Proceedings of the 18th Conference of the Simone de Beauvoir Society

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Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Edited by

Andrea Duranti and Matteo Tuveri

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INTRODUCTION

ANDREA DURANTI AND MATTEO TUVERI

Yesterday, today and tomorrow: The legacy of Simone de Beauvoir

On April 14, 1986, Simone-Lucie-Ernestine-Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir, simply known as Simone de Beauvoir, the "prettiest Existentialist" (Flanner 1947, 20), who, during her long and intense life had observed, described, analytically deconstructed and effectively changed the world that surrounded her "one word at a time", died in Paris. An engaged intellectual like her life partner and comrade Jean-Paul Sartre, she took active part in most of the main social and political struggles of the 20th century, first and foremost women's emancipation and auto determination (also through the legal and safe access to contraception and abortion), but also the decolonisation of French Algeria, the denunciation of American imperialism in Vietnam and the marginalisation of elderly people in contemporary societies.

Beauvoir was a "scandalous woman" who used to disappoint the bourgeois conformist society with her independent life and courageous works that deconstructed the "myths" on which that same society was based (*The Second Sex* was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books of the Catholic Church in 1956). However, she ended up becoming a "myth" herself, an "icon" for second-wave feminism, celebrated by supporters but also criticised by detractors, being, in any case, an inexhaustible source of inspiration for both militants and academics who have produced an immense bibliography of essays and critical works that discuss and examine countless aspects of her literary, philosophical and essayistic works as well as her own life. But who actually was Simone de Beauvoir? In the autobiographical book *Force of Circumstance* (*La Force des choses*), she provided a summary of the different depictions of her that circulated during her life, and a definition of how she perceived herself:

> Two images of me are current: I am a madwoman, an eccentric […] my morals are extremely dissolute; in 1945, a communist woman told the story

> that during my youth in Rouen I had been seen dancing naked on tops of barrels; I have assiduously practised every vice, my life is a perpetual orgy, etc. Or, flat heels, tight bun, I am a chieftainess, a lady manager, a schoolmistress (in the pejorative sense given to this word by the Right). I spend my existence with books and sitting at my worktable, pure intellect. […] Apparently a combination of these two portraits involves no contradiction. I can also be an egg-headed whore or a lubricious manageress; the essential is that this figure I cut should be abnormal. If my censors are trying to say that I am different from them, then I take it as a compliment. The fact is that I am a writer – a woman writer, which doesn't mean a housewife who writes but someone whose whole existence is governed by her writing. (1994, 369–70)

A woman writer. This was the very essence of Simone de Beauvoir, as in the act of writing she found her identity and scope in life. And her writings provide a key to understanding her life and commitment and to evaluating her legacy today, exactly 30 years after her demise. This collection of essays aims to provide a contribution to the field of Beauvoirian studies with up-to-date pieces of research provided by scholars from a variety of disciplines that range from French literature to gender studies, from philosophy to social sciences, offering a multidisciplinary overview on the "state of the art" of research on the life and the works of Simone de Beauvoir.

More precisely, the volume collects a selection of revised papers presented at the 18th International Conference of the Simone de Beauvoir Society, held in Cagliari (Italy) from June 23 to 26, 2010, and organised by the editors of this collection, Andrea Duranti and Matteo Tuveri. The Simone de Beauvoir Society was created in December 1981 by Professors Konrad Bieber, Yolanda Astarita Patterson and Jacques Zéphir after what was undoubtedly the first session ever entirely devoted to Beauvoir at an annual convention of the Modern Language Association of America, which was held in New York City that year. Professor Zéphir became its first president and Professor Patterson its first secretary-treasurer. In 1983, Professor Patterson took over as president and Dr Liliane Lazar assumed the responsibilities of Secretary-Treasurer, positions they have continued to fill until 2016[1]. The scope of the Society lies in the preservation and promotion of the intellectual legacy of Simone de Beauvoir and in the continuous scholarly study of her works. The Society publishes a

[1] At the 23rd Annual Simone de Beauvoir Society Conference in June 2016 held in Superior, Wisconsin, a new executive committee was elected with Tove Pettersen as President and Meryl Altman as Secretary-Treasurer.

specialised academic journal titled *Simone de Beauvoir Studies* and a semi-annual newsletter, and organises a yearly international conference aimed at gathering Beauvoirian scholars from all over the world, which has reached in 2016 its 23rd edition (June 21–24, University of Wisconsin, USA), focused on the theme "Solidarity and Social Justice: The Political Life and Writings of Simone de Beauvoir".

The topic of the 2010 conference was "Simone de Beauvoir: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow", a title inspired from the name of a famous 1963 Italian comedy anthology film (*Ieri, oggi e domani*) directed by Vittorio de Sica and interpreted by Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni, which discussed the changing gender roles and couple dynamics in post-war Italy. Yesterday, today and tomorrow clearly represent the past, the present and the future, which often merge in the most famous works by Beauvoir like *The Second Sex* (*Le Deuxième Sexe*), where the historical analysis of gender inequality provides the backdrop for a critical understanding of the contemporary situation of "the intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine" (2011, 281), whilst the awareness of the historically determined – hence relative – nature of social inequalities between men and women is the basis of the claim for the creation of that "reign of freedom" for every human being – the "supreme victory" of full gender equality – that the author hoped for at the end of the book (2011, 766), encouraging her readers to take part in the achievement of this long-term objective (something that they actually did a few decades later with the development of "second-wave" feminism). The theme of the conference was also related to the different research perspectives of the Beauvoirian scholars gathered in Cagliari, which were partly focused on the study of Beauvoir's life and works and of the impact of her ideas on her own time ("Yesterday"), partly on the use of her conceptual frameworks to understand relevant contemporary issues ("Today") and partly on the analysis of new theoretical orientations such as "queer theory" and "post-feminism" and of current efforts to redefine and reshape the agenda of the women's movement ("Tomorrow"). At a later time, 27 of the 47 papers discussed during the conference were collected and structured within the present volume, which reunites remarkable pieces of scholarship from international Beauvoirian researchers, organised in four thematic sections that ideally reprise and reflect the above-mentioned three time frames: the "Yesterday" (part I and II), the "Today" (part III) and the "Tomorrow" (part IV).

A woman writer

The first part, titled "A life governed by writing", gathers the essays focused on Beauvoir's works of fiction and autobiographical writings, here including some of her travel narratives, providing an interesting insight into the strict connection between the fact of living and the act of writing. In her essay "Les diverses manifestations du non-dit significatif chez Simone de Beauvoir", which opens the collection, Triantafyllia Kadoglou (PhD Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) provides a comprehensive overview of Beauvoir's novels and sets of short stories, analysed with particular regard to allusions, "not-said"s and intertextual connections that relate her works of fiction with other fields of arts and thought like painting, philosophy and psychoanalysis. Kadoglou highlights that, around the second half of the 1960s (with *Les belles images*, 1966, and *The Woman Destroyed*, 1987, original title: *La Femme rompue*, 1967), Beauvoir changed her writing style, moving from a more direct, clear and explicit narration to a subtler and more polysemous one, characterised by allusions and a "significant not-said" (*non-dit significatif*) that "makes silence speak", able to render on the page the complexity of real life besides the ambiguousness and contradictions of human beings. The subjects covered by the intertextual "*non-dit*" include, among others, Sigmund Freud and the psychoanalytical archetypes rooted in the Greek mythology evoked in *Les belles images* and *The Mandarins* (1999; original: *Les Mandarins*, 1954), particularly through the main character Anne, a practising psychoanalyst, identified by critics as Beauvoir's own alter ego; the literary description of the artworks of Marcel Duchamp and Alberto Giacometti; Marxist thinking; and, last but not least, the Sartrean existentialist metaphysics that represents a constant invisible element in the background of most of the novels.

Literary intertextuality is a key concept also in the second paper of this collection, "'On ne nait pas femme, on le devient': le devenir feminine dans Anne, ou quand prime le spirituel" by Liva Bodil Kalvik (PhD Charles de Gaulle University – Lille III), which is focused on "Marcelle", one of the five short stories that compose *When Things of the Spirit Come First* (1984; original: *Anne, ou quand prime le spirituel*, 1979), the last Beauvoirian work of fiction to be published albeit the first to be written by her in the 1930s (1935–37) but not released for a long time. Kalvik analyses this early work, which reveals "Beauvoir *avant* Beauvoir" (the young writer before becoming a "myth", still influenced by the style of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, particularly by André Gide), evidencing the presence *in nuce* of patterns and themes, like a feminist view of the

condition of women in society and the "ethics of ambiguity" that appear in most of her later writings. "Marcelle" is therefore interpreted by Kalvik in the light of *The Second Sex*, of the philosophical writing *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (1944) and of other works of fiction like *All Men Are Mortal* (1992, original: *Tous les hommes sont mortels*, 1946), highlighting how the human growth of the eponymous character, constricted by the moral and religious values of the French bourgeois society in the 1930s, is directed towards the process of "becoming" a woman, namely, a passive and powerless "object" of male desire (ultimately a wife), the "Other" of man, who is the only active "subject" and is sarcastically depicted in the novel through grotesque archetypal figures. Love and marriage are seen as deceiving, driving women to aspire to being a pale reflection of man's glory, like Marcelle, who initially desires to live with a "man of genius" and to be "his companion" but later, after being exploited and then abandoned by her husband Denis, a faux bohemian, consolatorily changes her mind, proclaiming that *she* is a woman of genius and that this is her own destiny despite being alone.

Beauvoir's view of (heterosexual) love and couple relationship is further discussed in the article "Simone de Beauvoir and loving existentially" by Skye Cleary (Columbia University), which is introduced with the statement that "romantic loving is, for Beauvoir, mortally dangerous". This assertion, which is argued through reference to *The Second Sex* and *The Mandarins*, has to be contextualised within what Cleary denominates Beauvoir's "philosophy of loving", which identifies seven "deadly sins" (not in a religious meaning) of inauthentic love, namely, behaviours that result in the sacrifice of freedom and independence of the female partner and to the limitation of her opportunities of fulfilment as a human being. The "deadly sins", analysed through the "case study" of the couples in *The Mandarins*, include, for example, "idolising and subordinating to a lover", "possessing and dominating a lover", "devoting oneself to a lover" and "believing in destiny"; in brief, giving up one's own happiness and identity for the sake of the lover. On the contrary, in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir states that

> Authentic love must be founded on reciprocal recognition of two freedoms; each lover would then experience himself as himself and as the other: neither would abdicate his transcendence, they would not mutilate themselves; together they would both reveal values and ends in the world (2011, 706).

Cleary then debates the "metaphysical utopia of authentic loving" in the light of contemporary post-feminist society, evidencing both the merits

and the limits of Beauvoir's view in the current context characterised by greater gender and economic equality between men and women, in which the balances in couples' power struggles are rather more fluid.

Probably the most enduring love story Beauvoir ever lived was that with the act of writing something that she considered essential to define her own identity ("*je suis une femme écrivain*"). But *what* and *who* is a writer, according to her? And what is the social role of the writer? The chapter "L'êthos de l'écrivain chez Simone de Beauvoir : empreinte théorique et ambiguïtés" by Delphine Nicolas-Pierre (Paris-Sorbonne University) attempts to answer these questions by examining Beauvoir's concept of being a writer – better, an *engaged* writer – and the correlated ethical issues, tracing the development of this idea from her early writings to the post-World War II period. Yet, in the *Cahiers de jeunesse* (her diaries written between 1926 and 1930 and first published in 2008), indeed, Beauvoir asked herself questions about the role of the writer and the "value" of each literary work, both in the more common meaning of "artistic quality" and in the less immediate sense of "ethical value" with regard to the historical period in which it was written. In the aftermath of the war, Beauvoir's discourse went further thanks to a greater awareness of the historicity of the individual person (and, therefore, of the writer), who belongs to a collective history that has shaped its development as a human being in relation to the social, economic and cultural influences it was exposed to. However, according to Beauvoir, historicity works both ways as every person has a little responsibility in shaping the time it lives in (a theory that was formulated in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 2000, original: *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, 1947). Nicolas-Pierre suggests that the purpose of "taking responsibility" by means of writing paved the way to the elaboration, since the 1940s, of Beauvoir's concept of the "metaphysical novel", an intersection between (existentialist) philosophy and pure literature that reconnects the individual in its totality to the overall totality of the world that surrounds it and that, differently from a thesis novel, is not aimed at "teaching a lesson" to the reader but at reproducing the sense of human experience with its complexities and ambiguities (in a philosophical meaning) but without a univocal moral and semantic interpretation of the experience itself.

The chapter "Troublesome translations and elusive allusions in Beauvoir's Diary of a Philosophy Student", written by Barbara Klaw (Northern Kentucky University), is focused on the everything but simple task of translating into American English the *Cahiers* (with the first volume, published in 2006 as *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, covering the years 1926–27) in order to render the most authentic meaning of

Beauvoir's youth diary into the target language, starting from the original notebooks held at the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, still unpublished in France at the time. Major problems concerned, for example, the research of "the most fitting interpretation and translation for one ambiguous reference involving a proper name" and the rendition of "Beauvoir's use of the French historic present into English". Other troubles regarded the need of "avoiding any terms that will imply philosophy where it is not implied" and finding the terms that "might puzzle the average American reader", providing annotations able to clarify them. The publication of the French critical edition of the *Cahiers* in 2008, edited by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, further complicated the picture of the American translation as several changes occurred within the text in comparison with the approved transcription of the diaries used by Klaw for the 2006 edition. For example, the spelling of names, punctuation and the transcription of entire words are varied, according to Klaw, and these differences have been considered by her in the ongoing translation of the remaining part of the diaries (years 1928–30), which are to be published as volume 2 of the *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, and in the review and re-edition of the volume 1.

Beauvoir's autobiographical writings are also discussed by Tiphaine Martin (PhD Paris Diderot University – Paris 7) in her chapter "Faim et politique. La nourriture dans le recits de voyages autobiographiques beauvoiriens", which provides an original perspective on the life and the literary works of Beauvoir seen through the lens of her relationship with food and nourishment. Her great appetite since her childhood years provides an effective metaphor for her insatiable hunger for life, for the real and tangible universe, counterposed to the immaterial world of religious transcendence. Martin writes that she effectively ate the "forbidden fruit" of knowledge, becoming an atheist, firmly grounded on the earth. Furthermore, she evidences that, besides being a metaphor for the desire to live, food and nutrition also represent a realm of struggle for Beauvoir's emancipation from the "natural destiny" and the associated practices of her own gender and social class (bourgeoisie), whose customs are decisively rejected by her. She spent the least amount of time in the kitchen (a place strictly connected to the myth of the "angel of the heart") and acquired the habit of eating out at restaurants, occupying a space traditionally reserved to men and enjoying intellectual conversations during meals. Beyond the metaphor, the study also analyses the description of food in Beauvoir's travel narratives, which provided the traveller with a sensorial and physical experience of the visited country,

and the discourse on "hunger and politics", which is focused on the control of the masses by means of rationing food.

The following two studies, which conclude the first part of the book, explore Beauvoir's approach towards the non-Western, extra-European world, one of the least discussed – yet no less interesting – topics in the field of Beauvoirian studies. Andrea Duranti (PhD University of Cagliari), in his chapter "The 'Orient' *par* Beauvoir: travel memories and anti-colonial issues" tries to define what the "Orient" – broadly intended (here including not only Asia but also French colonial North Africa) – meant for Beauvoir in the light of Edward Said's definition of "Orientalism" (1994), which considers the image of the East as a Western construction. She described her experience of the Orient both in her autobiography (the 1966 journey to Japan is depicted in the fifth chapter of *All Said and Done*, 1974; original: *Tout compte fait*, 1972) and in monographs like *The Long March* (1957; original: *La longue marche*, 1957), dedicated to Maoist China. Duranti states that Simone de Beauvoir was certainly not an "Orientalist" in the sense of being a scholar of Oriental studies (as she herself admitted in the introduction to *The Long March*), and this fact emerges in the imperfect understanding of the real conditions existing in the countries she visited, but she was indeed an "Orientalist" from a Saidian point of view as she used to project her desire for social change onto far and someway different lands considered fertile ideological battlefields for progress, egalitarianism and freedom. This is particularly true with regard to her Chinese travel diary, which, while praising the progressive achievements of the communist revolution, indulgently ignores the authoritarian and repressive nature of the regime and the enduring poverty and inequalities among the population. Also, the Maghreb and South-Eastern Asia were part of this ideal "battlefield" as Beauvoir took part, at her own risk, in anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, firstly supporting the cause of Djamila Boupacha, a liaison agent of the Front de Liberation Nationale who had been imprisoned, tortured and raped by members of the French colonial army, by writing the pamphlet *Djamila Boupacha* (1962) together with the lawyer Gisèle Halimi, and then adhering in 1967 to the project of the "Russell-Sartre Tribunal" aimed at judging the American war crimes in Vietnam.

Beauvoir "orientalised" also French colonial sub-Saharan Africa when she visited it with Sartre in 1950 on the suggestion of the ethnologist Michel Leiris, who had praised the anti-colonial ferment growing there in the after-war period. The story of what can be defined as a "missed encounter" is told by Éric C.G. Levéel (University of Stellenbosch) in the chapter "Tristes Tropiques. Simone de Beauvoir et l'Afrique: le rendez-

vous manqué". As Levéel remarks, "Le système de pensée de Simone de Beauvoir est fondamentalement européen et de culture classique: ses références sont solidement ancrées sur son continent de naissance", and the way she looked at Africa and the Africans – namely as a European not immune from Eurocentric prejudices – compromised a proper understanding of what she experienced during this journey that took her from Gao and Bamako (nowadays Mali) to Dakar (Senegal). Being more interested in the prospectively revolutionary urban proletariat than in the "underdeveloped" rural social classes (living in an "out of time" countryside), she did not realise that the urbanisation had occurred at the expense of the people that lived in the countryside, were dispossessed of their land and forced to move to the cities, and who were far more numerous than the minoritarian industrial working class. She also had a contemptuous attitude towards African traditions and morals (sometimes the real ones, other times the imagined ones like cannibalism, labelled as "barbarian"). Levéel provides an explanation of Beauvoir's approach, relating it, on the one hand, to the paternalism towards the "South of the world" deriving partly from her own education, and in part from the influence of the primitivism of the French school of ethnology and anthropology of the 1930s; on the other hand, it should be connected with the Marxist view of a possible proletarian revolution within an urbanised context, leaving aside the backward countryside.

Existentialism and philosophical issues

Besides being a Prix Goncourt-winning writer, Beauvoir was also a key figure of the French Existentialist movement, and her theoretical works are examined in the second section of the book, "Philosophy according to Beauvoir". In her essay "Ethics of ambiguity and the formation of the subject in contemporary society", Mariolina Graziosi (University of Milan) reflects on Beauvoir's concept of the birth of the "ethical person" through a process of transcendence that starts with the will to be free, a desire that expresses itself with the act of being engaged in the world in order to transform it and the person herself. Graziosi analyses this idea as it is expressed in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and wonders whether freedom is an ontological or a social condition, stating that for Beauvoir, the act of freedom represents an act of rebellion against "facticity", namely, the historical situation in which the individual is immerged, and it implies a constant process of questions and answers about the meaning of "existence" (a concept that does not merely coincide with "life"). From the acceptance of this process as an essential aspect of

existence, the human being can find joy, which represents the main quality of freedom and an engaged and meaningful life. The essay then considers some works of fiction with regard to this ethical discourse as literature was used by Beauvoir to further explore philosophical ideas. *The Blood of Others* (1983, original: *Le Sang des autres*, 1945), *All Men Are Mortal* and *The Useless Mouths* (2011a, original: *Les Bouches Inutiles*, 1945) provide, indeed, interesting examples of "ethical individuals" involved in existentialist choices and the decision of being free and deciding their own destiny in a social context that sacrifices the individual to the collective well-being. And, according to Graziosi, the relevance of Beauvoir's thinking for 21st-century society, characterised by a plurality of systems of values in which identity is "no longer based on a fixed system of roles, but is the result of a narration created by the individual himself", lies in the proposal of a true individualism "in which the relationship toward the other is at the centre and the goal of auto realisation is connected to the goal of creating a better society: a society of free individuals".

"Beauvoir. Memory and aesthetic reception" by Magda Guadalupe Dos Santos (Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais) aims at providing an interpretation, in the light of aesthetics, of the Beauvoirian autobiographical writings, investigating the impact of her works on the traditional system of philosophical reflection and explaining the longevity of her memoirs. The study proceeds on three levels of analysis and interpretation. The first is conceptual, and regards the problematisation of Beauvoir's autobiographic texts in relation to memory and aesthetic reception; the second concerns what Dos Santos considers the main character of Beauvoir's philosophic-literary texts, namely, the feminine, in its dimension of subjectivity and alterity; the third and last one, constructed as a dialectical interconnection of the first two levels, stands up for the idea that the feminine gives the necessary bond to the text and its readers, as well as to Beauvoir and the text. This allows the creation of a proper identity, the one of a philosopher of the 20th century, capable of reading and writing about its own time. In these interpretative levels, literature and philosophy follow a common path in a dialogic way. In this way, Dos Santos evidences the weak points of the language and the meaning of the human adventure itself, which finds in the 20th century a historic horizon open to questioning. Indeed, Beauvoir opens space for new paths of reflection. These questions come to us as a discourse on a time which is ours and another which is not, something that displaces the accounts of Beauvoir and makes from its "history a reality not finished, what it is not".

Laura Piccioni (University "Carlo Bo" – Urbino), in "Simone de Beauvoir, une idée de morale", focuses on the development of Beauvoir's conception of morals and on her relevance in the history of political thinking in the period between the end of the Second World War and the outbreak of the Cold War, evidencing the importance (and autonomy with respect to Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy) of her intellectual elaboration, able to interact profitably with the issues of cultural revitalisation that were growing in that same period throughout Europe, especially in Italy. In her essay, Piccioni remarks on the experiential and antispeculative dimension of Beauvoir's thinking and the emergence of an original existential phenomenology rooted in real life, which is not constricted to the traditional philosophical frames (like the debate between idealism and materialism) and expresses a will of reinvent the rules and reasons of life.

Another Italian scholar, Nadia Santoro (PhD University of Calabria), deepens the discourse on the concreteness of the Beauvoirian philosophy and its bond with the experiential dimension through an analysis of the concept of the female body and its political value in the realm of feminism. In "Simone de Beauvoir: sexed thought and corporeal politics", Santoro goes through the genesis of *The Second Sex*, pointing out the weaving of autobiographical materials and the role of philosophy as self-narration within a thick conceptual framework. She also considers how Beauvoir's core theories were adopted and further developed by feminist intellectuals like, among others, Luce Irigaray, Toril Moi and Judith Butler, with a focus on the Italian thought of sexual difference, "the philosophical practice that strives to connect words and bodies and that criticises traditional conceptual paradigms in the light of the living knowledge of experience". The "philosophical journey" across the reception of Beauvoirian thinking provides a comprehensive overview on the intellectual debate on biological body and subjectivity, and on the dialectic between the "subject" and the "Other", between master and slave. On this regard, Santoro evidences that Beauvoir was "one of the first feminist philosophers to have dealt with Hegel's philosophy in her attempt to explain Woman's status as the Other", and explains how this particular point was reprised and reworked by Butler and Italian intellectuals like Wanda Tommasi.

The relevance of Beauvoir and, at the same time, the lack of adequate recognition of her importance in the history of contemporary philosophy is discussed by Eva Bahovec (University of Ljubljana) in the chapter "Between Lévi-Strauss and Lacan. Why is there still no place for Simone de Beauvoir in the 'French philosophical moment'?" At the beginning of her essay, Bahovec provocatively questions: "Why is there no female

Plato, Descartes or Kant? […] why is there no *great* woman philosopher that could be put into the big tradition, known from every textbook?" In the context of this question, Beauvoir is then placed in the framework of Alain Badiou's analysis of "The Adventure of French Philosophy" (2012) and of philosophical "greatness", focusing on Beauvoir's absence and exclusion from it. The paper concentrates on explaining the reasons Beauvoir should actually be included (according to Badiou's own criteria) in this theory. For this purpose, Bahovec provides a detailed analysis of Beauvoir's reading of Marx and Freud as it emerges in *The Second Sex*, focusing on their pivotal role in the conceptualisation of the book (something that Beauvoir seemed to share with other French philosophers of her time). Bahovec concludes by stating that, firstly, there is no substantial reason for excluding Beauvoir from the history of the "French philosophical moment", and secondly, that by defining the category of "the woman" the way she did, Beauvoir has actually contributed a lot to the "greatness" of contemporary French philosophy.

Making sense of a complex reality

"Reading Beauvoir to understand a complicated world", the third part of the present volume, includes a series of essays that make use of Beauvoirian theories to analyse contemporary problems, also connecting and comparing them with the methodologies of social sciences. The first chapter of the section, "150 ans de femmes italiennes: mais qui sont-elles vraiment? Du Code de la famille de 1865 aux escorts d'aujourd'hui" by Matteo Tuveri (independent researcher), is a case study that applies the theories of *The Second Sex* to an analysis of the condition of women in Italy since the approval of the (strongly patriarchal) family code in the post-unitarian period to the debasement of the female body in the contemporary age, which has revived the feminist movement in defence of the dignity of the *donne italiane* through the movement *Se non ora quando?* ("if not now, when?"). Tuveri refers to some real figureheads of the Italian culture involved in the discussion of the social role of women, like the feminist Anna Maria Mozzoni, the writers Aldo Busi, Lorella Zanardo, Elena Gianini Belotti and Loredana Lipperini, and, last but not least, the Sardinian intellectual Antonio Gramsci. The author also tries to outline a comparison between the view of the exploitation of women labour in Italy in the first part of the 20th century, discussed by Mozzoni and Anna Kuliscioff, and the treatment of the same argument in *The Second Sex*. Other issues considered by Tuveri, through a continuous dialogue between the Beauvoirian writings and those of the Italian

feminists, regard divorce and equality in marriage, the struggle for the legalisation of abortion and contraception and the influence of the Catholic Church on the endurance of the traditional role of women in the country. Relevant new problems presented in the chapter concern the misrepresentation of women on Italian television through the "commercialisation" of the female body and the emergence of political scandals connected with high-class prostitution.

Another "country study" that makes use of Beauvoirian conceptual frameworks to analyse the female condition, this time with regard to South Africa, is provided by Chet Fransch (University of Stellenbosch) in his chapter "The reading of Simone de Beauvoir's sexual violence in marriage within the changing climate of South Africa, c. 1948-2007". Fransch reports that legal reforms on sexual violence and marriage have undergone several permutations in the South African context. Not only have legally recognised marriages become more inclusive but the limited recognition of traditional marriages has meant that more couples are protected by legislation, which, amongst other protectionist policies, entails greater legal recourse for any form of sexual violence or rape within marriage. The legal framework, however, does not automatically curtail societal views and attitudes towards gender power relations, and power rape in particular. Across his study, Fransch applies Simone de Beauvoir's theory on violence within marriage to specific people, situations and circumstances in order to foreground the changing nature of the legal and social views on marriage and sexual violence in the South African context from 1949 to 2010. He also argues that Beauvoir's philosophy can be applied in varying forms and within certain contexts upon the various "tribes" that make up the South African nation by using *The Second Sex* as a literary study in which the "literary truth" can enhance the historical understanding of sexuality and violence in South Africa.

Another contemporary problem, the tragedy of the "illegal" immigrants that lose their lives in their attempt to cross the Mediterranean from Morocco to Europe, dreaming of a better existence, is considered by Catherine Naji (independent researcher) in the light of a work of Simone de Beauvoir, namely *The Useless Mouths*, her only theatrical play. The chapter "'The useless mouths' desiring" arises from a personal experience of the author, who, while she was working on the English translation of Beauvoir's play, came across the dead body of a young woman that had been thrown up by the waves onto a deserted beach in Morocco after a failed attempt to flee the conditions in her native country. Naji writes that she was

> suddenly struck by the relevance of Simone de Beauvoir's play to this event, in particular to the decision that this young woman had taken […] What struck me was the fact that when she set out she was like one of the people of Vaucelles, the town in Simone de Beauvoir's play, one of its "useless mouths", a group deemed to be useless and therefore unworthy of being fed from the available scarce food and who like them had expressed her essential humanity in a collective enterprise of risking her life to gain her life. Seen through this lens, she was no longer a victim but an agent who had made a choice and taken control of her destiny, not knowing whether the result would be life or death.

The author of the chapter tries to give a voice to that silent body, which she names "Hayat" (Life, in Arabic), making her a mouthpiece for the life stories of the many victims of clandestine immigration, stuck at the crossroads of the past, present and future: projecting themselves into the future, escaping from a dramatic past, but presently bogged down in a no man's land. Naji's narration intertwines with Beauvoir's play and actualises its meaning, demonstrating its relevance for the modern reader.

The contemporary relevance of Simone de Beauvoir emerges also with regard to social sciences, which can take advantage of her interdisciplinary approach to gender roles and the feminine. The two chapters that follow discuss, respectively, the use of her theories in the fields of sociology and anthropology whilst evidencing, on the other hand, the influence that these two disciplines had on the development of *The Second Sex*. In the first article, titled "Women, The Second Sex: the Myth According to Simone de Beauvoir. A Feminist Approach to Empirical Sociology in Germany", Claudia Gather (Berlin School of Economics and Law) states that it is time to refer to Beauvoir as a classic in feminist theories also for sociologists. That means on the one hand to take Beauvoir seriously as a mastermind and on the other to regard *The Second Sex* as an oeuvre with theoretical potential that is still interesting to discuss. To this purpose, Gather examines the Beauvoirian theoretical concept of the "myths" (used to explain the oppression of women) and discusses it against the background of the sociological concepts of social norms, the social construction of gender and gender polarisation. From a sociological point of view, according to Gather, Beauvoir's myths are located on two analytical levels: a macro and a micro-sociological level. On the one hand, they are collective images that developed from the past and on the other hand, on a micro-level they are individual concepts of concrete men. Different collective myths are in different ways integral parts of those individual concepts. Beauvoir analyses those different ideas of femaleness related to maleness in novels of famous French writers. In *The Second Sex*, she shows how those writers define manliness firstly and autonomously, and

then secondly create an appropriate femaleness, often referring to some of the collective myths of femaleness. Within her study, Gather assigns this view of the myths to empirical sociology, presenting examples of qualitative interviews with some heterosexual couples. Each couple defines differently how a woman should be and what she should do and defines femaleness in relation to manliness. The analysis shows a broad variety of "femaleness" and "manliness" based on a polarised asymmetry in the construction of gender in heterosexual relationships. But on the other hand, women are very often involved in constructing gender in their relationships in different ways.

Monica Tarducci (Buenos Aires University), in "Simone de Beauvoir, anthropology and the feminist studies of kinship", examines the relationship of Simone de Beauvoir to anthropology in general and to the anthropology of kinship in particular, and then discusses the "families" she constructed throughout her life. We know that when preparing to write *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir read Claude Levi-Strauss's *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (*The Elementary Structures of Kinship*) before it was published in 1949 and consulted the anthropological bibliography that was recommended by him. We know, from her memoirs, that she had a close relationship to anthropology and that she was good friends with some (male and female) anthropologists. The feminists of the 1970s rescued her very anthropological notion of woman as the "Other". Following a tradition widespread in leftist thought, Beauvoir was very critical of the Western family and she lived a life coherent with that conviction: she did not get married, she did not have children and she did not have a house of her own until she was middle-aged and won a literary prize that allowed her to buy one. In agreement with the most radical proposals formulated and analysed by the feminist anthropology of kinship, Beauvoir was surrounded by loving people in a circle comprising friends (both men and women), lovers, ex-lovers, disciples, etc. She even broke out from the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy. That circle of affective relationships was curiously referred to as "family" by its members and worked much better than many "real" kinship ties, according to Tarducci.

The chapter that concludes the third part of this volume, "L'œuvre de Simone de Beauvoir en Grece. Une histoire a multiples facettes" by Maria Menegaki (University of Athens) and Loukia Efthymiou (University of Athens), is another "country study", focused on the history of the translation of Beauvoir's works and their reception in Greece. The authors outline the cultural context of the Greece that emerged from World War II and from the four years of the 1946–49 civil war as strongly oriented to

the French culture, which had influenced the education of most of the Greek intelligentsia of the time, with French as the main foreign language used by cultivated people. In the post-war period, the country was "peacefully invaded" by a great number of translations of the new and innovative works that were being published in France, among them those of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. Menegaki and Efthymiou detail the gradual penetration of Beauvoir's novels and essays, with particular regard to *The Second Sex*, which was translated and edited several times, and they highlight the differences among the different versions, identifying omissions, additions and alterations. They attempt to explain these differences with reference to the personality of the translators, their prospective readers and the historical moment in which these translations were produced. Using supporting documents from the press, the publisher and the Greek National Archives, Menegaki and Efthymiou also provide an analysis of the impact of Beauvoir's ideas on the evolution of the intellectual culture in contemporary Greece.

Beauvoir beyond Beauvoir

The chapters of the fourth part, "Beauvoir beyond Beauvoir: crossed portraits and new theoretical approaches to gender", juxtapose Simone de Beauvoir's life and works with those of other women writers and intellectuals, highlighting similarities, differences and theoretical interconnections in the perspective of gender studies. The first "crossed portrait" is dedicated to the feminist writer Angela Carter. Chiara Cretella (University of Bologna), in "Sadeian Women: Simone de Beauvoir and Angela Carter", presents a thematic retrospective of the two intellectuals, considered with regard to their daring studies on Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade. As remarked by Cretella, Beauvoir was the first woman to intervene in the debate on the "Divine Marquis" in a period in which his works were being republished in France after a 150-year censorship, while the proud publisher was tried in a tribunal with a charge of obscenity. Beauvoir's essay *Privilèges* (1955), then re-edited as *Faut-il brûler Sade?* (1972), provided an essential theoretical contribution to the rethinking of Sade's ideas, beyond the moralistic, aesthetic and literary evaluation of his writings, in a detailed analysis that discusses the concept of freedom and its perversions, which hide in the name of an absolute freedom unequal power relationships based on cruelty. On the other hand, Angela Carter, an expert of feminist erotic writing, reprised the debate from where Beauvoir stopped, trying to define, in *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (1979), a cultural history of erotic literature seen from a female

perspective, overturning the traditional patriarchal view given that women have always been, much against their will, the protagonists of it, a passive object of the male fantasies. Analysing the figure of Justine, one of the most known Sadean heroines, having in mind the essays of both Beauvoir and Carter, Cretella plumbs the unexpected feminist implications of Sade's works as seen from women's perspectives.

The second "portrait" offers a glimpse into the work of the American playwright Jane Chambers, considered a pioneer in writing theatre plays with openly lesbian characters. Fatma Kalpakli (Selçuk University), in her chapter "Alternative life-styles in Jane Chambers' Eye of the Gull", sketches out an analysis of the lesbian couples in this 1971 novel, using *The Second Sex* as a reference for the understanding of female sexuality and the gender dynamics of the characters. Kalpakli highlights how a close reading of the text shows that Chambers not only holds a mirror to the problems of homosexuals but also reflects the happy moments in the lives of these same-sex couples in order to draw a bridge between the heterosexual and homosexual world, and prevent the othering process in patriarchal societies and cultures.

About ten years before the publication of *The Second Sex* in France, another book with a similar content had been issued in Slovenia. Sabina Znidarsic (University of Ljubljana) provides an original comparison in her chapter "Angela Vode: Gender and Destiny", in which she juxtaposes the theories and the reception of Beauvoir's most known work and *Spol in usoda* (literally "Gender and Destiny", 1938–39), written by one of the central figures in the Slovenian women's movement of the time. According to Znidarsic, Angela Vode was an unusual and versatile public figure: a teacher, a special education teacher, a publicist, and author of the first books on the position of women in Slovenia. A member of the local Communist Party and, at the same time, a victim of the socialist persecutions in Yugoslavia in the post-war period, Vode wrote her masterpiece as a result of her work as a Slovenian feminist activist in the period between the two World Wars. In terms of content, the two books are organised in a similar way, but in contrast to Simone de Beauvoir, Vode drew mostly from her personal experience. The second book of this work questioned the traditional gender roles and raised the problem of the equality of the spouses in marriage. It was harshly criticised for this reason by the Catholic Church, which exerted great control over "public morality" in 1930s Slovenia, and the book was labelled a "Marxist conspiracy". Angela Vode was seen as a threat to the existing order and the Church's control over sexuality, and a "damnatio memoriae" was acted against her until very recent times. Her work was reprinted only in 1999

and, as Znidarsic remarks, it is probably of no coincidence that only in 2000, about 50 years after it was originally published, was *The Second Sex* first translated into Slovenian.

The three studies that follow were originally part of the same panel of the 18th Conference of the Simone de Beauvoir Society, entirely dedicated to the theoretical connections between Beauvoir and Judith Butler's queer theory. The chapter by Laura Sarnelli (University of Naples L'Orientale), "Antigone's challenge. From Simone de Beauvoir to Judith Butler", investigates the fascinating eponymous heroine of Sophocles' tragedy from a feminist point of view. Antigone has often been considered a feminist icon of defiance, embodying a fundamental division between conflicting orders of values: politics and ethics, State and family, public and private, man and woman. Furthermore, she proves to be a more ambivalent figure for feminism than has been acknowledged as she represents, at one and the same time, the fate of the tragic woman forced to succumb to the laws of State and patriarchy and the strength of a heroine who challenges those laws, subverting their intrinsic structures. Following the feminist readings and revisions offered by Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, who redefine the relationship between woman and law beyond the logic of tragic immanence and false dichotomies, Sarnelli addresses the issue of Antigone's legacy for contemporary feminist politics where new conceptions of gender, sexuality and kinship can be envisaged and acknowledged without risking social exclusion and loss of subjectivity. In *The Second Sex*, Antigone hovers like a ghostly shadow in the philosopher's interpretation of the rereading of the myth proposed by Hegel and thus she becomes the symbol of a woman's right to defy the State over matters of conscience. In Butler's theoretical elaborations, Antigone is shown to be a political heroine and also a potentially queer figure that undermines the dominant regimes of representations. Butler draws on Antigone to tackle the contingent political discourse of the regulation of kinship and family structures in contemporary society where the law does not reflect the deformations that have occurred within them, such as, for instance, the presence of single mothers, same-sex couples, the blending of families already formed after divorces and second marriages, the separation of families due to migrations. These occurrences embody the legacy of Antigone, who stands for what is not represented by any symbolic law. Thus, Antigone coincides with the political action of those who are opposed to the codes already fixed and judged as necessary in an attempt to create a possible place of political action for those subjects whose juridical and ontological status is suspended.

Marina De Chiara (University of Naples L'Orientale) ideally continues Sarnelli's discourse in her chapter "From Judith Butler to Ranjana Khanna: looking back to Simone de Beauvoir", further exploring the Beauvoirian legacy in the thinking of other feminist intellectuals within a broader frame of marginalised identities that claim their own place in the world. According to De Chiara, indeed, "it is the insistence on the idea of subjectivity, meant as an 'effect' of specific social-historical contexts […] that situates Simone de Beauvoir's thought within the ethical question raised by decolonisation and anti-colonialist efforts" and other identitarian issues such as the "Black soul" or the "Jewish character". Defining the context of post-feminism, De Chiara mentions Khanna's essay "Dark Continents. Psychoanalysis and Colonialism" (2003), which describes the melancholic shadow with which the feminist movement in Europe and in the United States was saturated after Simone de Beauvoir's death besides a nostalgia for a more "ethical", political and reliable feminism, such as the one represented by Beauvoir. "Dark continent", a psychoanalytical metaphor for woman and female sexuality perceived as an "impenetrable mystery", connects the feminine to the colonial discourse as, according to Khanna, modern psychoanalysis has interpreted the "woman" in light of categories produced in the colonial context. She even defines psychoanalysis itself as a colonial discipline, insisting on the contingency of Europe's grand narratives (including concepts of modernity's self, civilisation, and nationhood) with coloniality (Khanna 2003, 10). Going further, De Chiara analyses the concept of subjectivity in Judith Butler's queer theory of "fluid" gender identity and in the works of the Italian transsexual philosopher Fabrizia Di Stefano, connecting them to Beauvoir's theoretical heritage.

Judith Butler's discourse on "queerness" is then reprised by Pablo Pérez Navarro (University of Coimbra) in his chapter "On ne naît pas queer: from The Second Sex to male pregnancy". Navarro reminds us that Queer Studies has often used *The Second Sex* as a matter of reflection and as a starting point to articulate resistance to all of the forms that restrictive naturalisation of bodies and gender can take. Authors like Monique Wittig and Judith Butler have almost literally started their work on gender with a reflection on Beauvoir's understanding of femininity. Although very different in their respective theoretical frames, one could easily read their respective contributions as a radicalisation of some of the most well-known Beauvoirian ideas. As these and other queer works on sex, gender and sexuality demonstrate, the way Beauvoir approached the social process of construction of women – getting distance from the biological reductions of that very same process – has had a major influence not only

on specifically feminist contexts but, very interestingly, on queer understandings of gender. Navarro explores some of these connections as a way of acquiring a historical approach to how queer identities have irrupted into the field of feminism. That way, one could more clearly perceive the repetition and dissemination of Beauvoir's famous statement that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" in different queer contexts. It would also be a good way to obtain a broad perspective on non-dualistic understandings of gender as a proliferation (in Butler's terms) of sexed and gendered positions that destabilise the very concept of sexual difference. His journey across the queer theory, beginning with Wittig's understanding of the lesbian subject, considers the theoretical issues related to the liminal identity of intersex people and reaches the mass media coverage of various forms of "male pregnancy", evidencing the limits of our "public" understandings of gender and masculinity, and finishes by analysing the very different treatments that this specific form of being a trans man, and of becoming a pregnant man, have received.

After the excursus on queer theory, the following two papers conclude the series of "crossed portraits". Mauro Trentadue (Centre for Psycho-Philosophical Education, Milan) devotes his chapter to the Iranian exile writer Azar Nafisi and to the influence of Beauvoir on the feminist thinking in contemporary Iran. Through the telling of his encounter with Nafisi during a presentation of her last book in Italy, Trentadue evidences the desire for freedom and democracy and the belief in self-determination of the human being that emerged from her discourse, in contrast with the authoritarian nature of the theocratic regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nafisi describes Beauvoir in her most famous memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2008, 323) as an example of a respectable intellectual woman and, despite never mentioning *The Second Sex* as one of her readings, according to Trentadue it can be asserted with good reason that Azar Nafisi was familiar with it (the first Persian edition was published in 1978, just before the Islamic Revolution, and more recently republished in 2001 with a new translation). Trentadue also remarks that Beauvoir had harshly criticised the imposition of the veil after the 1979 Iranian Revolution as an act against the freedom of women, expressing her own support for the modern and secularised women that had rallied in the streets of Tehran to protest against the imposition of the Islamic *shari'a*. Besides the elaboration of feminist issues, Trentadue focuses on another common trait between the two intellectuals, namely the use of autobiographical writing as an instrument to objectify the lived experience and take the individual's self-narration into a more universal dimension.