

A CRITIQUE OF SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S FEMINISM

BY

EJIRO IKEGU

ART1601332

**BEING A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A HON) DEGREE IN
PHILOSOPHY**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this work entitled “A Critique of Simone de Beauvoir’s Feminism” is a research carried out by me. All sources consulted are acknowledged and properly documented. Therefore, I attest that the record of this work is the effort of my research and I would be accounted to all information provided therein.

Ejiro Ikegu

.....

.....

Student

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATION

This project has been read and approved as meeting the requirements and regulations of the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

Prof. A.A. Asekhauno

Supervisor

Signature

Date

Dr. S.I. Odia

(Ag) Head of Department

Signature

Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty the give of wisdom and knowledge whose unmerited grace given to me enable me to complete this programme. To God be glory.

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary times, one of the fundamental and most trending problems confronting philosophers and social scientists has been the problem of sex discriminations. Over the years, there have been heated debates among scholars and between the two sexes (male and female) over the argument of male's discriminations against women in almost all areas of human endeavours. This argument is put in the form of gender bias. Groups of individuals have divided themselves on this issue. On the one hand, some scholars have continued to argue that there is no discrimination between the male and the female. On the contrary, others argue that females are being discriminated against by the male counterpart. Feminism is being approached from different strands and perspectives; some approach feminism from the academic perspective, to others, feminism is approached from the economic perspective, to others, it is viewed from the family perspective and to others, it is approached from the social perspective. It was in the light of this debate that Simone de Beauvoir came into the debate. She joined members of the Social Feminist Movement by advocating for the liberation of the women and calling for equality between the two sexes in the society. Beauvoir frowned against what she perceived to be social discrimination against the women within social milieu. This work therefore is a critical examination of Simone de Beauvoir's idea of feminism with a view to show the strengths and weaknesses in her idea of feminism.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The *Second Sex* (originally published in 1949 as *Le Deuxieme sexe*), Beauvoir's study on the situation of women, provoked much dispute and discussion at the start of the 1960s feminist movement. This discussion still continues. Exploring the historic situation of women, Beauvoir concluded that women have been prevented from taking active control of their lives. Woman has been the Other throughout culture; man has been the Self; the subject. Woman has been subjected to man, who, partly with woman's consent, has made her an extension of himself. For the first time in history, Beauvoir wrote in 1949, through the availability of contraceptives and the access to paid work, women have the chance to develop into a Self as well. The *Second Sex* is a passionate appeal to women to take this chance. Twenty years after the book's appearance, the new feminist movement discovered it. This movement had focused on the liberation of female sexuality and on economic autonomy for women. Influential were the works of Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett, and Betty Friedan, all of whom admitted-in the case of Millett and Friedan only many years later-that Beauvoir's works started them "on the road".

Simone de Beauvoir's publication on feminism sparked the whole world and eventually woke many women from their dogmatic slumber. Her theory of feminism

became important as a source of knowledge about female sexuality as well as an inspiration for the articulation of a different form of thinking and writing compared to the masculine logo-centric approach. Most feminist theoreticians and writers after her have sought to develop in their arguments that femininity lies outside the dominant subject form in Western society.

However, with respect to the theme of the liberation of female sexuality, after a few years, the new women's movement radicalized, stressing the difference between men and women, between masculinity and femininity. Instead of becoming equal to men, women were to develop their own values, which would amount to a complete cultural revolution. Although part of the 1960s emerging women's movement had embraced Beauvoir, other factions of the movement criticized her intensely: The *Second Sex* was condemned as a male view of women and was superseded by the new, real feminism.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Over the years, one of the fundamental challenges bedeviling the society has been how to balance a relationship between women and men. It has been argued that traditionally there appeared to be unequal relationship between these two sexes. Some group of individuals has argued that women are treated as secondary entity with no significant place occupied in the society. This group of individuals believes and argues

that women are not given equal opportunity in the society like their male counter-part. It is perceived and argued that the females are looked and treated with disdain and not given equal opportunity in the day-to day decisions and affairs. One of these individuals who held to this assertion was Simone de Beauvoir. Simone's writing is just as relevant today as it ever was, spanning across time and nations. Everyone, male and female, needs to be exposed to her work. Because no matter how far you think we have come, it's not far enough as the problem and debate over sex discrimination between the two sexes continue to generate controversies. Simone de Beauvoir argues that within the study of philosophy, in the area of politics, family and in other areas of human existence, women are treated as second class citizen and are seen to be inferior human beings when compared to their male counter-part. . Beauvoir's most enduring work, *The Second Sex* (1949), was launched as a reaction against the imbalances and unequal treatment been melted out against the women in the society. Ever since this publication, Beauvoir's advocacy and argument is still read and studied as an essential manifesto on women's oppression and liberation. However, since after her publication of the famous and celebrated *The Second Sex*, the problem that de Beauvoir saw and wrote against still persist. The various works and arguments put forward by later thinkers after the publication of *The Second Sex* by de Beauvoir shows that the question of male and female dichotomy are far from been resolved. This debate is still ongoing. Therefore, it is in this regard that this study is poised to

undertake a critique of Simone de Beauvoir's idea on feminism with the hope of showing the strengths and weaknesses in her thought on feminism.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this project is to carry out a critique of Simone de Beauvoir's treatise on feminism. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Trace the development of feminism before de Beauvoir and to discuss some of the various theories of feminism
- ii. point out the strengths and shortcomings in de Beauvoir's commentators who have criticized her feminist's philosophy
- iii. analyze in piecemeal de Beauvoir's idea of feminism in *The Second Sex*
- iv. identify the strengths and weaknesses in de Beauvoir's view on feminism

1.4 Method of the Study

To ascertain the aforementioned tasks, the study adopts the method of critical analysis to evaluate the problem under investigation. It also employs the hermeneutic method; where textual analysis and exposition are given precedence. In addition, the MLA style of writing research is adopted in the documentation of the endnotes and bibliography. More so, the study relies on both primary and secondary sources of information in order to examine and evaluate Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy. The primary information includes all the works written by Simone de Beauvoir which dwelt directly and are related to her treatise on equality and the idea

of feminism. On the other hand, the secondary sources are commentary materials written by different writers on Simone de Beauvoir's treatise on feminism. With these methods, the entire edifice of the research problems is to be x-rayed in a single intellectual basket.

1.5 Scope of the Study

In every scholarly work, the need to put the study in its proper perspective is expedient and cannot be neglected. The scope of a study puts the researcher within the limit and content within which his or her study is to be conducted. Thus, every study is guided by a giving scope of study. With the above clarification, the scope of this study therefore circumvents around Simone de Beauvoir's feminism, especially her thoughts and arguments on sex discrimination between male and female within the society.

In addition to this, in order to put this study in its proper perspective, it is imperative to establish the structural organization of the study, as this on the one hand, will guide the researcher and put her in a clear direction in conducting the research. On the other hand, through the structural arrangement of the entire work, the readers will be able to have a glimpse of what he or she looks forward to see in the work. This project will be organized into Four Chapters for easy comprehension and elucidation. Chapter One generally dwelt on the general introduction of the study; otherwise known as the methodological considerations. Under this Chapter One, a consideration is given on the background to the study, statement of the problem, aim and objectives

of the study, scope of the study, and method of the study, significance of the study and literature review.

Chapter Two provides a detailed analysis of the various developments of feminism and some of the basic theories of feminism. Such theories to be discussed include Cultural Feminism, Radical Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Marxist and Socialist Feminism and Feminist Epistemology. With this achievement in Chapter Two, in Chapter Three, the researcher will pay particular attention toward a more comprehensive study of Simone de Beauvoir's feminism.

Chapter Three will examine the thought of Simone de Beauvoir on feminism, especially, his advocacy for the liberation of women and her championed for gender equality between the sexes. Here, the basic subthemes to be discussed include; Biography of Simone de Beauvoir, Simone de Beauvoir on Feminism, Simone de Beauvoir on Intellectual Destiny, Simone de Beauvoir's Advocacy for Equal Sexual Relations, Simone de Beauvoir on Women's Participation in Politics, Simone de Beauvoir on Mutual-Situation Relation Between Self and the Other, and Critique of Simone de Beauvoir's Feminist Philosophy. Finally, Chapter Four focuses on the evaluation, conclusion and recommendation.

1.6 Significance of the Study

In a given scholarly work, the significance of a study depends on the degree of its solutions as well as its contributions to the present research problem confronting the researcher. This is why the significance of a study varies from one research topic to another. Therefore, this work, no doubt shall be significant in the following ways:

- It will provide us with the knowledge and understanding of why the issue of sex discrimination remains one of the problems facing researchers, academia, and men of learning and amongst intellectuals.
- It will be relevant as it will help subsequent readers and researchers on the topic under investigation to determine whether Simone de Beauvoir's idea and conception of feminism is devoid of prejudice and dogmatism.
- Again, the study shall also be significant as it would strike a balance between the rationalists and the empiricists on the nature of human knowledge
- Beside these, the study will objectively show the strengths and weaknesses inherent in both Beauvoir Hume analysis of human knowledge
- Finally, the study will immensely be of great contribution to academia and researchers, especially, subsequent researchers in the Department of Philosophy and related disciplines who may embark on the same or related topics in the nearest future. This is because this projected when successfully completed, will add to the available materials in the library, thus, it would also serve as reference material to subsequent researcher(s).

1.7 Literature Review

To successfully accomplish the aim of writing this long essay, it is imperative to review materials that could aid the student in the process of reconstructing the arguments for and against Simone de Beauvoir's idea of feminism. This literature review will help the student to deconstruct and reconstruct holistically, Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy. In addition, it is important to draw our attention to the fact that ever since Simone de Beauvoir launched her publication entitled; *The Second Sex*, which presents how society has created an imbalance relationship between the male and their female counter-part, her treatise has been greatly criticized by different writers. In short, her work on feminism has continued to attract scholarly attentions, mixed feelings and controversies amongst the intellectuals. Based on this assertion, this section specifically reviewed the thought of some notable thinkers and scholars who have written commentaries on Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy. The thrust of this literature review is to enable us have a more comprehensive understanding and insight into her philosophy of feminism. Also, in the course of this literature review, we tried to unravel and understand the thought of Simone de Beauvoir on feminism, based on secondary account. This exercise, no doubt, will provide us with a more clear and distinct view as we shall continue in Chapter Three with a more detailed analysis and exposition of her primary ideas. Having established

this, it is expedient therefore to consider the thought and opinion of most of these notable scholars.

According to Tom Grimwood; “Referencing ‘Simone de Beauvoir’ is to reference a stage in the history of feminist philosophy; when one cites the name ‘Simone de Beauvoir’, as the signature of *The Second Sex*, one is also citing not just the context of its original inscription, but a further context endowed upon it by the history of critical responses.”¹ As briefly stated above, Grimwood admits that Simone de Beauvoir occupies a major place in the history of philosophy and the society at large. In short, Grimwood further posits that Beauvoir’s name is not just been written but has been severally re-written in the sand of human quest for knowledge and equality. She is known as one of the leading figures for the liberation of women’s right. Again another important point to remember is that de Beauvoir’s works on feminism, especially her publication of *The Second Sex*, have attracted plethora of scholars’ commentaries.

Grimwood however regretted that most of her contemporaries and critics wrongly criticized and accused her. Grimwood however calls for reflection on every bit of criticism level against her thought. The various arguments put forward against her thought, according to Grimwood are germane in the study of de Beauvoir’s idea of feminism. Thus, Grimwood stepped further to declare the intention of his paper on Simone de Beauvoir’s work when he lucidly had this to say; “In this paper, I will

argue that this context of ‘failure’ that accompanies the citation of Beauvoir’s signature should not be ignored, but is rather a key to the understanding of *The Second Sex*’s philosophical meaning. I will examine the effect of such a context on various readings of *The Second Sex*; review possible responses to such a signature; and finally, suggest a way in which this negative context yields a constructive meaning.”²

In a related opinion, Chanter, T. in his paper entitled; “The Ethics of Eros: Irigaray’s Re-Writing of the Philosophers” agrees with Grimwood that Beauvoir’s feminist philosophy has attracted more attention within the intellectual circle than anyone can imagine. In his own words, Chanter had this to say:

Of course, in general, feminist philosophy has been enthusiastic to reference the name of Simone de Beauvoir as a figure of influence. In her allotted role as the ‘mother’ of post-war feminist philosophy, Simone de Beauvoir’s name is an inevitable point of reference as a polemical icon of ‘early’ feminism. However, if we differentiate the general iconic name of Simone de Beauvoir from the specific references to the ‘Simone de Beauvoir’ who signs *The Second Sex*, a quite distinct referential history emerges.³

As Chanter tells us in view of the above, Simone de Beauvoir’s feminist philosophy is described as the pillar and the bedrock of contemporary feminist philosophy. Simone de Beauvoir, according to Chanter further argues that; “using historical account, psychological analysis and biological ‘fact’, attempts to formulate the philosophical question ‘what is a woman?’, suggesting that while man ‘is’, woman ‘is not’; man is ‘being’, woman is ‘becoming’. The point to stress here is that Beauvoir, according to

the above scholar cited, argues that from the biological, historical and psychological point of view, society has been unfair to the female sex. Thus, a great demarcation has been created between the two sexes. Chanter further write however that; “Despite such polemical statements having been echoed throughout the history of feminist philosophy, a fundamental tension has remained surrounding the status of this specific ‘Simone de Beauvoir’ as an original philosophical authority.” Hence, Chanter argues that:

The Second Sex’s philosophical value is questionable initially because Beauvoir seems to utilize inappropriate conceptual frameworks – most notably, Jean Paul Sartre’s existentialism – that are ill-equipped to deal with the problems she is attempting to pose. As a result, Beauvoir’s project of recognizing what a woman ‘is’ would seem ill-fated, so long as she perpetuates the very philosophical schemas that contribute to the non-answering of such a question. Inasmuch as The Second Sex’s ‘Simone de Beauvoir’ asserts itself as an authority; this authority seems at odds with Beauvoir’s apparent dependence on Sartre’s philosophy.⁴

In another study conducted by Arp in his article entitled; “Beauvoir’s Concept of Bodily Alienation” a study of Beauvoir’s idea of feminism is given prior attention. This scholar begins his analysis of Simone de Beauvoir’s idea of feminism by focusing his lenses on the work; *The Bible of Feminism* which was also authored by Simone de Beauvoir. In this work, Arp argues and posits that for Beauvoir, women only become women passively not because nature fundamentally enslaved or endowed them to be so. However, in his opening remark, Arp first of all asserts that; “Simone

de Beauvoir is praised as one of the most important women in 20th century. Her work *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) has left an extreme influence on Europe and America, and even on the whole world.”⁵ .Arp goes on to say; “In this famous theoretical work praised as “The Bible of Feminism”, Simone de Beauvoir elaborates her main idea of “Women become women passively instead of being born to be in this way”.⁶ He further contends that:

This book advocates the idea of equality “Men can be their own masters; so shall women be able to do the same”. Due to the influence brought by *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Simone de Beauvoir became the pioneer in western feminist movement and feminism research. She was not only a public figure of feminism; but was also a well-known writer and literature theorist who cared a lot about women’s destiny and living circumstances.⁷

As evident from the above assertion, Beauvoir’s advocacy for the liberation of the women entails calling for a world where both men and women will become masters of their own without the interference or undue crossing the boundary by the male. Women for Beauvoir, according to Arp are to decide their own fate. They are to be self-mastery and not to be seen as second fiddles.

Another important work written by Simone de Beauvoir which touches on and argues for gender equality or feminist idea is the existential literature piece by de Beauvoir. In a study conducted Crosland, M. in her work entitled “Simone de Beauvoir: The Woman and Her Work,” Crosland pointed out that Beauvoir presented this book in form of a dialogue. He further explained that in this book, one will

discover that Beauvoir happens to be one of the leading figures among existential literary writers. Her literary prowess and consistency in method of writing and development of ideas earned her this recognition. Commenting on her idea and achievement, Crosland explains that; “As a leading figure among existential literature, Beauvoir can always pass a philosophical value to her readers. From the first book *L’invitée* to *Les Mandarins*, all the characters’ dialogues and conflicts are around the relation between the self and the other.”⁸ No doubt, in this literary piece, Beauvoir was seen to have studied humanity from the perspective of morality. She even went further to classify humanity into three principals’ categorization. Explaining this further, Crosland avers that; “Beauvoir’s perspective of the other is an ethical view of the relations between the self and the self, the self and the other, and the self and the world. It can be called a practical ethical view or a daily-life ethical view.”⁹ This demonstrates that for Beauvoir, human being relates with he or herself, relates with others because man is not alone in this world and that man relates with the external world.

To build on from here, Yanyuan, Bai. In her study entitled “A Study of the Main Ideas in Beauvoir’s Works from Perspective of Existentialism” also buttresses that; “Three periods of Beauvoir’s lifetime writing are related to the ethical view of the other. The first period is before World War II. For example, the novel shows the contrary views of self-consciousness and consciousness of the other. The second period is

Beauvoir's life his-tory in Paris under Nazi's occupation. During this period, Beauvoir changed her contrary views and advocated the mutual-situation relation between the self and the other.”¹⁰

The other is the situation of actions taken by the self while the world is the situation that both the self and the other face together. This view is fully interpreted in *Les Mandarins*. In the occupied Paris, those slaughtered Jews and communists consists the situation of people with no Jewish nationality or Communist Party relation. Besides, they were also the situation of Nazi and traitors. This is because kill the other as something instead of a human being can show how every other person can also be slaughtered like something. Hence, to bring oneself freedom means to give the other freedom. The mutual-situation relation between the self and the other is a mutual beneficial relation. The differentiation between two subjectivities can only be respected with the existence of mutual recognition.

Again, according to Felman, S. in his work entitled; “What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference”, he reported that; “For Beauvoir, literature was a means to involve in political life. The involvement that existentialism made in literature made Beauvoir insists on the belief that literature contained the mission to guide political actions. This belief led her to express her philosophical ideology and political views in novels.”¹¹ As mentioned above, intellectuals like Henry and Lobell in *Les Mandarins* believe revolution and politics are the channels for them to

understand and participate in the world. They hold this belief from the beginning to the end. Henry and Lobell can truly reflect the activities, existence environment, and spiritual journey that Sartre, Beauvoir, and those French intellectual elites of their age had.

In another development, Evans, M. in his work entitled; “Introducing Contemporary Feminist Thought” observed that Beauvoir’s works on feminism has greatly shaped the world and has been of immense contribution to the liberation of the young girls in most parts of the world. We are told that through her philosophical works, Beauvoir was able to liberate Algerian girls. She was also known for her strong support and participation in French feminist war. Expressing and describing this thought, Evans writes inter alia:

Beauvoir actively took part in political activities and insisted on expressing her ethical views about the consistence between the self and the other after World War II. She applied those views in political practice and supported Algerian Anti-Colonization War which liberated Algerian girls from the slaughter of French troops. She sponsored, supported, and participated in French Feminism War. She revealed the reality that the old generation was considered as “the others” by the society. She voiced her discontents towards children’s “the other” status in families.¹²

Another exploration undertaken by Evans M. in his work entitled; *Simone de Beauvoir*. In this work, Evans attempts to show the relevance of Beauvoir’s thought in *Les Mandarins*. He also tries to show the relationship between Beauvoir and Sartre.

Beauvoir was said and seen to be the brainbox behind the successes which she and Jean Paul Sartre recorded after the World War II. Beauvoir alongside with Sartre strongly supported the career fighting for justice and freedom. In this regard, Evans comments thus; “Beauvoir’s unique contractual relation with Sartre and her involvement with Sartre after World War II helped her and Sartre win worldwide reputation together. Most of Beauvoir’s and Sartre’s friends were celebrities and political VIPs. She and Sartre sympathized on the working class and the lower class.”¹³

Evans also argues that both Beauvoir and Sartre “supported the career fighting for justice and freedom. Besides, they protected young people’s achievement in fighting for freedom of speech and encouraged young students’ social activities. All these have brought Beauvoir and Sartre reputation and wide-range circulation for their works.”¹⁴ He therefore concludes by saying that; “from the above, we can see that *Les Mandarins* shows us another Beauvoir we cannot see in *Le Deuxième Sexe*. *Les Mandarins* is Beauvoir’s supplement for her belief or ideology in a literal way. We can also regard this novel as a practical experience in Beauvoir’s ideal. On the completion of this novel, Beauvoir amended her life path more or less and accomplished something she couldn’t conquer anywhere else.”¹⁵ Another important point that this scholar added newly to this literature review also is that some of the fundamental ideas and arguments put forward by Beauvoir which were not contained

in her *The Second Sex*, are found in her *Les Mandarins*. Beauvoir for him was a campaigner of women freedom and liberation from men's domination in all facets of human lives.

In another development, while we observed from the above that most of Beauvoir's commentators applauded her for her great contributions toward the liberation of women and for championing the idea for equality between the two sexes, most scholars however, have taken serious criticism against her idea of feminism. This is, however, shows that her thought has received and been placed under two views; the right and the left wing of Beauvoir's feminism. On the left wing, Crosland tells us that "the flaws of *The Second Sex* have been listed and repeated ever since its publication. In terms of philosophical analysis, *The Second Sex*'s 'Simone de Beauvoir' fails at the 'rules' of objective detachment and submits to naive egoism or, at the very least, 'remains limited both by the intellectual legacy she inherits from her philosophical mentors, and by her refusal, or inability, to fully inhabit the role of a woman.'¹⁶ It can also be, argued that as an anthropologist, Simone de Beauvoir is accused of 'pretentious' ignorance. While the text appears to begin with a question of woman's subjectivity, this would imply that Beauvoir should be supplying us with a 'subjective identity, a sense of effective agency', but we are left with an incomplete, ill construed, contradictory and unfinished argument.

Again, in the work entitled; A Critical Review of how Existentialism and its Men Influenced the Feminism of Simone de Beauvoir, Sergio A. Silverio argues that Beauvoir's idea cannot be said to have originated from her but rather a thought borrowed from Jean Paul Sartre. As we saw and read earlier, we are told that most of her ideas are derived from Sartre who was said to be her lover. Expressing this feeling and assertion, Silverio opines that:

Subsequently, while references to the 'influential' Beauvoir figure that is, as an icon or 'founder' of feminist thought abound with maternal images, in stark contrast specific references to *The Second Sex's* 'Simone de Beauvoir' produce what can be termed an 'infantilization' of the author. 'She is represented as under the influence of her philosopher lover Sartre, and as 'unable' to control entirely the unstable, conflicting theoretical elements with which she is dealing.¹⁷

On the bases of this, Silverio contends that; "in *The Second Sex* 'Simone de Beauvoir' has led to the maintaining of a certain critical distance from the philosophical value of the authorship, visible through the ways in which her name is cited. This is the 'Simone de Beauvoir' that references a moment confined to the early development of modern feminist philosophy; a grounding point, but as a ground also a point to move beyond or progress from."¹⁸ In other words, contextualizing Beauvoir within such a schema effectively appropriates the text of the signature towards its own failure. She has been accused of being inconsistent in all her publications. The most fundamental element in all her works is contradiction. She was self-contradictory. Thus it is remark

that in a whole range of different contexts, Simone de Beauvoir's qualities as a person and as a writer are critically judged and found wanting.

In a separate study, Beauvoir's feminism has been undertaken side by side with Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism. While we are told that de Beauvoir was Sartre's love who has always work with the later, we are also told that on the contrary, she did not toe the same path with Sartrean existentialism. While following Sartrean existentialism, she however, through existentialism pointed out what she felt was wrong in the society. Capturing this thought, Fullbrook, K. and Fullbrook, E. in their paper 'Sartre's Secret Key' explain that Simone de Beauvoir tackled feminism not from an existentialist viewpoint of what she wanted to happen, but rather what was wrong with the current situation, and what she could do for others to rectify it. Simone de Beauvoir lamented that women has long been denied their proper place in the society and that they have been given unfair treatment in the society. According to them therefore:

The unethical practices of existentialism taint the equalities proposed by de Beauvoir's feminism, and in turn, the drive for equity and being externally charitable in feminism, undermines the authenticity (being true to one's self and one's internal desires) aspect existentialism, leaving de Beauvoir in 'bad faith' (addressing societal desire, and not internal personal wants). Yet, somehow de Beauvoir reconciles the two and brings balance to the table.¹⁹

The outer existentialist shell for de Beauvoir, was riddled with flaws and much like crackled glass, fogged the deeper feminist agenda held by de Beauvoir to set out her mark on the state of women and the human condition after the horrors of warfare, and in the wake of a new beginning across Europe and the Western World. We must ask: “What was her agenda?” Some argue her as a feminist. Others claim her historical importance as cultural figurehead in the wake of a global power struggle. Some depict her being a philosopher, so entrenched in academic life she was, in fact, totally blind to the depravity of the morose reality which she inhabited, but never acknowledged. But it is just possible, her agenda was little more than to be a woman, but a woman heard. Against the perceived neglect of women by men, Beauvoir believed women were not emancipated. Rather they were subjugated and enslaved. Describing this scenario, Fullbrook, and Fullbrook sum up as follows:

Women were not emancipated, and this was, and remains, wrong. Women were objectified, and this should be changed. Women were “The Second Sex”, and she ardently proved through her intellect and status, there was no reason for the woman to be the subordinate gender. Through her interrogation of history and her scholarly treatment of politics and public policy, Simone de Beauvoir goes down in history as a colossal contributor to the gender revolution of the post-war period. It is possible no further knowledge of how she managed to reconcile her two life projects will ever be uncovered, but her works will forever be the subject of lively debate and amongst that debate, one thing is for certain: Undoubtedly Simone de Beauvoir’s greatest success was putting women firmly on the agenda for

humanity and ensuring a woman's voice *could be* and ultimately heard.²⁰

To sum up with the review of relevant literature, let us avail ourselves with the thought by Kruks, S. in his article "Beauvoir: The Weight of Situation" Kruks undertake this study by exploring into Beauvoir's *Les Mandarins*, which is a love story narration, we are told de Beauvoir in this book showed how women were treated with indignity by their opposite sex. As Kruks would observe; "Another important clue running from the start to the end of *Les Mandarins* is character's love story, especially Anna's extramarital affair. Besides political activities, social activities, and personal career, romance is another main fun in this batch of intellectual elites' life."

He goes on to say that:

In Henry's life, he keeps relationship with several women: Bohr, Nadine, Norsat, and Nadine again at last. Nadine's life is also full of men, from American officer to Henry, then to Lembert and others. For Anna, she goes to America and keeps her personal relationship again and again. Almost more than half of the second half of the novel is about her extramarital affair. In this novel, sexual relation is a form of normal social connection. It is the reflection of the free sexual relation in France. Also, it is related to Beauvoir's ideological system of sexual relation.²¹

In *Les Mandarins*, Beauvoir wrote Henry's boredom with his wife Bohr and his pursue of freedom in a favorable way. She described with sympathy about how Bohr gets stuck in woman's legend and establishes an unreal ideal for herself based on woman's subordinate status leading her to a miserable end. According to Kruks

“Beauvoir also symmetrically arranged two women who enjoy sexual freedom same as Henry: Anna and Nadine. We can find *Les Mandarins* was published five years after *Le Deuxième Sexe*, *Les Mandarins* follows Beauvoir’s ideological thought in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, which emphasizes that men can be their own masters; so shall women be able to do the same.”²²

As observed from the above, Beauvoir’s *Les Mandarins* was written five year after her publication of *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (The Second Sex). Beauvoir used a lot of wordings to describe from a feminist’s perspective. She made Anna the witness and narrator of the whole story, showing reader her own romance with American writer Lewis. From the beginning to the end of the love story, almost every detail reflects Beauvoir’s life experience. What is different from Beauvoir’s life is the female leading role in the novel is married with an adult daughter. Even so, when Anna finds out she is in love with that young American, she barely thinks about marriage or family. All she cares is whether he loves her or not. Thus, no sense of guilt has Anna ever felt.

To conclude this chapter, it is evident that central to Simone de Beauvoir’s writing was the quest the liberate women in the society. Throughout her life time, she observed and studied with great dismay that women were been subjugated, seen as inferior human, treated as ‘other’ and never given equal opportunity in all areas of human lives; this ranges from the area of politics, education, family, religion and in almost all if not all sectors of human social lives. Her observation no doubt might

reflect the spirit of her age. But if one is to use today's experience to examine her argument and advocacy, one would argue that she was extreme in her campaign for women liberation. One may conclude that she went this far because she was a female and possibly because of her personal experiences and background. As at today, women are seeing occupying different places of authority in the politics. Women are fully recognized in educational career and other professions. In all of this, whatever understanding we have here are based on secondary information about Simone de Beauvoir and her philosophical thought on feminism. Before we shall discuss her idea directly in Chapter Three, Chapter Two continues with a historical survey into the discussion on the development and theories of feminism.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND THEORIES OF FEMINISM

2.1 Historical Development of Feminism

This section tries to look at some of the fundamental historical development of 'Feminism' as a Movement. While it aims to achieve this goal, it also attempts to clarify what Feminism stands for and how it originates. Thus, to understand its historic development, one would be asking; what is Feminism? Responding to this question, Lerner opines that; "The term feminism can be used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women."¹ In this sense, Feminism is seen as both a political, cultural and economic movement. Feminism therefore has its root and branches in different areas of human endeavours. For instance, in Philosophy, we have Feminist Epistemology. In nutshell, Feminism spread around different areas of human field of endeavours. In a more comprehensive sense, Lerner maintains that:

Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. Although the terms "feminism" and "feminist" did not gain widespread use until the 1970s, they were already being used in the public parlance much earlier; for instance, Katherine Hepburn speaks of the "feminist movement" in the 1942 film *Woman of the Year*.²

Beside the fact that feminism can be discussed as an issue in Philosophy, sociology and political science, one central point of view added in the above quotation by Lerner is that the term feminism was earlier used even before it was officially launched as a movement by Simone de Beauvoir. He explained that Katherine Hepburn earlier speak of feminism in the late 1942. According to Maggie; “the history of feminism can be divided into three waves. The first feminist wave was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the second was in the 1960s and 1970s, and the third extends from the 1990s to the present. Feminist theory emerged from these feminist movements. It is manifest in a variety of disciplines such as feminist epistemology, feminist geography, feminist history and feminist literary criticism. To further trace and buttress how feminism developed as well as stating the gamut of the hallmark of feminist agitation, Brown avers inter alia:

Feminism has altered predominant perspectives in a wide range of areas within Western society, ranging from culture to law. Feminist activists have campaigned for women's legal rights; such as rights of contract, property rights, and voting rights as well as for women's right to bodily integrity and autonomy, for abortion rights, and for reproductive rights including access to contraception and quality prenatal care; for protection of women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; against misogyny; and against other forms of gender-specific discrimination against women.³

During much of its history, most feminist movements and theories had leaders who were predominantly middle-class white women from Western Europe and North America. However, at least since Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech to American feminists, women of other races have proposed alternative feminisms. This trend accelerated in the 1960s with the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the collapse of European colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, parts of Latin America and Southeast Asia. Since that time, women in former European colonies and the Third World have proposed 'Post-colonial' and "Third World" feminisms. Some Postcolonial Feminists, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, are critical of Western feminism for being ethnocentric. Black feminists, such as Angela Davis and Alice Walker, share this view.

In addition to this, studies revealed that Simone de Beauvoir who is the anchor bearer of this study recognizes that feminism was used and mentioned even before her own times. This is in agreement with Silverio observation and opinion as she vociferates as follows; “Simone de Beauvoir wrote that ‘the first time we see a woman take up her pen in defense of her sex’ was Christine de Pizan who wrote *Epitre au Dieu d'Amour* (Epistle to the God of Love) in the 15th century. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and Modesta di Pozzo di Forzi worked in the 16th century. Marie Le Jars de Gournay, Anne Bradstreet and Francois Poullain de la Barre wrote during the 17th.”⁴ The point to be made clear here is that feminism has been in used prior to the

publication of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist project. Thenceforth, feminism as a movement has been categorized or grouped into three major periods, namely; the first wave of feminism, the second wave and the third wave. This is what Silverio wants us to understand when he asserts that:

Feminists and scholars have divided the movement's history into three waves. The first wave refers mainly to women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mainly concerned with women's right to vote. The second wave refers to the ideas and actions associated with the women's liberation movement beginning in the 1960s which campaigned for legal and social rights for women. The third wave refers to a continuation of, and a reaction to the perceived failures of, second-wave feminism, beginning in the 1990s.⁵

As evident from the above quotation, the second and the third of these waves of feminism arose as reactions to the previous or existing ones. Commenting on the nature and characteristic of the first wave feminism movement, Lamprey notes that; "First-wave feminism refers to an extended period of feminist activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the United Kingdom and the United States. Originally it focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to chattel marriage and ownership of married women (and their children) by their husbands."⁶ However, by the end of the nineteenth century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly the right of women's suffrage. Yet, feminists such as Voltairine de Cleyre and Margaret Sanger

were still active in campaigning for women's sexual, reproductive, and economic rights at this time. In 1854, Florence Nightingale established female nurses as adjuncts to the military.

It can be seen and read from the above quotation that originally, feminism was born out of the desire to promote equal rights for both sexes in the areas of property rights. It originally argued for equal rights in marriages where both sexes (husband and wife) are to enjoy equal rights and opportunity within the same family. Therefore after, by the late 19th century and early 20th century, it shifted attention from family-hood to equal rights in all matters of political decisions. Lamprey noting that:

In Britain the Suffragettes and, possibly more effectively, the Suffragists campaigned for the women's vote. In 1918 the Representation of the People Act 1918 was passed granting the vote to women over the age of 30 who owned houses. In 1928 this was extended to all women over twenty-one. In the United States, leaders of this movement included Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, who each campaigned for the abolition of slavery prior to championing women's right to vote; all were strongly influenced by Quaker thought.⁷

Following on this development and evolution, Schippers reports that; “the American first-wave feminism involved a wide range of women. Some, such as Frances Willard, belonged to conservative Christian groups such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Others, such as Matilda Joslyn Gage, were more radical, and expressed themselves within the National Woman Suffrage Association or individually.”⁸

American first-wave feminism is considered to have ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919), granting women the right to vote in all states. The term first wave was coined retrospectively after the term second-wave feminism began to be used to describe a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as political inequalities.

After the collapsed of the first wave of feminism, emerged the second wave. According to Schippers; “Second-wave feminism refers to the period of activity in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s. The scholar Imelda Whelehan suggests that the second wave was a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism involving the suffragettes in the UK and USA.”⁹ Second-wave feminism has continued to exist since that time and coexists with what is termed third-wave feminism. The scholar Estelle Freedman compares first and second-wave feminism saying that “the first wave focused on rights such as suffrage, whereas the second wave was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as ending discrimination.” The feminist activist and author Carol Hanisch coined the slogan ‘The Personal is Political’ which became synonymous with the second wave. Second-wave feminists saw women's cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked and encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting sexist power structures. Notable proponents of the second wave of feminism include Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and others. Finally, according to Schippers:

Third-wave feminism began in the early 1990s, arising as a response to perceived failures of the second wave and also as a response to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave. Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity, which according to them over-emphasize the experiences of upper middle-class white women.¹⁰

A post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is central to much of the third wave's ideology. Third-wave feminists often focus on "micro-politics" and challenge the second wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for females. The third wave has its origins in the mid-1980s. Feminist leaders rooted in the second wave like Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Chela Sandoval, Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, Maxine Hong Kingston, and many other black feminists, sought to negotiate a space within feminist thought for consideration of race-related subjectivities. Unger remarks that; "third-wave feminism also contains internal debates between difference feminists such as the psychologist Carol Gilligan (who believes that there are important differences between the sexes) and those who believe that there are no inherent differences between the sexes and contend that gender roles are due to social conditioning."¹¹

2.2 Theories of Feminism

Following the development of feminism, there have been different theories of feminism. These theories arose to speak against the different areas of human endeavours that are perceived to exhibit imbalance relationship between the sexes.

2.2.1 Marxist and Socialist Feminism

Feminists, grounded in Marxist and socialist analysis, attribute women's oppression principally to the capitalist economic system where global corporate power prevails. Many other feminists believe that this form of power seen in the class system is a crucial factor in women's subordination but see patriarchy as the major force behind women's subjugation. As a feminist movement named after Karl Marx, Marxism or Marxist Feminism arose with the hope that once class discrimination is successfully fought against, the problem of sex discrimination would also be addressed. This thought can be captured in the words by Butler in the following passage; "Marx felt when class oppression was overcome; gender oppression would vanish as well. According to some socialist feminists, this view of gender oppression as a sub-class of class oppression is naive and much of the work of socialist feminists has gone towards separating gender phenomena from class phenomena."¹² However, some contributors to socialist feminism have criticized these traditional Marxist ideas for being largely silent on gender oppression except to subsume it underneath broader class oppression. On the other hand, other socialist feminists, many of whom belong to 'Radical Women and the Freedom Socialist Party', two long-lived American organizations, point to the classic Marxist writings of Frederick Engels and August Bebel as a powerful explanation of the link between gender oppression and class

exploitation. To explain further how Socialists reacted to Marxist feminism and to state the position of the Socialists on feminism, Connell submits that:

Socialist feminism connects the oppression of women to Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression and labor. Socialist feminists think unequal standing in both the workplace and the domestic sphere holds women down. Socialist feminists see prostitution, domestic work, childcare and marriage as ways in which women are exploited by a patriarchal system that devalues women and the substantial work they do.¹³

Socialist feminists focus their energies on broad change that affects society as a whole, rather than on an individual basis. They see the need to work alongside not just men, but all other groups, as they see the oppression of women as a part of a larger pattern that affects everyone involved in the capitalist system.

2.2.2 Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism, according to Qin advocates for “the equality of men and women through political and legal reform. It is an individualistic form of feminism, which focuses on women’s ability to show and maintain their equality through their own actions and choices.”¹⁴ Liberal Feminism uses the personal interactions between men and women as the place from which to transform society. This kind of feminism works within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into it and make it more responsive to individual women’s rights, but does not directly challenge the system itself or the ideology behind women’s oppression. The suffragist movement is an example.

Viviani also contends that liberal feminists insist that, “all women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality; therefore it is possible for change to happen without altering the structure of society.”¹⁵ Issues important to liberal feminists include reproductive and abortion rights, sexual harassment, voting, education, equal pay for equal work, affordable childcare, affordable health care, and bringing to light the frequency of sexual and domestic violence against women.

2.2.3 Radical Feminism

Radical feminism views patriarchy and sexism as the most elemental factor in women’s oppression – cutting across all others from race and age to culture, caste and class. It questions the very system and ideology behind women’s subjugation. The term often refers to the women’s movements emerging from the civil rights, peace and other liberation movements at a time when people increasingly were questioning different forms of oppression and power. Radical feminists, seeking to understand the roots of women’s subordination, have provided the major theoretical understanding that has served as the basis for the inspiration and analysis guiding women’s movements around the world. Budgeon argues that:

Radical feminism considers the male controlled capitalist hierarchy, which it describes as sexist, as the defining feature of women’s oppression. Radical feminists believe that women can free themselves only when they have done away with what they consider an inherently oppressive and dominating patriarchal system. Radical feminists feel that there is a male-based authority and power structure and that it is responsible

for oppression and inequality, and that as long as the system and its values are in place, society will not be able to be reformed in any significant way.¹⁶

Some radical feminists see no alternatives other than the total uprooting and reconstruction of society in order to achieve their goals. Over time a number of subtypes of radical feminism have emerged, such as cultural feminism, separatist feminism and anti-pornography feminism. On cultural feminism as a branch of radical feminism, Sandra and Susan write that:

Cultural feminism is the ideology of a "female nature" or "female essence" that attempts to revalidate what they consider undervalued female attributes. It emphasizes the difference between women and men but considers that difference to be psychological, and to be culturally constructed rather than biologically innate. Its critics assert that because it is based on an essentialist view of the differences between women and men and advocates independence and institution building, it has led feminists to retreat from politics to life-style.¹⁷

On the other side, according to Sandra and Susan separatist feminism as a branch of feminism "is a form of radical feminism that does not support heterosexual relationships. Its proponents argue that the sexual disparities between men and women are unresolvable."¹⁸ Separatist feminists generally do not feel that men can make positive contributions to the feminist movement and that even well-intentioned men replicate patriarchal dynamics. Author Marilyn Frye describes separatist feminism as "separation of various sorts or modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities that are male-defined, male-dominated, and operating for the

benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, by women."¹⁹

2.2.4 Black Feminism:

This is a school of thought which argues that sexism, class oppression, gender identity and racism are inextricably bound together. The way these concepts relate to each other is called intersectionality. The term *intersectionality theory* was first coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. In her work, Crenshaw discussed Black feminism, which argues that the experience of being a black woman cannot be understood in terms of being black or of being a woman. Each concept is considered independently, but must include the interactions, which frequently reinforce each other. The Combahee River Collective argued in 1974 that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression. Sara observes that; "Black feminism argues that sexism, class oppression, and racism are inextricably bound together. Forms of feminism that strive to overcome sexism and class oppression but ignore race can discriminate against many people, including women, through racial bias. It argues that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression."²⁰

Also, one of the theories that evolved out of this movement was Alice Walker's Womanism. It emerged after the early feminist movements that were led specifically

by white women who advocated social changes such as woman's suffrage. These movements were largely white middle-class movements and had generally ignored oppression based on racism and classism. Alice Walker and other Womanists pointed out that black woman experienced a different and more intense kind of oppression from that of white woman. Barbara sum up that "Angela Davis was one of the first people who articulated an argument centered on the intersection of race, gender, and class in her book, *Women, Race, and Class*. Kimberle Crenshaw, a prominent feminist law theorist, gave the idea the name Intersectionality while discussing identity politics in her essay, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color*."²¹

In summary, as seen in Chapter Two in view of the above, the exercise has been an attempt to trace the historical origin of feminism as well as discuss some of the various theories of feminism that have been developed to this date. We observed from the above exposition that feminism as a movement did not originate with Simone de Beauvoir whose idea of feminism is the subject of our research here. However, we were able to trace also that she occupied a major place in the history in the discussions of feminism within the global terrain. Beauvoir's feminist movement is said to be among the second wave of feminism. Finally, is to our knowledge that beside the few theories of feminism explained in this chapter, there are other strands of feminism that are not directly explained here, and few out of these theories or types of feminism not

discussed include Feminist theology, Cultural feminism, Architectural feminism, Linguistic or Language Feminism, Environmental feminism, Standpoint feminism and other numerous theories of feminism. In Chapter Three therefore, a more attention shall be given on an analysis of Simone de Beauvoir's idea of feminism.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER THREE

A CRITIQUE OF SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S FEMINISM

3.1 Biographical Sketch of Simone de Beauvoir

Plethora of scholars and commentators has written on Simone de Beauvoir's biography. However, this section only takes a glimpse of few scholarly thoughts on his biographical antecedents. According to Vintges "Simone de Beauvoir was born in Paris in 1908 to a bourgeois family. Like her famous companion, Jean-Paul Sartre, whom she met at the École Normale Supérieure, she was an acclaimed French existentialist philosopher who wrote fiction and memoirs, as well as philosophy. In her most influential book, *The Second Sex* (1949), de Beauvoir argued that women have been defined by men and that if they attempt to break with this, they risk alienating themselves."¹ Specifically, Vintges buttresses that; "following Hegel, de Beauvoir maintained that otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Women are defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential."² In line with the above assertion, Evans collaborated that:

Simone de Beauvoir was born on 9 January 1908 into a bourgeois Parisian family in the 6th arrondissement. Her parents were Georges Bertrand de Beauvoir, a legal secretary who once aspired to be an actor, and Françoise Beauvoir, a wealthy banker's daughter and devout Catholic. Simone's sister, Hélène, was born two years later. The family struggled to maintain their bourgeois status after losing much of their fortune shortly

after World War I, and Françoise insisted that the two daughters be sent to a prestigious convent school. Beauvoir herself was deeply religious as a child, at one point intending to become a nun. She abandoned her faith in her early teens and remained an atheist for the rest of her life.³

Waugh on his own part contends that; “Beauvoir was intellectually precocious, fueled by her father's encouragement; he reportedly would boast, ‘Simone thinks like a man’.

Because of her family's straitened circumstances, Beauvoir could no longer rely on her dowry, and like other middle-class girls of her age, her marriage opportunities were put at risk. Beauvoir took this opportunity to take steps towards earning a living for herself.”⁴ Waugh further reported that; “After from passing baccalaureate exams in mathematics and philosophy in 1925, she studied mathematics at the Institute Catholique de Paris and literature/languages at the Institut Sainte-Marie. She then studied philosophy at the Sorbonne and after completing her degree in 1928, she wrote her *diplôme d'études supérieures* which is roughly equivalent to Masters of Arts Thesis.”⁵

In addition to this nonfiction masterwork, she was also the author of memoirs, essay collections, and novels, all drawing on her sharp observations of human nature and reflecting her particular philosophical views. Always curious and academically inclined, de Beauvoir majored in philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris. She also studied Greek, logic, ethics, sociology, and psychology. In Felman account, it is learnt that:

Beauvoir was accepted into Jean-Paul Sartre's intellectual circle which included other noted existentialists including Albert Camus and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Famously, she and Sartre had a committed open relationship that lasted until his death. Espousing ideas that were considered radical when it was published, *The Second Sex* made Simone de Beauvoir an intellectual force to be reckoned with, and inspired a generation of women to shake up the status quo.⁶

Following on this similar report, Evans explains that; “Beauvoir first worked with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Claude Lévi-Strauss, when all three completed their practice teaching requirements at the same secondary school. Although not officially enrolled, she sat in on courses at the École Normale Supérieure in preparation for the *agrégation* in philosophy, a highly competitive postgraduate examination which serves as a national ranking of students.”⁷ It was while studying for the *agrégation* that she met *École Normale* students Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Nizan, and René Maheu. The jury for the *agrégation* narrowly awarded Sartre first place instead of Beauvoir, who placed second and, at age 21, was the youngest person ever to pass the exam.

Beauvoir herself also wrote her own autobiography in which she expressed her discomfort with the dichotomy been created between male and the female sex. Writing of her youth in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* she said; “my father's individualism and pagan ethical standards were in complete contrast to the rigidly moral conventionalism of my mother's teaching. This disequilibrium, which made my life a

kind of endless disputation, is the main reason why I became an intellectual.”⁸ She stresses that nature has a bias relationship between the two sexes. She frowned that men also see themselves to be superior. Commenting to this in the light of Beauvoir’s contention, Gatens avers that it is the general nature in man that; “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute; she is the ‘Other.’ Simone de Beauvoir links woman’s identity as Other and her fundamental alienation to her body, especially her reproductive capacity.”⁹ Similarly, Lundgren-Gothlin maintains that:

Childbearing, childbirth, and menstruation are draining physical events that tie women to their bodies and to immanence. The male, however, is not tied down by such inherently physical events. In the struggle described by Sartre as that between *pour-soi* and *en-soi*, men are cast in the role of the *pour-soi* (for itself), that is, the continual process of self-realization, or creative freedom; while women are cast in the role of *en-soi* (in-itself), in which, instead of choosing to engage in the authenticating project of self-realization, they consent to become an object, to exist as *en-soi*.¹⁰

Simone de Beauvoir (1908 – 1986) was a French author, existential philosopher, political activist, feminist, and social theorist. Her most enduring work, *The Second Sex* (1949), is still read and studied as an essential manifesto on women’s oppression and liberation. The sampling of quotes from *The Second Sex* that follow will make you question how far we’ve come, and how far we still have to go. According to Marks “De Beauvoir urged women to decline to be the Other, to refuse to be a party to the deal. Akin to earlier feminists such as Charlotte Perkins-Gilman, de Beauvoir

encouraged women to strengthen their ‘masculine’ rational faculties and critical powers, to exist as a *pour-soi*, that is, a transcendent subject who constitutes her own future by means of creative projects.”¹¹ However, de Beauvoir fully recognized that this moral choice was fraught with anxiety, since “women’s independent successes are in contradiction with her femininity, since the ‘true woman’ is required to make herself object, to be the Other.”¹² De Beauvoir died on April 14, 1986. After the death of Simone de Beauvoir in 1986, her intellectual works had received recommendations and many praises. Hence, on this notion, Pilardi summarizes as follows:

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) is praised as “One of the Most Important Women in 20th Century”. Her work *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) has left an extreme influence on Europe and America, and even on the whole world. In this famous theoretical work praised as The Bible of Feminism, Simone de Beauvoir elaborates her main idea of Women become women passively instead of being born to be in this way. This book advocates the idea of equality that just as men can be their own masters; so shall women be able to do the same.¹³

Due to the influence brought by *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Simone de Beauvoir became the pioneer in western feminist movement and feminism research. She was not only a public figure of feminism; but was also a well-known writer and literature theorist who cared a lot about women’s destiny and living circumstances. Among Beauvoir’s many works, *Les Mandarins* is known as the most famous full-length novel. In the year it was published (1954), *Les Mandarins* won Prix Goncourt. In fact, this novel contains the nature of autobiography to a certain degree. Beauvoir died

of pneumonia on 14 April 1986 in Paris, aged 78. She is buried next to Sartre at the Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris.

As earlier situated above, a lot of scholars have written on Beauvoir's biography. But for the purpose of this study a brief of her story has been presented to lead us proper into the study of her feminist philosophy. Thus, in the immediate section we continued with a study of her idea of feminism. To further under this task, we shall be looking at some of the important themes in the treatment and analysis of the idea of feminism in the light and teaching of Simone de Beauvoir. At this juncture we begin with the analysis her idea of intellectual destiny.

3.2 Simone de Beauvoir on Feminism: An Overview

Basically, there are various themes in the study of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy. While this Chapter attempts to discussed in detail some of these themes, it is imperative however to consider an overview of her idea of feminism. To undertake this task, it is necessary for one to understand the prevailing circumstances that surround her development and writing on feminism. To continue from here, suffice to say that Simone de Beauvoir lived in a time when there was an increased awareness on what some women perceived to be dichotomy between the two sexes. As de Beauvoir earlier admitted, she was not the first person to raised concern into the problem of inequality between the two sexes. In short, Beauvoir admitted that for quite some time, she had remained mute and silence to write or speak up on the problem of

sex discrimination and inequality between the two sexes. But at some point, Beauvoir could not continue to live in silence over this problem; the problem of discrimination and inequality between the male and female in almost if not all aspects of social lives. When she could not continue to live in silence over this experience, Beauvoir was therefore forced to pick up her pen to write against this ill. Thus, in the opening remark of her *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir declares:

For a long time I have hesitated to write a book on woman. The subject is irritating, especially to women; and it is not new. Enough ink has been spilled in quarrelling over feminism, and perhaps we should say no more about it. It is still talked about, however, for the voluminous nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have done little to illuminate the problem. After all, is there a problem? And if so, what is it? Are there women, really? Most assuredly the theory of the eternal feminine still has its adherents who will whisper in your ear: 'Even in Russia women still are women'; and other erudite persons sometimes the very same say with a sigh: 'Woman is losing her way, woman is lost.'¹⁴

As noted in the above declaration, Beauvoir opines that she had for a long time refused to write on what according to her seemed to be a traditional and cultural differences created between the two sexes. She observed with great dismay that such subject of discussion is quite irritating to be discussed. She even admitted that even before she picked up her pen, several authors and writers had written on the same and said problem. And that works on this particular subject matter are enough in the public and among the intellectual circle such that, according to her there should have been no

further reason to write on the same problem. She also observed in the last part of the above statement that this problem seemed not to be taken care of; thus, the problem continues to resurfaces. It is based on this that she decided to pick up her pen to join the class of intellectuals who have written on the said problem. As at the time Beauvoir wrote on this problem, women were losing their right and place in the society. The role of women was no longer recognized and their personality was no longer identified. Thus Beauvoir raises concerned into this when she says; “One wonders if women still exist, if they will always exist, whether or not it is desirable that they should, what place they occupy in this world, what their place should be. ‘What has become of women?’ was asked recently in an ephemeral magazine.”¹⁵

In a related development, Vintges buttresses that; “To understand the inner workings of de Beauvoir’s inner psyche one must strip back the layers of her work and reference the marked change points which consequently altered in guise over time.”¹⁶ In other words, a proper study of Simone de Beauvoir’s feminism would be more appreciated if one undertakes this task by taking his or her mind back on the historical development of her earlier background. Thus, describing the prevailing circumstances that prompted her writing on feminism, Marks advances that:

Towards the end of her life, de Beauvoir became less dogmatic in her existentialism musings and sided more and more with her earlier rebuttal to Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, published as *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. In this volume and again in lectures later in her life, she argued for a more compassionate approach

to 'being' accepting mankind as intricate and nuanced agents of their destiny; and to how 'nothingness' enabled humans to live with freedom to do and create whatever they wish.¹⁷

Marks goes on to explained that; "It can be said this creativeness is what allowed de Beauvoir to live her life in such an untraditional way, writing and producing volume after volume of philosophy and studies on humankind. However, for de Beauvoir, it simply was not conceivable to live an ethical life, if the life itself had no rules except for one to do what pleases them."¹⁸ Suffice to say that Simone de Beauvoir's analysis and defense of feminism are further expanded on different important areas of human endeavours. Thus, to take us further in this study, let us avail ourselves with some of these important themes in her treatise on feminism. One of such important themes is her analysis of the Intellectual Destiny.

3.3 Simone de Beauvoir on Intellectual Destiny

The French author and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir wrote novels; monographs on philosophy, politics, and social issues; essays; biographies; and an autobiography. She is also best known for her metaphysical novels, including *She Came to Stay* and *The Mandarins*, and for her treatise *The Second Sex*, a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational tract of contemporary feminism. Written in 1949, its English translation was published in 1953. It sets out a feminist existentialism which prescribes a moral revolution. As an existentialist, she accepted Jean-Paul Sartre's precept existence precedes essence; hence one is not born a woman,

but becomes one. Her analysis focuses on the social construction of Woman as the Other. This de Beauvoir identifies as fundamental to women's oppression. She argues women have historically been considered deviant and abnormal and contends that even Mary Wollstonecraft considered men to be the ideal toward which women should aspire. De Beauvoir argues that for feminism to move forward, this attitude must be set aside.

Having made the above clarification, it is to be iterated that this section dwells on the idea and development of Simone de Beauvoir's Intellectual Destiny. Thus, what do we intend to understand as intellectual development in the light of de Beauvoir? To reply, it is our thrust to study de Beauvoir's declaration on sex discrimination which according to her is being experienced both within the intellectual circle and in other areas of human endeavours. Toward an analysis of de Beauvoir's feminism, a proper study of her thought on the intellectual destiny and her development feminism exposes the readers with the clear fact that the third paragraph of *The Second Sex*, covering only two pages in the French text, is a landmark in feminist thought.' At the beginning Beauvoir starts by declaring "I am a woman," at the end she affirms for the first time that woman is the Other. How does she get from a declaration about herself to a general claim about all women? And in what way do these claims answer the question about what a woman is? Responding to this, Simone de Beauvoir maintains:

The very act of stating the problem at once suggests to me a first answer. It is significant that I raise it. A man

would never think of writing a book on the specific situation of males in the human race. But if I want to define myself, I must first of all declare: "I am a woman"; this truth is the background from which all further claims will stand out. A man never begins by affirming that he is *par se poser comme* an individual of a certain sex: that he is a man goes without saying.¹⁹

Some feminist theorists would probably feel that Beauvoir here turns her back on the real problem. Perhaps, they might say, she unconsciously realizes that the very fact of uttering the question 'What is a woman?' is to condemn oneself to metaphysical essentialism. Since she does not wish to take up an essentialist position, the argument might go; she abandons the terrain of theory for that of autobiography: confession takes the place of analysis. This is why, they might say, Beauvoir never succeeds in theorizing sexual difference, as opposed to simply gathering more or less positivist information about it. Needless to say, I think this is to leap to conclusions, and fairly predictable conclusions at that. I want to suggest instead that if we allow ourselves to be patient with this passage, it will emerge as the cornerstone of a truly original effort to think beyond the narrow choice between theory and autobiography, beyond the dichotomy between the first and the third person that irks so many contemporary critics, and, not least, beyond the opposition between essentialism and nominalism.

Beauvoir herself gives a marvelous example of just such a situation when she discusses the case of an abstract conversation where a man says to her; 'you say that because you are a woman.' Although this experience may be far less painful for the

intellectual woman than the experience of racism was for Fanon, the juxtaposition of the two situations reveals that similar mechanisms of oppression are at work in the encounter between the raced and the sexed body and the Other.” According to Stavro therefore:

Same as Satre, Beauvoir was also against the literary view of ‘Art for Art’s Sake’ as an existential litterateur. She thought literature must involve in politics and life. As a result, her novels can always manifest the spirit of the time and reveal contemporary people’s living condition. As she wrote in the preface of *Les Mandarins*: “The function of literature is to reveal what the author sees to readers. Readers can see their worries and find problems from literature. Literature shall function as a witness instead of encouragement for anything.”²⁰

This may be her idea of literature creation. At least, this is her creation idea in *Les Mandarins*.

Les Mandarins describes those years from right before the end of World War II to early after the end. On the Christmas in 1944, a batch of leftist intellectual elites gathered to celebrate the first holiday after the victory. They were ready to welcome a new phase of the world and the new life they were about to have. At that time, they were looking forward to realizing their hopes. However, they realized the war left them a heavy and difficult-to-heal wound before long. Stavro buttresses that; “During such dark and miserable time, these elites still kept their faith in making progress and passion in revolution. They kept on fighting and refused to kill time with no

accomplishment. They didn't accept to abandon their responsibilities and were even ready to pay a high cost for fulfilling those responsibilities.”²¹

To summarize on this, Beauvoir bravely faced reality and her-self in *Les Mandarins*. She put her characters through failure and disillusion and back to the starting point. The characters in the novel mainly reflect the path of exhaustion - self-selection - exhaustion - self-selection again. This endless self-selection spirit is advocated in Sartre's and Simone de Beauvoir's existential philosophy. It is the reflection of human being's existence value and truly pictures the acts, existence environment, and spiritual journey of Beauvoir, Sartre, Camus and the French intellectual elites of their age. The hallmark of her idea on the analysis of intellectual development lies in her quest for equality between the two sexes within the academic domains. That women's literal works should not be classified as feminine but should be seen as a normal intellectual works like those of the men's counterpart without sex inducement and attachment.

3.4 Simone de Beauvoir's Advocacy for Equal Sexual Relations

Another important clue that runs through Beauvoir's feminist philosophy is her advocacy for equal sexual relationship. Almost more than half of the second half of the novel is about her extramarital affair. In this novel, sexual relation is a form of normal social connection. It is the reflection of the free sexual relation in France. Also, it is related to Beauvoir's ideological system of sexual relation. According to Kruks;

“In *Les Mandarins*, Beauvoir wrote Henry’s boredom with his wife Bohr and his pursue of freedom in a favorable way. She described with sympathy about how Bohr gets stuck in woman’s legend and establishes an unreal ideal for herself based on woman’s subordinate status leading her to a miserable end.”²² Beauvoir also symmetrically arranged two women who enjoy sexual freedom same as Henry: Anna and Nadine. We can find *Les Mandarins* was published five years after *Le Deuxième Sexe*, *Les Mandarins* follows Beauvoir’s ideological thought in *Le Deuxième Sexe* where Beauvoir emphasized that men can be their own masters; so shall women be able to do the same.

In *The Second Sex*, which is the most pronounced and celebrated treatises by Simone de Beauvoir on feminism, Beauvoir saw the question of ‘what is a woman’ as fundamental and very the starting point into a proper study and analysis of the problem of sex discrimination and gender inequality. Have asked this very all-important question, Beauvoir went further to assert that:

To state the question is, to me, to suggest, at once, a preliminary answer. The fact that I ask it is in itself significant. A man would never set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. But if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: ‘I am a woman’; on this truth must be based all further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man.²³

Beauvoir goes on to defend that the terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. Beauvoir also lamented that; “In the midst of an abstract discussion it is vexing to hear a man say: ‘you think thus and so because you are a woman’; but I know that my only defence is to reply: ‘I think thus and so because it is true,’ thereby removing my subjective self from the argument.”²⁴ Here, Beauvoir observed that whenever a man wants to address the woman in any conversation, the usual experience is that they will always ask a question to remind the woman to always remember that they are women. This question, according to her, is demining and puts the woman in a second class consideration. Hence, Beauvoir goes on to write:

It would be out of the question to reply: ‘And you think the contrary because you are a man’, for it is understood that the fact of being a man is no peculiarity. A man is in the right in being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong. It amounts to this: just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine. Woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands.²⁵

Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as the testicles, and that they secrete hormones. He thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it. 'The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities,' said Aristotle; 'we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness.' And St Thomas for his part pronounced woman to be an 'imperfect man', an 'incidental' being. This is symbolized in Genesis where Eve is depicted as made from what Bossuet called 'a supernumerary bone' of Adam. Also, some admirers of de Beauvoir would argue that her view on feminism focuses on creating a world of the independent of the women. In other words, Beauvoir advocated for a society where the women would become independent rather than been slave to men. Such interpretation can be read in the following passage by Spivak According to him:

To become an independent woman on Beauvoir's terms means undertaking an ongoing process towards freedom that has no predetermined destination in sight. There is no blueprint for this process of becoming an independent woman and this is not a weakness of Beauvoir's argument, rather it is the whole point. Existentialism is premised on the idea that "existence precedes essence" and this is reflected in Beauvoir's ground breaking idea from *The Second Sex* that "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman."²⁶

As evident from the above, the argument and defense for gender equality is germane to de Beauvoir's idea of feminism. She calls for a society where women can be given

sense of belonging and self-realization. The independent of a woman; and not to be seen as a second class takes precedence in her analysis of feminism. This is also seen in her calls for women participation in politics. Thus, in the immediate section, we tried to look into her thought on women's participation into politics.

3.5 Simone de Beauvoir on Women's Participation in Politics

As earlier stated in this work, central to feminism is the quest for the liberation and emancipation of the freedom of the female sex among the male counter-part. It is noteworthy to say therefore that the quest for women participation in politics was one of the central themes in de Beauvoir's idea of feminism. One therefore would be wondering by asking how did she arrived or came up with this development. Studies revealed that Beauvoir believes that literature plays important role in helping women to get involved in political affairs of the day. This expression can be located in the following passages as Moi aptly opines; "For Beauvoir, literature was a means to involve in political life. The involvement that existentialism made in literature made Beauvoir insists on the belief that literature contained the mission to guide political actions."²⁷ He goes on to submit that:

This belief led her to express her philosophical ideology and political views in novels. As mentioned above, intellectuals like Henry and Lobell in *Les Mandarins* believe revolution and politics are the channels for them to understand and participate in the world. They hold this belief from the beginning to the end. Henry and Lobell can truly reflect the activities, existence environment, and spiritual journey that Sartre, Beauvoir, and those French intellectual elites of their age had.²⁸

According to Le Doeuff “Beauvoir actively took part in political activities and insisted on expressing her ethical views about the consistence between the self and the other after World War II. She applied those views in political practice and supported Algerian Anti-Colonization War which liberated Algerian girls from the slaughter of French troops.”²⁹ She also sponsored, supported, and participated in French Feminism War. She revealed the reality that the old generation was considered as “the others” by the society. She voiced her discontents towards children’s “the other” status in families. In similar knowledge about her political campaign and involvement, Nye had this to say:

Beauvoir’s unique contractual relation with Sartre and her involvement with Sartre after World War II helped her and Sartre win worldwide reputation together. Most of Beauvoir’s and Sartre’s friends were celebrities and political VIPs. She and Sartre sympathized on the working class and the lower class. They supported the career fighting for justice and freedom. Besides, they protected young people’s achievement in fighting for freedom of speech and encouraged young students’ social activities. All these have brought Beauvoir and Sartre reputation and wide-range circulation for their works.³⁰

From the above, we can see that *Les Mandarins* shows us another Beauvoir we cannot see in *Le Deuxième Sexe*. *Les Mandarins* is Beauvoir’s supplement for her belief or ideology in a literal way. We can also regard this novel as a practical experience in

Beauvoir's ideal. On the completion of this novel, Beauvoir amended her life path more or less and accomplished something she could not conquer anywhere else.

Furthermore, Beauvoir lamented that one of the reasons why women are been discriminated from getting involved in political affairs is akin to the problem of dualism that has long been created between the two sexes. On this note, Beauvoir writes; "But it will be asked at once: how did all this begin? It is easy to see that the duality of the sexes, like any duality, gives rise to conflict. And doubtless the winner will assume the status of absolute. But why should man have won from the start?"³¹ Beauvoir did not stop at that but went further to asked why has men been the winner in this race of dualism? To answer this question, Beauvoir goes back to submit inter alia:

It seems possible that women could have won the victory; or that the outcome of the conflict might never have been decided. How is it that this world has always belonged to the men and that things have begun to change only recently? Is this change a good thing? Will it bring about an equal sharing of the world between men and women? These questions are not new, and they have often been answered. But the very fact that woman is the Other tends to cast suspicion upon all the justifications that men have ever been able to provide for it. These have all too evidently been dictated by men's interest.³²

In view of the above, de Beauvoir seems not to be in agreement with whatever men have written in the name of supporting or advancing feminism. She argues that their supports or whatever ever they (men) say in support of feminism should not be taken too serious. She agrees with some other female members of feminism that men are

deceptive and that their support for feminism may not come from the true nature of their heart. In view of this, Beauvoir cited the above assertion in the earlier thought and argument by Poulain de la Barre, whom she described as a little-known feminist of the seventeenth century. Quoting this scholar, Beauvoir succinctly puts it thus:

Poulain de la Barre, put it this way: ‘All that has been written about women by men should be suspect, for the men are at once judge and party to the lawsuit.’ Everywhere, at all times, the males have displayed their satisfaction in feeling that they are the lords of creation. ‘Blessed be God ... that He did not make me a woman,’ say the Jews in their morning prayers, while their wives pray on a note of resignation: ‘Blessed be the Lord, who created me according to His will.’³³

In the same vein, Beauvoir also observed that Plato in the Socratic tradition also had a similar confession and expression. In reference to Plato, de Beauvoir had this to exclaim; “The first among the blessings for which Plato thanked the gods was that he had been created free, not enslaved; the second, a man, not a woman.”³⁴ Beauvoir however argues that the males could not enjoy this privilege fully unless they believed it to be founded on the absolute and the eternal; they sought to make the fact of their supremacy into a right. ‘Being men, those who have made and compiled the laws have favoured their own sex, and jurists have elevated these laws into principles’, to quote Poulain de la Barre once more. The law, according to her was made to favour the male as against the female. On a general note, in politics, in priesthood, among philosophers, scientists and writers, Simone de Beauvoir therefore goes further to say:

Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers, and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. The religions invented by men reflect this wish for domination. In the legends of Eve and Pandora men have taken up arms against women. They have made use of philosophy and theology, as the quotations from Aristotle and St Thomas have shown. Since ancient times, satirists and moralists have delighted in showing up the weaknesses of women.³⁵

She backs up the above quotation by stressing with an example of what played out in French literature sometimes ago. This, she captures; “We are familiar with the savage indictments hurled against women throughout French literature. Montherlant, for example, follows the tradition of Jean de Meung, though with less gusto. This hostility may at times be well founded, often it is gratuitous; but in truth it more or less successfully conceals a desire for self-justification.”³⁶ To sum up this Chapter, it is to be reiterated that central to Simone de Beauvoir’s feminism is the call for the liberation of women from what she and other members of the female sex perceived to be inequality and subordination of the women to their men counterpart. Beauvoir noticed with great displeasure and dismay that in almost all areas of the social lives, women are being discriminated against. She was worried that women were treated as second class, what she popularly called; “The Second Sex or the Other.”³⁷ Therefore, to launch out her advocacy and campaign against these societal ills and to fight against these social injustices between the two sexes, Simone de Beauvoir took up her pen to speak against it. This, Beauvoir expresses her displeasure on many areas of human

endeavours such as in the area of education (intellectual), equal sexual relations, religion, politics and in almost all facets of human endeavours and some of these are were treated and discussed in this study as themes of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy. In Chapter Four therefore, which focuses on the evaluation, the study will continue with the critique of Simone de Beauvoir's idea of feminism. This will enable us to determine the weaknesses and strengths inherent with her theory of feminism.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Evaluation

This Chapter is a critique of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy. It is the main thrust of this section therefore to unravel Simone de Beauvoir's idea of feminism. In other words, all the various issues earlier discussed in previous Chapters are to be put into a single intellectual basket for a critical reevaluation and examination. In pursuance of this objective, suffice to reiterate that in order to systematically carry out this project, the entire structure of the work was grouped into four Chapters. In Chapter One, the study undertook a general methodological consideration of the study. Chapter Two considered a review of relevant literature; where the thought of Beauvoir on feminism are read and analyzed based on secondary sources of interpretations. This literature review helped the researcher to have a wider scope of knowledge on Simone de Beauvoir's feminism. Sequel on this, in Chapter Three, the study focuses more on the researcher's personal hermeneutic interpretation of Beauvoir's idea of feminism; a philosophical thought which she developed to championed the course for equality between the two sexes. In this Chapter therefore, which is the last Chapter of this project, the study continue with a critique of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy by attempting a more expository, interpretation and analysis of Beauvoir's

treatise on feminism. It is the intention of this Chapter therefore to re-evaluate the salient points and themes earlier discussed in Beauvoir's feminist philosophy, with the hope to establish the weaknesses and the strengths in her theory of feminism.

Building on the above established grounds, first of all, it is necessary to review how the negative citation of 'Simone de Beauvoir' has developed. Some critics would argue that reading *The Second Sex* is like falling in love: you respond emotionally, you accept, you do not carp. Fundamentally, one of the criticisms leveled against Simone de Beauvoir's feminism lies in what some scholars identified to be inconsistency in her thought and argument. For example, Crosland remarks that:

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* a mere confirmation of the inherent contradiction that stems from Beauvoir's obsession with her own mortality, which consequently leaves her dependent upon a male figure. 'From the age of twenty-one Simone de Beauvoir has never really stood alone. The same general criticism which she applies to women at the end of *The Second Sex* may well be applied to her. Sartre is Simone de Beauvoir's most efficacious means of evasion'. The paradox of Beauvoir's dependency is that while Sartre gives her strength, this dependent strength is undermined by the prospect of his own death.¹

In Crosland's observation above, de Beauvoir is accused of fueling a revolt against the traditional relationship that long existed between the two sexes by calling for independency of the female, but she was always seen to be appendages to Jean Paul Sartre. Most of, her intellectual achievements and other areas of her life are said to be achieved through the assistance of Sartre. Thus, one would be wondering how the

same person who advocated for the freedom and liberation of the women's right also derives and depends on men's strengths for whatever successes she made? In addition, this version of feminism that is marked by inconsistency also characterized the later groups of feminism, especially, the Radical School of Feminism. In his evaluation, Etienne observes that; "Radical feminism inherits from Beauvoir a weakness in theory that makes inevitable this weakness in practice. Radical feminist theory cannot satisfactorily explain why it is that from the earliest days of existentialist history or radical feminist history it was men who asserted themselves."² In a related observation and argument, Ciclitira posits that Simone de Beauvoir failed to achieve her desired ontological conception of feminism. Thus, Ciclitira adumbrated inter alia:

This is a citation of 'Simone de Beauvoir' as history; a closed topic, the past that is superseded in the present. Beauvoir's name is not just held transfixed once again at that point where feminism 'goes wrong' in its dependency on deeply masculine terms of ontology, it is also ordered towards masculinity in terms of its failure to achieve that ontological status. Attempting to write with the 'male pen' from the standpoint of philosophical authority, Beauvoir's conclusions do not leave her a woman, but not-quite-man.³

What can also be deduced from the above quotation is that even when Beauvoir tried to write like a man; tried to do things like men do, and tried to behave in a masculinity way, she ended up not been the desired man of her dream. She continue to displayed some characteristics and attributes of a woman. In addition to this, de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy has also been heavily attacked and criticized. Despite the fact that

she was influenced by existentialist ideology, her feminist thought has also been rejected with the argument and accusation that her existentialist shell was marked by flaws. Also some critics believed that her feminism was only aimed at making her a figure head among the women. Thus, Beauvoir was only seeking for relevance among her fellow women. This assertion can be seen below as Ciclitira accuses her thus:

The outer existentialist shell for de Beauvoir, was riddled with flaws and much like crackled glass, fogged the deeper feminist agenda held by de Beauvoir to set out her mark on the state of women and the human condition after the horrors of warfare, and in the wake of a new beginning across Europe and the Western World. We must ask: 'What was her agenda?' Some argue her as a feminist. Others claim her historical importance as cultural figurehead in the wake of a global power struggle. Some depict her as a philosopher, so entrenched in academic life she was, in fact, totally blind to the depravity of the morose reality which she inhabited, but never acknowledged. But it is just possible, her agenda was little more than to be a woman, but a woman heard.⁴

Beside the accusation that the real intention for Beauvoir's campaign for women liberation was for her personal elevation and recognition, her approach and position on the subject matter has been identified to creates more problems than resolving the already existing problem which she met. In line of this argument, Deutscher poignantly sported that:

In more traditional readings of the history of philosophy, the transcendence of the signature alludes to a self-determination and control of meaning over and above

temporal change. In the case of Beauvoir, the becoming of woman as an 'object' of study problematizes Beauvoir's own signatorial relation to the text, as a woman and a philosopher: thus this authorial self-determination is actually indeterminable. In other words, by virtue of her arguments on immanence, Beauvoir cannot argue her authority over an argument that, paradoxically, pleads for woman's authority.⁵

Donovan also argues that; "The signature to *The Second Sex* thus inhabits a position that is in every way derogatory to the thesis. This has two important consequences: first, the reader's effort to cohere Beauvoir from a point of 'origin' is frustrated; but, second; the very impossibility of the self-determination of women authoring their own existence is brought to theoretical consciousness."⁶ Following this understanding, it is an operative contradiction: the existence of what should not exist, but by the virtue of such an existence challenges, not its own legitimacy, but rather the coherence of the framework it is presented within. Furthermore, this position does not and cannot separate itself from the temporal development of its own reading. One can see that Beauvoir's project, like other scholarly projects has received a lot of criticisms.

On the contrariwise, there is no gainsaying that Simone de Beauvoir had made important contributions in the sand of intellectual circle. Her philosophical, political and other of her social works, especially, those of her works that touches on feminism, stand her shoulder high. Most of those who criticized her idea did so out of prejudice and gender bias. The responses and reactions of her critics, especially, her right wing critics, may be popular but however, do not entirely satisfy none criticize the real

argument put forward by Beauvoir's signature. Her thought has received recommendations from plethora of individuals. On this note, commenting on her achievements, Heywood and Drake maintain that; "...as much as closer attention to her other works implies a certain proximity to Beauvoir as a writer; such a response can also resemble tactics of avoidance. In ignoring the 'Simone de Beauvoir' which signs *The Second Sex*, that signature will, nonetheless, remain."⁷ Pateman. in his own opinion, added that; "The responses we have listed are all, in effect, attempts to render that iteration of the signature obsolete; but in terms of dealing with its actual reproduction, nothing of the 'Simone de Beauvoir' presented in the previous section is challenged in these claims."⁸ Pateman goes on to write:

Second, I find these reactions curiously disparaging to the text that has a place in the history of Anglo-American feminism as arguably one of the most influential ever read. In other words, there is a secondary avoidance, this time of the operative effect of *The Second Sex*, as a book, within the wider world. The idea that we might 'rescue' the text by recovering an 'original' form closer to the intention of the author arrives at the expense of the vast amount of work produced in the English speaking academy over the past fifty years concerned explicitly with the problems raised by the book itself the book as a translation; as if we could somehow 'start again', in some kind of pretend ignorance of the tensions and instabilities surrounding Beauvoir's citation in the past 50 years of feminist philosophy.⁹

Most of those who accused Beauvoir in one way or the other, wrongly accused her. Their thoughts and views are beclouded with prejudice. It is either some of them lack

proper understanding in interpreting the original text of Beauvoir from the French language into the English version. Most of her accusers' translations provide a complete invalid text about her true intention and this renders their argument questionable.

Commenting on Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy of feminism, Flax avers that; "It is fair to state, Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist and feminist works almost definitely left her in constant tension. To be valued as an equal woman of thought and learning to whom people would listen and heed advice on gender equality. Feminism and existentialism came together within de Beauvoir and she managed to give an equal share of the stage to both during her lifetime, though she lives on in the present day as a feminist philosopher."¹⁰ What Flax tries to tell us is that it was tasking for de Beauvoir to combine her humanistic or existentialist nature with her philosophy of feminism. However, Beauvoir was able to manage these two ideologies or polemics together. Nevertheless, a different study undertaken by James revealed that her feminism has its underpinning in existentialism. In other words, Sartre's existentialism greatly influenced her idea of feminism. This is captured by James as he puts thus:

In many ways, this dual aspect of her life undermined her statements on how male Psychology should be used to level the two sexes, as her critics and the public viewed her existentialism-laced behaviours as 'machismo' and inappropriate for a high-society woman. Existentialism had a profound effect on de Beauvoir, and on her feminist expectations, and some thought

should be given to the dyad of her genius when we write using her feminist ideologies.¹¹

To drive toward the concluding remark, it is pertinent to say that Simone de Beauvoir tackled feminism not from an existentialist viewpoint of what she wanted to happen, but rather what was wrong with the current situation, and what she could do for others to rectify it. Women were not emancipated, and this was, and remains, wrong. Women were objectified, and this should be changed. Women were “The Second Sex”, and she ardently proved through her intellect and status, there was no reason for the woman to be the subordinate gender. Through her interrogation of history and her scholarly treatment of politics and public policy, Simone de Beauvoir goes down in history as a colossal contributor to the gender revolution of the post-war period.

It is possible no further knowledge of how she managed to reconcile her two life projects will ever be uncovered, but her works have continued to be the subject of lively debate amongst scholars and in the course of these debates, one thing is for certain; undoubtedly, Simone de Beauvoir’s greatest success was putting women firmly on the agenda for humanity and ensuring a woman’s voice could be ultimately heard. This can be said to be the hallmark and gamut of her feminist philosophy.

4.2 Recommendation

From the detailed analysis, discussion and findings of this research topic which has been the task of this project, and irrespective of the shortcomings inherent in de Beauvoir’s feminism, the researcher made the following recommendations that;

1. Simone de Beauvoir's project and treatise on feminism remains one of the most articulate and most relevant works written on feminism in the history of feminist movement. Thus, the study recommends her theory of feminism to the Department of Philosophy and other related disciplines for further studies.
2. Beauvoir's advocacy for women participation in politics and calls for sexes equality, no doubt has contributed immensely to the yearning and aspiration for gender equality, globally. Hence, it is recommended that her theory of feminism should be adopted as a model for strengthening the campaign for gender equality in all organizations and political societies.
3. Finally, the study recommends that Beauvoir's theory of feminism should serve as a paradigm for all policy makers, law makers, government officials and other organizations in their day to day policy formulations, especially, as it relates to the issues of sexes.

4.3 Conclusion

This exercise has explored the diversity of views on Simone de Beauvoir's feminism. To undertake this task, the researcher applied a critique approach as a lens to conduct the research. The review of literature on de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy uncovered a lot of truth and knowledge about her views on feminism. Much discussions and conceptualizations about feminist issues appears in the literature. However, from our finding in the discussion, most of her critics interpreted her with prejudice and bias analysis. They do not offer honest and objective interpretations of

her idea of feminism. Today, the issue of feminism as a movement and advocacy remains vibrant, diverse, and wide-ranging. Simone de Beauvoir's conception of feminism as a focus remains an issue of scholarly discourse. There are more complex issues to be discussed as reading and interpreting the French philosopher and essayist into English language still leave us with textual and hermeneutic challenges.

In conclusion, this study submits that although there are some fundamental problems with Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy, nevertheless, her courageousness and boldness in advocating for women's freedom and equality, no doubt earns her a remarkable place in the history of humanity. Her project on feminism alongside other scholarly works, immensely contributed to the continuous calls on women's rights today, across the globe. Therefore, the researcher concludes that Beauvoir's project (advocacy for women's right) has some merits but being a rational argument; it is not incontrovertible given the deficiencies in human knowledge especially with such a problematic subject matter; the problem of inequality and imbalance relationship between the male and female sexes. Even if her view can be described as merely apologetic, Beauvoir's projects are invaluable but nevertheless not quite perfect given the limitations imposed on human knowledge by nature or what Kant calls 'antinomies'.

Endnotes

1. B. Crosland. *Simone de Beauvoir: The Woman and her Work* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1992), p. 33.
2. R. Etiemble. "Simone de Beauvoir, the Concrete Mandarin." In: *Critical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir*, E. Marks ed. (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1987) p.58.
3. K. Ciclitira. *Pornography, Women and Feminism: Between Pleasure and Politics*. (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 88-89.
4. Ibid. p.89.
5. P. Deutscher. *Yielding Gender*. (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 45.
6. J. Donovan. *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism*. (New York: Continuum, 1993), pp. 200-201.
7. L. Heywood and J. Drake. (Eds.) *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press), 1997), p. 90.
8. C. Pateman. *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp23-24.
9. Ibid. p. 27.
10. J. Flax. Women do Theory. In M. Pearsall (Ed.), *Women and Values: Readings in Recent Feminist Philosophy* (Cambridge: Wadsworth Inc., 2008), p.50.
11. F. James. "Postmodernism and Gender Relations." In: *Feminist Theory: Feminism/post-modernism* L. Nicholson (Ed.). (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 39-40.

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