

Simone de Beauvoir and the Race/Gender Analogy in *The Second Sex* Revisited

KATHRYN T. GINES

1. Introduction

In “Sartre, Beauvoir, and the Race/Gender Analogy: A Case for Black Feminist Philosophy” (Gines 2010) I offered a preliminary examination of the race/gender analogy in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Respectful Prostitute* and Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, taking into account the influence of Richard Wright and Gunnar Myrdal on both Sartre’s and Beauvoir’s understanding of racial oppression as a white problem rather than a so-called Negro problem. I argued that the analogizing of racial oppression with gender oppression problematically codes race as Black male and gender as white female, erasing the ways in which Black women experience racism and sexism – or racialized sexism and sexualized racism – simultaneously.¹ In a commentary on this essay, Stephanie Rivera Berruz asserts, “Works like that of Gines’ ... are of utmost importance in opening a new theoretical terrain that considers the importance of black feminist thought and its utility in thinking through race, gender, and sexuality within different philosophical traditions” (Berruz 2012, 505). However, Berruz also calls for a more extensive examination of the “dis-analogy” between race and gender in *The Second Sex*. Responding in part to Berruz’s call, I am revisiting this (dis-)analogy in *The Second Sex*.

In this chapter I argue that Beauvoir’s utilization of the race/gender analogy omits the experiences and oppressions of Black women. I offer a more extensive examination of how the analogy functions in the text while also providing a more nuanced exploration of Beauvoir’s influences. The question of influence is posed frequently in scholarship on Beauvoir. Some have argued that Beauvoir was a great philosophical influence on Jean-Paul Sartre rather than the other way around (Fullbrook and Fullbrook 1994; Simmons 1999). Others have argued that Beauvoir was influenced by white male philosophers in the Western canon and/or appropriated their work in innovative ways to create her own unique philosophy (Bauer 2001; Scarth 2004). It is not surprising

that the question of influence also emerges in the specific context of the race/gender analogy. With this in mind, I explore the question of influences on Beauvoir concerning this analogy to show where she converges with and/or diverges from certain sources in her own analogical analyses of race and gender oppression. Additionally, I highlight secondary literature by Sabine Broeck (2011), Elizabeth Spelman (1988), Margaret Simons (1999), and Penelope Deutscher (2008) who offer critical analyses of the race/gender analogy and give an account of the insights and oversights of this secondary literature. More specifically, I argue that Beauvoir's defenders and critics here share in common their non-engagement with Black feminist literature on Beauvoir. Put another way, Black feminists who explicitly take up Beauvoir in their writings have remained largely unacknowledged in the secondary literature on Beauvoir by white women.

As a corrective to this erasure, I call attention to the scholarly contributions of Lorraine Hansberry (1957), Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985), Deborah King (1988), Oyeronke Oyewumi (2000), and bell hooks (2012) – each of whom explicitly engages Beauvoir. Hansberry offers a positive reading of *The Second Sex*, affirming Beauvoir's analysis of the woman question, and critiquing the gender politics that prevented adequate attention to the theories advanced in *The Second Sex*. Ogunyemi, King, and Oyewumi have been critical of Beauvoir's use of the race/gender analogy and her limited conceptualization of "woman." And hooks differentiates Beauvoir's tendency to think about female identity as shaped by sex, from her own inclination to analyze female identity as also shaped by gender, race, and class. However, hooks also favorably presents Beauvoir as a powerful example of a woman thinker-writer. Unfortunately, none of these scholars are given attention in the aforementioned secondary literature on Beauvoir.

2. The Race/Gender Analogy Revisited

When I speak of the race/gender analogy in *The Second Sex*, I have in mind Beauvoir's use of racial oppression as analogy for gender oppression (Gines 2010 and 2014). I begin by differentiating the slave/woman analogy from the race/gender analogy. While these analogies are sometimes presented as synonymous, a closer reading of *The Second Sex* reveals that they are neither always already the same nor necessarily mutually exclusive.² The slave/woman analogy is used by Beauvoir throughout *The Second Sex*. There are points early in the text where she seems to be describing institutional slavery or forced slave labor even as she is considering the implications of slavery for the status of (non-slave) women. There are also moments when Beauvoir portrays woman as enslaved by man, enslaved by domestic duties, and enslaved by the body's reproductive functions for the species. Additionally, she analyzes and appropriates Hegel's master-slave dialectic as a theoretical framework for examining the subjugation of woman. But in each of these cases when Beauvoir is talking about slavery, she does not focus on racialized slavery in the U.S. or in European colonial contexts. Even when Beauvoir is talking about the oppression of Blacks explicitly in *The Second Sex* she often gives examples of racial segregation in the U.S. *post*-emancipation period. To reiterate, this chapter focuses on the race/gender analogy and not the slave/woman analogy which I have taken up in more detail elsewhere (Gines 2014).

In Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* an operating assumption in analogizing various systems of oppression is that these oppressions are similar but separate. Beauvoir identifies similarities in the motives and strategies of oppression and then proceeds in a way that presumes these oppressions are separated and/or separable. But this is not the case for Black women, Jewish women, colonized women, and/or proletarian women within the groups to whom Beauvoir compares the situation of the (white) "woman."³ Looking specifically at Beauvoir's race and gender comparisons, I contend that her emphasis on the gender oppression of white women (as if all of the women are white) and the racial oppression of Black men (as if all of the Blacks are men) ignores the multiple oppressions confronting Black women and other women of color (those of us who are brave).⁴ To underscore this point, I put in parentheses (white) women and Black (men) throughout the chapter to make visible the invisible coding of woman/women as white and of Blacks as men that is actually happening in the text. This also draws attention to the unarticulated specificity that is really operating in *The Second Sex* and the ways that such unspoken coding occlude analyses of the experiences and oppressions of Black women.

In revisiting the race/gender analogy here, I offer a close reading of the sections of *The Second Sex* where Beauvoir analogizes and compares racial and gender oppression. In addition to extracting several relevant quotes from *The Second Sex* in which these analogies appear, I also set these passages side by side with excerpts from Alva Myrdal, W. E. B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, Gunnar Myrdal, and Jean-Paul Sartre – all figures identified as influences on Beauvoir in select secondary literature (Simons 1999; Deutscher 2008; Broeck 2011).

Beauvoir's analogical analysis emerges very early in her Introduction to *The Second Sex* where she interrogates disciplines and theories (e.g. religion, philosophy, theology, science, biology, experimental psychology) that have been used to prove women's inferiority. Then she turns suddenly to the application of "separate but equal" doctrines to genders as well as to races (*TSS 12/LDS I:24*).⁵ She explains that, at most, antifeminists were willing to "grant 'separate but equal' status to the *other sex*" and, comparing (white) women with Black (men), Beauvoir asserts that like Jim Crow racial segregation, gender segregation can only serve to support extreme forms of discrimination (*TSS 12/LDS I:24*). For her, "This convergence [i.e., the use of so-called egalitarian segregation for gender just as it has been used for race] is in no way pure chance: whether it is race, caste, class, or sex reduced to an inferior condition, the justification process is the same" (*TSS 12/LDS I:24*).

Some have noted that there are similarities between Beauvoir's analysis of race and gender oppression in *The Second Sex* and Alva Myrdal's observations in "A Parallel to the Negro Problem" (1944) Appendix 5 in *An American Dilemma*, Volume 2 (Simons 1999; Deutscher 2008; Broeck 2011).⁶ Just as Beauvoir interrogates the disciplines and theories offered as evidence for (white) women's inferiority, A. Myrdal in her earlier essay explores arguments used to support ideas of inferiority for (white) women and Black (men). A. Myrdal states, "The arguments, when arguments were used, have been about the same: smaller brains, scarcity of genius and so on. The study of women's intelligence and personality has had broadly the same history as the one we record for the Negroes" (A. Myrdal 1944, 1077).⁷ When presenting segregation as a form of both racial and gender discrimination A. Myrdal states, "This close relation is no accident" (1944, 1076), while Beauvoir asserts, "this convergence is in no way pure chance" (*TSS 12/LDS I:24*).

Beauvoir itemizes several analogies between (white) women and Black (men) in her Introduction positing:

[T]here are deep analogies between the situations of women and blacks: both are liberated today from the same paternalism, and the former master caste wants to keep them “in their place,” that is, the place chosen for them; in both cases, they praise, more or less sincerely, the virtues of being the “good black,” the carefree, childlike, merry souls of the resigned black, and the woman who is a “true woman” – is frivolous, infantile, irresponsible, the woman subjugated to man. In both cases, the ruling class bases its argument on the state of affairs it created itself. (*TSS 12/LDS I:25*)

Again, there are overlaps between Beauvoir’s extended quote and A. Myrdal’s Appendix. A. Myrdal asserts, “Their [(white) women’s and children’s] present status, as well as their history and their problems in society reveal striking similarities to those of the Negroes” (1944, 1073). She adds, “As the Negro was awarded his ‘place’ in society, so there was a ‘woman’s place.’ In both cases the rationalization was strongly believed that men, in confining them to this place, did not act against the true interest of the subordinate groups” (1944, 1077).

Beauvoir and A. Myrdal identify similarities between racial subordination of Black (men) and gender subordination of (white) women – specifically the use of doctrines, theories, and disciplines to prove the inferiority of both groups, the paternalism applied to both groups, and the notion that both groups were expected to stay in their predetermined “place” in society. Also, both emphasize stereotypical representations of (white) women and Black (men). Beauvoir identifies the praise given to the “good black” (man) and the (white) “true woman” – insisting that in both cases these representations are rooted in conditions created by the ruling class. A. Myrdal asserts, “The myth of the ‘contented women,’ who did not want to have suffrage or other civil rights and equal opportunities, had the same social function as the myth of the ‘contented Negro’” (A. Myrdal 1944, 1077). But for her, “In both cases there was probably – in a static sense – often some truth behind the myth” of the contented women and the contented Negro (1944, 1077).

Two additional overlapping issues we find in Beauvoir’s Introduction and A. Myrdal’s Appendix concern competition and the notion of superiority and inferiority complexes. Beauvoir notes that the competition of (white) women threatens (white) men in a similar way that the competition of Blacks threatens whites (*TSS 13/LDS I:25–6*). A. Myrdal discusses this comparative threat of competition in more detail:

Women’s competition has, like the Negro’s, been particularly obnoxious and dreaded by men because of the low wages women, with their few earning outlets, are prepared to work for. Men often dislike the very idea of having women on an equal plane as co-workers and competitors, and usually they find it even more ‘unnatural’ to work under a woman. White people generally hold similar attitudes toward Negroes. (A. Myrdal 1944, 1077)

Moving from competition to inferiority and superiority complexes, A. Myrdal considers how (white) women and Black (men) “have often been brought to believe in their inferiority of endowment” (A. Myrdal 1944, 1077). But on this point Beauvoir

shifts the paradigm. She explains, “in the United States a ‘poor white’ from the South can console himself for not being a ‘dirty nigger’ ... Likewise, the most mediocre of males believes himself a demigod next to women” (*TSS* 13/*LDS* I:25–6).⁸ Noting the inferiority complexes in (white) men – rather than only in (white) women and Black (men) – Beauvoir explains that even in these cases, “no one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or more disdainful, than a man anxious about his own virility” (*TSS* 13/*LDS* I:25–6).

Already in Beauvoir’s Introduction and A. Myrdal’s Appendix we see overlaps in their language about race and gender oppression, as well as their presentation of women and Blacks as belonging to mutually exclusive groups (i.e. no account of Black women). But we also find subtle differences in their approaches to the race/gender analogy. I return to these two figures later, but now I want to explore influences between Black male intellectuals and Beauvoir – specifically W. E. B. Du Bois and Richard Wright. In *Beauvoir and the Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism* Margaret Simons offers one of the first close examinations of W. E. B. Du Bois’ and Richard Wright’s philosophical influence on Beauvoir’s theory of oppression. Describing Wright as “the intellectual heir” of Du Bois, Simons describes Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness “as a model for Beauvoir’s concept of woman as the Other in *The Second Sex*” (Simons 1999, 176). She reads Wright and Beauvoir as holding “a shared concept of the oppressed Other” as well as a similar “focus on the importance of social relations and recognition in the formation of the self” (Simons 1999, 176–7). Furthermore, both theorists use phenomenological descriptions of oppression in an effort to challenge pernicious stereotypes (Simons 1999, 178). Let us examine these connections between Beauvoir, Du Bois, and Wright in more detail.

In the second volume of *The Second Sex*, when describing the experience of being revealed to oneself as alterity Beauvoir states:

It is a strange experience for an individual recognizing himself as subject, autonomy, and transcendence, as an absolute, to discover inferiority – as a given essence – in his self: it is a strange experience for one who posits himself for himself as One to be revealed to himself as alterity. That is what happens to the little girl when, learning about the world, she grasps herself as a woman in it. (*TSS* 311/*LDS* II:52–3)

From this starting point of alterity as experienced by the little (white) girl grasping herself as (white) woman, Beauvoir describes a similar sense of alterity for American Black (men). She asserts:

This is not a unique situation. American Blacks, partially integrated into a civilization that nevertheless considers them an inferior caste, live it; what Bigger Thomas experiences with so much bitterness at the dawn of his life is this definitive inferiority, this accursed alterity inscribed in the color of his skin: he watches planes pass and knows that because he is black the sky is out of bounds for him. (*TSS* 311/*LDS* II:52–3)

Beauvoir then returns to the alterity experienced by the little (white) girl, “Because she is woman, the girl knows that the sea and the poles, a thousand adventures, a thousand joys are forbidden to her: she is born on the wrong side” (*TSS* 311/*LDS* II:52–3).⁹

Readers of Wright will recognize the reference to Bigger Thomas (from *Native Son*) and may consider him the primary influence in these passages. But readers of W. E. B. Du Bois will also hear his analysis of the strange experience of being perceived as a problem or the peculiar sensation of double consciousness. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) Du Bois introduces this concept in “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (Du Bois 1997, 38)

For Du Bois, being revealed to oneself as alterity is an experience that occurs in one's youth (as Beauvoir asserts later), though he speaks of his own boyhood rather than of the little (white) girl about whom Beauvoir speaks. He states, “It is in the early days rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were” (Du Bois 1997, 37–8). Furthermore, the notion that the little (white) girl is born on the “wrong side” (“of the line” in the first English translation) is also an allusion to Du Bois' analysis of the color line, which he famously described as the problem of the twentieth century.

Let us revisit A. Myrdal's Appendix here insofar as she explicitly names Du Bois, asserting, “Du Bois' famous ideological manifesto *The Souls of Black Folk* is, to mention only one example, an ardent appeal on behalf of women's interests as well as those of the Negro” (A. Myrdal 1944, 1076).¹⁰ But A. Myrdal and Beauvoir have different positions concerning the uniqueness of the situation of the (white) woman and the Negro (man) as well as the description of their situations' “problems.” A. Myrdal, whose Appendix is part of G. Myrdal's massive two-volume study of the “Negro,” denies the uniqueness of racial oppression. She explains:

In studying a special problem like the Negro problem, there is always a danger that one will develop a quite incorrect idea of its uniqueness. It will, therefore, give perspective to the Negro problem and prevent faulty interpretations to sketch some of the important similarities between the Negro problem and the women's problem. In the historical development of these problem groups in America there have been much closer relations than is now ordinarily recorded. (A. Myrdal 1944, 1073)

For A. Myrdal, the oppression of Black (men) is not unique because the oppression of (white) women has similar origins, ideologies, and consequences. She adds that there is both a Negro problem and a women's problem, “both [Negroes and women] are still problem groups” (A. Myrdal 1944, 1077). But Beauvoir approaches these issues differently. Leading with the alterity experienced by the little (white) girl grasping herself as (white) woman in the world, Beauvoir asserts that it is the (white) girl's alterity (or the othering of gender oppression) that is not unique. Furthermore, for Beauvoir, there is not a *Negro problem* or a *women's problem*, rather there is a *white problem* and a *man problem*. Utilizing the frameworks of Richard Wright, G. Myrdal, and Jean-Paul Sartre, she explains, “Just as in America there is no black problem but a white one, just as ‘anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem, it's our problem,’ so *the problem of woman has always*

been a problem of men" (TSS 148/LDS I:221).¹¹ Finally, unlike A. Myrdal, who does not use the language of complicity in describing the status or situation of (white) women, Beauvoir underscores (white) woman's complicity and privilege. So Beauvoir not only pinpoints similarities between the little (white) girl grasping herself as a (white) woman and American Black (men), she also names a "great difference" between the two, "the blacks endure their lot in revolt – no privilege compensates for its severity – while for the woman her complicity is invited" (TSS 312/LDS II:53).

As with Beauvoir and A. Myrdal, there are important similarities and differences between Beauvoir and G. Myrdal. Simons notes that Beauvoir, like G. Myrdal, uses analogies with racism, draws on the notion of caste and social constructionism (rather than biological racial categories), and produces a text with an encyclopedic scope (Simons 1999, 171). Penelope Deutscher in *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance* also explores influences on Beauvoir's writing on sexism and racism. Deutscher posits that the initial scope of Beauvoir's book on the "woman question" might have been closer to that of Sartre's short book on the "Jewish question" but after reading *An American Dilemma*, Beauvoir expands her project (Deutscher 2008, 80).¹² Describing some influences as important interventions, Deutscher asserts, "Beauvoir's engagement with American racism, and particularly with the analysis of race relations offered by Wright, John Dollard, and [G.] Myrdal constituted, therefore, a decisive intervention into her reflections on relations between the sexes" (Deutscher 2008, 78).

Deutscher also delineates distinctions between G. Myrdal and Beauvoir. On the one hand, she reads Beauvoir as using a more interrogated interdisciplinary method than G. Myrdal's – taking cues from his interdisciplinarity and also enhancing it by registering multiple voices that work both with and against the disciplines in question (Deutscher 2008, 81). On the other hand, Deutscher notes that Beauvoir does not always utilize the diverse resources of Black scholarship available in G. Myrdal's study.¹³ Beauvoir does not examine G. Myrdal's references to the Black writers – especially writers whose alternative analyses could have called into question Beauvoir's more problematic presuppositions about race and racism that we find in *The Second Sex*.

Up to this point, I have outlined examples of the race/gender analogy at work in *The Second Sex*, focusing on the comparative aspects of Beauvoir's analysis of racial and gender oppression, and making connections with A. Myrdal, Du Bois, Wright, and G. Myrdal. We see these influences in the very framing of the comparisons between racial and gender oppression. We also see how at times she converges with Wright, Sartre, and G. Myrdal in framing the issues of oppression as *oppressor* problems rather than problems caused by the *oppressed*. But she diverges from A. Myrdal's formulation of racial oppression as a Negro problem and gender oppression as a women problem. A. Myrdal and Beauvoir also offer divergent perspectives on the uniqueness of racial and gender oppression – A. Myrdal emphasizing the lack of uniqueness of racial oppression and Beauvoir underscoring the lack of uniqueness of gender oppression. In considering these influences and analogical analyses of oppression, how they conceal the simultaneous racial oppression and sexual oppression experienced by Black women becomes more evident. In the next section I present critical readings of the race/gender analogy.

3. Critiques of the Race Gender Analogy

In “Re-reading de Beauvoir ‘After Race’: Woman-as-Slave Revisited” (2011) Sabine Broeck problematizes Beauvoir’s analogical analyses of gender and race along with the secondary literature she interprets as supporting them. Broeck identifies the following shortcomings of the race/gender analogy: 1) it presents gender struggles as parallel to and yet in competition with anti-colonial and Black struggles, and 2) it forsakes possibilities for acknowledging the epistemic leadership of Black female subject positions, especially in efforts to create coalitions between white and Black women aiming at destroying both gender oppression (suppression of the female human) and racial oppression (abolishment of thingification and abjection of the Black male and female) (Broeck 2011, 181). Broeck explains, “My interest is to engage this transportation of race to gender as a problematic epistemic ground” including “an epistemic default of white women’s interests, in which whiteness as racialization does not factor” (Broeck 2011, 168–9).

I agree with Broeck’s critiques and insights about the impact this analogical approach has continued to have on the narrowness of white feminism. But I also want to nuance to some of these critiques as applied to specific scholars. For example, Broeck seems more sympathetic to Spelman and Simons as sources that explore Beauvoir’s indebtedness to Black intellectuals concerning discourses on race, but she critiques Deutscher as a supporter of Beauvoir’s analogical arguments and one who “clearly sees the analogy of race and gender relations as worthwhile” (Broeck 2011, 168). Contra Broeck on this particular point, I offer examples of passages where not only Spelman and Simons, but also Deutscher are critical of Beauvoir’s analogies of different systems of oppression.

Spelman argues that Beauvoir had the theoretical resources available to present a far more inclusive and nuanced analysis of “woman” than is offered in *The Second Sex* (Spelman 1988, 58). Beauvoir has insights about the multiple positions of women and the differential political consequences of those multiple positions, yet undermines these insights in her comparison of women to other groups (Spelman 1988, 64). For Spelman, the question is not whether these comparisons are historically accurate, but rather that these comparisons obscure the existence of women within the groups to which woman’s situation gets compared (Spelman 1988, 65). Thus, the race/gender analogy breaks down. Simons explains, “separating racism and sexism as distinct, though analogous, categories can be problematic, denying the experience of African American women, for instance, for whom the effects of racism and sexism are often inseparable” (Simons, 1999, 170). Likewise, Deutscher explicitly articulates the limits of Beauvoir’s approach to race, racism, and colonialism, asserting: “Conceptually, Beauvoir does not consider the plurality of race and cultural difference as mediating, dividing, or fragmenting a subject in an ongoing way... as if the intersections of each [woman or man] with race and culture wait politely outside the door while their exchange as “sexed” takes place” (Deutscher 2008, 134). Deutscher describes ambiguity as an untapped theoretical resource for Beauvoir to “think about what it means to be simultaneously raced and sexed” (2008, 135). Spelman, Simons, and Deutscher each critique the limits of Beauvoir’s feminism and her use of the race/gender analogy. Having said that, Broeck, Spelman, Simons, and Deutscher all neglect the Black feminist literature on Beauvoir in the works cited here. The final section of this chapter offers a corrective to

their non-engagement. I present these readings in the chronological order in which they were written/published to show they are not responding to Beauvoir in the same critical and temporal moment.¹⁴

4. Black Feminist Readings of Beauvoir

Beverly Guy-Sheftall's *Words of Fire* (1995) includes a previously unpublished essay on Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* written by Loraine Hansberry. In the 1957 essay Hansberry criticizes the biographical imperative that focuses on gossip about Beauvoir's personal life rather than on her analysis of woman's situation. Anticipating later defenses of Beauvoir Hansberry states, "One may well begin by suggesting that the fact of such gossip about one who does appear to be the leading woman intellectual of our time is in itself something of a tribute to the accuracy of the thesis embodied in the title of Mlle. Beauvoir's two volumes on the status of woman" (Hansberry 1995, 128; Simons 1999; Bauer 2001). Rejecting the gender politics working against Beauvoir, Hansberry asserts, "This writer [Hansberry] would suggest that *The Second Sex* may very well be the most important work of this century. And further that it is a victim of its pertinence and greatness" (Hansberry 1995, 129). But Hansberry's positive reception of *The Second Sex* stands in stark contrast to earlier Black feminist critiques of white feminism in general and later critiques of white feminism and *The Second Sex* in particular.

Chikwenye Ogunyemi in "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English" (1985) distinguishes the projects of Black and white feminism and writing. In doing so she presents Beauvoir as one example of the differences. After quoting Beauvoir's observation of women's domestic work: ("But woman is not called upon to build a better world: her domain is fixed and she has only to keep up the never ending struggle against the evil principles that creep into it; in her war against dust, stains, mud, and dirt she is fighting sin, wrestling with Satan"), Ogunyemi critiques this framing of women's domestic work. She explains, "In couching woman's war in domestic and religious terms, de Beauvoir is playful and somewhat Puritanical; her account does not cover the experience of the black woman for whom Satan is not a metaphysical concept but a reality out there, beyond her home, where she must willy-nilly go to obtain the wherewithal for descent survival as well as for a 'better world'" (Ogunyemi 1985, 76-7).

We find critiques of the race/gender analogy in white feminism in Deborah King's "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology" (1988) where she asserts:

Among the first and perhaps most widely used approaches for understanding women's status in the United States has been the race-sex analogy. In essence, the model draws parallels between the systems and experiences of domination for blacks and those for women, and, as a result, it assumes that political mobilizations against racism and sexism are compatible. (King 1988, 43)

King explains that "Feminist theorists including Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Mary Daly, and Shulamith Firestone have all drawn extensively on this [race/gender] analogy

in their critiques of the patriarchy” (King 1988, 44). Pinpointing the limitations of this approach she states, “We learn very little about black women from this analogy” (1988, 45). Shifting from the race/gender analogy to the limited conceptualizations of “woman” by white women, Oyeronke Oyewumi argues in “Family Bonds/Conceptual Binds: African Notes on Feminist Epistemologies” (2000) that a problem with Beauvoir (and white feminism generally) is that they too often try to universalize from their own experience in which woman often equals wife – the subordinated half of a couple in a nuclear family (Oyeronke 2000, 1094).

Finally, bell hooks has both praised and critiqued Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*.¹⁵ In “True Philosophers: Beauvoir and bell” (2012) hooks asserts, “Simone de Beauvoir, as intellectual, philosopher, culture critic, and as a politically radical leftist woman charted a path that was vital to me throughout the process of my intellectual growth” (hooks 2012, 233). But hooks also notes, “Influenced by the life and writing of Beauvoir, it was essential for me to move beyond her focus on woman as ‘other’ to bring together critical perspectives for understanding female identity that began from the standpoint that female identity is shaped by gender, race, and class, and never solely by sex” (hooks 2012, 233). While Beauvoir was an inspiration, hooks also expresses the need to push beyond the limits of Beauvoir’s conceptualization of woman that neglected interlocking identities and oppressions. Hooks elaborates, “Our perspectives on gender fundamentally differ ... While Beauvoir separates issues of class, race, and gender – a perspective that distorts the true reality of human being – I continually insist that we cannot understand what it means to be female or male without critically examining interlocking systems of domination” (hooks 2012, 235).

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have problematized Beauvoir’s analogical analyses in *The Second Sex*, arguing that her utilization of the race/gender analogy omits the experiences and oppressions of Black women. I have provided a more extensive examination of how the analogy is functioning in *The Second Sex* and a more nuanced exploration of Beauvoir’s influences – noting where she converges and diverges from these influences. Additionally, considering select secondary literature that emphasizes these issues, I have argued that Beauvoir’s defenders and critics share in common their non-engagement with Black feminist literature on Beauvoir. As a corrective to this erasure, I have presented commentaries by Hansberry, Ogunyemi, King, Oyewumi, and hooks – whose writings on Beauvoir have remained largely unacknowledged in the secondary literature by white feminists. There is still more critical and productive work to be done on Beauvoir and Black feminism. It is hoped that this chapter helps to inspire such scholarship.

Notes

- 1 This essay focuses on erasures of Black women and the neglect of secondary literature on Beauvoir by Black feminists. In my larger project I discuss other women of color exclusions from and engagements with Beauvoir (e.g. Mariana Ortega, 2006).

- 2 For examples of how the slave/woman and race/gender analogies at times overlap, see Broeck (2011) and Gines (2014).
- 3 Numerous other groups and women of color are ignored altogether by Beauvoir. Again, I take up these issues in a larger project in progress on Beauvoir.
- 4 See *All of the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave*. Eds. Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY Graduate Center, 1982).
- 5 The translators note that in the French Beauvoir writes “L'égalité dans la différence” which has a literal translation of “different but equal” rather than “separate but equal” (TSS 12, fn 6).
- 6 Alva Myrdal was a Swedish sociologist, politician, and 1982 Nobel Peace Prize recipient (and married Gunnar Myrdal).
- 7 A. Myrdal continues, “As in the Negro problem, most men have accepted as self-evident, until recently, the doctrine that women had inferior endowments in most of those respects which carry prestige, power, and advantages in society, but that they were, at the same time, superior in some other respects” (A. Myrdal 1944, 1077) – perhaps acknowledging white women’s “superior” advantages.
- 8 Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, uses the language of inferiority and superiority complexes and the phrase “dirty nigger.” For a reading of Beauvoir’s influence on Fanon, see Amy Victoria Atkins, “Black/Feminist Futures: Reading Beauvoir in *Black Skin, White Masks*” (Atkins 2013).
- 9 The idea that the girl is born on the “wrong side” [“of the line” in the first English translation] is similar to Du Bois’ analysis of the color line. See Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Howard Madison Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953), p. 298.
- 10 I would not describe *The Souls of Black Folk* as an ardent appeal for women’s interests. A. Myrdal may be thinking of Du Bois’ *Darkwater*, which includes his pro-feminist essay “The Damnation of Women.”
- 11 In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre states: “Richard Wright, the Negro writer, said recently: ‘There is no Negro problem in the United States, there is only a White Problem.’ In the same way we must say that anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem; it is our problem” (Sartre 1995, 152). In *An American Dilemma*, G. Myrdal asserts, “The Negro problem is primarily a white man’s problem” (G. Myrdal 1944, 669).
- 12 According to Deutscher, “The response to [G.]Myrdal is excited and identificatory. She is drawn to the breadth, multidisciplinary nature, and size of his project and states her attraction to the idea of being the object of that kind of extended intimacy with the reader” (Deutscher 2008, 80). As Beauvoir herself notes in a letter to Nelson Algren, “I should like to write a book as important as this big one about Negroes” (Deutscher 2008, 80).
- 13 Deutscher, “Making mention of a greater diversity of African American writers than appears in *The Second Sex*, it [*An American Dilemma*] is a reserve offering unexplored possibilities with the potential to resist and tacitly challenging the use she did make of [G.] Myrdal. This could be seen as an excess to her writing, containing resources for questioning some of her presuppositions” (Deutscher 2008, 137).
- 14 It would be interesting to consider whether, for example, Hansberry would have offered as favorable a critique today as she had in the late 1950s. (Thanks to Joycelyn Moody for pointing out the significance of the timeline in which these critiques were written and published.)
- 15 Donna Dale Marcano (2009) connects hooks to phenomenology through Sartre and Beauvoir. She has also explored Lorraine Hansberry and Beauvoir in a conference presentation (philoSOPHIA panel 5/2/14).

References

- Atkins, Amy Victoria. 2013. "Black/Feminist Futures: Reading Beauvoir in *Black Skin, White Masks*," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112(4), 697–723.
- Bauer, Nancy. 2001. *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. 2010. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. New York: Knopf. (TSS) English translation of *Le deuxième sexe*, 2 vols. Paris: Gallimard. 1949. (LDS)
- Berruz, Stephanie Rivera. 2012. "Ressenha: GINES, Kathryn T. – Sartre, Beauvoir, and the Race/Gender Analogy: A Case for Black Feminist Philosophy." *Sapere Aude* 3(6): 504–7.
- Broeck, Sabine. 2011. "Re-reading de Beauvoir 'After Race': Woman-as-slave Revisited." *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 14(1–2): 167–84.
- Deutscher, Penelope. 2008. *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. 1997. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Edited by David W. Blight and Robert Gooding-Williams. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- . 1999. *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. Dover Thrift Editions.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1952. *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- . 1967. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press.
- Fullbrook, Kate and Edward. 1994. *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre: The Remaking of a Twentieth Century Legend*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gines, Kathryn T. 2010. "Sartre, Beauvoir, and the Race/Gender Analogy: A Case for Black Feminist Philosophy." *Convergences: Black Feminism and Continental Philosophy*, edited by Maria Davidson, Kathryn T. Gines, and Donna Dale Marcano, 35–51. New York: SUNY Press.
- . 2014. "Comparative and Competing Frameworks of Oppression in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*." *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 35 (1–2): 251–73.
- hooks, bell. 2012. "True Philosophers: Beauvoir and bell." In *Simone de Beauvoir in Western Thought: Plato to Butler*, edited by Shannon M. Mussett and William S. Wilkerson. New York: SUNY Press.
- Marcano, Donna Dale. 2009. "Talking Back: bell hooks, Feminism and Philosophy." In *Critical Perspectives on bell hooks*, edited by Maria del Guadalupe Davidson and George Yancy. New York: Routledge.
- Myrdal, Alva. 1944. "A Parallel to the Negro Problem," Appendix 5, in *An American Dilemma*, Volume 2. New York: Harper.
- Myrdal, Gunnar. 1944. *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. New York: Harper.
- Ortega, Mariana. 2006. "Phenomenological Encuentros: Existential Phenomenology and Latin American & U.S. Latina Feminism." *Radical Philosophy Review* 9(1): 45–64.
- Oyewumi, Oyeronke. 2000. "Family Bonds/Conceptual Binds: African Notes on Feminist Epistemologies." *Signs* 25(4): 1093–98.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1955. *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*. Translated by George J. Becker. New York: Schocken Books.
- Scarth, Fredrika. 2004. *The Other Within: Ethics, Politics, and the Body in Simone de Beauvoir*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.
- Simons, Margaret. 1999. *Beauvoir and the Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Spelman, Elizabeth. 1998. *Inessential Woman*. Boston: Beacon Press.