her **get up** (23)

Her tone was harsh, she **looked** straight in front of her (41)¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Je ne les avais encore jamais vues parler si longtemps avec sérieux, d’habitude après dix minutes elles pouffaient de rire / Ce fut une autre qui se leva et vint vers moi ... elle s’assit et me regarda avec insistance / Elle grommela, s’agita un peu sur place, puis fit signe à deux femmes plus jeunes qui vinrent l’aider à se lever /

Transitivity choices such as these are one way in which a certain view of the world is built in language, and as such relate to ideological perspective. Here, the reader's window on the collective is constructed through processes which focus on external, observable actions and behaviours rather than through insight into their psychology.

The close links between ideological and psychological viewpoints can be seen in how this estranged portrayal of the group of women is supported by negative shading. When the women's mental states *are* described, they are often conjectured rather than asserted, evidenced by foregrounded epistemic and perception modality and 'words of estrangement'. For instance:

she looked satisfied, *she must have believed* that she'd obtained my compliance (22)

she seemed dizzy (22)

[Aline] *seemed* uneasy. She looked at me sadly, *maybe* she was feeling sorry for me ... *she looked* filled with emotion. (27)

she seemed astonished (36)

it *seems* to me there was a little quiver of excitement [in the group] (56)

they *didn't look as if* they understood what was happening (64)¹⁵⁸

[negative modal elements in italics]

In these examples, the women are not described as definitively 'astonished' or 'satisfied', instead the narrator interprets their emotions from their appearance,

Son intonation était dure, elle regardait droit devant elle

¹⁵⁸ Elle eut l'air satisfait, elle dut croire qu'elle obtenait mon obéissance / Elle sembla prise de vertige / [Aline] sembla gênée. Elle me regarda tristement, peut-être avait-elle pitié de moi ... Elle avait l'air émue / Elle sembla étonnée / Il me semble qu'il y eut un petit frémissement d'excitation / elles avaient l'air de ne pas comprendre ce qui se passait

demonstrating an uneasy grasp of their inner workings. In this way, both the narrator's worldview (constructed through transitivity processes) and attitude (expressed through modal shading) coalesce in this section to create a sense that the group's inner life is disconnected from the narrator and impenetrable to her. This is at once indicative and constitutive of her alienation from them.

This representation of the collective is also enacted through labelling; a marker of explicit ideological judgement. In terms of how the narrator refers to her "cellmates" (35),¹⁵⁹ during this period the label *les femmes* [the women] recurs far more frequently (42 times) than comparable terms, such as *les autres* [the others] (14 times), *compagnes* [companions] (once), *personnes* [people] (twice), and should be considered as well against those that never appear *cohabitantes* [cohabitants], *voisines* [neighbours], *camarades* [mate/colleague], *amies* or *copines* [friends]. This repetition of the neutral "the women" in contrast to more amicable alternatives, creates an affective distance and also sets up 'women' as a category from which she is excluded. If we consider some examples, we can see that the emphasis on 'the women' in opposition to 'I' or 'me' contributes to the binary me versus them logic of these passages:

The women would often laugh, and it seemed to me that I occasionally joined in with them (11)

Most often, the women would sigh, they would turn their gaze away, and would say to me "what good would it do you to know?" (13)

The women would come and go carrying out the few duties of daily life and would never ask me to join in (14)

If the women had been sensible, they would have left it there (24)

¹⁵⁹ Compagnes de prison

I never had discussions with the women (25)¹⁶⁰

In these examples, the group are homogenised to an extent, as they are portrayed as a single entity and shown acting and behaving as one. Théa, one of the younger women with whom she later develops a friendship, remarks on the narrator's tendency to treat the women as an undistinguishable group, demanding "Stop referring to us in the plural" to which the narrator responds, "well make yourself stand out!" (32).¹⁶¹ Moreover, the reiteration of "the women" foregrounds the age differential between the narrator and the group. They are all adults when they enter the cage, and she is the only child. Not knowing her name, they call her "la petite" [the little one (f)]. From this angle, the opposition between the term 'women' (as adults) and her 'I' (as a girl), relates to the gulf of age and experience which lies between them. She is excluded from laying claim to this adult identity, and that is one of the factors which drives her defensive hostility towards them.

This resentment finds expression in evaluative judgements, which explicitly brand the women as stupid and mean-spirited, for example she calls them "sotte" [idiotic] (23, 26), "stupides" [stupid] (25), "folles" [crazy], and describes their "mauvaise volonté" [ill will] (13), "mesquinerie" [meanness] (24) and "indifference" [indifférence] (35) towards her. As Paque has noted, from the start, the women "as a

¹⁶⁰ Les femmes riaient souvent, et il me sembla que je m'étais parfois jointe à elles / Le plus souvent, les femmes soupiraient, elles détournaient les yeux, et me disaient un « A quoi te servirait-il de savoir ? » / Les femmes allaient et venaient en se livrant aux rares occupations de la vie quotidienne et ne me demandaient jamais d'y participer / Si les femmes avaient été prudentes, elles en seraient restées là / Je ne discutais jamais avec les femmes

¹⁶¹ - Ne nous met pas toujours au pluriel
- Alors singularise-toi !

group” are viewed with contempt by the character-narrator (*Harpman* 113).

Furthermore, in part, the reader perceives the narrator as excluded because she labels and designates herself as an outsider. Although she does not have a name, she does ascribe herself with badges of difference, describing herself as: “étrangère à leur drame” [a stranger to their drama] (10), “silencieuse” [silent] (13), “isolée” [isolated] (36), “seule” [alone] (61), and “différente” [different] (11). In this way, the reader knows the narrator is alienated from the collective because she lays explicit claim to this position.

Finally, the narrator’s opposition to the group is also enacted through management of spatial perspective. Not only is the narrator portrayed as physically separate from them, always *écartée* [at a remove] (36), but this distance is reinforced when the narrator and the women do interact because it involves a movement to or from the other. The exchanges between the women and the narrator are conceived almost as advances and retreats, with spatial perspective anchored with her as the deictic centre. For example,

Annabelle came to question me ... then went to take my reply back to the others. They talked a little, and Annabelle came back ... She frowned and went back to join the others (19)

It was another one who got up and came towards me (19) ... She returned to her normal place at the other end of the cage (23)

[Colette] came to plant herself in front of me and demanded in a menacing tone that I speak ... Colette, terrified, moved back, I smiled bitterly at her (26)¹⁶²

[directional deixis is underlined]

¹⁶² Annabelle vint me questionner ... puis, alla porter ma réponse aux autres. Elles discutèrent un peu, et Annabelle revint ... Elle fronça les sourcils et rejoignit les autres. / Ce fut une autre qui se leva et vint vers moi ... elle regagna sa place habituelle, à l’autre bout de la cage / [Colette] vint se planter en face de moi et ordonna d’un ton menaçant que je parle ... Colette effrayée recula, je lui souris durement.

In this sense, deictic motion verbs construct the gap between the parties with this physical space a literal marker of their distance and a symbol of their alienation; becoming a threshold that must be crossed for interaction, with many of these exchanges characterised by conflict.

Overall, then, the representation of the group as homogenous and hostile, setting out with *acharnement* [determination] to *arracher* [drag out] her secret (27), as well as paradoxically (as they have information she wants) unthinking and mechanical, is mediated through narrative viewpoint on the psychological, ideological and spatial planes. When considering how to read these hostile relations between self and other, it is also worth noting that the relationship is structured around a lack of care. Certainly, the younger narrator believes that “none of the women ever cared about me” (28) and they showed “indifference towards me” (35-36).¹⁶³ This impression is corroborated by Théa who defines the relationship between the group and *la petite* in terms of what they could *not* do for her. She describes how when they first arrived in their prison the narrator was scared and uncommunicative, but “as it was forbidden for us to touch each other, none of us could take you in our arms, try to reassure you, or even force you to eat” (37),¹⁶⁴ and how, later, they could not manage to interest her in learning (50-51). Although the younger narrator perceives the group’s distance as a lack of concern, Théa frames it rather as an *inability* to provide care, given that the mechanisms of nurture (whether it be enforcing discipline or showing affection) are curtailed in the cage.

¹⁶³ Aucune ne se souciait jamais de moi (28) / indifférence à mon égard (35-36)

¹⁶⁴ Comme il nous était interdit de nous toucher, aucune ne pouvait te prendre dans les bras, tenter de te rassurer, ni même te forcer à manger

Given that their relationship is founded upon a lack of care, it seems reasonable to compare it to another paradigm to which nurture is central: the mother/daughter dynamic. Can the group here be read as proxy collective mother? One which withholds the sustenance the mother figure is symbolically aligned with, here conceived as physical comfort and intellectual stimulation. Certainly, in her analysis, Nodot-Kaufman agrees, dubbing the women “maternal substitutes” for the narrator (280),¹⁶⁵ and this rendering of a hostile mother figure would fit a pattern in Harpman’s oeuvre, where Bainbrige has noted a tendency to depict the mother “within a mythology of a threatening, demonised figure” (*Francophone* 93). Moreover, considering the focus on the development of the narrator’s identity, in this stage of the narrative the collective could even be read as personifying the Oedipal mother. Indeed, given Harpman’s adherence to Kleinian psychoanalysis (Paque *Harpman* 28), it is especially tempting to make a link between the text and Freudian narratives of development. Although Melanie Klein adapted Freudian theory, her writings agree with Freud on the daughter’s “rivalry, aggression and hatred against her mother” in the phallic phase as her desire for the father develops (Klein 63). In some ways, this Oedipal analogy carries through. For example, the guards, with their whips and rules, can be read as embodying the law of the father, the interdictory force which comes between mother and child. The narrator’s disdain for the women is a defensive response to the exclusion she feels from their shared knowledge and experience, which echoes the child’s sense of exclusion from the maternal body by paternal prohibition. Then, the narrator’s attraction to the young guard

¹⁶⁵ Substituts maternels

can be taken to symbolise the daughter's incestuous desire for the paternal, which correlates with her repudiation of the mother. Plus, of course, the mother figure, represented by the group of women, is threatening to the narrator. They are a menace to her autonomy, determined as they are to access her "secret"; one of her key ways of separating and distinguishing herself. Furthermore, this period of conflictual relations between the narrator and group is then followed by the narrator's integration into the group, which could be viewed as a resolution of the Oedipus complex through (re)identification with the mother. As such, there are clear parallels between the narrator's coming to consciousness and the Oedipal scenario.

However, there are issues with elaborating further on this reading of the life-story narrative as a re-enactment of psychosexual drama. Namely, psychoanalytic accounts, be they from Freud, Klein or Lacan, describe a child's development in a particular social and cultural order. The setting in *Moi qui* departs dramatically from a Western, heteronormative family structure. Most obviously, masculinity and the phallus (although symbolically very much present in the interdictions and whips of the guards) are in other ways mute. Not only do the guards not speak, but the narrator knows nothing of what a 'man' is. She suspects men are different physically, but does not understand exactly what this difference entails (38), and she knows that men were important to the women's lives before, but not exactly how (41). Thus, aside from their authority, the men are empty signifiers for the narrator at this stage. This leads Vanbaelen to conclude that, "the heroine of the novel manages 'to be born' and create a

(sexual) identity for herself without any reference to men” (70).¹⁶⁶ I would nuance this by acknowledging that the men represent ‘the law’ because they enforce the few rules. Therefore, negotiations of identity are, to start with at least, managed within confines of reference points set by men. Nonetheless, men in the novel are an unknown quantity, and so the narrator’s identity is primarily negotiated in reference to the other women.

This is an interesting thought experiment, because in many accounts, female identity, in terms of ‘what is a woman?’, has been revealed to be dependent on their difference from a masculine norm. Throughout the cultural imaginaries of Western civilisation, ideas of womanhood have clustered on the negative pole from the positive definitional pole of masculinity. Perhaps most famously stated by Simone de Beauvoir, woman “is determined and differentiated in relation to man, and not he in relation to her; she is the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute: she is the Other” (*Tome I 4*).¹⁶⁷ In other words, a woman is what a man is not. Nancy Jay’s 1981 article on “Gender and Dichotomy” describes the assumptions underlying this binary relation, which she labels as “taken for granted” in society and “dangerous” for women (47). Jay explains the how the categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ tend to be treated as “logical contradictories” (A/not-A) in our symbolic system, rather than as “contraries” (A/B) (44). In a contrary A/B relation each term has “positive reality”, not being completely reliant on the other for its definition, and “there is nothing about them that necessarily prevents also considering C (a third possibility), and then the distinction

¹⁶⁶ L’héroïne du roman parvient à ‘naitre’ et à se forger une identité (sexuelle) en dehors de toute référence aux hommes

¹⁶⁷ Elle se détermine et se différencie par rapport à l’homme et non celui-ci par rapport à elle ; elle est l’inessentiel en face de l’essentiel. Il est le Sujet, il est l’Absolu : elle est l’Autre

becomes A/B/C” (*ibid*). A/not-A dichotomies, on the other hand, have certain characteristics: they are “all-encompassing” (there is no middle ground or possible third term); mutually exclusive (nothing can be A *and* not-A); and only one term has positive definitional value, thus the other term becomes “a random catchall” for everything not-A (44-46). Of women’s relegation to not-A or ‘not-man’ status in dominant “phallogentric” discourses, Luce Irigaray concurs that “the ‘feminine’ is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex” (“Discourse” 119). Woman has been conceived in terms of ‘lack’, in relation to Freudian theory this is expressed through ‘penis envy’, but more generally it can be seen in how femininity has been culturally considered as the absence of masculine strength, reason, hardness, separation and so on. To counter the representational systems which place women in this negative definitional rut, Irigaray promotes women inventing femininity in reference to and in communion with each other. This is not a singular, coherent identity which can be pre-determined (Irigaray “lèvres” 26), rather a move towards finding women’s positive difference or specificity.

So, with this in mind, does *Moi qui* provide the staging ground for imagining a feminine identity outside the oppressive, not-A, Other position to which the female gender has been confined? Certainly, in Irigaray’s writing the relation between women, through which new conceptions of the feminine can be founded, is a symbolic matrilineal one, which chimes with *Moi qui*. Yet, the novel cannot quite be considered in the same terms as Irigaray’s theories. Namely, the project for self-re-definition is inextricably linked to linguistic innovation for Irigaray, who claims “if we continue to

speak the same language, we are going to reproduce the same story” (“lèvres” 23).¹⁶⁸ For her, the whole symbolic order is masculine (including ideas of the female sex), and so to bring femininity and female sexuality into existence language must be subverted. Harpman, on the contrary, tends towards “ultra-classicism” in her writing style and was publicly critical of *l’écriture féminine* (Paque Harpman 10, 150).¹⁶⁹ Moreover, in her renowned paper “Quand nos lèvres se parlent” [When our lips speak together], Irigaray elaborates an ethic of interconnectivity between women, who are neither completely separated nor unified, a form of “you/I” [tu/je] (“lèvres” 24). This does not easily fit with the first stages of the novel, where the protagonist-narrator builds a sense of herself in binary opposition to the collective of women, rather than through affiliation and distinction.

Indeed, it is worth noting that the cage and the collective of women gathered there are not completely detached from society. They are not untainted by normative gender ideals, given that the women were immersed in traditional relationships and social roles in their lives before the ‘catastrophe’. Their affective experience depended on men, as Théa describes when asked about the importance of men: “men, little one, it was to be alive” (41),¹⁷⁰ and the women had been in stereotypically female occupations such as housewives, or typists and sales assistants (13, 84). In this way, they bring their culturally assumed femininity with them, so that when the narrator is distinguishing herself from them, she is not doing so from an ideal of womanhood which is somehow

¹⁶⁸ Si nous continuons à nous parler le même langage, nous allons reproduire la même histoire

¹⁶⁹ Hyperclassicisme

¹⁷⁰ Les hommes, petite, c’était être en vie.

pure, or freed from culture. Harpman has not tried to create a situation allegedly dislocated from our social signifiers, perhaps aware of the impossibility of such an endeavour. As Judith Butler highlights, given the constitutive nature of discourse, “sexuality that is “before,” “outside,” or “beyond” power is a cultural impossibility” (*Trouble* 42). Therefore, we cannot view the novel as interrogating what female identity could be if extricated from the negated, dichotomous, not-man position. The group of women carry their femininity with them into their relations with the narrator, so her identity is formed in reference to ‘women’ who have internalised the Self/Other, man/woman binary. In a sense, the narrator distinguishes herself as Not(not-A) in opposition to not-A. Her difference from the notion of ‘woman’, comes to be central to her quest for self-understanding.

Yet, the text’s scenario of a young woman forging her identity principally in relation to other women, *does* act as an estranging device to habitualised constructions of gender identity in society. If the reader tries to gender the narrator according to a dichotomous A/not-A schema, their classificatory processes are disrupted. For example, if separating and distinguishing herself from ‘women’ (not-A), does that then follow that she becomes (A) a man? Of course, the proposition is absurd, and indicates that ideas of ‘men’ and ‘women’ are contingent, and not mutually exclusive or all-encompassing; there is a possibility to be not one nor the other, there is middle ground, a third way. The narrator is not a ‘woman’ in the sense that the others are, but neither is she a man. It is these differences from the notion of womanhood that will become of interest in the

following section, when the narrator's cultural and physical liminality to dominant conceptions of gender will be analysed.

In this section it has been established that the first phase of the narrator's relationship with the collective is characterised by dichotomous separation between 'them' and 'me'. The drive to distinguish herself from the group stems from rage against their withholding of intellectual sustenance, and coincides with her conscious and sexual awakening. The link between isolation, reasoning, anger and sex implies that processes of individuation, although accompanied by animosity, are necessary for the development of intellectual and sexual functioning. The perceived or contrived conflict between the narrator and the group therefore becomes an important step in developing her intelligence and her sense of self. It was shown that these hostile relations are framed through negative modal shading and a tendency to behavioural and action processes in the description of the group, rendering them alien and opaque. Additionally, the management of spatial point of view constructs their interactions as advances and retreats within the confines of the cage, and the binary divide between self (the narrator) and other (the women) is generated through explicit labelling and imagery. These associations build a picture of the women as bound to the material and physical, routine and passive acceptance in opposition to the narrator who is mentally active, imaginative and interrogative. The group are also homogenised and treated as a single entity by the narrator, which opens a reading of them as a collective mother figure. Comparing the group/narrator to the mother/daughter in the Oedipal complex, accounts for the resentment felt by the narrator and its importance in her development. However,

importantly, it also illuminates the fundamental difference between hegemonic developmental paradigms and the situation in the cage, namely, the narrator only has women to relate to. Hence, the identifications between male and female positions are disrupted for the narrator. Instead, this stage of the text establishes women as the ‘other’ to the narrator’s self; the standard against which she will find her differences and similarities. In this first phase, it was difference above all that mattered to the narrator, but as she reintegrates into the group, she gains a sense of what links as well as divides them. It is this relation of *différance* to which this chapter will now turn.

4.2.2 Necessary Solidarity

The next stage of the narrator’s relationship with the group is marked by greater collaboration and understanding than the initial conflictual dynamic. This shift in attitude towards the women starts whilst they are still in the cage, but lasts throughout the rest of their time as a community. There are two key turning points in terms of the re-orientation of their relations, or more precisely, the narrator’s view of their relations.

Firstly, on reflecting on the effort that it takes to keep them fed, healthy and warm in the cage, the narrator realises that the secrets the women are withholding from her, and she from them, hold “little worth next to the ones that the guards possessed: what were we doing here, why were we being kept alive?” (31).¹⁷¹ That is, she begins to see that she and the women are aligned by circumstance, and are united against a bigger

¹⁷¹ De peu de valeur à côté de celui que détenaient les gardiens : que faisons-nous ici, pourquoi nous maintenant-on en vie ?

challenge. It is at this point that she embarks on discussions with Théa about their situation, making a move towards the others, although she retains an antagonistic stance for some time. Interestingly, it is not until she has something to contribute to the group, that she stops viewing them as adversaries and begins to integrate. Her contribution is to tell them the time. She has a special skill for counting and can keep track of her heart beats. Calculating by beats per minute, she is able to build up an idea of how many hours the lights are lit for, how often they are given food, and so on, as well as relate this to the twenty-four-hour clock when they decide to count it from a set point (60). This project reveals that they live on an irregular schedule, a discovery which incites “revolt in drowsy minds” (60).¹⁷² Of the effect of her input, the narrator explains plainly that, “I had stopped considering the women as enemies from when they took from me what I could give them: the time” (61).¹⁷³ There is a sense here that group membership consists of participation; belonging is achieved through contributing. This transition to affiliation with the collective is also accompanied by shared laughter, as they mock the absurdity of their schedule, with the narrator underlining that she joined in, “we would laugh like mad. I laughed as well” (61).¹⁷⁴ Again, inclusion is attained through action. Moreover, this point marks a shift away from the emphasis of ‘the women’ as opposed to ‘me’, to increased reference to ‘we’: a marker of a collective or plural subject.

At first this ‘we’ is used to describe what they did together, using material processes, for instance: “we moved”, “we crossed the room”, “we went back”, “we

¹⁷² La révolte dans les esprits embrumés

¹⁷³ J’avais cessé de considérer les femmes comme des ennemies depuis qu’elles recevaient de moi ce que je pouvais leur donner : l’heure

¹⁷⁴ Nous avions des fous rires. Je riais aussi

took”, “we tied them up” (88-89)¹⁷⁵. Yet, as the narrator becomes more fully anchored in the collective after they exit the cage, she lays claim to psychological union with them. Specifically, she expresses their shared perceptions, thoughts and feelings with second person plural pronouns. For example, “we saw that she wasn’t among us”, “we wanted a river not too far from a bunker”, “we decided to build houses”, “we had observed”, “we realised”, “we were modest”, “we found it very pleasant to shelter there” (105-06).¹⁷⁶ This shared psychological viewpoint differs markedly from the external perspective from which the women were approached in the first section. This change is representative of the narrator’s assimilation into the group and the result of her empathic move towards the other women. Her improved understanding of the women’s inner lives comes from watching and thinking through their behaviours and actions. For example, after listening to Théa’s account of the early days in the cage, the narrator reassesses the women as they prepare a meal:

They no longer seemed so foolish because I understood that, having nothing in their lives, they took the little that happened and made the most of it, exploiting every scrap of action to feed their starved minds. (51)¹⁷⁷

Here, empathy is produced through concerted activity; observation and reflection. Not only does the narrator feel more inclined towards the women in this stage of the narrative, but she too alters her behaviour, learning how to live harmoniously with

¹⁷⁵ Nous passâmes / nous traversâmes / nous retournâmes / nous prîmes / nous les nouâmes

¹⁷⁶ Nous vîmes qu’elle n’était plus parmi nous / nous voulions une rivière pas trop éloignée d’une cave / nous décidâmes de construire des maisons / nous avons observé / nous nous rendîmes compte / nous fumes modestes / nous trouvâmes bien agréable de nous y réfugier

¹⁷⁷ Elles ne me parurent plus si sottes car je comprenais que, n’ayant rien dans leurs vies, elles prenaient le peu qui arrivait et s’en servaient au maximum, exploitant chaque bribe d’évènement pour nourrir leurs esprits affamés

others. For instance, when she is the first to spot another sentry hut marking the entrance to a bunker, she does not run ahead: “I forced myself to wait for them. I too had become a good companion” (95).¹⁷⁸ Therefore, the narrator’s attitude and perspective in relation to the group has shifted, she is now aligned with them rather than opposed to them. Moreover, the process of integrating into the group is characterised by contribution and consideration.

During this stage of the narrative, then, the group are portrayed as acting and thinking collectively. However, this unity is forged due to necessity instead of choice. They did not choose to be in the cage, nor who they would be grouped with. In a certain sense, they had a facet of shared identity forced upon them, because they were placed together on the basis of sexual difference. In all the bunkers the women come across, the forty occupants are always of the same sex. Thus, their designation as female is the cause of their particular grouping, and their sole linking factor. This enforced assembly and imprisonment is reminiscent of Gregory Claeys’ definition of dystopian collectivist ethos as “compulsory solidarity” (*Dystopia 8*), in the respect that it is non-consensual. However, as Claeys points out, usually in dystopian fiction “false sociability” is achieved through coercion, with compulsion fundamentally eroding “all that is truly valuable in solidarity” (*Dystopia 8*, 42). This implies that the state intervenes in citizens’ lives to unite them against their will. Now, whilst it is true that the women were grouped and detained without consent, the guards in fact act to dislocate them in the cage rather than connect them. The rules prevent touching and gestures of comfort and solidarity

¹⁷⁸ Je m’astreignis à les attendre. J’étais devenue, moi aussi, une bonne compagne

that may otherwise have taken place. Indeed, when they escape from the cage, their grouping is no longer compulsory given there is the potential to separate. Yet, they remain together without even considering splitting up: “it seemed so clear, at that moment, that we should not separate” (95).¹⁷⁹ Their union becomes instead an alliance of necessity for survival in the unknown environment, rather than coerced solidarity. Therefore, although pushed together by circumstance, there are already some indications that the collective in this novel is not the dystopian locus of the work. In fact, on closer inspection of the representation of the group in this stage, it becomes clear that their alliances are not portrayed as compromised or ‘false’ due to the duress under which they are formed. On the contrary, their solidarity and teamwork arise in response to their absurd situation and the bleak setting, and become a positive, even eutopian, correlate of the post-apocalyptic scenario.

Although the women seem to work peacefully and cooperatively enough together in the cage, even chatting and laughing at times, it is when they escape their incarceration that their relationships develop and flourish. Previous studies have commented on the positive depiction of the collective. For example, Susan Bainbrigg highlights the “co-operative, non-violent” basis to the community which becomes an eutopian undercurrent running through the text (“Transgressive” 1019-20); and Paque remarks how friendship is promoted as “la valeur clé” [key value] amongst them (“Vie” 95). In the novel, this collaborative and amicable dynamic is evident in the care they show one another and the universal participation in the group’s projects. Expressions of

¹⁷⁹ Il paraissait si évident, à ce moment-là, que nous ne devions pas nous en séparer

mutual support are apparent in the way the women huddle together when they first leave the bunker and are fearful of the unknown: “again, they gathered together, shoulder to shoulder, seeking, I suppose, to reassure themselves through this contact” (72, see also 68-69).¹⁸⁰ Moreover, when the eldest of the women, Dorothée, falls sick, the women look after her by wrapping her in blankets, holding her hand (103), and transporting her on a stretcher “taking great care to keep an even gait which wouldn’t jostle her” (102).¹⁸¹ Many of the women also establish loving relationships, sleeping together on their travels and living as a couple in their permanent settlement (94, 124). Although the narrator herself is unsettled by physical contact, she nonetheless also shows care through gestures of kindness, such as searching for suitable wood for those who enjoy carving (125), comforting Théa on her deathbed (132), and rendering women the service of euthanasia, which is here conceived as an act of great compassion that puts an end to suffering and comes as a *soulagement* [relief] (128). In this way, the women show care and concern for one another through touch and intimacy, gifts, and nursing in life, and by ending their suffering when requested.

Furthermore, a communal spirit is in evidence throughout their travels and village life. For example, when sorting the supplies they will take with them on their journey, they organise their loads according to principles of fairness, “everyone will carry what she can” (91), and universal contribution “everyone took a part of it” (93).¹⁸² They also cooperatively take turns sheltering from the rain in the first structure they

¹⁸⁰ De nouveau, elles se rassemblèrent, épaule contre épaule, cherchant, je suppose, dans le contact à se rassurer

¹⁸¹ En faisant bien attention à garder un pas égal qui ne la secouerait pas

¹⁸² Chacune portera ce qu’elle peut / chacune en prit une partie

build (106), and work together to construct the two settlements that they inhabit (106-07, 124). What's more, they begin to develop their own culture through creating their entertainment and rituals out of memories and habits from their previous lives. For instance, they sing and pray at burials (97, 103, 105, 116), and make a draughts board to play (114). These activities bring them together and aid in creating a shared identity, however, there is no compulsion to conform. Although all women are portrayed as participating, this does not necessarily entail an identical contribution, rather an equivalent one, where each brings their own skills and preferences. Claeys notes that in even in eutopian fiction social cohesion is often brought about through suppressing difference, with homogeneity prevailing "at the cost of individuality and diversity" (*Dystopia* 8). As such, in both dystopian and eutopian paradigms, the collective tends to sameness over variation, it is only the attitude towards this which alters between the modes. Yet, in *Moi qui* differences between the women's characters and strengths, especially when they are out of the cage, are foregrounded. In their village, they divide themselves according to dispositions and preferences between four houses, with the narrator noticing that "affinities had created groups which became more marked when we split into the houses" (109).¹⁸³ The narrator finds herself with others who are calm and "réalistes" [pragmatic] like her, whereas others are more "sombre" [glum/solemn] or "agitée" [restless/nervy] (109). The women also take on different roles, for example the narrator becomes one of the leaders (85), and others act as teachers, hairdressers, singers, nurses, wood carvers and builders (114, 124-25). However, despite these

¹⁸³ Les affinités avaient forme des groupes qui s'accusèrent quand nous nous repartîmes dans les maisons

different roles and qualities, there are no major disagreements or unrest amongst the women. In fact, the narrator describes how “our life continued peacefully” (115),¹⁸⁴ with the singular ‘life’ instead of ‘lives’ emphasising the shared nature of their experience. On the harmonious balance achieved, Paque notes that it derives from “a kind of complementarity between generations, between characters, between qualities, between individual strengths” (“Vie” 95).¹⁸⁵ Therefore, overall, the positive depiction of the collective relates to its tolerance of difference and its basis in mutual care, equivalent participation, reciprocity and fairness.

The narrator is an integral part of the group and their projects in this stage. Yet, in one particular way, she remains liminal. Namely, in relation to the initial classification that brought them together: their gender. In certain ways, she identifies as a woman and takes up that position. Not only was she grouped with the women to start with, but she describes herself as one: “I was a woman, forever virginal, but adult despite my half-formed breasts and my aborted puberty” (47), and on burying Laurette, her final surviving companion, she calls the act “this burial of a woman by the last of the other women” (142).¹⁸⁶ Moreover, she assumes a feminine position in language. The women recognise her as *la petite* as opposed to the masculine *le petit*, and she uses feminine agreements in her writing. Therefore, through recognition, speech and self-appraisal, she lays claim to a female identity and to an extent this act itself renders her

¹⁸⁴ Notre vie se déroulait dans le calme

¹⁸⁵ Une espèce de complémentarité entre les générations, entre les types, entre les qualités, entre les forces individuelles

¹⁸⁶ J’étais femme, définitivement vierge, mais adulte malgré mes seins inachevés et ma puberté avortée / cet enterrement d’une femme par la dernière des autres femmes

identity legitimate.¹⁸⁷ Assuming gender is produced through performance, linguistic choices play a key role in self-representation. However, there is more to the production and reception of gender than verbal acts, and there are other ways in which the narrator's gender identity is questioned in the text. She struggles to associate with characteristics and experiences that are promoted as culturally and corporeally female. 'Woman' emerges as a biological and social category to which she cannot quite belong, of which she is on the margins.

The narrator recognises her difference and distinction from the other women, noting "I am well aware that I remained an outsider to them" (127).¹⁸⁸ Her estranged status leads Paque to describe her as a form of "mutant" and as a "woman without really being one" ("Vie" 93).¹⁸⁹ As remarked upon earlier, much of the women's lives before the "catastrophe" appeared to be orientated around the relationships with men. For example, Théa describes men as the meaning of life (41) and the purpose of beauty for men's approval (44), and when Francine, Denise and Germaine describe their lives they focus on their husbands and boyfriends (118-19). Indeed, in the bunker, the narrator senses the vital importance of men and love to the women, and that is why she becomes so enraged that they do not expand on the subject for her (14-15). Without having entered into relationships with men, the narrator cannot configure this aspect of 'female' experience. On listening to their memories of romantic encounters, the narrator

¹⁸⁷ This view is increasingly widely held; although self-nomination of gender is still not legally available in many countries, UN and EU bodies are calling for "gender recognition procedures based on self-determination" (Ghoshal and Knight, 7)

¹⁸⁸ Je sens bien que je leur suis restée étrangère

¹⁸⁹ Mutante / femme sans l'être vraiment

comments “everything muddles together in my head”, and that their stories “didn’t awaken images in my mind” (120-21).¹⁹⁰ She is thus disconnected from what, in the ideological schema of the other women, is a central part of female experience. Maternity and motherhood also loom large in the text, but as a gap or negative. The women do not discuss pregnancy or their children: “none ever want to talk about their children” (120),¹⁹¹ as it is too painful to recall (see also 59). Their sensitivity to, and prohibition on, the topic places it as of paramount importance to their previous lives. In this way, reproduction, child-rearing, and romantic relations with men are portrayed as the lynchpins of pre-cataclysmic femininity. As the narrator is unable to identify with the other women’s experiences of gendered life, and indeed cannot even represent it to herself, she cannot be conceived as occupying the place often assigned to women in patriarchal culture. In these terms, she is not a ‘woman’. Indeed, through the narrator’s gaze, ideas of women’s gendered roles and behaviours are defamiliarised in the narrative. Transplanted from their culture of origin concepts such as beauty and marriage are rendered absurd, highlighting their dependence on a particular context of male/female relations. For example, the women are debating the merits of marriage when it strikes them that they are “in this desert where there are no men to marry, cheat on or leave” and so burst out laughing, with the narrator commenting, “even I could appreciate the absurdity of the thing” (119). Thus, in relation to the estrangement of ‘normal’ ‘feminine’ activities, Paque is correct in remarking that the text threatens to “overthrow sexual roles and clichés” (“Vie” 96). Noticeably, of course, these aspects of

¹⁹⁰ Tout s’embrouillait dans ma tête / n’éveillaient pas d’images dans mon esprit

¹⁹¹ Aucune ne voulut jamais parler des enfants

a 'woman's role' rely on a heterosexual assumption, with sexual complementarity in the reproductive process the divisive link which dichotomises men from women. As such, this particular cultural expectation of gender is intimately connected to sexual function and bodily attributes. Indeed, for arguments on sexual difference, as Naomi Schor points out in her edited collection on the topic, "the fundamental issue is the body" (ix). So how is the body conceived here, and how is the narrator's difference seen to matter?

The key aspect of the narrator's difference from the others, her pre-pubescent body and "aménorrhée" [amenorrhea/lack of periods] (31), centres on her reproductive status. Terming herself, "the sterile offspring of a race I know nothing of" (121) and explaining how puberty "had barely begun to swell my breasts and let a few hairs grow on my pubis, when it gave up" (112),¹⁹² the narrator's body does not conform to dominant, heteronormative notions of female corporeality which are based in its reproductive potential. As Lori Sauble-Otto has pointed out the narrator's body demonstrates, "the foundational principle of Butler's theory, namely, that in a society based on heterosexuality as the norm there are 'bodies that matter' and bodies that don't" (61). Sauble-Otto is here invoking Judith Butler's theory of performativity: that sex and gender are "regulatory fictions" produced through repeated acts which naturalise the heterosexist assumptions that support them (*Trouble* 46). In doing so, Sauble-Otto highlights how the narrator does not "conform to the heterosexual female reproductive role" (61), and therefore her body troubles dominant discursive ideas of the female sex.

¹⁹² Je suis le rejeton stérile d'une race dont je ne sais rien / À peine avait-elle gonflé légèrement mes seins et laissé quelques poils pousser sur mon pubis, puis elle avait renoncé

Butler argues that male and female bodies are culturally intelligible as binaries only through a paradigm of compulsory heterosexuality. She explains the “heterosexual matrix” holding together sex/gender/sexuality as follows:

a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (Butler *Trouble* 208)

In other words, ideas of reproductive complementarity regulate the production and reception of sex and gender, and features and traits gain significance in relation to this paradigm. ‘Intelligible’ gender identities maintain the heterosexual matrix, and imply a causal relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality; where sex (female), produces gender (femininity) and desire (for men). There are two key points of Butler’s argument that are relevant here. Firstly, that sex (as well as gender) is not a pre-given and natural division, but a social one. Secondly, that the maintenance of binary sexual difference implicitly rests on the heterosexual matrix. Sauble-Otto is right in asserting that the narrator does trouble ‘natural’ categories of sexual difference. Certainly, if the narrator is nominally female but does not conform to the criteria which make one, it indicates that the category is not so stable and ‘real’. Her *différance* troubles the foundations of the female sex. *Différance* is a term from Derridean deconstruction for “the sameness which is not identical” (Derrida 129). In this usage, it refers to the state of being the same, and different, at once, which calls into question the dichotomous A/not-A definitions of same/different and, indeed, many other categories. By demonstrating that concepts which are posited as “logical contradictories” in Jay’s terms (47), that is

mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive (such as same/different, man/woman) in fact overlap, sharing sameness and differences, our fixed notions are undermined, and the contingencies which masquerade as natural and absolute in our language and discourses are exposed, or deconstructed. The narrator cannot be easily encompassed into dominant categories of womanhood (whether defined along social or biological lines), nor indeed that of manhood. She is neither exactly the same as, or entirely different from, the concept of 'woman', and thus implies it is not a fixed logical contradictory category.

Yet, in another sense, the narrator can also be read as reinforcing the heterosexual matrix, because the causal links between sex, gender and desire are still visible in her configuration. That is, her (lack of) sexuality is portrayed as caused by her (lack of) biological sexual development, and (lack of) gendered experiences. In this way, there is still a close link between her sex, gender and desire, all of which comply with a heterosexual assumption. Indeed, in some ways, the reproductive function is privileged in the novel as fundamental to human identity and as providing the meaning of life. This sentiment is expressed both by the narrator and by Théa. Théa is deemed "the most intelligent" of the women (25),¹⁹³ which lends, within the framework of the text, authority to her opinion. In responding to the importance of men, Théa remarks: "what are we, without future, without descendants? The last links in a broken chain" (41).¹⁹⁴ The narrator also emphasises the centrality of childbirth and -rearing to human concepts such as temporality, "I think that time must relate to the length of pregnancies, the

¹⁹³ La plus intelligente

¹⁹⁴ Que somme-nous, sans avenir, sans descendance ? Les derniers maillons d'une chaîne cassée

growth of little ones, all these things which I haven't lived" (188). Her musings defamiliarise our concept of time, but also depict reproduction as the factor which anchors and secures sense and meaning. Through the value and importance bestowed on reproduction, *Moi qui* ratifies the dichotomous division of bodies based on heterosexual complementarity. Furthermore, as Vanbaelen has commented, it is implied in the text that a woman's body needs a man and a child "to open it and make it speak" (74).¹⁹⁵ Meaning or purpose is therefore given to the female body through reproduction. This conviction is evident in how bodies are presented as responding to their environment. Théa argues that some of their periods have stopped because of their emotional state: "it's not the menopause that has dried us up, it's despair" (41).¹⁹⁶ This logic is echoed by the narrator who pictures her brain ordering her pituitary gland to ignore her ovaries: "it had judged that, without any sperm available, it isn't necessary for eggs to be released and undertake the journey towards the uterus" (112).¹⁹⁷ It is therefore proposed that the narrator has not reached sexual maturity *because* there are no men. She also states that, if she had not been transported to the bunker, "I would have had periods, children, and my uterus would not have rotted away" (191),¹⁹⁸ reinforcing that it is the situation that has impacted on her biology. What's more, it is not just the narrator's body's expression of female sexual characteristics that has been interrupted, but consequently also her sexuality and desire. After her initial heterosexual desire for the young guard which

¹⁹⁵ Pour l'ouvrir et le faire parler

¹⁹⁶ Ce n'est pas la ménopause qui nous a desséchées, c'est le désespoir

¹⁹⁷ Elle avait estimé que, sans sperme disponible, il n'est pas nécessaire que les œufs se détachent et entreprennent la migration vers l'utérus

¹⁹⁸ Là-bas, j'aurais eu des règles, des enfants et mon utérus inutile n'aurait pas pourri

fades into memory on their exit for the cage, the narrator is unable to experience sexual pleasure and has no physical sexual desire. She describes how “my genital organs were plunged into silence” (111), and when touching herself to try and elicit pleasure, it leads to nothing: “my mucus felt my fingers, and my fingers felt my mucus, but it all stopped there” (112-13).¹⁹⁹ There seems to be a link here between lack of reproductive capacity and lack of sexual desire. Or even, that without men, there is no female desire. Of course, the latter assertion is not indicative of the whole group, given that many of the other women form couples and sexual relationships. However, this pleasure is shrouded in mystery to the narrator who remains “perplexe devant les couples” [perplexed by the couples] (109). It is an aspect of experience she is excluded from and which consequently remains unrepresented in the narrative.

Yet, to nuance this point, it can be argued that her asexuality is a response to the conditions generally, rather simply the absence of men. *La petite* describes how, “I hated to be touched” (109),²⁰⁰ a revulsion which Théa attributes to the legacy of the guards’ whips, given that the women were forbidden from contact in the cage and struck for attempting to do so (37). The narrator’s physical responses have been apparently shaped by her surroundings, and external forces have been internalised to colour her preferences and how she inhabits her body. This highlights how the body is “a *practical* direct locus of social control”, one which is “regulated by the norms of our cultural life” (Bordo 91). The very particular society in which the narrator has grown up has impacted on her

¹⁹⁹ Mes organes génitaux étaient plongés dans le silence / mes muqueuses sentaient mes doigts et mes doigts sentaient mes muqueuses, mais les choses s’arrêtaient là

²⁰⁰ Je détestais qu’on me touche

desire. In this interpretation, the novel foregrounds the cultural mediation of the body and our understandings of our experience.

However, on the other hand, there is no escaping the heterosexual assumption at work in the causal connection between the lack of men and reproductive opportunity, and the narrator's biology. Ultimately, she does not trouble the heterosexual matrix because she is equally misaligned to markers of female sex, female gender, and female to male desire, and there is a logical connection between the (non)expression of these aspects. So, whilst the narrator's *différance* to paradigms of femininity does question its foundations, it also reinforces a heterosexual dichotomy. There is, therefore, a tension in *Moi qui* between echoing traditionalist gender narratives and disrupting them. The narrator at once expresses a distance or rejection of 'woman' as man's other and the possibility of other horizons, whilst simultaneously embedded in and reinforcing dichotomous difference. A similar ambiguity has been identified in other novels by Harpman. For example, in her study of *Orlanda*, Bainbrigge comments on an oscillation between liberation from and "re-inscription of prescriptive stereotypes of masculinity and femininity" (*Francophone* 84). Fabrice Schurmans' article on identity and doubles in Harpman's *Le Bonheur dans le crime* (1993), talks of a destabilisation or crisis of identity in the text. He relates this to the breakdown of grand narratives and monolithic concepts in the postmodern era, arguing that fixed standards against which to define ourselves (such as God, the Monarch, Woman, Man) have dispersed, leaving us "without a reference point" in the creation of self (Schurmans n.pag.).²⁰¹ This angle may

²⁰¹ Sans point de repère

provide a useful way to understand the narrator's uneasy relationship to female identity in *Moi Qui*.

Does the novel betray a discomfort with what philosopher Rosi Braidotti calls “the decline of metaphysically fixed stable identities”(Nomadic 26), all whilst acknowledging their lack of stability? In its bleak setting and nihilistic ethos, *Moi qui* does express anxiety and unease, and suggests that the quest for identity is irresolvable, or, perhaps even, that it can only be found in a reproductive role. This valorisation of maternity can be read as representing a longing for coherent purpose, in a world where there is none to be found. In that sense, it is nostalgic, symbolising a lost and irretrievable ideal in the text. Certainly, in the post-apocalyptic setting of the novel, gender roles and attributes have been rendered absurd and empty. The women feel this loss; when their searching and building is over, they experience a “flattening of their mood” and begin fading away: “the women discovered that surviving is nothing more than pushing back the moment of death” (126).²⁰² Removed from their previous roles, it is as if they have nothing to live for. Yet, on the other hand, stripped of its grounding and substance, there is a potential to reconfigure ‘womanhood’, and the narrator represents a chance for a new way of being. In reading other novels by Harpman (*Orlanda*, *La Lucarne*, and *Mes Œdipe*) Dora Leontaridou finds a “reflection on the necessity to reconceptualise feminine identity according to the social set-up of our times” (141).²⁰³ Indeed, as noted earlier, there are positive values present in the novel,

²⁰² Un aplanissement de l'humeur / les femmes découvraient que survivre n'est jamais que reculer le moment de mourir

²⁰³ Une réflexion sur la nécessité de reconceptualiser l'identité féminine selon les données sociales de nos jours

such as the compassion and equivalent participation evident in the group's collective endeavours. Although the narrator often focuses on her difference from the others, she does come to embody a vision of reflective, creative, and productive subjectivity in her own right. The next section will examine the final phase of the novel, when the narrator finds herself alone in the barren landscape, and will develop this consideration of the skills and traits which make up the narrator's sense of self.

To summarise this section, it was shown that after initial hostility the narrator integrates into the group through participation and empathic understanding. This move towards the others is reflected by the appearance of a shared, plural psychological perspective, and revised evaluations of the women by the narrator. Although the women are forced by circumstances into 'necessary solidarity', their unity is characterised positively by collaboration, mutual care, and a retention of difference, as opposed to conformity and coercion. Nonetheless, despite her group membership, in one regard, the narrator still remains liminal to the women. That is, she cannot identify with the features and experiences of being a 'woman'. She is marked by difference from norms of the 'female' subject in her body, whose sexual development is arrested, and in her disconnection from male/female relations. In this way, by being a woman but not 'intelligible' within dominant paradigms, she challenges the naturalised absolutism of sexual categories and estranges gender roles. However, given the causal links between her difference of sex, gender and sexuality, she also acts to reinforce heterosexual assumptions underlying sexual complementarity. This tension has been interpreted as both expressing an anxiety with a break down in stable gender identities, a nostalgic

longing for the purpose and meaning they gave, and as opening the door for new configurations of feminine subjectivity.

4.2.3 Enforced Solitude

In the final section, the narrator finds herself alone in the wilderness after the last of the women have passed away. This solitude is not greeted with despair by the narrator, instead, she views it as the moment “my last tie was released” (141),²⁰⁴ and immediately recommences her passage across the landscape. On her travels, she eventually finds an underground house which is comfortably furnished and well-supplied including with books. Here, as she ages and is able to explore less, she spends her confinement reading, writing her life-story, and reflecting on her relationship with others, and by extension with the human race. How, then, does the narrator, and particularly her solitary existence at the end of the novel, question what it means to be human? And, isolated from social relations, what sense of individual identity emerges?

Of most pertinence to this analysis, is the intersubjective aspect of humanity which comes to the fore when the narrator is alone. Here, the text affirms the importance of communication and mutual recognition to validate meanings and identities. For example, the narrator considers how time has lost its relevance now she is alone, “I count, every 30 days I say that a month has passed: these are words, they don’t really give me the time. Maybe there can never be time, when you are alone?” (187), and

²⁰⁴ Ma dernière attache avait cédé

proposes that “if someone spoke to me, there would be time ... the least conversation brings time into existence” (187-88).²⁰⁵ Time, in this schema, only makes sense when recognised between people. A similar sentiment is expressed in relation to the self. Although the narrator achieves self-validation by looking in the mirror, viewing her changing expressions, she thinks “it’s me”, this involves a kind of doubling where she plays the role of self and other, noting of her face in the mirror “I give it a friendly smile, and receive a smile in return” (181).²⁰⁶ However, elsewhere this self-recognition is mediated through others, for example in the narrator’s desire to attract the guards’ attention so that they would distinguish her from the rest and “recognise that I exist” (45).²⁰⁷ Or in the narrator’s assertion that “to speak is to exist” (32),²⁰⁸ and of the pages she is writing, “I still do not exist because no one reads them” (188).²⁰⁹ Here communication is a means to (self)recognition and affirmation, but for this to function it requires two participants. Vanbaelen, whose article takes an allegorical reading of the novel as relating a “purely feminine alternative” to creation myths, argues that the narrator’s writing project is an act of self-creation which results from a move “towards the other” (78).²¹⁰ In Vanbaelen’s interpretation, after receiving skills of reading and writing from Théa, the narrator “manages to (self) create out of nothing ... giving birth to herself and her story” (80).²¹¹ Moreover, contending that it is her memories of Théa

²⁰⁵ Je compte, tous les trente jours je dis qu’un mois a passé : ce sont des mots, ils ne me donnent pas vraiment le temps. Peut-être n’a-t-on jamais le temps, en étant seul ? / Si quelqu’un me parlait, il y aurait du temps ... La moindre conversation fait naître le temps

²⁰⁶ C’est moi / Je lui souris amicalement, et ainsi je reçois un sourire

²⁰⁷ Ils reconnaîtraient que j’existe

²⁰⁸ Parler, c’est exister

²⁰⁹ Je n'existe toujours pas puisque personne ne les lit

²¹⁰ Une alternative purement féminine / vers l'autre

²¹¹ Elle arrive à (se) créer à partir du rien ... s'enfantant elle-même et son récit.

that prompts the narrator to write, Vanbaelen maintains that the narrator carries out this act of self-realisation “sans hommes” [without men] (80). However, this assertion overlooks the fact that the narrator’s writing commences after she has read the books in the house, the only titles of which we are given come from the male canon including Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky and Cervantes (178). In fact, she lists Shakespeare as direct inspiration:

my story was just as important as that of King Lear or of Prince Hamlet which William Shakespeare had gone to the pains of relating in detail. The decision was made in me almost without my knowing: I would do like he did (11)²¹²

The claim that this is a “purely feminine” invention or process is therefore disputable. Nonetheless, writing still serves in the novel as a potential way for the narrator to make sense of her self and her life, with ‘sense’ and meaning created through intersubjective encounter. In this way, ‘identity’ and ‘humanity’ are only coherent to the extent that they are recognised by an other.

How then can we characterise this ‘self’ that the narrator creates through her writing? It has already been outlined how much of her identity is formed around what she is not, and her difference from gendered corporeality and experience. However, this distance from traditional roles can also be conceived as a freedom to positively self-define, removed from binary bindings. One way to conceive the narrator’s identity, is to consider how she positions herself in relation to certain values. For example, as shown

²¹² Mon histoire était bien aussi importante que celle du roi Lear ou du prince Hamlet que ce William Shakespeare s’était donné la peine de relater dans le détail. La décision se prit en moi presque à mon insu : je ferais comme lui.

earlier, during the stage when she was distinguishing herself from the group, she laid claim to the mental realm. This alignment with intelligence and imagination remains integral to her self-worth throughout the narrative and can be seen in her opinions on the intrinsic value of knowledge (15, 110), and in her triumph when exercising logic and creating suppositions (46, 156). Dignity and respect also emerge as valued by the narrator. For instance, she is so struck by the composure of a man in one of the underground cages who had died sitting up, staring ahead, “with an air of pride and of defiance” (144), that she aims to recreate this when she takes her own life at the end of the text, “I want to be positioned with dignity, like the man sat between the folded mattresses, looking straight in front of me” (191).²¹³ She also takes care to ensure a respectful burial for Laurette, who she carries “as delicately as possible” to the “nice, neat rectangular grave” she has built for her, so that she can rest “peacefully” (143).²¹⁴ Moreover, although the narrator does not experience physical sexual pleasure, sensory pleasure does become prized in her narrative. She takes a great liking to bathing in rivers (80, 157), hot baths when they are available, describing “the delight of plunging into exquisitely hot water” (180),²¹⁵ and the taste of new foods she discovers, proclaiming “it seemed so delicious to me, I thought that I’d never be able to stop eating” (81, see also 153, 179), and takes pleasure in the comfort of a bed and pillow for the first time, “I liked it a lot” (181).²¹⁶ Above all, however, the value of activity repeatedly comes to the

²¹³ Avec un air de fierté et de défi / Je veux être posée avec dignité, comme l’homme assis entre les matelas repliés, regardant droit devant moi.

²¹⁴ Le plus délicatement possible / belle, tombe rectangulaire, nette / tranquillement

²¹⁵ L’enchantement de plonger dans une eau exquisément chaude

²¹⁶ Cela me parut délicieux, il me semblait que je ne pourrais jamais arrêter de manger / Cela me plut beaucoup

fore in the text. For instance, it is emphasised each time houses are built that this is something the narrator enjoys (108, 122, 124), and when they are finished she “imagined something to do”, such as making furniture or going on an expedition for supplies (108).²¹⁷ She understands that she has not adapted to their “vie sédentaire” [sedentary life] (108) and feels menaced by “désœuvrement” [idleness] (124), always impatient to carry on the quest (138). As well as construction and carpentry, her preferred occupations are learning, and then later, writing. In the cage, she had a thirst for the women’s knowledge, but out of it her “taste for learning” is reawakened (108), and she is taught biology (111-12) and grammar (114) by the women. Writing is particularly valorised, with paper being the “plus précieux” [most precious] (182) item she discovers, and the time spent writing her memoir: “a month, which has perhaps been the happiest of my life” (12).²¹⁸ Overall, therefore, productivity, intelligence, pleasure and dignity are key values that could be viewed as central to the narrator’s identity, as well as the mutual care and contribution which characterise the collective.

How then does this portrayal of the narrator interact with feminist debates on what a reimagined femininity could or should be? Even though *Moi qui* is a non-didactic text which undermines as much as it promotes any single position, the values central to the narrator’s sense of self hint at an ethics of subjectivity. As such, some parallels can be drawn to feminist scholarship on the topic. One correspondence that arises, perhaps surprisingly, is to existentialist feminism. The central proponent who elaborated this

²¹⁷ J’imaginai quelque chose à faire

²¹⁸ Un mois, qu’a peut-être été le plus heureux de ma vie

position was Simone de Beauvoir. Brief reference was made to Beauvoir earlier in this chapter for her argument on the social construction of woman as man's Other. Indeed, if her theories are examined more closely, it becomes clear that *Moi qui* does appear to support some of the prepositions and implications of this existentialist perspective. For example, Beauvoir developed her ideas of the self/other relation "following Hegel" (*Tome I* 21),²¹⁹ and the story of the narrator's relations with the collective mimics Hegel's master-slave dialectic.

Hegel argued that self-consciousness, emerges "through the exclusion from itself of all that is other" (110), with 'all that is other' becoming object in the gaze of the subject. Definitional power lies here with the subject, they become the 'me' from which everything else is 'not-me'. However, importantly, this self-conscious subject relies on recognition for its existence, Hegel explains "self-consciousness is *in* and *for itself* while and as a result of its being *in* and *for itself* for an other; i.e., it is only as a recognized being" (111). Therefore, the subject exists as a subject, only as long as it is recognised by an other as a subject. In her summary of the topic, Ursula Tidd underlines the importance of Hegel's intersubjective account in challenging the Cartesian thinking-subject (*cogito*) as an independent guarantor of meanings. Instead for Hegel, "self-consciousness cannot exist without the Other", and thus his philosophy brings interrelations to the fore (Tidd 15). Beauvoir similarly asserts that "we need others in order for our existence to become founded and necessary" (*Writings* 129). As demonstrated above, a similar thematic preoccupation with intersubjectivity is very

²¹⁹ Suivant Hegel

much in evidence in the novel through the narrator's musings about the nature of humanity and self-identity which rely on recognition to have meaning. Moreover, continuing with a Hegelian thread, if for each subject everything else is object, when two subjects enter into relations (which are necessary to confirm their existence), there will be inevitable conflict over who claims the positive definitional 'me', or 'master', position, compared to the objectified, not-me, 'slave' role. Hegel states that in searching for recognition, "they must engage in this struggle, for each must elevate its self-certainty of existing *for itself* to truth" (111). Beauvoir explains that in "consciousness itself [there is] a fundamental hostility towards every other conscience; the subject only arises through opposition: it asserts itself as the essential and makes the other into the inessential, into object" (*Tome I* 21).²²⁰ Relations with others are therefore both necessary and threatening for the subject, given that they see themselves reflected back as an object in the gaze of the other. If we take up this lens, conflictual relations between the women and the narrator at the start of the novel takes on another shade. Here, each tries to 'master' the other consciousness, through gaining knowledge of their 'secret' they attempt to position them as something known, objectified, within their representational field. In this reading, the narrator's hostility becomes part of assertion of her self as a subject; a process through which she defines herself, intersubjectively, in opposition to the women and, defends herself from the threat of becoming objectified by them. Rather, she takes on the 'master' role, claiming subjective sovereignty and

²²⁰ Dans la conscience elle-même une fondamentale hostilité à l'égard de toute autre conscience ; le sujet ne se pose qu'en opposant : il prétend s'affirmer comme l'essentiel et constituer l'autre en inessentiel, en objet.

enslaving the women to her definition of them. The narrator is characterised by imagination, rationality and thought, whereas the women become the opposing ‘not-me’, the material, mechanistic and inane. Their consciousnesses are not recognised, and this objectification is evident in the external perspective and negative modality used to present them.

Yet, this hostility is not where the novel ends, nor where the existentialist view of intersubjectivity stops. Beauvoir envisions the potential to work through the conflictual self/other interaction by aiming for mutual subject-to-subject recognition. This reciprocity is not only necessary for validating our selves, we need to be recognised *as a subject, by a subject to exist*, but it also subtends ethics, being: “the metaphysical basis of the idea of justice” (Beauvoir *Writings* 140, 249). Therefore, although there is a tendency to oppress and objectify others, to truly experience ourselves as subjects we must make an ethical effort to recognize others as subjects too. The narrator’s move towards the other women, where she understands their behaviour and attitude by thinking through their situation (31, 58), represents a moment of ethical recognition. In particular, the pleasure the narrator takes in her discussions with Théa reads as a reciprocal meeting of minds, “it was so nice to have a conversation partner [*interlocutrice*] as intelligent as me” (33).²²¹ Moreover, an existentialist perspective also chimes with the link between participation and belonging in the group dynamic. It is central to the existentialist ethos that *being* consists of *doing*. In her essay “Pyrrhus and Cineas”, Beauvoir claims that “I take on a shape and an existence only if I first throw

²²¹ Il était fort plaisant d’avoir une interlocutrice aussi intelligente que moi

myself into the world by loving, by doing” (*Writings* 130). The implications of this is that we self-create through activity and projects, and these gain value through recognition by others. Similarly, when the narrator engages in her project to measure the time, this act comes to fruition when it is shared in by the women, awakening their interest and bringing novelty “into our immobile life” (61).²²² Also, it was shown that the narrator *belongs* to the group *through* her contribution to their mutual endeavours, such as housebuilding, sense-making, and ritual. In this way, the relationship is constituted by what they *do*, through their mutual participation in projects. It is collective action that makes the collective.

Furthermore, according to existentialist thought, although we have no pre-given nature or purpose, humans are inherently capable of going beyond, or transcending, their situation. As Tidd explains, “we are never entirely ‘there’, fixed in the moment, but always somehow engaged in transcending the given state of affairs” (31). In one sense, this means that we are not just inert material, but can think beyond our immediate circumstances. We are more than, for example, a person brushing their teeth, we are also thinking or imagining things that take us beyond that instant. This intellectual or theoretical freedom is tied with an ethical responsibility, to recognise and take advantage of our ability to transcend, within the limits of our circumstances, and undertake projects to surpass our situation. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir explains that “Every subject creates itself concretely as a transcendence through projects; it only fulfils its freedom

²²² dans notre vie immobile

by continually moving towards other freedoms” (*Tome I* 32).²²³ If we are cut from this transcendence, we become a “thing” in the world, an object rather than subject, and fall into a state of “immanence” (*Tome I* 25, 33). In this schema, it is morally positive to transcend, assuming your freedom to make choices and follow projects which take you beyond your current state. On the other hand, refusing to make choices, abdicating your freedom, and remaining immanent is a “chemin néfaste” [harmful path], because it leads to frustration and dependence on others (Beauvoir *Tome I* 25). In the context of her study of contemporary French society in the 1940s, in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir argues that, as men’s Other, women have been confined to immanence and been denied the possibility to transcend their imposed roles. To address this inequality, Beauvoir’s call in the book is for a “collective evolution” where women become free to realise their own projects, with men and women “mutually recognising each other as subjects” (*Tome II* 647, 654).²²⁴ In future, Beauvoir envisions that a girl “would be interested in what she does, she would throw herself without hesitation into her endeavours” (*Tome II* 648).²²⁵ There are certain ways in which the narrative of *Moi qui n’ai pas connu les hommes* can be read through the ethical paradigm of immanence versus transcendence. From one perspective, it can be argued that the group’s imprisonment in the cage is a vivid metaphor for women’s confinement to immanence within patriarchal society. With their restricted space, means and routine, their ability to progress or go beyond their circumstances is radically impeded. Their unending repetition of cooking, sleeping,

²²³ Tout sujet se pose concrètement à travers des projets comme une transcendance ; il n’accomplit sa liberté que par son perpétuel dépassement vers d’autres libertés

²²⁴ Une évolution collective, se reconnaissant mutuellement comme sujet

²²⁵ Elle s’intéresserait à ce qu’elle fait, elle s’engagerait sans réticence dans ses entreprises.

defecating, and chatting, recalls how Beauvoir describes the housewife's routine in *The Second Sex*. She describes it as a Sisyphean task which "only perpetuates the present ... it is a battle which begins again each day", and for women, "they will be subject to these rites until death. Eat, sleep, clean ... each day is the same as the one before, it is an eternal present: useless and without hope" (Beauvoir *Tome II* 256-57).²²⁶ Similarly, the women are not working towards anything in the cage, they are not producing anything useful, or learning or growing; instead they are stuck in a cycle and confined to one vision of themselves: as prisoners. However, even in this limited environment, the narrator finds a way to transcend their immediate reality by carrying out projects, such as counting her heartbeats, that aim at improving understanding and inciting change. In her unwillingness to accept their position and her attempt to think beyond their immediate oppression, she is exercising her freedom.²²⁷ Although the narrator is initially scornful of the women's apparent resignation to their material reality and lack of "perspectives" (38), she comes to understand this as "a way to survive" (58).²²⁸ Returning to the analogy of women in the cage as representing women in patriarchal society, the narrator's changed opinion can be read as indicating sympathy with women's complicity within a male dominated system. Compliance may not have moral value, but it is understandable as a survival mechanism.

²²⁶ Elle perpétue seulement le présent ... c'est une lutte qui se renouvelle chaque jour / jusqu'à la mort elles seront soumises à ces rites. Manger dormir, nettoyer ... chaque jour imite celui qui le précéda, c'est un éternel présent inutile and sans espoir

²²⁷ Freedom here is in the philosophical sense of "the autonomy of choice", over how the situation and self is conceived, rather than the freedom "to obtain what one has wished" (Sartre 483)

²²⁸ Un moyen de survivre

Moreover, the women are energised by the narrator's projects, she awakens rebellion amongst them and they too begin to think beyond their position. The narrator explains that, "we found again our sense of being human. We were no longer complicit with the guards" (60).²²⁹ In this reading, one woman helps others to realise their freedom and view themselves as subjects. Indeed, when outside of the bunker, the group carry out projects to teach one another, to build, to search for meaning and for civilisation. As was demonstrated above, the narrator particularly exemplifies transcendence as she values action, onward travel, productivity, learning and creation. Throughout the text, she embodies a movement, literally and figuratively, forward. Even in her last days she is still working towards something, reaching out to others, through her memoir. This activity does contrast with the other women, who have a tendency to fall back into "inertie" [inertia] or immanence (62). For example, after construction of the second camp is completed, the women's spirits are extinguished [*éteindre*], and although they continued "to eat, to drink, to sleep: somewhere behind the scenes they began to withdraw, to silently give up" (125-26).²³⁰ This process of retreat reaches its peak with Laurette, the final woman, who dies, not of an illness but from lack of will to live, "it wasn't her body which was giving in, but her soul, which was ever more weary of stimulating her muscles, of making her heart beat" (137).²³¹ It is almost as if the women, conditioned by their upbringing in the traditional roles of the pre-cataclysmic society,

²²⁹ Nous retrouvons notre qualité d'êtres humains. Nous n'étions plus complices des gardiens

²³⁰ À se nourrir, à boire, à dormir : quelque part dans l'ombre se développèrent des abandons, des renoncements silencieux

²³¹ Ce n'était pas le corps qui cédaient, mais l'âme, de plus en plus lasse d'animer ces muscles, de faire battre le cœur

struggle to live *for* themselves outside this sphere. As expressed in “Pyrrhus and Cineas”, Beauvoir’s existentialist ethics derides these “resignations of freedom” as morally corrupt (*Writings* 137). Yet, Beauvoir accepts that not everyone has the same potential or tools to accomplish their freedom, to pose themselves as subjects and to transcend. In *The Second Sex*, she explains that women may not have “the concrete means” to do so, or are unwilling because it means “renouncing all the advantages” that their current position offers (Beauvoir *Tome I* 25).²³² In her empathic move towards the other women a similar understanding is shown by the narrator, although it is her activity and mental capacities that remain more highly valued in the text. Following this interpretation, the image of the narrator as a positive force, in contrast to her indoctrinated and immanent companions, reads as a call for women to be given opportunities and tools to transcend: that is, to make sense of the world, produce, participate, learn, create and move beyond their immediate reality.

A common charge levied against Beauvoir’s feminist philosophy is that it privileges masculinist values and depreciates female specificity. For example, Luce Irigaray reads Beauvoir as “demanding the neutralisation of sex” and describes her egalitarianism as “an erroneous expression of a real issue ... What do women want to be equal to? Men?” (“Equal?” 32). Le Dœuff explains that, “Simone de Beauvoir was often cited as the archetypal case of the sin of identification with the masculine” (96). Beauvoir’s theories have been read as promoting that women become equal to men within the existing masculinist system, that women become subjects in man’s image.

²³² les moyens concrets / renoncer à tous les avantages

Here, women cast off their passive, other-centred femininity (immanence), to enter into male-aligned productive activity, rationality and self-sufficiency (transcendence). Yet, this assumes that values are innately gendered, and that Beauvoir is disparaging, for instance, maternity as an absolute, rather than maternity as currently conceived within patriarchy, or care and nurture per se, rather than versions which consume the subject. In any case, could *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* face similar accusations for disparaging the feminine, embodied by the narrator's 39 companions? They are certainly less resilient and less intelligent. Yet, these characteristics are only feminine in the sense that they have been produced by their roles in society before. However, one way that a potential anti-female bias does creep into Harpman's prose is the treatment of the body. Nodot-Kaufman has identified how her clinical language and imagery convey, not neutrality, but negative shading towards female anatomy. Picking up on register-specific vocabulary, such as *aménorrhée* [lack of periods], and the detailed descriptions of vaginal haemorrhaging and uterus cancer from which many women die (189), Nodot-Kaufman argues that "in Harpman's work there is a certain disgust of the feminine, with a particular emphasis on the stomach" (248).²³³ She concludes that periods in the text are conceived as an inconvenience and embarrassment, and in general, "all these female prisoners who haunt the story are prisoners of their body, the cage being an image transparent for the female sex" (Nodot-Kaufman 271).²³⁴ Indeed, Bainbrigge has also remarked on "associations between femininity and imprisonment" as a recurring theme

²³³ Il y a chez Harpman un certain dégoût du féminin, avec une insistance particulière sur le ventre

²³⁴ Toutes ces femmes prisonnières qui hantent le récit sont prisonnières de leur corps, la cave étant une image transparente du sexe féminin

in Harpman's oeuvre (*Francophone* 93). At other points, there is a refusal to write the body or sexuality, distancing the act or the experience through euphemism. For example, the term *soulèvement*, normally associated with political uprising or geographic or physical uplifting, masks sexual pleasure, and lesbian relationships are only alluded to as, "those who don't sleep alone" (104).²³⁵ Again, this is a tendency common to Harpman's writing, Paque confirms that there is always "the obsession to speak of sexuality, but also its denial" (*Harpman* 92).²³⁶ What then to make of this distancing or disgust of adult female corporeality and sexuality? Although from one angle it does read as a masculinist denigration of the body, and serves to reinforce that position, it could also be interpreted as echoing the complications of female embodiment within patriarchy. Where physical experience is mediated through dominant discourses, thus felt as restrictive and alienated. From this perspective, due to the cultural filter between self and body, pleasure struggles to find positive representation and repulsion is amplified.

On the other hand, in terms of values, there is a balance in the novel between the worth placed on so-called masculine and feminine traits. The culturally feminine role of care and nurturing emerges as central to the life of the community, and the narrator's apprenticeship in this aspect is important in her integration into the group. Through its mourned absence, reproduction and child-rearing are also endowed with value, portrayed as the cornerstone of human meaning and purpose. Of course, these more

²³⁵ Celles qui ne dormaient pas seules

²³⁶ L'obsession de dire la sexualité, mais aussi son déni

'feminine' activities sit alongside qualities that have previously been aligned with the masculine side of binary sexual difference, such as: rationality, social contribution, and productivity. Overall, therefore, in the speculative space created by *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes*, the positive vision of productive femininity does not imply a denigration of other-centred activity. Rather, they are part of the same project, with recognition and participation key to self-realisation.

To summarise this section, it was demonstrated that for the narrator individual identity is confirmed in intersubjective encounters. This dimension was underlined and read through existentialist theories of self/other relations. This highlighted how mutual recognition emerges in the novel as an ethical framework subtending group relations. Furthermore, it was shown how the narrator's individual identity is built around the values of rationality, imagination, dignity, pleasure, and foremost, productivity. Again, this vision of subjectivity was interpreted through the lens of Beauvoirian existentialist ethics, where the narrator's transcendence beyond her situation takes on positive moral shading, in contrast to the women's, conditioned, tendency to live within their fixed roles and horizons. However, given the importance of care and mutual support to the collective, the narrator does not realise her freedom at the expense of others, but through intersubjective reciprocity. Thus, the novel can be viewed as writing against gendered hierarchy, towards human subjectivity based in mutual reciprocity and equal potential to realise freedoms and projects.

4.3 Genre Crossings

The works in this thesis' corpus have been brought together under the umbrella of speculative fiction. Speculative indicates texts which take place in alternate realities, or tell stories which go beyond the limits of the possible as commonly understood. *Moi qui* clearly fulfils this criterion, offering a setting and story that exceeds the boundaries of empirical reality. However, in addition to this generic sense, it can be understood as a novel which thematises speculation, with conjecture a recurrent narrative trend. In response to the unknown, the narrator and other protagonists continually speculate, posing questions and supposing answers which are always tentative and never confirmed. This applies to existential questions, about the meaning of life for example, but also concrete queries about their situation and prospects. For instance, from mundane interest of how the guard duty worked: “so they didn’t sleep here? They left every evening and came back every morning? Where did they go?” (73), to more fundamental questions: “Something, someone, somewhere, did they know what all this means?” (164).²³⁷ Similar rhetorical questions appear also on pages 82-83, 86 and 156, and add to the generalised atmosphere of uncertainty created through negated cognition verbs, as outlined earlier in the chapter. That their knowledge remains speculative, rather than definite, is emphasised through the narrator’s announcement of “another question which will remain unanswered: it seems to me that I am made of nothing but those”

²³⁷ Ils dormaient donc pas ici ? Ils partaient tous les soirs et revenaient tous les matins ? Où allaient-ils ? / Quelque chose, quelqu’un, quelque part, possédait-il le sens de tous cela ?

(12).²³⁸ Relaying the story of a speculative creature in a speculative world, the novel therefore truly justifies its inclusion under the banner of speculative fiction.

Turning to the novel as an instance of utopianism, however, it interacts in a more complex way with generic paradigms. On one hand, there is a clear dystopian atmosphere in the novel. In pinpointing their difference, Fatima Vieira contends that dystopia resembles eutopia in its presentation of an alternate social set-up, except crucially instead of portraying a ‘better’ state, it is “essentially pessimistic in its presentation of projective images” (16). Simply put, the post-cataclysmic world of the *Moi qui* with its carceral premise and barren landscape is undoubtedly a ‘worse’ setting than the quotidian material world. Moreover, the text conforms to M. Keith Booker’s understanding of the “principal literary strategy” of dystopian fiction as “defamiliarisation” through the presentation of “imaginatively distant settings” (*Guide* 3-4). It has been highlighted in this chapter how, supplanted from their culture of origin into the wilderness, gendered habits and roles are estranged and thus implicitly questioned.

Yet, most definitions of dystopia do centre on the satirical and critical functions of the genre. For instance, Booker affirms that dystopia is “the epitome of literature in its role as social criticism” (*Guide* 3). Inasmuch as a critique of reductive gender roles, or of ecological exploitation (see for example Bainbrigge “Transgressive” 1022), can be read onto *Moi qui*, the work’s ideological positioning remains diffuse. It is not a didactic text with a clear social target nor desired change, and this does set it apart from the other

²³⁸ Encore une question qui restera sans réponse : il me semble que je ne suis faite que de cela

works in this corpus, and the popular dystopian canon. Furthermore, as per the “compulsory solidarity” dystopian ethos expounded by Claey, Booker also holds that in the genre generally, collective experience is depicted as “a stifling threat to the freedom and integrity of the individual” (“Collective” 59). Indeed, the women’s freedom is curtailed and they are forced together without consent. However, it was demonstrated earlier that the women’s experiences of communal living, despite the circumstances, are broadly positive, and their alliances represent an eutopian force in the novel. That eutopian and dystopian modes are mixed throughout the fabric of the narrative is one of the reasons that Bainbrigge compares the novel to Dunja Mohr’s description of “transgressive utopian dystopias”. In Mohr’s corpus of 1980s and 90s Anglophone feminist dystopias, she discovered that, “the utopian subject is woven as a continuous strand within the dystopian text” (53). Indeed, despite the inhospitable backdrop, hope does continually resurface in *Moi qui*. For example, even in the face of bitter disappointment when a road she had been following disappears, the narrator states that, “slowly my natural vigour reasserted itself” (171).²³⁹ Her irrepressible optimism is evident in her desire to keep reaching out, by lighting fires on the plain to signal her presence to any other survivors for example (185), even after decades of solitude. The act of writing, and leaving her papers for a potential future reader, also epitomise the hopeful spirit.

What’s more, according to Mohr, these fictions transgress on a “formal and content level” as well as a generic one (270). Bainbrigge investigates this premise in

²³⁹ Peu à peu mon naturel vigoureux reprit le dessus

relation to *Moi qui*, and concludes that the novel, “is situated generically, formally, and thematically as a liminal ‘in-between’ work” (“Transgressive” 1016). In terms of form, the lack of resolution clearly places the novel as an example of postmodern open-ended, process-focussed utopianism, as elaborated by Moylan, Sargisson and Mohr amongst others. In relation to Harpman’s text, Bainbrigge confirms that within the work there is a resistance to “narrative closure”, which is “an obvious transgressive feature” (“Transgressive” 1021-22). However, although there is no explanatory climax to the novel, in other ways there is formal regularity to the piece. For example, within the narratorial frame, the life-story unfolds in chronological order and there is a clearly defined narrative progression. There are also no chapters or even significant textual breaks in the text. This renders it markedly continuous, and it reads as a single, consistent thread, with only a few temporal ellipses to summarise the passing of the years. This sets it apart from the formal fragmentation and digressive prose of other eutopian dystopias in Mohr’s corpus which are “episodic, fragmentary and non-linear narratives” (272). *Moi qui* is cooperatively orientated towards the reader, in the sense that the narrator expresses herself plainly (in general without figurative language, neologism or repetition for example), ostensibly reliably, and explains or clarifies where necessary (for example 157-58). Sylvie Vanbaelen agrees that it is “an ordered, logical text, appealing to reason, without the least stylistic divergence nor illegibility” (80).²⁴⁰ In these respects, the novel conforms to classic novelistic form.

²⁴⁰ Un texte ordonné, logique, s'adressant à la raison, sans le moindre écart stylistique et sans la moindre illisibilité

Nonetheless, thematically and conceptually the text does challenge boundaries. It was shown earlier how the narrator transgresses to some extent what it means to be a woman, thus bringing the category's stability into question. Paque's study draws attention to how, through positively re-valuing anger and death, the novel is morally transgressive and delivers "blows to customs, to tradition, to authority" ("Vie" 96).²⁴¹ Furthermore, Bainbrigge highlights a "pattern of oscillation" between asserting opposing images or concepts. She states:

recognizable concrete scenarios are juxtaposed with unreal ones: the concentration camp with the alien landscape; the pursuit of knowledge with the reality of certain 'unknowns' and 'unknowables'; life and the survival instinct brushing with death and the desire for assisted suicide ("Transgressive" 1023)

These juxtapositions blur the lines between one domain and another, and contribute to the text's ethical equivocity. Returning to the work's generic status, as above, Bainbrigge notes a mixture of prosaic and surreal elements in *Moi qui*. Reading through a Todorovian definition of the fantastic as the hesitancy between a real and supernatural explanation of the events, she concludes that the novel, with its atmosphere of uncertainty and blend of reality and unreality, inhabits the fantastic space ("Transgressive" 1016). This view of the fantastic is also upheld by key theorists Rosemary Jackson and Christine Brooke-Rose who view it as a mode which "exists in the hinterland between real and imaginary" and which narrates "the unreal as real" respectively (Brooke-Rose 51; Jackson 35). Therefore, with the above discussion in

²⁴¹ Coups portés aux usages, à la tradition, à l'autorité

mind, Bainbriggé's characterisation of the novel as a hybrid text, spanning of the "transgressive dystopian fantastic", seems appropriate.

It is also worth considering the novel amongst its predecessors in the Francophone utopian tradition, to position it within this context. Kathryn Arbour's research focuses on French feminist literature from 1969-79, an earlier period than Harpman's work. However, given that Monique Wittig's eutopian *Les Guérillères* (1969) is a key reference point, being the "core around which modern French feminist utopianism gathers its energy", it is worth considering any parallels between this "ur-text" and *Moi qui* (Arbour 13). Again, of course, there is a different attitude to language and form, with Wittig and the other authors that Arbour studies (Rocheport, d'Eaubonne and Bersianik) attempting the "overthrow of language itself" (15). However, Arbour does pick up on the valorisation of work as a tool for self-discovery (191) as well as "thematic obsessions" with rage and exploration across her corpus (15). *Moi qui* similarly values work and productivity as a means to self-realisation and meaning creation, and as well as the narrator's energising rage, she also has a thirst for exploration and onwards movement. Thematic links are thus evident between the novel and previous Francophone utopianism, and the texts likewise concur in evidencing an "inherent lack of closure" (Arbour 196). In her comparison of French and American feminist utopianism, Rudnik-Smalbraack judged the French works to be "more abstract, more extreme" than their Anglophone counterparts (178). On an aesthetic and conceptual level, rather than formal, it could be said that *Moi qui* upholds this abstraction and extremity in its setting, indeterminacy and premise.

In terms of more contemporary generic comparisons, the novel has been read alongside Marie Darrieussecq's *Truismes* (1996) by Sauble-Otto, a text in which the female narrator is slowly turning into a pig, and Bainbrigge and Bergeron both make links to Amélie Nothomb's *Acide Sulfurique* (2005), about a reality television show staged in a concentration camp, for the carceral setting. As Bergeron points out Nothomb's text is more ironic and satirical than Harpman's (23), however it does convey a similar sense of existential unease through its use of imprisonment and dystopian fantastic mode. Moreover, despite the difference in settings and storylines, Sable-Otto finds that *Truismes* and *Moi qui* both privilege writing as an act of "subversive creativity" and embody a "crisis of identity at the turn of the third millennium" (66). The texts exploit speculative dystopia as a means to convey concerns over identity and belonging in society. This is perhaps unsurprising, as utopianism is often read as a literary form that "articulates the deep tensions within the political unconscious at the present moment" (Moynlan 210). Interestingly however, in these later texts by Nothomb, Darrieussecq and Harpman the dystopian mode predominates, in contrast to the eutopian optimism of Wittig's novel. Perhaps, this turn comes as a result of a gradual deflation of optimism following the revolutionary impetus of May '68. Or, with regards to *Moi qui*'s positioning, Bainbrigge, like Sauble-Otto, links it to "*fin-de-siècle* malaise", a tension between nostalgia for the passing of an era and angst regarding the unknown of the one to come ("Transgressive" 1020-21). In this chapter, this pull between nostalgia and apprehension was identified in the concurrent assertion of reproduction and the maternal role as a privileged locus of meaning and value, and the rejection of this position in the narrator's sterility. This was read as a response to anxiety

over untethering from fixed roles, identities and concepts in the postmodern era. However, this unease is matched by a eutopian vision of productive, cooperative and reciprocal subjectivity in the novel. Indeed, the text well earns Bainbrigge's 'liminal' characterisation, with its alternation between anxiety and hope, between alienation from the group and belonging to it, and between embodied experience of the past self and the reflective insight of the narratorial voice, and blending of values, modes and genres.

Overall, then, *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* shares certain parallels with other works of feminist utopianism from Francophone Europe and the Anglophone canon, including a transgressive quality in terms of concepts and genre, and open-ended and interrogatory structure which evades finality. This places it firmly in the burgeoning tradition of transgressive, process-focussed and critical eutopias and dystopias. However, it does appear more formally regular than other texts, and sits uneasily under the 'feminist' heading given its rejection of a clear satirical social critique. Indeed, despite strong parallels with other novels, *Moi qui* stands out as a striking post-apocalyptic novelty, a highly original work which defies expectations and revels in ambiguity. Its ending precludes neither a dystopian nor eutopian reading: as apocalyptic negativity at the end of humanity, or the optimistic hope of continuation latent in the narrator's manuscript.

4.4 Conclusion

The vision of the collective in *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* undergoes a transition as the narrator distances herself from, then integrates into the group. In the beginning, the group are the hostile other from which the narrator defines herself in binary opposition. She is the thinking, active subject, and 'they' the mechanistic object. The linguistic means supporting this conflictual portrayal were shown to be: explicit labelling, management of spatiotemporal viewpoint, an exaggerated external psychological perspective of the group shaded by negative modality, and predominance of material and behavioural processes. The links between rage and the desire to self-differentiate was read through psychoanalytic and existentialist paradigms as a developmental step in the formation of self-identity.

However, the relationship evolves when, through an empathetic move, the narrator reaches greater understanding of the women, and, through participation, achieves group membership. In this phase, the collective become a positive force for validating the narrator's projects, providing necessary recognition for her self and giving meaning to her activities. Despite being forced together into 'necessary solidarity', the group dynamic was revealed to be based in cooperation, fairness, a respect for difference, and mutual care. Solidarity here is produced through working together towards a common aim, rather than set characteristics. Extrapolating from the logic of the narrator's progression into the community, it would follow, in a feminist frame, that movements should be broad and inclusive, extending empathy to seek mutual recognition and understanding, rather than excluding based on particular ideas of

‘woman’. It could also be read as implying that alliance is necessary for survival, for women to flourish and realise their freedom within oppressive circumstances. Overall, the collective comes to be a eutopian strand in the novel, underlining the importance of intersubjectivity to subtending meanings and ethics.

In terms of individual identity, the narrator troubles ideas of the ‘female’ subject in relation to both sex and gender. She is a woman by self-designation and as recognised by others, yet she does not take up the role or experiences culturally accorded to women, nor easily conforms to the supposed bodily attributes of the female sex. In this sense, she is not ‘intelligible’ within dominant gender ideology, breaking down the ‘logical contradictory’ reasoning underlying binary sexual difference. Yet, it was also demonstrated that there is a regularity to her *différance*. That is, the causal links between her (lack of) expression of sexual characteristics, her (lack of) gendered experience, and her (lack of) female to male desire maintained the heterosexual assumption on which sexual dichotomy depends. This tension between deconstructive and conservative impulses implies both a desire to flee imposed gender restrictions, and a longing for the stability they provided. This ambiguity has been contextualised in terms of a postmodern rejection of monolithic concepts and narratives, as well as *fin-de-siècle* anxiety over the unknown.

Existentialist feminism provided a lens for viewing the ideological orientation of the work. Despite the novel’s ambiguity and open-endedness, certain values were identified throughout the analysis. It became clear that intersubjectivity, empathy and mutual recognition provide the grounds in the text from which individuals can realise

their freedom to produce, create, think, learn and imagine. Overall, therefore, in this transgressive novel, this model of interdependent transcendence serves as a speculative platform on which to build future femininities.

Chapter Five. Comparisons and Conclusions

The aim of this final chapter is to bring together the findings of the research, in order to highlight similarities and contrasts in how the novels represent individual and collective identities, addressing in this way the thesis' central research questions. That is, to discover how narrative point of view generates a vision of the individual in relation to the collective in contemporary utopianism by women writers, and what significance these representations have in a feminist context and from a generic angle. Overall, this chapter will serve to bring the novels into dialogue, comment on their significance, and reach conclusions.

5.1 The Collective

One might assume a direct link between eutopia and a positive, happy collective, and dystopia and a negative, unhappy group. Whilst attitude is important, the difference is perhaps more subtle. Indeed Gregory Claeys argues that “both utopia and dystopia conceive of ideal harmonious groups which privilege close connections between individuals” (*Dystopia* 7-8). For Claeys, it is rather the degree of coercion that determines the nature of the collective. His definitions of eutopia as “enhanced sociability” and dystopia as “compulsory solidarity”, reveals this emphasis on consent (Claeys *Dystopia* 8). In this way, eutopian groups may exhibit some of the characteristics traditionally associated with dystopian societies (such as homogeneity, conformity and systemisation) but the difference is they are willingly entered into.

Dystopian groups similarly may have idealised elements (such as low crime, economic prosperity and equality) but they are formed and maintained through fear and compulsion. Claeys notes this coercion can pervade the main group (these are “internal” dystopias), or demonisation of outsiders may cement the in-group mentality (these are “external” dystopias) (*ibid*). Claeys’ viewpoint is an interesting one which foregrounds the parallels between the two modes and indicates that they are not so much opposites, but opposing perspectives. Certainly, within the same society, it can be imagined that individuals may experience its cohesive force differently: as a euphoric union say, or an oppressive obligation. However, if we consider an outsider’s view; the fabric holding the collective together is of less relevance than its functioning as a whole and its relation to them. For example, in the latter stages of *The Power*, Tunde and Darrell depict the group of women as threatening, out of control and dangerous: a dystopian vision. Yet, for the women in the group their bond is not secured by force or contrived solidarity. They are linked through a hatred of men, an ‘external’ dystopian group in Claeys’ terms, but for them their connection will not feel like “compulsory solidarity” but freely chosen by each. Moreover, in *Moi qui n’ai pas connu les hommes*, it was shown that even when the association between members is imposed, and sustained under duress as with the group in the cage, positive values and experiences arise which contradict a dystopian interpretation. Therefore, Claeys’ definition, although a useful lens to take, on its own does not adequately account for the works in my corpus and their collectivist dynamics.

Rather, it seems that what matters is the shading a group takes on from a particular point of view. This *may* relate to how group cohesion is maintained and an individual's experience of this, but could also involve how it is perceived by an outsider or framed by a narrator. Are they threatening and oppressive, or supportive and beneficial? It may appear that we have now returned to the initial binary positive or negative classification. However, we have stressed the perspectival and unfixed dimension; it is how the individual perceives their place and experience within the group, or the group's relation to them, that marks the group as eutopian or dystopian.

How then, are the all-female collectives in *El país de las mujeres*, *The Power*, and *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* represented? What are the links which bind them? Do they repress and menace the individual, or emerge as a positive source of solace or pleasure? In terms of similarities between the novels' treatment of the collective, there are two main parallels. Namely, the unifying logic behind inclusion in the group, and the positive representation of small group dynamics. Addressing this first point, in a sense, all of the groups in the corpus are brought together by a logic of likeness whether this is imposed by outside judgement or a self-ascribed identity. In *The Power*, women are linked by their electrostatic power, a biological connection which is awakened by physical contact between them. Moreover, the novel shows women finding mutual cause in rebelling against oppression. Varying levels of derogation and suffering under patriarchy is portrayed as a universal circumstance of womanhood. Each woman in the novel subscribes to the role of avenging angel, readdressing and revenging previous discrimination or victimhood. The likeness between them is therefore shared

physiology and a position on the reversed side of the binary gender hierarchy. The connection between women in *El país* relates to their affinity with the archetypal feminine caring role, and sensual femininity embodied by Viviana Sansón. They identify with this vision of life-giving, creative, practical and powerful womanhood, with this image unifying their political party and guiding policies. With *Moi qui* in contrast, the connection between women was one that was forced on them, rather than appropriated by choice. They have been grouped in the cage based on their (female) sex, so this is the primary link between them, even if the narrator's sexual development is later arrested. However, it is their situation, the need to survive in a barren land, that keeps them together after their escape. They are thus tied by an imposed classification, then necessity. In this way, each novel indicates that women constitute a distinct group which can be identified along biological grounds, and each links this bond to shared circumstances which lead to shared agendas.

The texts also all generally concur in their framing of small groups of women, painting them in a positive and empowering light. In *The Power* the girls in the convent are shown to display gestures of solidarity and support, feel safe and nurtured in the group, and take pleasure in their communal life. In *El país*, PIE support and respect one another, work harmoniously together and enjoy each other's company. Similarly, in *Moi qui*, for the majority of the narrative, the group is collaborative and represents a source of solace, companionship and self-validation. These smaller groups are often represented in intimate spaces: Ifigenia's garden or Vivi's office in *El país*, and the convent in *The Power*. Although, *Moi qui*'s setting on the barren plain could not be described as

‘intimate’, once out of the bunker, the action is still similarly at a remove from public spaces and civic life. Scenes around the camp fire or in their makeshift village recall the enclosed and comforting spaces of the other novels. Moreover, in every small group in the corpus, there is also a tolerance for difference of disposition, preferences, abilities and appearances. Womanhood is seen to be embodied differently, but without destabilising group unity. Therefore, within these eutopian groups, complementarity is emphasised over conformity.

In contrast to this small group harmony, there are differences in how large groups function in the novels. For *Moi qui* this is not relevant, given that the narrative is limited to the 40 characters and a few nameless, silent guards. In *The Power*, however, it was shown that large groups protesting, or later rampaging, in public, outdoor spaces were depicted as homogenous, out-of-control, eerily unified, dehumanised, and monstrous. There are relatively few large group scenes in *El país*, with the notable exception of the opening chapter when Viviana is addressing the crowd. This is a scene of cohesion and harmony with the group hypnotised by her appeal, responding to her movements and energy, and unified in support. It does, however, also mark the moment when she is shot in an assassination attempt. This breaks the idealised scenario, and introduces large groups as a site of danger and risk. Other large group scenes are referred to only in passing rather than described in detail, and involve protests and civil unrest arising from the political uncertainty after Viviana’s injury. Again, the crowd and the street are here uneasy and troubled sites. This link between positive female affiliation and the domestic sphere, and collective unrest and the public realm may seem

to reinforce the traditional link between women and the home. However, it is worth noting that the connection between large groups and public spaces, which was highlighted in the chapter on *The Power* and linked to theories of herd mentality is, an inevitable one. A large number of people cannot fit into an intimate domestic space, so their representation as a collective necessitates open areas. A state, as the totality of the citizens, is harder to capture as a whole in narrative prose. Nonetheless, *El país* does have representative characters who stand in for the voice of the people, such as José de la Aritmética and his family. Their evaluative perspectives serve to emphasise that the country, as a body of people, approve of the eutopian schemes of PIE's government and indicate collective agreement and unity. Yet, in *The Power*, countries as whole populations are not approximated. Instead, states are viewed through their leaders, such as Tatiana Moskalev, or rogue groups within them who do not represent the whole, but factions. Moreover, in the novel, states as entities enter into civil and proxy wars, culminating in eventual nuclear cataclysm. Thus, *The Power* and *El país* both express a wary attitude towards crowds, but differ in their portrayal of the state-level collective, with *El país* alluding to (broad but not absolute) group consensus through individual voices, and *The Power* foregrounding corrupt leaders and fragmented civil unrest. Undoubtedly, this is reflective of their contrasting eutopian and anti-eutopian modes and plot lines.

From this analysis, then, we can conclude that each novel does exhibit a positively framed collectivist ethos with women working together effectively and harmoniously regardless of whether the novel is a dystopia, eutopia or anti-eutopia.

Relative differences between women are present, demonstrating a superficial rejection of conformity, but ultimately do not trouble the functioning of the group. In *The Power* and *El país* this is because the shared identity position supersedes other affiliations, and in *Moi qui* differences are resolved through empathetic effort and active participation. However, this positive vision does tend to be limited to smaller groups; larger groups are linked, in contrast, to threatening, homogenising, or engulfing connotations (with the exception of the state in *El país*). Through a feminist lens, this restriction on the size of successful groupings could imply that it is only possible to retain individuality in smaller collectives. In the small groups depicted in the novels, the women know each other's names and personalities, they can collaborate based on individual strengths and provide that crucial function of mutual recognition and validation. In larger scale groups, this interpersonal functionality is lost in anonymity, with crowds eclipsing the individual. This finding corroborates Claeys' research on dystopian collectivism, which found that, "size is everything in the functioning of group dynamics" (*Dystopia* 45). He argues that in larger groups individuality (as in autonomy, ethical judgement and identity) are transferred or exchanged for that of the group (*ibid*). In terms of implications for feminist organising, we can extrapolate from these visions of women working together that a network approach may be effective. That is, a form of devolved power structure made of smaller units who collaborate on an issue basis to amplify support. Individual groups can respect the integrity and specificity of their members, offering support and recognition of their particular situation and needs, whilst gaining political force when they join together. In effect, this already happens in women's movements across the world. For example, *Movimiento Feminista de Nicaragua* [Nicaraguan Feminist

Movement] is a movement made up of several smaller groups (for instance *Grupo Lésbico Artemisa* and *Voces Caribeñas*) and works in alliance with other umbrella organisations such as *La Red* [The Network], which is itself made up of smaller collectives. Or, in Scotland, the lobbying group Engender represents the interests of smaller scale women's organisations across the country including rape crisis centres, LGBT Youth Scotland, and Yon Afro Collective. This network approach has benefits, providing a ground for alliances and allyships to grow. Yet, as sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis highlights, even coalitions like this may rely on "a belief in the inherent reconcilability and limited boundaries of interest and political difference among those who are disadvantaged and discriminated against" ("Empowerment" 191). That is, the potential of finding a policy, a position, a priority that all agree on, assumes that it is possible to feed different lived experiences of gender through the network unproblematically into a single voice or stance. In *The Power* and *El país* the agenda is set by one dominant group: Mother Eve's religious circle and PIE's policy making respectively. Clearly, the novels do not fully investigate nor resolve how to reconcile conflicting feminist positions. However, what these fictions do all underline is the value of supportive, caring and collaborative links between women in small group scenarios. That attitude can still stand as a goal, even if the processes of translating this dynamic into widescale political action remains complex.

Turning now to how this vision of eutopian collectivism in feminist speculative fiction fits with existing criticism on the individual versus the collective paradigm across the literary genre. The appearance of eutopian groups as enclaves in more broadly

negativistic texts (*Moi qui* and *The Power*) contradicts the tendency that Booker has noted in “Western” dystopias “toward suppression of any positive (utopian) figuration of collective experience” (“Collective” 59). In his paper on the topic, Booker found that, in contrast, African writers of dystopia appear to “maintain an ability to envision positive collective experience” (“Collective” 60). The same is true in this corpus. Albeit that this is a limited study, these findings do suggest that dystopia and negative groupism may correlate less closely in feminist fabulations. This is certainly a hypothesis which merits further investigation within the genre, and would be an interesting avenue for future study. Indeed, it may be a trend not just in feminist utopianism but across more contemporary speculative fictions in general. Claeys notes a move away from depictions of oppressive totalitarian states which prevailed in the first half of the twentieth century: “we no longer fear (it seems) collectivism overwhelming the individual” (*Dystopia* 496). His view is that dystopias since that time express fear instead of “plutocratic post-statist orders which abandon us to crime, disease, hunger and global warming” (*ibid*). In this context, the dehumanising threat is unleashed market forces which disarticulate the state as a coherent collective. In contrast to canonical examples such as *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* or *We*, this expresses a fear of a *loss* of existing mechanisms of collectivism and the security they can bring. This kind of anarcho-capitalist vision chimes with much utopianism over the last three or four decades, including the toxic slums and crime lords of Gioconda Belli’s story of a lost eutopia *Waslala* (1996), the exploitative prostitution ring run under the cover of a perfume shop in Marie Darrieussecq’s fantastic tale *Truismes* (1996), and the bioengineering exploits of big pharmaceutical companies dramatized in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003). A similar fear of social

breakdown is certainly evident in *The Power* and *Moi qui*, in which small groups serve as a refuge from the degraded or dissolved social sphere. Yet, fear of current trends negatively evolving in the future does not quite serve to characterise the catalytic factor behind the fictions in this corpus, in the way it does perhaps for the recent upsurge in Anglo-American dystopias which focus on society's control over women's reproductive choices (such as *Red Clocks* by Leni Zumas (2018), *Gather the Daughters* by Jennie Melamed (2017), and *The Farm* by Joanne Ramos (2019)). As was discussed in the chapter on the novel, amorphous anxiety does dominate *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* through the atmosphere of uncertainty and unanswered quest for meaning, but it stops short of pointing towards a specific cause of this unease, be it technological, environmental, economic or conflict-based. *The Power* and *El país*, on the other hand, do not seem a reaction to future projections, rather they read as embodiments of anger or frustration at how society, as it is now, depreciates and harms women. Their representations of the collective, in this light, become mechanisms for changing the world, not for sheltering from where it is headed.

In any case, this thesis joins its findings to that of Claeys' research to affirm that the novels do not posit collective experience as a stifling pressure on the individual. Instead, group membership is vital to wellbeing, success and self-fulfilment. This fits with a reading of the texts as working against the individualistic and competitive discourses of neoliberalism, promoting instead a more communal political ethics. An exception to this overview would be *The Power's* vision of destructive and violent large-scale uprisings, still pleasurable for those participating, but destabilising to civilisation.

Nonetheless, all three novels untie the paradigmatic narrative correlation of a negativistic speculative vision with dystopian group dynamics, and a eutopian alternate reality with social conformity. Rather, regardless of narrative mode, in these texts small group collectivism allows difference, respects individuality and proves valuable.

5.2 Identity and Identity Politics

In addition to an examination of how the collective functions in the novels, this thesis has focussed on interpreting how individual female identity is conceived. The reason for this dual pronged approach is that groups and identity are intimately interconnected. Identities are produced in part through group memberships, and groups are often bound together along identitarian lines; such as nation, gender, race, sexuality, age or class. As discussed in the opening chapter, these axes of identity, especially within the frame of feminist theorising, are highly contested. Social identities can be harmful in two ways: firstly, they justify and naturalise ideological assumptions about a group (for example that woman are maternal); secondly, they pose fixed and absolute criteria for group membership which may silence or marginalise those who do not share an easy connection to the identity, and may exclude others. In response to these issues, feminist theorists have tried to either come up with more fluid, open conceptions of female identity (such as Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subjectivity), or proposed finding ways of associating which do not depend on shared identity (such as Judith Butler's notion of precarity as a coalitional framework (*Assembly 27*)). However, much of this discourse

remains within academy walls and identity politics continues to be a key mechanism for feminist organising across the world.

The interest in investigating individual identity alongside the collective in the novels is therefore to discover where the texts are positioned in relation to identity politics. Do they question its basis and foreground its dangers, or do they champion a shared identity? To do this, how the notion of 'woman' is represented in the texts was examined. Is it portrayed as something stable and comprehensible? Is it imagined along biological or cultural lines? Or is sexual difference as a concept questioned? If so, what connects group members instead? And, what implications does this representation have for feminist politics and organising?

The main findings were that all texts:

- suggest the existence of a shared human nature;
- align in promoting a broadly social constructivist stance on gender, which is held in tension in each novel with contrasting strands such as biologist understandings of sexual difference or deconstructive questioning of sexual categories;
- agree that women are linked by their derogated position in a patriarchal order, evidencing as such a materialist critique.

In short, they all posit woman as a viable political category, although as we will see from the following discussion, they disagree on the utility of identity-based approaches.

In terms of human nature, it was shown that all novels create a sense of tangible, shared human tendencies. This was most pronounced in *The Power* where the impulse to dominate emerged as a recurrent human flaw determining the outcome of the narrative. In *El país de las mujeres*, a common human nature was split by gender and based in biology, with men only pushed out of aggressivity into apathy through fantastical intervention, and women on the contrary sharing a tendency to compassion and care. In this way, both novels indicate shared drives which unite human experience and explain social outcomes. In *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes*, on the other hand, the concept of human nature as pre-given is interrogated. It becomes clear in the portrayal of the narrator as adapted to her world and the other women as products of theirs, that human nature is not innate but responsive to environment and culture. From the above summary, we can see how these views on human nature link to the texts' depictions of gender. *The Power* reveals a shared human instinct, but posits a sex-neutral stance. That is, that biological sex does not determine behaviour or predispositions, rather these ideas of femininity are constructed in society. *El país*, in contrast, presents sexual difference as a real and impactful force. However, at the same time, it also contains a thread which foregrounds the performance of femininity, turns femininity into a political product, and defamiliarises it through exaggeration and hyperbole. This secondary layer contradicts the biologist strand by indicating that feminine traits are not inborn but assumed. This tension between different stances is echoed in *Moi qui*. This narrative affirms a biological understanding of womanhood as tied to the reproductive role and sexual complementarity with men, placing value in this function. However, it also estranges these same beliefs by displacing them into the post-apocalyptic setting, demonstrating

that they were only meaningful in the former social world. Here, the feminine role is socially mediated, but holds intrinsic worth nonetheless. In all novels then, there is a distinction between biological sex and cultural gender, and an appreciation that culture determines how gender is conceived.

Where they differ is in how to move forward from this constructivist view of gender. In both *El país* and *The Power*, an empowering version of femininity is appropriated by female characters to further their political ends. With Belli's text, this eroticised, caring brand of identity politics is immensely effective, boosting PIE into power and allowing them to change the country's social fabric. This transgressive application of female identity disrupts the existing order, breaking women out of the narrow roles to which these very discourses had previously confined them. It is a case of working within a traditional model of female identity, to reclaim and revalue it. Alderman's novel, on the other hand, works by reversing prevailing gender norms. Female characters take on so-called masculine attributes by becoming assertive, strong, and dominant. This revised femininity is championed by leaders, mass media, embodied by the central characters, and associated with reconceptualised ideas of maternity and motherhood. Yet, in contrast to *El país*, although this boosts women's status, it does not lead to an improved world. Instead, corruption, violence and destruction take over. In this light, the positive value that the character Mother Eve in particular gives to femininity is seen as hypocritical and distorted. The idea of rallying behind a gendered identity is treated in the text with irony. Instead, *The Power* contests the eutopian valorisation of femininity, in any form. In *El país*, men scheme and assassinate; women

lead with compassion. *The Power*, when put into dialogue with this view, argues that this gendered division is not only illusory but misguided. It does not reproach it for its exclusionary potential to sideline women who cannot or do not concur with the feminine model, rather it refutes it from a gender neutral standpoint. It contends that men and women are all the same underneath gender masks, and women are as flawed as men. Alderman's text indicates that however a given gender identity may be conceived, it will crack open eventually to reveal the shared substance underneath. Hence, this rejection of identity politics as an instable and ineffectual fiction, substitutes an appeal to women's difference from men with an appeal to women's sameness. This could be read as a call to widen and diversify, or destroy, concepts of masculinity and femininity so that they are no longer sealed but blurred signifiers. Yet, the narrative ethos of *El país* would challenge this possibility, citing a deep-rooted attachment to these identities. PIE's policies are seen to work because they appeal to women as they are, without a loss, but an enhancement, of their ingrained sense of self. These two novels when brought into hypothetical conversation therefore challenge each other's attitude to identity politics: one touting it as a necessary path for broad based appeal, the other warning that it builds castles out of sand.

Added to this debate, Harpman's text works similarly to *The Power* to de-naturalise gender, but goes a step further. The narrator in *Moi qui* is distanced and disconnected from norms of femininity so its appropriation, affirmative or otherwise, is not available to her. With this in mind, supplanted into the world of *El país* or *The Power*, how would this character challenge their schemas? It seems unlikely she would

develop the electrostatic force, nor associate with the erotic femininity of PIE. As an outsider, she begins to destabilise not just social ideas of gender, but also of sexual difference. Recognised as a female but without the reproductive capacity and corporeal form associated with her sex, the narrator's body troubles what it means to be sexually female. That is, her *différance* from the female sex begins to question how bodies are partitioned, and hints that sex as well as gender may be a discursive construct.

Nonetheless, despite this problematisation of the female sex, it was argued in the chapter on *Moi qui* that the narrative stops short of deconstructing dichotomous sex categorisation, as the narrator's difference from sex, gender and sexuality (mis)align in a logically connected way from the standard set by her companions. As such, the heterosexual matrix, which provides the logic behind sexual difference and secures the cultural intelligibility of gender, remains in place in her representation. Therefore, ultimately in this novel, as well as in the others, sex as a natural and self-evident binary division of bodies remains largely unchallenged.

In this way, the idea of a female subject position emerges from each text. That is, 'woman' as a recognised group based on one side of the sexual difference divide. Whether this group has any innate meaning is questioned, particularly in *The Power* and *Moi qui*, but its basis is maintained. Therefore, in the sense that the social value, status and roles of this category are thematised in each novel, it can be said that they all demonstrate a version of a materialist critique of women's place within society. That is, they expose and examine material circumstances which impact on women's lives. In *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes*, this relates to the depiction of the repetitive,

quotidian life of the women in the cage (analogous for their daily routine in their housebound or low skilled jobs in their previous lives) which leaves them in a state of immanence. *The Power* reveals the scale of violence against women across the world, their secondary status in the workplace, and their sexualisation and objectification. *El país de las mujeres* similarly focuses on violence and exploitation of women, in particular through the stories of Juana del Arco and Ernestina, as well as factors which impede women from progressing in the workplace such as lack of childcare and *machista* attitudes. In each text, women are seen to be at a social disadvantage *because* they are women, and it is this position on the disparaged side of the gender hierarchy which connects them. In this sense, although not all texts explicitly promote identity politics (as in a shared form of femininity) they do all, by default, create a gendered identity position.

Where they differ noticeably is in whether they stop at illuminating this gender imbalance or suggest changes. *El país* is the boldest in prescribing solutions to the situation, through its constructive eutopian vision of a rejuvenated society. PIE's policies on education, workplace reform, community participation, environmentally orientated economic strategies, and legal amendments provide clear guidelines for how women's circumstances, and social wellbeing as a whole may be improved. In the chapter on *Moi qui*, it was argued that although the novel is open-ended, there is nonetheless a suggestion that women should be given the tools to engage with and rationalise their situation through education, and creative and productive opportunities. *The Power*, on

the other hand, whilst highly effective at defamiliarising the culturally derived disparities between genders, does not indicate a means to abolish them.

To interpret the significance of these differing approaches to delivering a materialist critique, it is necessary to consider the novels in their contexts. The aim is to show how each novel negotiates its social environment to effect a critique that will be at once palatable and subversive. That is, each text works pragmatically, covertly even, to achieve acceptance within mainstream discourses, whilst simultaneously challenging them. It was suggested in the conclusion of the chapter on *The Power* that the novel's deconstructive anti-eutopian mode, which evades positively configuring a means for change, expresses a sense of feminist futility in the face of neoliberal gender mainstreaming discourses. This reading of *The Power*'s nihilistic ethos stands, but here, to underscore its pragmatic functioning, it is worth highlighting how the text works within, yet exceeds, a post- or popular feminist aesthetics. In some ways, its characters conform with an individualist postfeminist sensibility, which, according to Gill and Donoghue in a 2013 chapter on the topic, is defined by an emphasis on "choice, agency and empowerment" (247). The plucky, exceptional protagonists burst their way into leadership roles in business, media, religion and politics. Literally empowered with the electrostatic force, they boldly take over. Moreover, in its fundamental assessment of the equivalence of women and men, the novel coincides with neoliberal attitudes which value both genders for their potential to be equal contributors to the market. The central premise of Charlotte Rottenberg's study on 'neoliberal feminism' is that men and women are "increasingly being hailed as generic human capital, as part of a process that

strips them of any value (or identity markers) except market ones” (17). Therefore, on one hand, the text recalls post- and neoliberal feminism’s sex-neutral ethics and figures of empowered, assertive women.

Nevertheless, whilst in some ways conforming to this model, the text also exceeds it. In a 2016 paper, Rosalind Gill notes how contemporary popular feminism is “encumbered by its desire not to be angry, not to be ‘difficult’, not to be ‘humourless’”, and wishes to distance itself from the dowdy and “killjoy” connotations of previous waves (“Post-Postfeminism?” 618). With its ironic stance, *The Power* does comply with a humorous and ‘fun’ feminist incarnation, at least to begin with. However, as was shown, this atmosphere transforms throughout the narrative, with a tonal slide into horror. Anger, in the form of retributive violence, is expressed, and the light-hearted laughter of earlier passages slips into a darker abject monstrosity later in the text. Here, the discomfort of scenes of rape and dismemberment strike discordantly with the “friendly, safe” critique of mainstream popular feminism (Banet-Weiser 15). Moreover, the novel *does* work to question the cultural normalisation of gender ideals through the defamiliarising spotlight it turns on language, law, consumerism, and scientific and religious discourses. By beginning to question in what way, why and how femininity is constructed, it invites a less individualistic and more structural critique of gender inequalities. In this way, it counteracts neoliberal feminist discourses of choice and autonomy which render invisible systemic oppressions and disparities (Rottenberg 3). What’s more, tactics such as those *The Power* employs to highlight the scale and persistence of androcentric language and beliefs, still have political force in today’s

climate. Compared with many forms of contemporary pop feminism (which Gill notes have a propensity for “contentlessness”: shying away from political issues to concentrate instead on affect: positivity, feel-good, self-confidence, and so on (“Post-Postfeminism?” 618-19)), *The Power* does deal with endemic violence against women, women’s continued disadvantaged place in the patriarchal order, and subjection to harmful gender norms. In a post-postfeminist setting, even highlighting that we continue to live in a man’s world, represents a consciousness raising act for a generation who were raised to believe that the feminist battle had been won. Against this background, *The Power* works pragmatically to conform to an ironic, pop culture aesthetic that readers will be familiar with, whilst going beyond ‘anaesthetising’ apolitical feminist discourses to unveil the insidious imbalances underlying the contemporary gender regime.

The dominant dystopian mode in Harpman’s novel was read as reflecting *fin-de-siècle* malaise, and nebulous anxiety over technological developments and ecological degradation. The confinement and limitations of the women could also indicate a certain feminist disillusionment with the lack of tangible social change after the optimism and energy of the women’s movement from the late 1960s–1970s had dissipated. Despite hopes for a radical overhaul, in the 1990s Belgian society still evidenced traditional gender roles and remained “anchored on the male breadwinner model” (Leitner 429-30; Vielle and Reyniers 1). However, *Moi qui n’ai pas connu les hommes* is not entirely negativistic, it maintains a forward-facing orientation in its oblique call for women to have access to opportunities and education that will allow them to critically engage with

and transcend their situation. Its feminist critique is much less rhetorical than the other novels in the corpus, but an element of pragmatism can still be inferred. That is, the restrictions on women's horizons in a masculine hegemony and the dangers of these limits on their resilience, creativity, mental capacities and autonomy are highlighted, yet the meaning bestowed on the maternal and caring function is maintained. As such, the text does not alienate readers who may be attached to traditional female roles, whilst encouraging reflection on how these positions are embodied. This is pragmatic in its balancing of affirmative and critical perspectives.

If *The Power* and *Moi qui* indicate a certain disillusionment with the lack of feminist gains and potential for future changes, then *El país de las mujeres* stands apart from this in its detailed and optimistic vision of a radically revised society. Can contextual information help to interpret why this novel, in contrast to the others, sketches a hopeful eutopian plan? Belli was passionately committed to the Sandinista revolution which succeeded in changing the political landscape of Nicaragua. In her memoir of this period she affirms her belief in the possibility of changing the world, affirming that “the future is a creation which is made in the present” (Belli *piel* 210).²⁴² Thus, this legacy of political participation likely plays a role in the content and mode of the novel's response to *machismo*. Attempts at wholesale change are not represented not as futile and escapist, but realisable through concerted collective effort. Moreover, although Nicaraguan feminist discourses share some parallels with their European counterparts, there are also key differences which may explain the more tangible

²⁴² El futuro es una construcción que se realiza en el presente

proposals of *El país*. Nicaragua's feminist context cannot quite be thought of in post-feminist terms of the Global North. Generally speaking, women's movements since the 1960s have always had an uneasy relationship to the 'feminist' label, viewing it as "anti-sexual", "anti-male" and "bourgeois", and as threatening to their feminine identities and roles (Kaminsky 18). Yet, despite this distancing from overt feminist identification, women have organised across the country in large-scale networks from the 1960s to date to fight for issues which affect them. In her research on the movement, Alyssa Howe maintains that "Nicaraguans can lay claim to a particularly vibrant and successful women's movement", which is held to be "the most effective in Central America" (288). This is not to say that women do not have to contend with the oppositional force of their demands being defused through gender mainstreaming in an analogous way to the Anglo-Belgian situation; simply that, in general, the relationship to 'feminism' is different and there has been an evolving but continuous struggle against inequalities and oppressions. Nicaragua's women's movement is active, productive, and diverse, uniting to face very concrete issue such as high rates of gender-based violence and femicide. It is clear that *El país de las mujeres* is informed by the ongoing energy of the region's women's movement as well as the legacy of revolutionary social change, and this in part explains why it demonstrates a confidence the other texts lack in adopting a positive eutopian mode. The novel addresses an audience who are not unfamiliar with radical social upheavals, many of whom will have lived through transitions between dictatorship, popular revolution, and democracy. In this context, there remains hope that times will change again.

Furthermore, in the chapter on *El país*, it was argued that the oscillation between biologist and constructivist stances on gender in the novel is a pragmatic appeal across both sides of the women's movement / feminism divide. The divide is configured by whether groups consider themselves as fighting *from* their gendered roles (women's movement), or to challenge these set ideas of gender (feminists). *El país's* championing of traditional femininity as a site of political worth and value can be read as echoing the identity politics of the women's movement. Yet, this is balanced with PIE's policies to legalise abortion (162-63) and institute anti-discrimination laws on sexual identity (43), which are central causes for Nicaraguan *feminist* groups (Howe 211). Plus, the text foregrounds how female identities are assumed and performed by the characters, highlighting their constructed nature, which fits more with a feminist challenge to gendered absolutes. As such, the novel holds in tension strands which appeal across different factions within the Nicaraguan women's and feminist movements; pragmatically aiming for broad based support.

To conclude this section, it was argued that 'woman' as a shared identity position emerges from all three novels, and forms the basis for a materialist critique of the conditions affecting women's lives. Differences between the texts in terms of their attitude to affirmative identity politics, internal conflicts over the relation between sex and gender, and their eutopian and dystopian outlooks, were read within their contexts. It was argued that each narrative's vision of female identity both conforms to, and problematises, dominant feminist discourses in their culture of origin. It can be said that these texts activate common, even normative, ideas of femininity that will be familiar to

their audiences, yet exploit or estrange them in order to expose and critique the harms of the current gender regime. Therefore, this pragmatic strategy delivers a defamiliarising critique, or radical programme for change, without alienating a broad readership.

5.3 Critical Linguistic Approach and Findings

So far, the representations of individual identity and collectivism have been compared and evaluated with reference to the genre, feminist debates and their sociohistorical context. This section will now take a step back to consider how the language of the novels creates these representations. Namely, parallels will be drawn between the linguistic resources and devices employed to portray the group in a particular eutopian or dystopian light, and to build a sense of individual identity. The evaluation, attitude and spatiotemporal mediation of the collective in the novels will be the starting point.

As may have been expected, a eutopian vision of collectivism (in this case amongst small groups of women) was generated in each novel through internal psychological perspective, spatiotemporal proximity, and explicit and implicit association with positive values and affects such as laughter, care, intimacy, support and participation. These tendencies could be seen across all novels. Scenes of group harmony were recounted from *within* the group in both a spatial and psychological sense. That is, either narrated directly by a character (the category A character-narration of *Moi qui*), or reflected through the perspective of a character (for example the category B heterodiegetic narration of *The Power* and *El país* in reflector mode). Moreover, an

impression of unity and cohesion amongst the collective was created through *joint* psychological insight. This could be when a narrative agent reflects the thoughts of a whole group at once, for example the baptism scene in *The Power*, or when a character-narrator shares in the group's communal experience and emotions, such as when the narrator in *Moi qui* takes up a shared subject position. It has been argued throughout this thesis that this communality is portrayed as beneficial, instead of uncanny or threatening to the individual, when presented from an internal psychological perspective, and, significantly, when coloured by positive modal shading. Positive modal elements cumulatively create the appearance of certain knowledge and judgements (Simpson *Ideology* 75), and allow the reader access, and therefore potentially empathy towards, communal psychology.

Furthermore, on the ideological plane, these all-female groups are evaluated favourably by narrators and characters, and associated with positive connotations in the novels (aside from the second half of *The Power*). For example, in the chapter on the *The Power* it was shown how in the convent setting the collective is aligned with homeliness, comfort and safety. Similarly, in *El país* PIE were linked to home comforts, intimacy, and collaboration, and in *Moi qui* when the narrator integrates into the group, they become associated with reciprocity, cooperation and mutual support. These connections are made through the setting, metaphors and comparisons, imagery, recurring motifs, character's actions and feelings, and evaluative comment. Overall, then, all three planes of narrative perspective coalesce within the texts to create an image of eutopian groupism.

However, dystopian, menacing groups also appear in the novels, in the form of rampaging gangs in the second half of *The Power*, the 39 women as a hostile force in the beginning of *Moi qui*, and men as an abstract opposition to PIE and their plans in *El país*. Again, this negative shading of the group can be traced along ideological, psychological and spatiotemporal planes, with each working together to create an overall impression that a single feature may not. An antagonistic sense of ‘us versus them’, or ‘me versus them’, was created through foregrounded third person pronouns and labels (such as the anaphoric repetition of ‘they’ at the head of each phrase in sections of *The Power*) and deixis. In the discussion on *Moi qui* in particular, it was argued that spatial perspective was exploited to construct the interactions between the narrator and the group as advances and retreats within their underground prison. Moreover, in terms of explicit ideology, these groups are evaluated in a negative way by characters and narrators. For example, in *El país* men are characterised as controlling and restricting women: “it was a masculine skill to control emotions” (148) and so women need to “lift off the weight of men’s presence” (196).²⁴³ Or in *Moi qui*, the narrator describes the group as showing “ill will” and “meanness” towards her (13, 24).²⁴⁴ Additionally, a vision of these groups as threatening is expressed implicitly through transitivity structures. It was demonstrated how existential and intransitive processes in *The Power* render the gangs of women as decentred, boundless and unstoppable. Similarly, it was detailed how in *El país* material processes are used to describe men’s mental influence on women, with this figurative language use emphasising the tangible force of their

²⁴³ Era un don masculino controlar las emociones / despejar el peso de la presencia real de los hombres

²⁴⁴ Mauvaise volonté / mesquinerie

behaviour. Also, the predominance of behavioural and action processes in the description of the group of women in the early stages of *Moi qui* was linked to their narrator's portrayal of them as tied to the material and mundane, and her alienating external perspective of them. The effect of these structures was supported by other features such as parataxis, synecdoche, under-specificity, and animalistic analogies which added to the menacing depiction of these groups in the novels.

As with the eutopian groups, these dystopian counterparts were also revealed to be synchronous and unified. This was especially noticeable in scenes of the group violence in *The Power* where "they move together" (297) and "as one" (305) and *Moi qui* narrator's repetition of the plural subject *les femmes* [the woman] which represented them acting and behaving in unison. That this simultaneity is perceived as threatening homogeneity, and not collaborative harmony, relates to the position and attitude from which they group are approached. Negative, threatening groups in these novels are viewed from an external perspective; from the psychological and spatial viewpoint of a character who is outwith the group. As such the reader, through the character, confronts these groups in the narratives, rather than integrates into them. Furthermore, negative modality plays a central role in mediating the portrayal of the groups. If positive modality is the language of subjective convictions, then negative modality relates to uncertainty. This negative modal shading can create a sense of self-questioning, disorientation, or estrangement. Particularly with regards to the early stages of *Moi qui* and the latter section of *The Power*, it was shown how the distancing effect of prominent negative modality portrayed the group as impenetrable and obscure. Given that these

negative modal shadings of the group are predominantly approached directly from a character's mind (the category A narration of *Moi qui*) or reflected through a participating character (the category B narration of *The Power*), they create a sense of subjective estrangement, characteristic of Simpson's B(R)-ve and A-ve categories (Simpson *Ideology* 72-73). That is, the reader has a clear idea of the unease or disorientation the character is feeling, but shares their incomplete or provisional understanding of the group, who are estranged and threatening.

Overall, then, it has been argued that ideological, psychological and spatiotemporal planes of point of view mutually reinforce one another to build a particular vision of the group. From this study, we can pick out correlations between how narrative perspective is structured, and the portrayal of the group. However, this project has also highlighted the wide range of features which influence interpretation of eutopian and dystopian collectivism. This observation is stressed by critical linguists, who emphasise the importance of subjective interpretation and context in the reading process. Simpson affirms that "all interpretations are in some sense context-bound and are contingent on the position of the analyst relative to the text" (*Ideology* 5). An example of this variability is clear in the multiple uses and effects of negative modal shading in the novels. In *The Power*, negative modality as well as features such as under-specificity, existential processes, parataxis and foregrounded sensory perception processes, which were central to the portrayal of the group as uncanny and alarming, were also employed to express bewilderment when women and girls developed the

electrostatic force. In this scene where Margot develops the power, all of these features can be discerned:

There is a tingling feeling in her chest and arms and hands. [additive conjunctions and an existential process] Like a dead arm, waking up. [simile] The pain is not gone now, but it is irrelevant. Something else is happening [under-specificity]. Instinctively, she digs her hands into Jocelyn's patchwork comforter. She smells the scent of the beech trees [perception verb], as if she were back beneath their woody protection [comparative structure] (25)

Again, we have a case of B(R)-ve narration. Here there is still a sense of indeterminacy, but the effect is more of wonder, than threat. This relates of course to the subject matter and its ideological and spatiotemporal mediation. The unknown is not outwith, but within the character. Moreover, it is linked to reassuring objects such as a patchwork comforter, and the “woody protection” of a tree, and we learn that she has transcended her physical discomfort. Thus, constellations of linguistic features recur in the novel, but their effect is highly dependent on textual context. Nonetheless, the benchmark set by modal categories was found to be a useful way into the text. It provided a means to understand why a certain atmosphere or attitude predominates in the narrative. Particularly, in terms of how a character is shown to experience the group, as eutopian harmony or dystopian discord, modality provided a consistent lens through which to interpret this relationship.

Another insight gained from this analysis was the importance of establishing the relationship between narrator and character, before approaching attitude and ideology. That is, before evaluations and worldview (evident in word choice, transitivity, images, and so on) and attitude (accessed through modality) could be evaluated, it was necessary

to distinguish who they could be attributed to, and whether they were undermined by irony or established as part of the dominant narrative ethos. In this way, the overall structure of psychological viewpoint was approached first, to identify the identity and position of the narrative agents, the characters whose thoughts and feelings are reflected by the narrator, and the relationship between them. In general, it was found that in the category B heterodiegetic narration of *El país* and *The Power*, there was often focal and vocal ambiguity between narrative and character attitude and opinion. Namely, it was not always clear whether a judgement or word choice came from the narrator or the character. However, it was argued that in cases such as these, the ideological perspective, whether it stems from the character or the narrator, was (usually but not always) sanctioned in the overarching narrative discourse. This means that, when it is not implicitly or explicitly undermined, it becomes a value or an opinion of the text as a whole.

The case was slightly different with *Moi qui* where the character-narrator was present in the narrative in her older and younger incarnations. At times, the older self commented on the younger self or revised her judgements from that time, so their distance became apparent. However, at other times, the older self merged with or disappeared behind the younger self. It was proposed, that to capture the nuance of this relationship (two instances of a perceiving consciousness evident in the narrative) Simpson's category A of homodiegetic narration should be expanded to include a 'reflector' mode. This would be category A(Ra), with the small a indicating the same identity, but at a different stage or diegetic level. Following from this, category A

narration in narratorial mode (A(N)) would then refer to times when the narratorial voice speaks independently from their current temporal situation, rather than through the mind of their younger self. For example, at the beginning and end of *Moi qui*, when the older narrator writes of her current writing project and living situation, or when she intrudes to comment on her life story narrative. As such, this expansion of Simpson's framework would allow greater nuance in discussing these kinds of character-narration.

The key point is that when assessing values or ideological viewpoints that emerge from the narrative, their source must be established. Moreover, they must also be considered against other contextual factors which may either sanction them as viable and veritable, or contradict or delegitimise them, such as irony. Therefore, as a point of procedure, before undertaking closer textual analysis of narrative point of view in relation to specific scenes, themes, characters and events, it was important to establish the overarching management of time and narrative identities and relationships. In this way, the contextual factors influencing interpretation could be taken into account.

Moving now to a brief overview of how narrative viewpoint built a certain vision of individual female identity in the novels. In all texts the ideological plane was central to constructing and deconstructing ideas of femininity, although this was supported by spatiotemporal structuring and psychological colouring. In *El país de las mujeres* notions of femininity were established through categorical assertions about women's nature, and links made between women and sexuality, the body, instincts, nature, care, and mothering. This composite picture of women's identity was solidified through dichotomous distinction from men as a group who were aligned with rationality and

aggression. Similarly, in *Moi qui*, female identity was drawn through a binary division between what the women had, but the narrator did not, that is their reproductive function and roles as wives and mothers. In terms of ideological markers, the narrator distinguished herself from the others through labelling and associating herself with opposing values (intellect, imagination, and rebellion in contrast to their material, mundane, repetitive docility). In *The Power* the idea of 'women' as a coherent group emerged from the bonds linking them together, for example through the tree branching imagery. However, femininity, as the characteristics and behaviours of this group, was revealed as a construct through the gender role swap scenario, and accordant satirical defamiliarisation of gendered dogma. As such, it became clear that notions of womanhood, sexual difference and identity belonged primarily to the ideological plane of each novel. That is, they relate to the explicit values and implicit associations and oppositions, which determine the worldview of the text. Therefore, as noted above, it was important to know if they were accepted or undermined within the wider narratorial frame in order to establish which visions of identity the texts put forward. That said, none of the texts had a singular stance on sexual difference, but tended to weave contrasting strands into their narrative. Close reference to the management of all planes of narrative point of view, provided a flexible and comprehensive tool to evaluate the interplay of feminist ideologies in the texts.

Overall, the application of a critical linguistic framework of narrative point of view was successful in this thesis. There were no issues working across the three languages because each has differing but analogous parts of speech (transitivity, modal

systems and conjunctions for example) which correspond with the three meta-functions: experiential, interpersonal and textual. The model allowed me to ground my impressions about a text in recurrent and prominent stylistic features, but it worked in the other direction too, by providing me with a way to approach text: features to look for, relationships and language to consider. The aim here was not to build a single interpretation, rather to open up the available readings of a text and account for ambiguities. The model accommodates such a responsive application; it is a vocabulary, a tool kit, not a prescriptive checklist. As highlighted by Simpson, the categories and planes of the model are not meant to be sealed absolutes, but point to “dominant patterns” (*Ideology* 82). Therefore, linguistic mixing, blurring, contextual variation, innovation, does not break the model, but find relevance in relation to its touchpoints. Additionally, for me, there was no obstacle in combining it with other linguistic theories (such as Lakoff’s cognitive metaphors) nor more traditional literary concepts (such as free indirect discourse). One potential drawback is the volume of specialised terminology required, however, hopefully the provision of a glossary aided ease of reference. To conclude, then, I would recommend undertaking a critical linguistic analysis of narrative point of view. The initial investment in learning the linguistic theory and terms pays off in how it facilitates a detailed approach to textual analysis.

5.4 Contemporary Feminist Utopianism: Pragmatic Critical Visions

Each chapter on the novels has contained a section on how the texts are positioned in relation to the genre, with particular reference to Lucy Sargisson and Dunja Mohr’s

notions of transgressive feminist eutopianism and dystopianism. The aim here will be to highlight similarities and differences between the novels' participation in the genre, and indicate this corpus' continuity with or deviations from the canon.

Lucy Sargisson and Dunja Mohr's monographs from 1996 and 2006 respectively have provided the benchmark for characterising contemporary feminist utopianism. Both worked on Anglophone corpora written between the late 1960s to early 1990s, but their concepts have since been applied to Latin American and Francophone literatures (see for example Bainbrigge "Transgressive"; McDowell). Their research coincides in underlining the transgressive quality of this generic current, which disrupts "binary logic" (Mohr 3). Dunja Mohr concludes that these works demonstrate "various forms of transgression and hybridity" on the "generic, formal and content level" (270). On the generic level, this entails a blurring of boundaries between eutopia and dystopia and the integration of other literary genres. All of the novels studied here evidence this hybridity, weaving eutopian and dystopian threads and including fantastical elements and features from other genres. *El país* and *The Power* invoke the (pseudo)testimonial or historical novel with the inclusion of documentary materials; *The Power* sits within an epistolary frame; and *Moi qui* subverts the bildungsroman and quest narratives. In this way, all novels eschew generic purity to blur boundaries and modes.

As well as being a common trait of postmodern literatures, generic hybridity is linked by Tom Moylan with his notion of "critical utopia" which he developed from a study of the resurgence of eutopian writing in the 1960-70s. He views this move away from generic absolutes as part of a critical approach by these texts, which effect a

critique of both the genre and the historical situation (Moylan 10). In terms of eutopia, a critical attitude to the genre equates to questioning the desirability or possibility of creating an ideal society. Expanded to include dystopias, it relates to a breakdown of absolutes, of 'good and 'bad', of 'right' and 'wrong'. Lucy Sargisson, speaking in the context of feminist writing, links imperfect and ambiguous eutopias with "a conscious and necessary desire to resist the closure that is evoked by approaches to utopia as perfect" (226). Closure here works beyond the sense of narrative resolution, to the monologic sense of promoting a single ideological perspective. Instead of closing down debate, Sargisson's transgressive eutopias remain "marked by unresolved tensions" (128). She links this to an impulse in contemporary feminist praxis to be open to "the validity of multiple readings and respect for diverse opinions" (96). Following from this, the question arises of whether the texts in this corpus are as ideologically open as their generic predecessors. Certainly, generic hybridity points to a rejection of absolutes. However, the texts range in the degree to which they destabilise fixed notions, or assert universal 'truths'. With regards to *El país*, despite presenting an evolving society and incorporating opposing perspectives, the novel does enact closure in the ideological sense because definite views on politics and ethics do emerge from the text. Indeed 'incorporating' is the key term in the phrase above, because dissenting voices are not equally weighted in the narrative but subordinate to the dominant narrative voice. A unified worldview is promoted by the novel, which cannot quite be considered in Sargisson's open-ended terms. *The Power*, although not proposing a social scheme, does assert a clear position in its anti-eutopian refusal of identity politics. Both texts therefore veer towards the universal and the didactic, over the ambiguous. *Moi qui* on the other

hand, does evidence ‘unresolved tensions’, foregrounds uncertainty and ambiguity, and consequently remains more open than the other novels. In this sense, it is the one which most resembles Sargisson’s corpus. It is also, however, more politically diffuse. This here is the nub of the issue, and one which Sargisson acknowledges. She understands that moving away from certainties, is “a dangerous game in political terms” (127). Therefore, a split between the novels is visible between the overtly political, and more ideologically stable, British and Nicaraguan texts, and the seemingly apolitical, and more ontologically uncertain, Belgian work.

Yet, despite this difference, it is *Moi qui* which is the most formally regular of the novels. Dunja Mohr views formal transgressions as characteristic of contemporary feminist utopianism (271-72). Again, these transgressions are not viewed as neutral, but as motivated suspicion of the allusion of unity and authority in the traditional novelistic form. This may be breaks in chronology or structure, circularity or repetition, linguistic innovation, fragmentation, and so on, which “call attention to the text as a construction” (Mohr 272). In its linear chronology, single coherent perspective, and stylistic classicism, *Moi qui*’s formal orthodoxy serves to build a clear sense of events and characters, and minimises disorientation. The text-world might be estranged through her eyes, but the character-narrator writes to be understood. Conversely, *The Power* and *El país* are fragmented formally by the inclusion of secondary materials, multiple perspectives and registers. Through meta-fiction, parody, and irony, they also draw attention to their own construction. Both these novels, however, despite their more complex and disjointed textual fabric, are still cooperatively orientated towards the

reader and are still held together by the overarching evaluative framework of the heterodiegetic narrative presence. They do not disorientate, confuse, or leave substantial gaps or unresolved threads. Again, this links to their tendency to ideological conviction, over open-endedness. Consequently, all of the novels are less formally transgressive than Mohr and Sargisson's corpora. This can be connected to the politicised nature of *The Power* and *El país's* critique, which requires clear communication, not instable forms which promote polyvalence. On the other hand, in the chapter on the novel it was argued that *Moi qui's* formal traditionalism is indicative of the author's writing style, which privileges story, description and character, over formal experimentation.

Nonetheless, despite the texts displaying narrative coherence and consistency, and, to varying degrees, promoting a unified ideological perspective, they do contain conceptual transgressions on the content plane. Sargisson argues that feminist eutopian texts from the 1960-90s "break and transform societal and cultural rules" (21). The novels in this corpus are similarly transgressive of social norms and fixed concepts. For example: *El país* is transgressive of the boundary between public and private spheres, and of taboos on sexuality and desire; *Moi qui* transgresses fixed notions of the female subject, and bestows positive value on 'negative' emotions such as anger; *The Power* also valorises rage and revenge, and transgresses norms of 'feminine' behaviour and language, particularly in its depictions of female on male violence. Importantly for this thesis, all of the novels question the nature of womanhood by alternating between biologist and performative paradigms. At points in the novels, femininity is naturalised through links to biology, the body, and reproduction, yet at others it is foregrounded as a

cultural concept: a performed identity or mask. Thus, in terms of female identity, there is a certain wavering, or transgression, between essentialist/constructivist views. This was linked in the section above to pragmatism, the desire to appeal across a broad audience and encompass different reading positions. Indeed, pragmatism itself is a marker of recent feminist thought and utopian literature (see for example Ellen Peel's study on this aspect). Alessa Johns, in a recent chapter on feminism and utopia, finds it to be a central characteristic of the genre. She notes that this pragmatic attitude is born out of necessity, "since only a collective effort can generate the socio-political changes necessary to improve women's lives" (Johns 192). Without doubt, the novels in this corpus embody this pragmatism; they seek to gain consensus for their values and materialist critique. This returns us to their critical dimension, which Moylan, Sargisson, and Mohr all agree is the central function of utopianism. Here we have a link which, despite their differences, binds them into contemporary feminist utopian canon. Mohr argues that utopianism is fuelled by "dissatisfaction with the socio-political status quo", and therefore texts act to "induce transformational paradigm shifts" or even just "momentarily altered perception" (8). *El país*, *The Power* and *Moi qui* all open up a defamiliarising space which allows us to imagine how politics would be without *machismo*, or to appreciate the malleability of gender ideals, or to interrogate what it means to be a woman respectively. From this functional perspective then, they very much continue the work of feminist utopianism from the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

Overall, then, the novels studied here evidence the generic hybridity and conceptual transgression of their utopian predecessors. However, they vary in their more stable communicative style, and *The Power* and *El país* in particular are more ideologically unified than the corpus of the 1980s-90s. What can we make of this side-step away from multiplicity and fragmentation? It may relate to their status as popular mainstream literature and literary and publishing trends. Or, with the more recent British and Nicaraguan texts, it could indicate a turn in the 2010s towards decisive political messaging. Sargisson argued that “feminist theory of the 1990s is less self-assured than was that of the 1970s”, and thus the texts “reflect in their lack of cohesion the (troubled) state of contemporary feminist theory” (29, 64). Maybe, in these more certain visions, we are witnessing a resurgence of political conviction within the feminist ranks. However, perhaps no general conclusions on feminism as a whole can be drawn here, given the difference of the contexts and the limited number of texts. Taking another angle, does it then follow that since these two texts sketch a clear worldview, that they are hegemonic? I would argue that this is not the case if we conceive them as contributions to an ongoing conversation, rather than the final word. All the novels make claims, *El país* proposes policies and revalorises ‘feminine’ qualities, *The Power* positions women as victimised and refutes gendered stereotypes, even *Moi qui* promotes values of productivity, participation, and intellectual engagement. However, bold statements should not be so easily equated with absolutism. If that were the case, everyone would be paralysed, and the only acceptable statements would be those which contradicted and undermined themselves. Stating ‘X’, does not mean ‘X, only and forever X’. Rather, it introduces ‘X’ as a proposition which can then be brought into

dialogue with ‘Y’ and ‘Z’. This is a process which the novels begin to undertake within their own narratives, and which this thesis has continued by comparing and contrasting their visions of identity and collectivism.

5.5 Conclusions

This brings us now to the conclusion of this chapter, and of the thesis overall. This research project has provided a detailed insight into collectivism in contemporary feminist utopianism, and represents the first analysis focussed on this topic. The study highlighted the importance of narrative point of view in creating eutopian and dystopian visions of the group and the individual’s relationship to it. In general, positioning *with* the group, both psychologically and spatiotemporally, was correlated with positive evaluations and modal shading, and external, outside positioning with negative judgements and shading. The critical linguistic approach proved effective in providing a consistent vocabulary and framework for interpreting how narrative builds effects, atmospheres and attitudes.

From this in-depth textual analysis, it was concluded that, despite oscillations between biologist and constructivist understandings of sexual difference, ‘woman’ as a political identity position emerges from all of the novels. The shared concerns and agendas derived from this position formed the basis of each texts’ materialist critique of gendered hierarchies and oppressions. Even in *Moi qui n’ai pas connu les hommes*, which is more interrogative and deconstructive than the other novels, a critical stance

towards women's treatment within masculine hegemony could be discerned. However, the novels varied in the degree to which they attributed behaviours and qualities to the figure of 'woman', or challenged fixed notions of femininity. Accordingly, they diverged in their attitude towards identity politics, with *El país de las mujeres* championing it, *The Power* opposing it, and *Moi qui* questioning it. Overall, their representations of what it means to be a woman, their attitude to identity politics, their utopian mode, and productive or negativistic nature of their critique were read as pragmatic appeals to gain acceptance within their individual discursive environments, all whilst challenging and estranging the dominant gender regime. This pragmatic aspect was also linked to these novels' relation to feminist utopian literature from preceding decades. On the whole, these texts were judged to share a transgressive quality with previous works in terms of genre and concepts, but were more formally stable and ideologically certain than earlier utopianism. Personal and contextual factors were tentatively hypothesised as responsible for this development.

Moreover, in relation to the collective, it was found that all of the novels portrayed small groups of women in a positive light. They were characterised by support, care, reciprocity, empathy, and security. This was regardless of their eutopian, dystopian or anti-eutopian mode, and suggested that feminist utopianism does not share the same suspicion of collective experience as the traditional dystopian, and even eutopian, literary canon. Nonetheless, larger groups, particularly in the context of street gatherings, became threatening to the individual, indicating a limit on favourable group dynamics. This reinforces the need to balance the benefits of association and collective

action with respect for the individual. That said, none of the novels take a concerted intersectional approach to gender, veering instead towards a single-axis optic. In this way, they offer no vision of how to truly account for differences between women. However, albeit from necessarily partial positions, the novels evidence a hopeful impulse; that working together will be affirmational experience for women and will lead to material changes in their circumstances. In this way, *El país de las mujeres*, *The Power*, and *Moi qui n'ai pas connu les hommes* all work to carve out a literary space which imagines the positive potential of female collectivism as a path to personal and political emancipation. Going forward, it will be of interest to see if this attitude is shared across a wider feminist utopian corpus. For now, it suffices to say that despite neoliberal and post-structural challenges to the possibility and dangers of collective movements, unity and solidarity are still retained as a goal by the feminist literary imagination. These dynamic utopian novels place collective uprising not as a dream disconnected from reality, but a point to work towards through ongoing effort, participation and dialogue. It is to this conversation that this thesis has contributed, and looks forward to future responses and continuations.

Appendix 1. Glossary

deixis. Paul Simpson defines deixis as, “those ‘orientational’ features of language which function to locate utterances in relation to speakers’ viewpoints” (*Ideology* 13). It includes pronouns, determiners, prepositions, verb tense and aspect, adverbs of time and place (such as ‘now’ or ‘nearby’), and temporal or locative expressions which serve to indicate spatial or temporal distance or proximity from the deictic centre. The **deictic centre** is the point in space and time from which other characters or objects are perceived. In narrative discourse, the deictic centre will be set by the speaking voice, although the narrator may share or borrow a character’s deictic reference. Deixis is thus central to how spatiotemporal perspective is constructed in narrative, and how narrator and characters are positioned in relation to one another and to the story-world.

free indirect discourse (FID). Free indirect discourse in Brian McHale’s influential 1978 typology of narrative voice is defined as an intermediate between indirect discourse (ID), where character speech or thoughts are paraphrased by the narrator (for example, “she thought that it was a shame there wasn’t any coffee in the mug”), and direct discourse (DD), where the character’s words are quoted directly (for example, “she thought, ‘shame there’s no coffee in the mug’”). In terms of grammatical appearance, McHale claims that FID:

resembles ID in person and tense, while it resembles DD in not being strictly subordinate to a ‘higher’ verb of saying/thinking, and in deictic elements, the word order of questions, and the admissibility of various DD features. (252)

Therefore, due to this mix of features, FID is often read as the composite voice of the narrator and character. Although, it should be noted, there is a hierarchical disparity in that character voice is still formally subordinate to narrator voice, even if this relation is not expressed in the clause structure.

generic sentences. Generic sentences encompass both gnomic sentences (statements of general principles) and habitual sentences (statements that characterise a noun) (Michaelis 232). For example, “volcanoes erupt when magma rises to the surface” (gnomic) or “Gioconda Belli writes novels” (habitual). Both types express a certain regularity (they do not refer to something that happened once, but to a permanent or at least iterative circumstance) and assert a truth value, gaining authority through a lack of modalisation (Eggins 182). However, this bears no relation to their actual veracity; and generic sentences can be a way to express opinion as timeless and universal truth.

lexicogrammar and **lexicogrammatical.** These are portmanteau words created by Michael Halliday by combining ‘lexis’ (syntagmatic word choice) and ‘grammar’ (paradigmatic structuring). The reasoning behind fusing these words is to emphasise that lexical and grammatical choices are interdependent.

metafunctions. According to Hallidayan Systemic Functional Grammar, there are three kinds of meaning, or functions, “intrinsic to language” (Halliday *Grammar* 31). When

we communicate, we activate each of these functions by using language to construe our experience (ideational), enact our social relationships (interpersonal), and organise our message for cohesion and coherence (textual). Every utterance or written word will express all metafunctions simultaneously, although one level of meaning may be more prominent.

experiential. Together with the logical function (“the expression of certain very general logical relations” (Halliday *Grammar* 310)) the experiential function makes up the **ideational** metafunction of language. When analysing this function, we are examining how language *represents* reality. It relates to how the ‘field’ or referential subject matter is expressed, or as Eggins explains it is how “content meaning” is packaged (225). The experiential function is interrogated through a **transitivity** analysis where processes, participants and circumstances are identified and labelled.

interpersonal. When analysing this function, we are examining language as a form of social *exchange* between participants. The interpersonal function relates to how we “express our appraisal of and attitude towards whoever we are addressing and what we are talking about” (Halliday *Grammar* 29). It is linked to the relationships between the participants, and particularly: the power balance and status between them and whether that is equal or unequal; their affective involvement and whether it is high, as in the case of families, or low, as with strangers on the street; and contact, that is whether they are in frequent or occasional communication. The interpersonal function is interrogated through an analysis of mood structures, speech roles, and **modality**.

textual. When analysing this function, we are examining how language is formed as a *message*. The textual metafunction relates to how language links to surrounding discourse and is constructed to make sense. It is related to the ‘mode’, or the means of communication, and how this expresses spatial, interpersonal or experiential distance between participants. The textual function is interrogated through a thematic analysis, in order to understand which elements of the message are foregrounded and linked to surrounding discourse.

modality. Eggins describes modality as a complex area of grammar “which has to do with the different ways in which a language user can intrude on his/her message, expressing attitudes and judgements of various kinds” (179). It therefore consists of evaluative and attitudinal elements, such as: verbs (such as ‘must’ or ‘should’ in English); adverbs (‘possibly’ or ‘usually’); “metaphors of modality” (that is, modal adjuncts such as “I’m sure that...” or “It’s possible that”); and vocatives (such as “my dear” or “Sir”).

boulomaic modality. A modal subsystem which expresses desire and wishes. Examples include, “I hope that...” or “regrettably” (for further detail on this and on epistemic and deontic modality see Simpson *Ideology* 47-51).

epistemic modality. This modal subsystem relates to confidence in a statement’s truth and conveys certainty or uncertainty. Epistemic modality represents notion of knowledge, belief and cognition. Examples include, “You could be right” or “allegedly”. This system also includes **perception** modality which relies on reference to human judgement of likelihood, such as “clearly” or “I see that you’re right”.

deontic modality. Closely related to boulomaic modality, this modal subsystem expresses degrees of obligation from permission to requirement. It represents notions of duty and commitment, and is important to politeness and persuasion. Examples include, “it is necessary that...” or “you may...”.

modulation. Encompassing boulomaic and deontic modality, modulation is the linguistic means for expressing obligation, necessity and inclination. A verb is said to be ‘modulated’ if it includes a modal operator of duty or desire, for example, “you *should* go”.

modalisation. Including epistemic and perception modality, modalisation is the linguistic means for expressing degrees of probability or frequency, and conveys the implicit judgement of the speaker. For example, “that might happen” is modalised and therefore less certain than the unmodalised “that will happen”.

Simpson’s modal categories. Paul Simpson used modality, and other linguistic markers, to classify the attitude expressed by narrators and characters to the text-world. In the critical linguistic model of psychological point of view, these categories are useful ways to understand how narrative is mediated and coloured. The definitions below are taken from pages 56-75 in Simpson’s *Language, Ideology and Point of View*.

negative. This modal category cumulatively foregrounds uncertainty and doubt. Key markers include: prominent **epistemic** and **perception modality**, comparative structures (such as similes and metaphors), and **words of estrangement**. Narratives with negative shading can have a range of effects such as delaying reader comprehension, and may give the appearance of unreliability, self-questioning, estrangement and alienation, psychological distance and bewilderment, or create effects such as horror.

neutral. This modal category is characterised by a lack of modality, and thus gives the impression of objectivity. The main indicators of neutral shading include: unmodalised categorial assertions, a suppression of modality, evaluative language and *verba sentiendi*, and it may correlate

with paratactic constructions. Narratives with neutral shading obscure subjective judgement and concentrate on physical ‘matter-of-fact’ descriptions. Depending on context and narratorial mode, neutral shading may lend text a journalistic, impartial feel, or express emotional disconnect or shock.

positive. This modal category relates to the presence of judgements and evaluations, and therefore creates the impression of a subjective consciousness. Positive shading is characterised by: *verba sentiendi*, generic sentences, foregrounded deontic and boulomaic modal systems, but conversely **epistemic modality** and **words of estrangement** are suppressed. Narratives which evidence positive modal features tend to be cooperatively orientated towards the reader, convey certainty and conviction, and create a sense of personality and opinion.

narrative point of view. Narrative point of view relates to how the story or content is presented and arranged. It will be used synonymously here with viewpoint and perspective, although it is important to remember that it relates to more than just visual dimensions. Through a **metafunctional** framework, critical linguistics evaluates how language is used to create a particular ideological, psychological and spatiotemporal perspective on events, characters, narrators and scenes of the text-world.

ideological point of view (ideoPOV). Ideological viewpoint pertains to the experiential function of language, or in other words it relates to how the text-world is evaluated and construed in narrative. Narratorial and character ideological point of view embodies their worldview (beliefs and evaluations), and ‘view of the world’ (their way of viewing, perceiving or understanding the world). In this thesis, these two orientations are conceived on a continuum with explicit worldview at one end, and symptomatic ways of perceiving the world on the other. Ideological perspective is analysed through, for example, **transitivity**, conjunctions, metaphors, motifs, word choice, and epithets.

psychological point of view (psychPOV). Psychological perspective pertains to the interpersonal function of language, that is, it relates to how attitudes, interactions and relationships are represented in narrative. In the critical linguistic framework, psychological point of view is first assessed in terms of narratorial identity and mode (to discover whose attitude is presented), then the degree of psychological insight or attitude provided is evaluated. This psychological shading is primarily analysed through **modality**, see **Simpson’s modal categories** above.

spatiotemporal point of view (sptPOV). Spatiotemporal viewpoint refers to the management of space and time in narrative. It relates to the textual metafunction; that is, how language communicates interpersonal distance between participants

and experiential distance from events. Thus, in narrative spatiotemporal perspective positions the narrator and character in relation to one another, and represents the camera angle and temporal focus with which the text-world is viewed. It is analysed chiefly through **deixis**.

narrator. The term narrator refers to the speaking voice, and is the agent responsible for **lexicogrammatical** choices. However, this figure does not have to be personalised in narrative, can switch regularly in a text, and can have various identities, positions and qualities. A key distinction is made in critical linguistics and post-classical narratology between those narrators who are positioned within the story-world (**category A**), and those who are separate from it (**category B**).

category A. Otherwise known as character-narrators; category A narrators belong to the story-world and, usually, participate in the events of the narrative. They may thus often speak in the first-person, although this is not a characteristic limited to category A narrators. In the critical linguistic framework, category A narrators' speech may take on positive, negative, or neutral modal shading, which conveys the degree psychological characterisation and attitude to the text-world. These narrators may then be thought to adopt the following modal shadings: **A+ve**, **A-ve**, and **A neutral**. However, it is important to note that these are transient attitudes, rather than fixed characteristics of narrative voice, and narrators may use different shading for different aspects of the narrative.

category B. Otherwise known as heterodiegetic narrators; category B narrators narrate from a position outside the story-world. There are many possibilities for these types of narrator in terms of perceptibility, personality and characteristics such as omniscience or reliability. These features tend to relate to their spatiotemporal, psychological and ideological viewpoints in relation to characters and the story-world. In terms of category B narrators' psychological perspective, they may either perceive the world through the consciousness of a character (**reflector mode**), or from an independent position (**narratorial mode**). The lines between these modes is not always clear cut, nor indeed is line between free indirect and free direct discourse when narratorial voice cedes to character voice. Nonetheless, they help to capture the structural relation between narrator and character perspectives in predominant heterodiegetic narration, when characters' viewpoints are subordinate to (or embedded within) a larger narratorial frame.

narratorial mode. B(N). This refers to when a heterodiegetic narrator adopts an independent psychological perspective on the story-world. They may 'borrow' a characters' *spatiotemporal* viewpoint, as in they may look over their shoulder, but the narrator here acts as the psychological and evaluative focaliser. As such, the modal shading in

these passages expresses narratorial attitude to the story-world. These category B narrators in narratorial mode, B(N) narrators, may then be classified as expressing positive, negative or neutral modal shadings: **B(N)+ve**, **B(N)-ve**, and **B(N) neutral**. Again, these are transient attitudes, not fixed characteristics, so narrators may move swiftly between categories.

reflector mode. B(R). This refers to when a heterodiegetic narrator perceives or ‘reflects’ the story-world through the psychological viewpoint of a character. That is, the narrator takes an internal perspective on the character, and thus views the world and events through their eyes and mind. As such, the modal shading in these phrases expresses character attitude to the story-world. Although, it is worth mentioning that passages and even single sentences often mix B(N) and B(R) narration, so that it can be difficult to attribute particular word choices to narrator or character. Category B narration in reflector mode may also be further classified in terms of positive, negative and neutral modal shadings: **B(R)+ve**, **B(R)-ve**, and **B(R) neutral**.

register variables. In the functional-systemic tradition, there is a conventionalised connection between our linguistic choices and *what* we are talking about, *who* we are talking to, and *how* we are communicating with them (Halliday and Hasan 38-39). In this sense, the register is the variety of language use expected in a particular context of situation, and depends upon configurations of three variables: field (the topic of the exchange), tenor (the roles and relationships of the participants) and mode (the mode of communication). For example, language will be used differently in an email (mode) about a salary increase (field) to the HR department (tenor), than when chatting (mode) to a close friend (tenor) about their new puppy (field), and this is because the configuration of field, tenor and mode in each situation entails a conventionally appropriate register. Each of these register variables is conceived spectrally and depend on specific criteria.

field. ‘Field’ relates to the **ideational** function of language, and refers broadly to the ‘subject’ or ‘topic’ of discourse (such as ‘literature’ or ‘cars’). A change in topic will of course entail a change in language and referents, but the expression of field will also vary by “social activity type”, that is, what situation the subject is addressed in (such as a literary book review for a general readership, or a book review of a textbook for an academic audience) (Eggins 68). The impact of the field on language use can therefore be captured by determining how specialised or everyday it is, with technical texts exhibiting more acronyms, specialised vocabulary and sub-classifications than the more commonplace.

tenor. The tenor of discourse relates to the **interpersonal** function of language, and refers to the role relationships between the participants. The tenor will vary depending on three factors. Namely: the power balance and status between those communicating, and whether that is equal or unequal; their affective involvement and whether it is high, as in the case of families, or low, as with strangers on the street; and contact, that is whether they are in frequent or occasional communication. These factors play a role in how formal or informal we would expect the language to be, with formality linked to unequal power balance, low affective involvement and infrequent contact, and informality expected with equal status, high affective involvement, and frequent contact. Linguistic indicators of informality include: attitudinal and colloquial lexis, swearing, interruptions and overlap, reciprocal use of nicknames and diminutives, and modality which expresses opinion and probability. Formality, on the other hand, correlates with: neutral and formal lexis (full forms of words, no slang), politeness formula, careful turn-taking, titles and no names, modality which expresses deference and suggestion (Eggins 67).

mode. The mode of discourse relates to the **textual** function of language, and refers to *how* language is being used. Mode varies according to two dimensions, ‘interpersonal distance’, which relates to whether there is face-to-face contact with immediate feedback, or not, and ‘experiential distance’ from the activity recounted which ranges from language as action, as in a transaction or argument, to language as reflection, as in a story or narrative text. As well as overall form, such as monologic or dialogic, differences in mode will influence how complex the grammar is and how linguistically dense a text is, or not.

transitivity. The transitivity system is a range of process types which configure experience, participants and circumstances, and as such they express meanings about the ‘content’ or referential subject (they relate to the **experiential metafunction**). In other words, transitivity choices relate to how action, events, relationships and experience are portrayed in language by organising *who* does *what* to *whom*. In **Systemic Functional Grammar**, a transitivity analysis involves identifying and labelling the processes and participant types and circumstances within a clause to uncover how the subject matter is being constructed. The first step is to ascertain what kind of process is taking place, and then label the other constituents functionally according to their role in this process. The 6 process types are material (the most common and relating to processes of ‘doing’, for example ‘to walk’), mental (processes of ‘sensing’ for example, ‘to consider’ or ‘to taste’), verbal (processes of ‘saying’ for example ‘to claim’), relational (processes of ‘being’ for example ‘X is Y’ or ‘X has Y’), behavioural (a mental and material hybrid of the physiological and psychological, for example, ‘to glare’, ‘to cry’, ‘to listen’) and existential (realised by the impersonal construction ‘there is/was’) (Eggins 242-54; Simpson *Ideology* 88-93). The process type determines the role of the participants, and

the other components of the clause provide the circumstances for the process. With material processes the ‘actor’ is the obligatory participant who carries out the process, and two of the optional participants include the goal (who the process is directed at) and the beneficiary (the recipient or client of the action). For example, in the clause “he is washing the dishes for her right now”, ‘he’ is the actor, the goal is ‘the dishes’, the beneficiary is ‘her’, and the circumstances are ‘right now’. In a mental process, on the other hand, the two necessary participants are the ‘senser’ and the ‘phenomenon’, for example “she (senser) felt happy (phenomenon)”. A table of processes, participants and circumstances is provided below (adapted from Eggins 228, 237).

Process	Obligatory participants	Optional participants	Circumstances
Material	Actor	Goal; Range; Beneficiary	Extent (duration/ distance); Cause; Location (time/place); Matter; Manner (means/quality/ comparison); Role; Accompaniment (reason/purpose/behalf)
Mental	Senser; Phenomenon		
Verbal	Sayer	Receiver; verbiage	
Behavioural	Behaver	Behaviour; Phenomenon	
Existential	Existent		
Relational	Token; Value (identifying) Or Carrier; Attribute (attributive)		

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). On the cover of *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics* (Eggins), this branch of study is described as “an approach which views language as a strategic meaning-making resource” which “asks both how people use language to make meanings, and how language itself is organised to enable those meanings to be made”. This pragmatic approach, which bridges theory and practice, was developed by Michael A. K. Halliday in the 1970s, and has since been applied to cultural studies, translation studies and stylistics.

verba sentiendi. This is a word for verbs which indicate mental processes, especially those that express feelings, thoughts and perceptions, such as ‘to feel’, ‘to wonder’, ‘to love’.

words of estrangement. A form of epistemic and perception modality, these words promote uncertainty or speculation, and function to “emphasise the act of interpretation” (Fowler *Criticism* 178). Their name comes from the fact they express estrangement from the text-world or characters, and examples include: ‘apparently’, ‘as if’, ‘maybe’ and ‘seem’.

Appendix 2. Extract from *El país de las mujeres*

Pp. 152-53

A dos meses de su gobierno, no lograba avanzar. Había intentado incluir a quienes fueran capaces, hombres y mujeres, pero la realidad de siglos se les venía encima. Aun con bajos niveles de testosterona, deprimidos y cansados, echando barriga y poniéndose flojos, los hombres no dejaban volar la iniciativa femenina. No se lo proponían conscientemente, pero una y otra vez, en las reuniones sus comentarios caían como baldes de agua fría: Ah, es que ustedes no saben de estas cosas; Ah, es que ustedes no tienen experiencia. El efecto era legible en los rostros de magníficas mujeres que recién aprendían los alcances de su poder. Las achicaban; hacían que se cerraran como anémonas asustadas.

...

Si bien ellas no se dejaban apabullar por la sapiencia masculina, la codiciaban; lamentaban el tiempo que ellos habían ganado mientras ellas se vieron forzadas a reducir la longitud de sus horizontes para que cupiera en ellos el amor, los hijos, la casa, todo eso que, socialmente, era apenas valorado. Viviana les repartió a los hombres una copia de *Un cuarto propio* de Virginia Woolf, la Gran Loba. Lectura requerida, les dijo. Lean allí porque estamos en desventaja de erudición con respecto a ustedes y modérense. No nos enreden con sus palabras. Mucha sapiencia tendrán, pero la verdad es que, a juzgar por cómo está el mundo, de poco les ha servido, así que no intenten dirigirnos; observen, ayuden y aprendan.

[Two months into their term, her government hadn't managed to move forward. She had tried to include those who were able, men and women, but the reality of centuries was bearing down on them. Even with low levels of testosterone, depressed and tired, putting on weight and getting lazy, the men would not let female initiative take flight. They weren't doing it on purpose, but time and again, in meetings their comments would fall like buckets of cold water: Ah, that's because you don't know about these things; ah, that's because you don't have experience. The effect was evident on the faces of the magnificent women who were just beginning to realise the extent of their power. They shrunk them; made them close themselves up like frightened anemones.

...

Even though they did not let themselves be crushed by male intellect, they coveted it; they regretted the time that men had gained whilst they had been forced to narrow their horizons to fit in love, children, home, everything that, socially, counted for very little. Viviana sent men home with a copy of *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf, the great she-wolf. Required reading, she told them. Read there why it is that we women are less erudite than you men, and moderate yourselves. Don't trick us with your words. You may have a lot of knowledge, but the truth is, judging by the state of the world, it has not done you much good, so don't try to tell us what to do; watch, help and learn.]

Appendix 3. Extract from *The Power*

Pp. 305-07

Darrell looks up, smiling, as if the trees should applaud his victory.

In the distance he hears the women pick up a song, a melody he's heard them sing before but which none of them will explain to him.

He sees the dark eyes of the women watching him from the factory. He knows something then. A simple fact that should have been obvious from the first, had he not been pushing the knowledge from him. The women are not glad to see what he has done or that he could do it. The fucking bitches are just staring at him: their mouths as closed as the earth, their eyes as blank as the sea. They walk down the stairs inside the factory in orderly file and march towards him as one. Darrell lets out a sound, a hunted cry, and he runs. And the women are after him.

He is heading for the road; it's only a few miles away. On the road, he'll flag down a car, he'll get away from these crazy bitches.

Even in this godforsaken country, someone will help him. He runs pell-mell across an open plain between two great bodies of trees, feet pushing off from the ground as if he could become a bird now, a stream now, a tree now. He's in open country and he knows they can see him, and they are making no sound, and he lets himself think – maybe they've turned back, maybe they're gone. He looks behind him. There are a hundred women and the sound of their muttering is like the sea, and they are gaining on him, and his ankle turns and twists and he falls.

He knows them all by name. There's Irina and clever Magda, Veronyka and blonde Yevgennia and dark Yevgennia; there's cautious Nastya and cheery Marinela and young Jestina. All of them are there, the women he's worked alongside these months and years, the women he's given employment to and treated fairly, in the circumstances, and there's a look on their faces that he cannot read.

'Come on now', he calls to them. 'I got rid of that solider for you. Come on. Yevgennia, did you see me? I took her down with one zap! Did you see that?'

He's pushing himself away with his one good foot, as if he could scoot on bum and hip for the shelter of the trees or the mountain.

He knows they know what he's done.

They are calling to each other. He cannot hear precisely what it is they're saying. It sounds like a collection of vowels, a cry from the throat: eoi, yeoui, euoi.

'Ladies,' he says as they run nearer and nearer yet, 'I don't know what you think you saw, but I just hit her on the back of the neck. Fair and square. I just hit her.'

He knows he is speaking, but he cannot see any recognition in their faces.

'I'm sorry,' says Darrell. 'I'm sorry, I didn't mean it.'

They are humming the ancient song softly.

'Please,' he says. 'Please don't.'

And they're on him. Their hands find bare flesh, their grasping, pulling fingers on his stomach and his back, the sides of him, his thighs and armpits. He tries to jolt them, tries to grab at them with hands and teeth. They let him discharge himself into

their bodies and still they come. Magda and Marinela, Veronyka and Irina, grabbing hold of his limbs and setting the power across the surface of his skin, scarring him and marking him, and digging into his flesh, softening his joints and twisting them.

Nastya places her fingertips at his throat and makes him speak. They're not his words. His mouth is moving and his voice is humming but it's not him speaking, it's not.

His lying throat says, 'Thank you.'

Irina plants her foot in his armpit and hauls on his right arm, shocking and burning it. The flesh at the joint crisps and turns. She has the ball out of the socket. Magda pulls with her, and they have the arm off. The others are at his legs, and his neck, and the other arm, and the place across his collarbone where his ambition sat. Like the wind stripping the leaves from a tree, so inexorable and so violent. They pull the skein, lithe and wriggling, from his living chest, just before they get his head off, and at last he is quiet, their fingers dark with his blood.

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