



THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY IN FEMINIST LITERATURE: SEX, GENDER AND DESIRE BETWEEN NEGATION AND NEGOTIATION IN SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S *THE SECOND SEX*ⁱ

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Abstract:

No one can abnegate that identity is one of the most esoteric nomenclatures that we can ever encounter, since it is not attached to specific maxims or determined within a set of fixed standards and criteria. It is an ontological question that manifests its theoretical and empirical mechanisms within an interpretive, integrative and critical status quo. In fact, it is a connotative representation of otherness that questions the self within an emotive and cognitive substratum that deciphers the common conceptual and structural apodicticity. Then, it is a panoptic introspection that deals with individuality within societal disquisitions. Moreover, it conjures up a plethora of fields (politics, culture, education, religion, industry, etc.) and deals with manifold issues that relate to our conscious and subconscious faculties. In fact, it investigates many ideologies of different philosophical thinkers, cultural theorists, social reformers and political activists, such as liberal and illiberal political systems, morality and religion, individual and social psychology, racial discrimination and so on, to create a strong platform for thematic and systematic analysis. It appears in varied simulacra (Manichean, dichotomous, eternal, ephemeral, concrete, abstract, allegorical, literal, metaphorical, etc.) that show up its complexity, abstractness and heterogeneity. For instance, Feminist literature is a far-flung and orchestrated field of study that questions identity, along with referring to cultural intelligibility and the heterosexual matrix. It bases its analytical deconstruction on three critical terms that form its ideational fulcrum: Sex, Gender and Desire. *The Second Sex* is a subtle magnum opus that adumbrates the stereotypical and prejudicial dichotomies that befuddle the evolutionary genesis of masculinity and femininity in the contemporary world. In fact, it is a forensic interpretation that manifests its literary dynamics from three focal points that relate to the existential status of women: readers, subjects and objects. Indeed, biased subjectivity is what urges Simone de Beauvoir to declare the tone of a critic

ⁱ LA QUESTION DE L'IDENTITÉ DANS LA LITTÉRATURE FÉMINISTE : SEXE, GENRE ET DÉSIR ENTRE NÉGATION ET NÉGOCIATION DANS LE DEUXIÈME SEXE DE SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

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who studies gender differentiation to transmit the pure sense of diversity without difference.

Keywords: gender hierarchy, misogyny, structuralist anthropology, sexism, heterosexuality

Résumé :

Personne ne peut nier que l'identité est l'une des nomenclatures les plus ésotériques que nous puissions rencontrer, car elle n'est pas rattachée à des maximes spécifiques ni déterminée par un ensemble de normes et de critères fixes. C'est une question ontologique qui manifeste ses mécanismes théoriques et empiriques au sein d'un statu quo interprétatif, intégratif et critique. En réalité, c'est une représentation connotative de l'altérité qui interroge le soi au sein d'un substrat émotionnel et cognitif décryptant l'apodicticité conceptuelle et structurelle commune. C'est ensuite une introspection panoptique qui aborde l'individualité dans les réflexions sociétales. De plus, elle évoque une multitude de domaines (politique, culture, éducation, religion, industrie, etc.) et aborde de multiples questions liées à nos facultés conscientes et subconscientes. En fait, cette question de l'identité explore de nombreuses idéologies de différents penseurs philosophiques, théoriciens de la culture, réformateurs sociaux et militants politiques, telles que les systèmes politiques libéraux et illibéraux, la morale et la religion, la psychologie individuelle et sociale, la discrimination raciale, etc., afin de créer une plateforme solide pour une analyse thématique et systématique. Il apparaît dans divers simulacres (manichéens, dichotomiques, éternels, éphémères, concrets, abstraits, allégoriques, littéraires, métaphoriques, etc.) qui révèlent sa complexité, son abstraction et son hétérogénéité. Par exemple, la littérature féministe est un champ d'étude vaste et orchestré qui interroge l'identité tout en s'appuyant sur l'intelligibilité culturelle et la matrice hétérosexuelle. Il fonde sa déconstruction analytique sur trois termes essentiels qui constituent son pivot idéationnel : le sexe, le genre et le désir. *Le Deuxième Sexe* est un projet littéraire subtil qui esquisse les dichotomies stéréotypées et préjudiciables qui obscurcissent la genèse évolutionnaire de la masculinité et de la féminité dans le monde contemporain. Il s'agit en réalité d'une interprétation forensique qui manifeste sa dynamique littéraire à partir de trois points focaux liés au statut existentiel des femmes : lectrices, sujets et objets. C'est d'ailleurs cette subjectivité biaisée qui pousse Simone de Beauvoir à adopter le ton d'une critique qui étudie la différenciation des genres afin de transmettre le sens pur de la diversité sans différence.

Mots-clés : hiérarchie des genres, misogynie, anthropologie structuraliste, sexisme, hétérosexualité

1. Introduction

The Second Sex is an introspective and speculative expedition that traces its analytical hues within the polarity of objective thinking and subjective submissiveness to the apothegms of a given culture. It enunciates a new mode of thinking that studies feminism as a dialectical process that reaches its locution and location from the nascency of human existence. Its main declaration is that the feminist cause isn't an anathema to male existence, but it is a verbal compendium that promotes democratic and egalitarian engagement for both genders. Simone de Beauvoir exploits a biological, sociological, political and cultural approach to analyze womanhood and femininity diachronically, systematically and syntagmatically. In fact, she brings us to understand that there is a liminal space or a contact zone between sex, gender and desire. These three terminologies are the backbone of forming a particular identity and addressing its physical and psychological characteristics. Sexuality is a biological fact that determines the physical construction of an individual. It is a genital, anatomical and physiological pattern that incorporates the somatic mechanisms of a given body. In fact, it creates an implicit bifurcation between the mind and the intellect to manifest the materiality of human existence. Both sexes adopt hormones and testicles that link them with the outside world to recognize the self and the other without natural defectiveness. Generally speaking, the woman is considered as an incomplete man or, more precisely, an indefinite obstacle that is hampered by everything that particularizes it. This makes reference to the Genesis story that regards Adam over Eve. So, the man takes the full prerogatives of humanity as he defines the performative and existential status of women in relation to himself. In Uriel's report, Monsieur Benda declares that: "*A man's body has meaning by itself, disregarding the body of the woman, whereas the woman's body seems devoid of meaning without reference to the male*" (Simone de Beauvoir, 25). Then, the woman is regarded as a sexed being that is a frivolous, infantile and irresponsible object vis-à-vis the man's desire as the absolute and essential subject. In fact, this dilemma approaches the consciousness of otherness that materializes the woman and dynamizes the psychological effectiveness of man as a driving force behind the progressive substratum of society. The division of species into two sexes (male and female) is not a clear organizational stratagem, as both of them serve for reproduction in the animal kingdom. In fact, human existence calls for revision of the notions of necessity and contingency, "*Existence has no fortuitous attributes, no content which does not contribute towards giving it its form; it does not give admittance to any pure fact because it is the process by which facts are drawn up*" (Simone de Beauvoir, 44). Then, female passivity and male activity are not a priori doctrines but a social mythology that aspires for finalism and mechanicity to give implausible connotations to life and human consciousness.

2. Body of paper

Psychoanalytically speaking, to define women is to display an unsettling flexibility against a background of rigid concepts. Analyzing the castration complex is delving in the latent paradoxes of the heterosexual matrix. In fact, the fixity of the heterosexual matrix as an apodictic and factual precondition is biased with the emergence of the Electra and Oedipus complex. These psychological complexes investigate the unconscious discursiveness of heterosexuality, since we approach two modes of sexuality that do not adhere to the maxims of cultural intelligibility. They adumbrate a sexual performance that appeals more to physical and psychological desires than ethical and cognitive needs. Then, the heterosexual matrix is a social and political construct that falsifies the clear biological and psychological image of women vis-à-vis themselves and their society. Moreover, it promotes the identity of women in its pejorative connotations due to the metaphysics of substance that objectify their existence with mythic allusions, mythopoeic imageries and phantasmagorical discourses, *"We are shown woman solicited by two kinds of alienations; it is very clear that to play at being a man will be a recipe for failure; but to play at being a woman is also a trap: being a woman would mean being an object, the Other; and at the heart of its abdication, the Other remains a subject"* (Simone De Beauvoir, 84). Then, the emergence of coalitional politics is far away from reach, since patriarchal regularities aspire for negation more than negotiation between males and females, *"officially, Beauvoir contends that the female body is marked within masculinist discourse, whereby the masculine body, in its conflation with the universal, remains unmarked....both marker and marked are maintained within a masculinist mode of signification in which the female body is marked off....phallogocentrism offers a name to eclipse the feminine and take its place"* (Judith Butler, 13).

From a sociological approach, gender is a social, cultural and political construct that reinforces the othering of women in its negative symbolism and discursive dynamism. This asymmetrical contact between masculinity and femininity lacks a concrete and rigid dialectic that exposes the quality of sexual difference as a paradigm for expunging the essentialist and totalizing dynamics of the universal masculine economy: *"Socialization theory is a powerful antidote to suggestions that gender difference are biologically inherent. It documents in detail a series of social and social-psychological processes through which girls and boys acquire a gendered subjectivity"* (Sylvia Walby, 93). In fact, gender subjectivity tends to eradicate the existential and performative status of women in society, as it defines their individual and collective roles in regard to men's expectations and convictions. That's why Simone de Beauvoir claims that we're not born women, but we are rather due to the theorizing of binary, unitary and beyond structures. Then, gender construction is an ontological and epistemic deficit that goes over space and time to befuddle healthy feminist practices as well as strengthen the polarity of source and medium between men and women, *"gender can be understood as a signification that an already sexually differentiated body assumes, but even then, that signification exists only in relation to another, opposing signification"* (Judith Butler, 9). This problem also brings us to question whether we need sex, gender and desire to understand the authentic identity of

each human being. In fact, this trinity makes part of a biological and cultural intractability that expands the mythological illusions and metafictional allusions of patriarchal hierarchy. Gender remains the circular ruin of contemporary debates in Feminist literature, since it addresses the strategies of language, power and displacement to create a fictive construction produced through the compulsory ordering of gender attributes into troubled significations of feminist and masculinist discourses. This point leads us to discover the approach of historical materialism that questions the status of women vis-à-vis labour, domestic responsibility, professional engagement and so on. In fact, women are prejudiced by nonchalance and philistinism, even though they get the huge part of active participation inside and outside their dwellings: "*And more serious still, woman cannot in good faith be regarded only as a worker; her reproductive function is as important as her productive capacity, both in the social economy and in her personal life; there are periods in history when it is more useful to have children than till the soil*" (Simone de Beauvoir, 92).

The approximation of historical materialism deepens its theoreticity when addressing humanity as a historical reality more than an entanglement within the wild engagement of animal species. It's a pro-activeness in the name of an antiphysis against the axiomatic exigencies of nature to evidence the mechanistic and spiritual quiddity of the human society. This usurpation cannot be completely a signum of subjectivity in its operational tone, but rather an objective accomplishment in its practical assimilation. It is a perspective that crystallizes the importance of eschewing the traditional ideological firmness that women are mainly an embodiment of sexual organism as their biological traits concretize their value in daily actions. The woman reaches her self-awareness when mechanizing a transmogrification from her sexuality to the exclusiveness of her technical advancement within the organizational economy of society. Then, the woman can bypass the biological traits for dynamizing an authentic self-realization without being grasped or enslaved by other species. All of these facts reach illumination instead of hallucination when addressed by the value and persistence of different economic, cultural and social contexts. Within the fluctuations of the human history, we have always realized that the naked body has never prototyped control over its dynamicity. In fact, the instrumentalization of the body within each culture is what differentiates the technicality of man and woman especially when it comes to the negligence of their muscular quality. Also, the acculturalization of men and women provokes the sublimity and intricacy of maternity' burdens as the majority of customs expose women to raising and nursing children without assistance or support. However, when society offers the ultimate pregnancy and care conditions for the child welfare, the maternity becomes lighter in its adjustment inside and outside home. Engels perlustrates the history of women within *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and The State* to show up the essentiality of women's techniques in advancing lifestyles and modes of thinking. This can be evidenced by women's undeniable role in agriculture during the stone age. Simone de Beauvoir professes that these primitive laborious tasks bifurcate men and women into two classes with equal farming engagement. This point focalizes the extent by which women integrate spontaneously in the proliferation of the economic societal life: "*the telling of the*

individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of collectivity itself" (Aijaz Ahmad, 109). In fact, the feminine sex gets defeated throughout history when the emergence of private property amalgamates the enslavement of labour man, land and woman. From this subjective process, women become assaulted by the differentiation of their tasks as trivial auxiliaries vis-à-vis men's tasks that epitomize productivity in their mechanistic nature. This point gets strengthened by the inheritance of properties from father to son instead of woman to daughter or to her clan. All of these historical fluctuations give evidence to the private property as the primordial door from which the emergence of the patriarchal family expands and historicizes. Then, it's a matter of economic oppression through which we trace the dynamics of the societal one till reaching the fixity of the domestic slavery as a normativity. Simone de Beauvoir fully asserts that equality between the two sexes should be canonized within a non-discriminatory judicature in terms of rights and duties. For this, the whole female sex should conduct a generic industrial engagement which actively anticipates this aspired enfranchisement. In fact, Simone de Beauvoir views that the domestic engagement should be less systemic and qualitative than the societal one, which better empowers women's productivity on a large, consistent scale. On the other hand, the industry of modern times makes of women's participation an engaging and demanding act that objectively and formally incarnates a new feminine identitarian status. Simone holds the same perspective as that one of Bebel when declaring that women's identity and socialism are inter-reflexive and complementary. This will elevate women from being constantly downtrodden by the hierarchical and classicist criteria that reduce them to the proletariat. Moreover, it will highlight the importance of machinery not mainly as a performative technicality for daily tasks, but as an appeal for the social upheaval of women's status due to the economic advancement. It's an expansion and perlustration of a whole cacophonous issue which is primarily engendered by the capitalist system and its paternalistic regimentation: "*often challenge, their dual-oppression patriarchy that preceded and continues after colonialism.... and a worsened predicament within a capitalist economic system introduced by the colonizers*" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 257). In fact, this idea can be instanced by the Soviet propaganda that crystallizes a socialist society of workers on an equal footing, instead of women and men in their biological differences. In other terms, it's a bond of interest that institutionalizes the private property instead of community ownership and thus takes a critical part in women's enslavement cause. To plumb the incidental and contingent paradigms of such phenomenon, we need to relate to the agential and cogent evidence of the 'economic man' as a theoretical approach and evolutionary praxis throughout history.

The feminist movement in its literary and non-literary model has always struggled to jettison the universalizing concept of patriarchy and its self-reification for better restricting the systemic articulations of the gender asymmetry: "*their insistence on creation, their movement from obedience towards revolution*" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 258). It's a combat against a racist, moralist and colonialist mode of oppression which holds an epistemologically manipulative strategy within the rubric of cultural transcendence or

transculturalism. It's a repressive more than a regulatory structure, which justifies itself as a law that reifies through what happened before its emergence. It makes-believes on its appearance as a historical inevitability by provoking a unilinear and to some extent necessary narrative model for justifying the irrecoverable nature of the past. Some feminists argue that the prejudicial and stereotypical past is the locus from which a utopian future will emerge, as there will be an insurrection and subversion of the patriarchal law for the establishment of a new order. The imaginary model of 'before the law' is always fuelled with a set of self-justificatory fabrications within the guise of a pre-historical narrative that seems vague or opaque in its feminist and anti-feminist tones. It's a pre-cultural sphere that remains politically problematic when taking into account the jeopardy of materializing the genuine femininity or the authentic feminine. The recourse to this concept in its nostalgic and parochial design will immediately refuse the acceptance of gender as a complex cultural construction. If we accept it like this, we will unconsciously dynamize it as an exclusionary practice with different exclusionary tones. The feminist positions get obfuscated when located and rooted in a structuralist anthropology that establishes a gender hierarchy. This provokes a critical displacement of the universal gestures that naturalize the oppression and subordination of women. Moreover, it renders the contemporary theoretical field of feminist thinking a contestatory terrain where gender hierarchy becomes a problematic and normative ideal: *"gender inequality must be understood as the product of a more complex set of social forces. These may include the actions of individuals, but they are also to be found in the expectations that guide our interactions, the composition of our social groups, and the structures and practices of the institutions we move through in our daily lives"* (Amy S. Wharton, 10). This point appeals to the distinction between nature and culture in the name of sex and gender, the concept of 'sex' becomes a discursive formation with a cultural signification for naturalizing the strategies of domination. All of these strategies are explored by the dichotomy between nature and culture, which provokes a relationship of hierarchy in which culture imposes meaning on nature. It renders it like a manipulated 'Other' by its non-restricted uses and thus confines the ideality of the signifier within the structure of domination. Too many anthropologists and feminist thinkers like Simone De Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Marilyn Strathern and Carol MacCormack argue that the Manichaeism between nature and culture typically analogizes with the one of women and men as it problematizes supremacy over subordination for favoring the activeness of male's role in society: *"Taken together, they are a composite woman's story....All of the testimonies are underscored by a movement from girlhood to adulthood....isolated individual experiences to a more politicised collective awareness"* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 258). This mode of bifurcation provokes the existence of misogyny as a dialectic where reason and consciousness are liaised to the masculine agency and the frameworks of body and emotionality as the silenced facticity that always waits for cogency from the masculine subject. Then, this dialectic is an exclusive analytical terrain for mediating the challenges behind the materialization of the feminine entity as an object and the masculine entity as a subject. Moreover, this point dynamizes the progressiveness of the sexual politics which incarnate a discursive

production of nature in favour of an unlimited and unquestioned foundation of culture. Clifford Geertz criticizes the structuralist model in its universalizing and discounting of multiple cultural configurations, which disorient nature from its innate objectivity. In order to understand the historical schematization which has engendered the hierarchy between nature and culture in the name of women and men, we need to relate to an explicit interrogation of the pre-discursiveness and singularity of nature within a given cultural context. Also, it brings us to question the existential inter-reflexivity between the dualisms of nature Vs culture and sex Vs gender. In fact, they unify in reifying a set of unlimited gender hierarchies and relations of subordination, which render the concept of 'Sex' a political issue within the structuralist anthropology.

3. Conclusion

To sum up, the question of identity remains esoteric and kaleidoscopic in its universalist dimension, since we get in touch with a continuous subjectivity that is beyond control but under accommodation. Then, Feminist literature is a simulacrum of global controversies that subliminally bring us to the bottom of a vicious circle where essentialist, individualist, Manichean and non-dialectical regulations are present and ongoing. All in all, Simone de Beauvoir professes that locating a 'sexed nature' outside the patriarchal law is a fundamental project which constantly aspires to think outside the biologicistic terms with an epistemic anchor that perustrates the machination of gender constructedness more than construction on the universal politico-cultural scope.

Conflict of Interest Statement

Me, the author of this article entitled "*The Question of Identity in Feminist Literature: Sex, Gender and Desire between Negation and Negotiation in Simone De Beauvoir's The Second Sex*" declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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I'm Kawtar Ettour, a PhD researcher at the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences of Beni Mellal and a University Professor at the Moroccan School of Engineering Sciences. I hold a non-contingent alacrity to delve deeper and perustrate the conceptual and structural intricacies of the interactions between literature, language, culture and society. I have participated in many local and international conferences that put into subtle and constant interrogation the importance of literature in mediating one's identitarian status in all its anthropological and epistemological means.

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