ISSN: 2716-9189 E-ISSN: 2676-1750
Journal of Studies in Language, Culture, and Society (JSLCS). (09) 02, 2026. (PP. 284-297)
Received: 06/09/2025 Accepted: 06/03/2026. Published: 30/06/2026.

GENDER, AUTHORITY, AND COMMUNAL BONDS IN ANNA NORTH'S OUTLAWED: A LITERARY-SOCIOLOGICAL READING

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Abstract: This study examines Anna North's Outlawed through a gender-critical lens to explore how the novel deconstructs male-dominated authority and rebuilds community in an alternate Western setting. The historical context of the study is the revival of speculative fiction by women authors, which challenges traditional social structures, reproduction, and power. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to literary criticism, structural analysis of gender, and utopian studies through the analysis of a recent novel. The primary focus is to interpret how Outlawed challenges the power structures of male-dominated authority and creates new forms of community through outlaw solidarity. The analysis also considers the narrative significance of alternative institutions and collective survival. The research follows a qualitative approach to literary criticism, employing close textual analysis and structural analysis of gender. The evidence was gathered from sources in the novel and supported by secondary sources from recent academic literature. The interpretation focuses on narrative structure, symbolism, and institutional representation. The thematic analysis was conducted in three strands: deconstruction of authority, reconstruction of community, and utopian social vision. The results indicate that Outlawed is a critique of a societal obsession with fertility and imagines solidarity, mutual support, and care as narrative strategies for community formation through shared responsibility and collective action. This study contributes to literary scholarship by extending its application to the Western genre while modelling complex social relations in narrative. The study recommends that future comparative research be conducted, interdisciplinary research on representations of reproduction, social regulation, and community formation be pursued, and the findings be applied in pedagogy.

***Keywords**:* Gender; authority; Outlawed; community; utopian narrative

How to cite the article:

Farhan, R. N. (2026). Deconstructing patriarchy and rebuilding community in Anna North's *Outlawed* through a feminist lens. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture, and Society* (JSLCS), 9(2), 284-297.

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1. Introduction

Anna North's Outlawed is a revisionist Western set in an alternate nineteenth-century United States where fertility serves as the axis of social control: barren women are branded as witches, and a fugitive collective strives to create a different social order. There are two reasons why it is timely to read this novel with contemporary gender theory in mind. To begin with, it contributes to a vigorous post-2010 shift that re-equips the most popular genres (Western, dystopia, alternate history) with a critique of hierarchical governance and racialised social structures. Second, against contemporary debates concerning reproductive policies and the regulation of fertility, the Outlawed speculative what-if challenges us to consider how legal and medical discourses within the fictional society structure social exclusion, and how narrative finds a way out of it (North, 2021; Conway et al., 2022; Johnston, 2023).

Recent scholarship explains the reasons why a gender-focused reading of speculative forms is analytically fruitful. The Routledge Companion to Gender and Science Fiction demonstrates the disruption of predetermined social hierarchies by twenty-first-century speculative narratives, their representation of marginalised communities, and the connection of domestic reproduction to broader technopolitical regimes (Nasir et al., 2023; Yaszek et al., 2023). Recent studies published in JSLCS have also examined how social discourse shapes identity and power relations in literary texts, highlighting the role of narrative in reinforcing and challenging social norms (Sadouni, 2019).

In the meantime, The Routledge Companion to Literature and Feminism orients modern approaches to representations of the body, gender relations, and reproductive practices, frames that are easily transportable to genre fiction (Carroll & Tolan, 2023). The edited volume Technologies of Feminist Speculative Fiction, edited by Vint and Buran (2022), offers a specific passage to make visible and challengeable the reproductive technologies, surveillance, and so-called biopolitical management as plotting devices through which dominant authority is constituted. Taken altogether, these works render Outlawed not a curiosity about the Western, but rather a strategic critical thought experiment of community, embodiment, and governance.

Simultaneously, the social sciences and humanities have begun to reconsider reproductive politics since 2021, in a way that helps to understand the alternate world of North. Ecofeminist literary criticism connects the suppression of fertility-related choices to extractivist, masculinist state assemblies (Kitch, 2023). In contrast, the public-health humanities demonstrate how fiction aids in conceptualising reproductive risk, carcerality, and technological control (Krendel, 2025). Following the 2022 Dobbs decision, scholars have traced how "reproductive governance" operates across law, policy, and culture (Hewer, 2024). Pedagogical practices have also revealed the expression of scholarly discussions of fertility, social regulation, safety, and dignity across different social groups (Farhan, 2025). A reading of Outlawed alongside this literature enables us to view fertility trials, witch-hunts, and outlaw community as a fictional grammar of the present-day discussion of social control.

The novel combines these approaches by dismantling the traditional mythos. Genre studies report on the globalisation, hybridisation, and opening of the Western as a spur to counter-narratives in which women, Indigenous peoples, Black communities, and other marginalised groups are foregrounded (Conway et al., 2022).

Alternate-history criticism also states that what-if scenarios are not escapist journeys, but critical tools that reveal contingency in ostensibly naturalised orders (Cohen, 2019; Farhan, 2024). The novel fuses these two approaches by dismantling the traditional mythos of the West while rebuilding community through mutual aid and collective support within the fictional framework. In brief, the novel employs revisionist genre conventions to dramatise institutional critique.

At the theoretical level, the reading presented here utilises contemporary literary criticism to analyse how "barrenness" operates as a disciplinary category that pressures women to conform to socially imposed expectations of fertility; theoretical perspectives on margins and centres to examine how race, class, and social position shape vulnerability to witch-hunts; and Fredric Jameson's argument that utopia serves as a method, specifically, a means of cognitively mapping and rehearsing alternatives to dominant social relations (Said, 1994; Jameson, 2007). The scaffolding is reinforced with post-2021 interdisciplinary research. Ferry (2025) argues that male-dominated authority should be understood as a structural and institutional system of power rather than as isolated social practices. This perspective directly applies to the entanglement of fertility regulation, institutional authority, and social marginalisation represented in Outlawed.

In this frame, the themes in the title, deconstructing authority and rebuilding community, correspond to two complementary analytic moves. The systematic exposition of the process through which dominant power legitimises itself through religious discourse within the fictional society, simulated empiricism, and the fear of infertility. The novel reverses the myths of the frontier by making the central theme a diverse outlaw community whose modes of mutual aid replace dominance with care. Rebuilding community involves the utopian labour of creating outlaw communities and institutions, such as clinics, camps, and rituals, that discontinue epistemologies of witch trials and redeploy knowledge (midwifery, medicine, disguise) to facilitate collective survival. Recent utopia studies have made it clear that these characters are not naïve and escapist: they are diagnostic devices, which subject the present to pressure (Farhan, 2025; Wånggren, 2024; Rauscher, 2025). Nandagiri (2025) and Sanders & Jenkins (2023) also stress that governance narratives should put capability, agency, and solidarity at their heart, which are precisely the coordinates to which Outlawed positions itself in relation.

This study, therefore, pursues two aims and two guiding questions. The first aim is to show how Outlawed deconstructs traditional rule by rendering visible its discursive props (medicalised superstition, religious sanction, dominant social norms) through the tropes of the Western and alternate history. The second aim is to theorise how the novel's outlaw collective models the rebuilding of community through shared social responsibility, mutual aid, and collective survival strategies.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Outlawed deconstruct traditional governance through the disciplinary regulation of fertility within the revisionist Western and alternate-history framework?

2. How does the novel rebuild community through social cooperation, mutual aid, and alternative approaches to fertility and social belonging?

Finally, placing the novel in post-2021 discussion serves as insurance against two potential pitfalls. To begin with, it avoids anachronistic readings that reduce nineteenth-century settings to timeless allegory; rather, the text is read as contemporary experimentation with genre, which engages with modern scholarship on biopolitics, recent gender scholarship, and reproductive politics (Schaab, 2026; Hewer, 2024; Ferry, 2025). Second, it does not accept community rebuilding as an individual process: contemporary gender and ecological theory insist on institutional and ecological levels, which the novel represents through communal infrastructures of care (clinics, knowledge commons, collective governance).

Together, these threads support a methodologically plural reading of Outlawed that integrates both the critical and constructive dimensions of contemporary gender theory (Kitch, 2023; Vint & Buran, 2022; Yaszek et al., 2023; Cohen, 2019).

2. Literature Review

This literature review aims to contextualise the work of author Anna North, specifically her novel Outlawed (2021), within the framework of modern literary and cultural studies. It examines how speculative fiction and alternate history challenge dominant authority; how literary studies of social relations and women's experiences challenge the possibility of utopian imagination; and how discussions of reproductive politics challenge the possibility of alternative social configurations in literature. The section then concludes with the identification of a research gap, as it is demonstrated that although substantial literature exists on speculative fiction, social marginalisation, and utopian imagination, the existing literature does not adequately synthesise these strands in relation to Outlawed as a gender-focused Western.

2.1. Feminist Speculative & Alternate History Fiction

In recent years, criticism has focused on speculative fiction, enabling the examination of male-dominated authority in its most nuanced form and the critical examination of it through a systematic approach. The edited collection Technologies of Feminist Speculative Fiction, by Vint and Buran (2022), emphasises that reproduction, embodiment, and biopolitics, as sites of domination and resistance, are recurrently explored by speculative narratives. They contend that technologies of reproduction (be they biological or artificial) are never neutral in speculative texts, but dramatise the politics of social control (Vint & Buran, 2022, p. 14). This understanding is the direct echo of Outlawed, which envisions infertility as the basis of exclusion within social hierarchy and witch-hunts.

Yaszek and Pearson (2023) in The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction broaden this scope, asserting that contemporary speculative fiction "foregrounds socially marginalised individuals as part of a broader destabilisation of established social hierarchies" (p. 201). Their work is particularly relevant to Outlawed's outlaw gang, which brings together characters marginalised within the fictional society, offering a narrative alternative to mainstream traditional social norms. In Textual Practice, Cohen (2019) analyses alternate history as a narrative strategy that reveals the contingency of dominant orders. In this case, he argues that the derivative event in an alternate history highlights the arbitrariness of social arrangements, thereby lending them to critique (Cohen, 2019, p. 5). Outlawed fits in this framework because in the other world that the novel presents, where infertility is viewed as a crime, the absurdity of the logic of the depicted social hierarchy is made apparent.

Rauscher (2025), in his review of Alternative Masculinities in Feminist Speculative Fiction, highlights how speculative fiction with gender-critical perspectives destabilises traditional models of masculinity across literary genres. He argues that speculative fiction exposes the fragility of traditional constructions of masculinity while imagining alternative forms of male identity (Rauscher, 2025, p. 332; Farhan, 2024; Farhan, 2025). This observation resonates with North's critique of traditional authority, particularly through the portrayal of religious leaders who define women's social value according to their reproductive capacity.

Together, these four works can be seen as an indication that speculative and alternate-history stories are doing practical work in criticising dominant authority, but are yet to apply the same criticism to the Western genre, which Outlawed fills.

2.2. Community, Social Reconstruction, and Collective Agency

Another significant body of literature examines community and its reconstruction in cultural studies. Ferry (2025) emphasises that male-dominated authority should be analysed as a structural and institutional system of power rather than as isolated social practices. Such a strategy is in accordance with Outlawed, where the interplay of social status, class, and reproductive capacity shapes the oppression experienced by the characters.

Schaab (2026) examines reproductive regulation and community formation in contemporary speculative fiction, highlighting the relationship between reproductive constraints, solidarity, and alternative forms of community. This can be echoed in the progression of Ada in Outlawed, as she finds herself redefining her social role not through conformity but by forming alliances with other marginalised characters. Recent studies have also explored how narrative voice and social representation shape social role in literary texts, demonstrating how storytelling strategies can reinforce or challenge dominant social norms (Kouach, 2018).

The Routledge Companion to Literature and Feminism, by Carroll & Tolan (2023), emphasises that discussing modern literature prefigures embodiment and agency as key elements of political agency (p. 78). Their observations can be seen to have placed female subjectivity in a position where it is not subjugated by dominant authority, particularly in the case of Ada, who seeks knowledge and medicine as a means of empowerment.

In Medical Humanities, Krendel (2025) demonstrates that science fiction facilitates the conceptualisation of reproductive technologies and the social roles they create, highlighting the fact that fictional narratives provide conceptual tools to reconsider reproduction beyond medical or legal discourses (p. 309). This observation can be applied to Outlawed, whereby the collective that is the outlaw gang becomes a platform through which one can reconsider reproduction and community beyond the institutional regulation of the law. All these studies confirm that the issue of community reconstruction is a primary concern for scholars. Yet, none of them has so far examined the outlaw collective as an example of community-making in a Western context.

2.3. Feminist Utopias and Reproductive politics

Recent academic work has also given significant emphasis to utopia and reproductive politics in modern literature. Kitch (2023), an author in Humanities, associates reproductive politics with ecofeminism, saying that institutional control of women's fertility-related choices is similar to the exploitative power of the

environment (p. 5). Outlawed reflects an ecocritical critique of institutional domination by portraying fertility as part of broader structures of social control. Hewer (2024) situates reproductive politics within the context of biopower, arguing that state and institutional apparatuses control the bodies of women in a manner that disciplines autonomy (p. 456). This critique reiterates the community's social regulation of women in Outlawed in terms of fertility tests and witch-hunts.

In Feminist Economics, Nandagiri (2025) argues that approaches to reproductive policy should prioritise agency, solidarity, and capability over simple access to services (p. 3). Their scheme aligns with the formation of an outlaw gang into a collective, where agency and solidarity are foregrounded alongside exclusion. In Women's Writing, Wånggren (2024) reconsiders utopias, concluding that utopian imagination is diagnostic, confronting the present through the imagining of its alternatives (p. 148). Outlawed fulfils this diagnostic role: in envisioning an outlaw community, it challenges readers to consider the follies of traditional standards. Collectively, these studies demonstrate how utopian thinking resonates with the themes explored in Outlawed, yet they do not pursue a deeper analysis of utopia within the revisionist Western genre.

2.4. Research Gap

Although recent speculative fiction and research on social marginalisation have received considerable scholarly attention, Outlawed itself has received minimal scholarly analysis. Vint and Buran (2022), Yaszek et al. (2023), Cohen (2024), and Rauscher (2025) do not do this, showing how speculative forms deconstruct dominant authority, but they do not work with the Western as a site of gender critique. Ferry (2025), Schaab (2026), Carroll and Tolan (2023), and Krendel (2025) confirm the significance of community reconstruction, yet do not discuss the specifics of how outlaw collectives actually model community reconstruction. Utopian imagination is clarified by Kitch (2023), Hewer (2024), Farhan (2024), Nandagiri (2025), and Wånggren (2024), but is not linked with revisionist Westerns. This is the gap in research: there is still no study that demonstrates how Outlawed presents a unique speculative critique, the rebuilding of community, and utopian imagination within the Western genre. In this context, the current paper examines how the novel by North reveals the breakdown of traditional power and rebuilds community through collective agency and outlaw solidarity.

3. Methodology

The methodological approach adopted in this study is grounded in qualitative literary criticism, employing close textual analysis of Anna North's Outlawed to explore how the novel deconstructs traditional structures and rebuilds community. A qualitative research design is the most appropriate approach for the present study, as the objective is not to quantify variables but rather to gain insight into the themes, symbols, and narrative patterns based on a gender-theoretical approach. According to Larbalestier (2023), the approach to literary studies focuses on the contextual, historical, and ideological aspects of texts, which enables scholars to deconstruct how cultural narratives create and contest systems of power (p. 212).

The design adopted in this study is one of textual analysis, as criticism is strategically positioned to question the way narratives situate and challenge authority structures. Carroll & Tolan (2023) explain that perspectives on literature focus on embodiment, agency, and the structures of domination and resistance, particularly in

relation to gender and reproduction (p. 76). Because the themes of infertility, reproductive politics, and collective organisation are explicitly thematised in Outlawed, they represent a set of concepts that need to be developed using the conceptual tools of textual analysis to interpret these dynamics and place them in the context of broader discussions in gender theory.

The main feature of this methodology is close reading. The critical practice of reading works by female authors, as Showalter (1984) suggested in her path-breaking book on gynocriticism, entails tracing how women's narratives reconstruct community outside traditional standards. New research confirms the usefulness of close reading in criticism. For example, Krendel (2025) argues that literary descriptions of reproductive technologies can be critically analysed through in-depth textual analysis, which can help us understand how cultural narratives conceptualise biopolitics and social regulation of the body (p. 309). Likewise, Schaab (2026) examines how speculative narratives represent reproductive constraints and community formation, highlighting the relationship between institutional regulation, solidarity, and alternative forms of community. These analyses affirm that textual analysis remains a critical methodological framework for understanding how literature resists oppression.

The paradigm of this study is also informed by a structural analysis of gendered power and is based on an interpretive paradigm. Structural analysis of gendered power examines gender oppression as a product of interconnected social, cultural, and institutional structures of power. According to Ferry (2025), male-dominated authority should be understood as a structural and institutional system of power rather than as a collection of isolated social practices. This perspective supports the structural framework adopted in the present study. Such an approach to the subject matter is essential to Outlawed because the outlaw gang includes women and other characters marginalised within the fictional society, who are united by the overlapping exclusion conditions around them. The analysis explains how overlapping systems of power shape community reconstruction through a structural analytical framework.

In addition to structural analysis, utopian criticism forms part of the methodological toolkit. The theorisation of utopia as a cognitive mapping device, as provided by Jameson (2007), remains a powerful tool; however, more recent research supports its methodological applicability. Wånggren (2024) argues that utopian narratives have a diagnostic nature and are not so much an escapist fantasy but one that puts pressure on the present by visualising an alternative (p. 148). Rauscher (2025) notes that speculative fiction restructures masculinities and creates utopian imaginaries, thereby disrupting traditional standards (p. 332). Using this utopian-critical approach to Outlawed, however, one can read the outlaw gang as a utopian project of community reconstruction, a symbolic representation of solidarity and mutual concern against exclusion.

The methodological framework of this study is therefore threefold: (1) close textual analysis of Outlawed's narrative strategies, character development, and symbolic structures; (2) application of structural analysis to interrogate overlapping systems of power; (3) utopian criticism to analyse how the novel projects alternatives to traditional orders. This integrated design enables the tracing of both deconstruction and reconstruction within the novel.

Recent scholarship supports this methodology. According to Vint & Buran (2022), speculative fiction can be examined in a non-thematic but methodological manner because debating narrative technique is a critical step in exposing the ways of critiquing authority and envisioning alternative ways of doing so (p. 17). Cohen (2019) also adheres to the idea that to unveil the social critique in alternate histories, one should read them through interpretive close analysis (p. 6). This study employs qualitative and interpretive procedures, ensuring consistency with the methodological requirements of literary studies.

The reasons why a quantitative or empirical method is not appropriate should also be explained. Quantitative content analysis, for example, might reveal trends in the representation of various texts; however, it would not reflect the subtle symbolic and thematic manoeuvres through which Outlawed subverts traditional authority and rebuilds community. According to Conway et al. (2022), qualitative methods are more suitable when the research question involves cultural meaning-making, ideological criticism, and genre transformation (p. 8). This confirms the suitability of the methodology adopted.

Finally, ethical considerations guide this approach to methods. This study adopts an interpretive approach concerned with examining power relations as represented in the novel. Overall, the current paper adopts a qualitative approach to textual analysis, utilising close reading, structural analysis of gendered power, and utopian criticism to examine Outlawed by Anna North. The logic behind this design is found in current research on gender in speculative fiction (Vint & Buran, 2022; Yaszek & Pearson, 2023), structural analysis informed by Ferry (2025), reproductive politics (Schaab, 2026; Krendel, 2025), and utopian narratives (Wånggren, 2024; Rauscher, 2025). The integration of these methodological approaches ensures that the study is methodologically rigorous, theoretically grounded, and analytically consistent, enabling it to clarify how Outlawed, while deconstructing traditional power, reconstructs community within an alternative Western setting.

4. Analysis

This section presents a textual analysis of Anna North's Outlawed. Based on the methodological orientations of literary criticism, structural analysis, and utopian theory, the analysis examines how the novel dismantles traditional authority and rebuilds community in a different historical Western setting. Three thematic strands guide this analysis: first, the deconstruction of authority, which helps to reveal the mechanisms of control and exclusion; second, the rebuilding of community, which underlines the significance of solidarity, knowledge, and collective agency; and third, utopian social vision, which places the outlaw community as a diagnostic and imaginative counterpoint to the society depicted in the novel.

4.1 Deconstructing Patriarchy

North's narrative highlights traditional authority by portraying fertility as a means of control. Ada's expulsion reveals how the community stigmatises infertility, linking reproductive inability to a sense of moral failing. Ada is publicly tested and not only found barren, but in the fertility hearing scene, she is also ritually examined through the ritualisation of medical language, which is mixed with moral accusation. The language used by the community constructs infertility not as a biological contingency but as individual failure and therefore enacts the concept of womanhood as reproductive compliance within the narrative. This scene illustrates how

institutions depicted in the novel maintain social control by repeatedly enforcing reproductive expectations and social norms upon women. Ada's body becomes the site where dominant social norms are enforced, revealing how institutional practices sustain unequal power relations.

This aligns with Krendel's (2025) observation that fictional portrayals of reproductive technologies reveal how societies regulate bodies through biomedical discourse (p. 309). The novel highlights the criminalisation of infertility, emphasising how reproductive expectations are socially constructed and institutionally enforced. Witchcraft is also used as an exclusion mechanism in the novel. Barren women are labelled as witches, which is an iconic gesture to justify violence and eradication. This representation illustrates how dominant power depends on naturalising oppression through discursive constructions. The repeated association between witchcraft and infertility demonstrates how the fictional society reinforces exclusion through recurring social and institutional practices that legitimise discrimination and violence.

Ultimately, authority is embedded within legal frameworks and religious institutions within the fictional society. Religious leaders and judges establish fertility as a standard of worth, strengthening systemic control. Hewer (2024) illustrates how state and religious institutions operate as biopolitical regulators of women's autonomy (p. 456). North illustrates this by demonstrating how religious and judicial authorities within the fictional society jointly reinforce the social regulation of fertility. The text reveals that authority is not just a cultural phenomenon but also an institutional one, embedded within systemic power structures.

4.2 Rebuilding community

In opposition to exile, Outlawed enacts community reconstruction with the help of outlaw solidarity. The Hole-in-the-Wall Gang emerges as a community where infertile women and other characters marginalised within the fictional society find protection and mutual support. Said (1994) posited that the margins can act as sources of resistance (p. 152). In the novel by North, the outlaw gang is the very place where social exclusion is transformed into collective strength and solidarity.

This interpretation is consistent with Ferry's (2025) understanding of male-dominated authority as an institutional system of power. Marginality in this case does not signify stigma but affiliation. The narrative depicts a community where social participation replaces biological determinism as a basis for collective identity. This movement is an indication that community reconstruction in Outlawed is not just psychological but institutional.

Knowledge and healing are fundamental to the rebuilding of community. Ada's pursuit of medicine opposes dominant epistemologies. Schaab (2026) examines how reproductive constraints in speculative narratives shape social relations and the formation of alternative communities. Ada reclaims midwifery and medical knowledge, converting instruments of control into resources for empowerment and strengthening community through shared knowledge and practice rather than imposed social expectations.

The inclusion of characters marginalised within the fictional society further strengthens the formation of an alternative community based on cooperation and mutual respect. Individuals excluded from dominant social norms are incorporated into the outlaw group, contributing to a plural and inclusive sense of collective community. According to Ferry (2025), dominant power operates through

interconnected institutional structures rather than isolated social practices. North's novel reflects this principle by portraying the outlaw community as a collective response to institutional forms of exclusion and control.

4.3 Utopian Social Vision

Outlawed imagines a utopian social vision even as it critiques and re-creates it. The outlaw gang is not merely an escape, but a diagnostic utopia, a revelation of what the depicted society fails at, through an imagined alternative. Wånggren (2024) insists that utopian narratives operate in a diagnostic manner, putting pressure on the present through their ability to create an alternative vision of the future (p. 148). North's outlaws play that role: their camp is a critique and a hope.

The outlaw camp is not escapist fantasy, but an experiment in institutional organisation. Instead of destroying form, the collective redesigns it: medical practice, governance, and kinship are restructured by consent and solidarity. This is cognitive mapping in the sense of Jameson (2007), a narrative re-enactment of other institutional logics. The frontier, which has been conventionally coded as masculine conquest, is turned into alternative social space where care takes the place of domination.

Solidarity and agency supplant individualism. The gang exemplifies a community founded on mutual care, where value is assessed not by fecundity but by collective dedication to survival and justice. Scholarship contends that governance narratives should emphasise "agency, solidarity, and capability" (Ferry, 2025, p. 3). North's utopia is fundamentally constructed upon these concepts.

Ultimately, through her reinterpretation of the Western, North challenges a genre that has long been characterised by themes of masculine conquest. Conway et al. (2022) observe that the West is undergoing globalisation and diversification; however, Outlawed takes this further by presenting an alternative perspective on social organisation. The outlaw gang reclaims the frontier not as a site of domination but as a space for social re-imagination, transforming the Western into a vehicle for exploring alternative forms of social organization.

Outlawed analysis reveals a dual process: the deconstruction of authority as a mode of exclusion and the rebuilding of community through outlaw solidarity, knowledge, and mutual support. Moreover, the novel is not left at the point of critique; it extends to offer a utopian vision of community, identifying the shortcomings of traditional reasoning in the process of envisioning communities of care. These three themes, when combined, demonstrate that Outlawed is both a revisionist Western and a narrative experiment that combines criticism with reconstruction.

5. Discussion

This analysis reveals that Outlawed by Anna North is a valuable contribution to literary criticism, as it combines speculative strategies with structural perspectives on gender and the utopian imagination within the Western genre. Instead of passively reflecting traditional violence, Outlawed reimagines the Western frontier as an alternative community that is organised around care, interdependency and experimentation with institutions. In this regard, the novel does not merely place women into the Western; rather, it alters the spatial and moral logic of the genre's

logic of conquest into one of collective formation. It is an effective intervention, considering that Westerns used to be traditionally viewed as one of the most hostile genres regarding reinterpretation from a gender perspective. Although recent studies have identified speculative fiction and its potential to challenge reproductive control (Farhan, 2025; Vint & Buran, 2022; Yaszek et al., 2023; Krendel, 2025), few studies have applied such an analysis to Western literature. This is a significant scholarly gap that is addressed by foregrounding infertility, outlaw solidarity, and social inclusion, as North transforms a traditionally masculinist genre into an alternative model of social organisation.

The results directly respond to the two guiding research questions. To begin with, the novel deconstructs traditional rule by dramatising fertility as a disciplinary tool in legal, medical, and religious systems. Second, the novel reconstructs community through collective solidarity and institutional experimentation within the outlaw collective, thereby modelling an alternative institutional model centred on care within the fictional community. These narrative strategies demonstrate how institutions construct and maintain systems of exclusion while also revealing the possibility of social transformation through collective action. Meanwhile, community is rebuilt through outlaw solidarity, medical knowledge, and inclusivity. The outlaw gang is a place where people who have been relegated by the depicted society can rebuild supportive social relationships, consistent with Said (1994), who argues that the margins can become spaces of resistance. Outlawed fulfils the research question in this dual movement, demonstrating how literature both critiques oppressive systems and proposes alternatives.

Beyond critique and reconstruction, the novel projects a narrative utopia that centres on solidarity, care, and agency. It is not a utopia of perfection, but, as Wånggren (2024) describes, a diagnostic utopia: a narrative that confronts the present by offering an alternative (p. 148). The outlaw community makes visible what scholarship describes as governance narratives in practice, in which coercion is replaced by agency and solidarity. This aspect distinguishes Outlawed, set in an alternative historical setting, from The Handmaid's Tale (Atwood, 1985), which foregrounds critique but does not develop an equivalent model of community reconstruction, and it exists within a new wave of speculative fiction, which is both constructive and critical.

This study makes a three-fold contribution. First, it extends literary scholarship to the Western genre, where established genre conventions can be reinterpreted through alternative representations of gender, authority, and community. This widens the scope of the field beyond science fiction and dystopian genre, where criticism already enjoys a longstanding presence (Yaszek et al., 2023). Second, it demonstrates the narrative functioning of structural analysis by showing how oppression is experienced across social position, reproductive capacity, and broader social conditions. Outlawed illustrates how institutions and structural systems of power shape experiences of exclusion and resistance, consistent with Ferry's (2025) discussion of male-dominated authority as a systemic and institutional form of power. This positions the novel as a case study demonstrating how fiction can illuminate structural analysis.

Third, the work also contributes to utopian criticism, as it demonstrates that utopian imagination can be operationalised in terms of alternate histories, as well as revisionist Westerns, but not only in futuristic or speculative worlds. In this way,

Outlawed demonstrates Jameson's (2007) thesis that utopia serves as a technique of cognitive mapping, providing readers with an imaginative structure for alternative futures.

This study fills this void by combining speculative criticism, structural analysis, and utopian criticism within a narrative tradition that has historically marginalised the voices of women. Moreover, the analysis contributes to the present-day discourse by revealing that narratives are not only reactive but also constructive, and suggests that they offer new forms of community and social organisation.

To sum up, this paper has established that Outlawed dismantles traditional authority and rebuilds community through collective solidarity, inclusive medical knowledge, practices, and collective support, while also presenting a diagnostic utopia of care. It has bridged a gap in the literature by extending gender analysis to the Western genre, responding to its two guiding research questions, and demonstrating how speculative narratives can critique, reconstruct, and reimagine social relations. What is unique about this contribution is that it demonstrates that literature is not limited to uncovering oppression, but can also envision and insist on other futures.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of Anna North's novel, Outlawed, demonstrates that the novel functions as both a critique and a reconstruction, subverting traditional authority while rebuilding community through solidarity, knowledge, and inclusivity. Describing infertility as a social crime, North reveals the absurdity and violence of the systems that reduce women in terms of their fertility. The outlaw gang simultaneously offers an alternative narrative in which women and other characters marginalised within the fictional society find acceptance, protection, and collective support.

The primary value of this work lies in its application of literary criticism to the Western genre. Whereas criticism of speculative fiction and dystopia is well established, Western literature has remained relatively unexplored in gender studies. Through its analysis of Outlawed, this paper demonstrates that it is possible to repurpose even genres with a strong foundation in masculinist mythologies to create an alternative social space. The second contribution is the demonstration of the role of structural analysis in narrative. Outlawed demonstrates how overlapping social and institutional systems of power shape exclusion and resistance, supporting a structural reading of the novel. The third contribution is to the field of utopian studies: the novel does not end with critique but proposes a diagnostic utopian vision in which solidarity and care function as alternatives to coercion.

Concerning practical implications, the research highlights the significance of literature as a cultural domain where representations of reproduction, community, and resistance are envisioned and negotiated. The outlaw gang also serves as a symbolic example of how marginalised communities can forge solidarities beyond the mainstream. For literary scholars and researchers, the novel represents marginalised characters as developing alternative forms of solidarity.

These findings can be developed in three directions in future research. To begin with, some additional comparative analysis might examine how other revisionist Westerns or alternate-historical novels approach this, placing Outlawed in a broader literary context. Second, future research could compare Outlawed with other revisionist Western and alternate-history narratives addressing fertility, social regulation, gender relations, and community formation. Lastly, pedagogical research

could examine how speculative fiction represents social authority, fertility, gender relations, and alternative forms of community.

To sum up, the present study not only addresses its two guiding research questions but also contributes to extending literary scholarship into new areas of inquiry. By addressing a gap in scholarship, the study demonstrates that literature can serve not only as a means of critiquing oppressive systems but also as a means of imagining futures based on solidarity, justice, and care.

AI Declaration. The author declares that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely for language editing and proofreading purposes, including improvements to grammar, clarity, and readability. The AI tools were not used to generate the research data, conduct the analysis, formulate the findings, or determine the conclusions. The author reviewed and approved the final manuscript and takes full responsibility for its content.

Ethical Declaration. This study is based exclusively on literary and textual analysis and did not involve human participants, personal data, surveys, interviews, or experimental procedures. Therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required.

Funding. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Author Contributions. The author solely conceived and designed the study, conducted the literature review and textual analysis, interpreted the findings, drafted and revised the manuscript, and approved the final version for publication.

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