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"A Dream, Dreamed by Reason . . . Hollow Like All Dreams": French Existentialism and Its Critique of Abstract Liberalism

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The recent claiming of Simone de Beauvoir's legacy by French feminists for a policy of assimilation of Muslim women to Western models of self and society reduces the complexity and richness of Beauvoir's views in inacceptable ways. This article explores to what extent a politics of difference that challenges the ideals and political strategies of abstract liberalism can be extracted from and legitimized by the philosophies of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. Without assuming their thought is identical, we can read them as elucidating each other and as implicitly exposing weak and strong points in their respective philosophies on ethnocultural relations and social identities.

In recent years, Simone de Beauvoir's legacy has often been claimed by European feminists to advocate a policy of assimilation of women from non-Western backgrounds to Western liberalism. This happened once more in January 2008, when the organizing committee of the Centenaire de Simone de Beauvoir in Paris, with Elisabeth Badinter and Julia Kristeva as two of its prominent members, chose to give a "Prix Simone de Beauvoir pour la liberté des femmes" to Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Hirsi Ali is a former Dutch politician of Somali descent, who in articles and books argues that Muslim women should leave behind their culture and religion so as to become emancipated, because Islam is supposedly inherently oppressive to women. Hirsi Ali, like the French feminists who honored her, advocates secularist, radical Enlightenment feminism as the only road to freedom for women, and is not receptive to the voices

of Muslim women who oppose this strongly secularist type of feminism and argue for a more inclusive and more plural feminist movement.[1]

Are the leading French feminists right in assuming that Beauvoir's work endorses an approach such as Hirsi Ali's? Does Beauvoir's work amount to the view that members of diasporic communities should either willingly or by force assimilate to dominant types of Western culture and politics with their liberal model of the person, which we can characterize, in the terms of Charles Taylor, as the "punctual" or "disengaged" self? With the image of the point, Taylor tries to convey an ideal of independence and rational self-control that is tremendously influential in the making of the Western notion of selfhood: a sense of self as, basically, "extensionless" with a notion of reason as free from established custom (Taylor 1989, 159ff.). Does Beauvoir endorse this dominant type of self of Western liberalism, or is her thinking more critical and more open to non-Western identities than Enlightenment and liberal feminists suggest?

Likewise, we can ask: does Beauvoir's work suggest that women should overcome their socially constructed identities so as to assimilate to dominant male identities? Regarding both gender and ethnicity—notwithstanding differences between these social identities, differences that we will discuss—we can ask the same question: does Beauvoir opt for a policy of assimilation or does her work involve a "politics of difference," that is, a politics that asks for recognition of oppressed or marginalized identity groups within a society and for a transformation of existing cultural, political, and societal institutions and practices on behalf of these social identities, so as to make society more inclusive?

The "politics of difference" is defined broadly here to include issues of both gender and ethnicity. It can be interpreted, very generally, as a critical response to the presupposition in theory and practice of the uniform, homogeneous nation-state. It rejects the suggestion that the state belongs to one national group—be it an ethnic group or a gender-specific group—and argues for the acknowledgment and accommodation of the social identity of non-dominant groups within the state. We take social identity to be flexible, overlapping, contested, and internally diverse. Beauvoir's existentialism would be incompatible with a reifying notion of identity. In the course of the argument, we reformulate "identity" in existentialist terms, that is, in terms of freedom, facticity, and situation.

We not only study what can be considered to be Beauvoir's relevant work, but at the same time elucidate her views regarding gender and ethnicity by structurally comparing them with a number of relevant writings by Jean-Paul Sartre on ethnocultural identities. By contrasting the two existentialists and exploring their differences and similarities on the topic of social identities, we will be able to get their respective theories more clearly into focus. In doing so, we hope not only to contribute to an actualization of both thinkers for current issues of cultural pluralism but more specifically to find an answer to

the question of whether Beauvoir's work is open to a politics of difference from the position of oppressed or marginalized groups, or whether her work endorses Enlightenment and liberal feminism, as claimed by Badinter and others.

In what follows, we compare Beauvoir's books *America Day by Day* (ADD) and *The Second Sex* (TSS), along with some of her feminist articles from the 1950s to 1960s, with Sartre's books *Being and Nothingness* (BN) and *Anti-Semite and Jew* (AJ) along with his essay "Black Orpheus" (BO) on the subject of "Negritude."[2] We also take account of the authors' other relevant work, though less prominently.[3] To analyze whether there are elements in both Sartre's and Beauvoir's works in favor of a politics of difference, that is, a politics that challenges the dominant, liberal perspective that tends to deny the concrete differences between groups, we will investigate the works mentioned above, asking the following questions:

> 1. Is a critique present regarding Western liberal models of self and society from the viewpoint of oppressed or marginalized social groups—be they women or ethnocultural groups—a critique that asks for a transformation of society in order for these identities to be recognized and accommodated?
> 2. Is the long-term goal assimilation and homogenization of society or a pluralism of social identities? This question is specifically relevant with regard to the Marxist-Hegelian influence on both thinkers with its inherent metaphysics of history, particularly its looming, ideal end-state installed by the socialist revolution.
> 3. Should members of oppressed or marginalized social groups assume their ascribed identity on a subjective level and if so, under what conditions? In other words, how can members of oppressed social groups be authentic?

The Politics of Difference in Beauvoir's Work

After the publication of her volume on ethics, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Beauvoir 1948/1947), Beauvoir started writing *The Second Sex*, interrupted by a visit to the United States in 1947 for three months. Here, she witnessed with her own eyes what in those days was called the "negro problem."[4] On her walks through Harlem, she did not feel that she had "the right to stroll in the streets where the color of my eyes signifies injustice, arrogance, and hatred" (ADD, 36). However, accompanied by her friend Richard Wright, one of the leading black intellectuals in the United States, she obtained access to places of black culture, such as churches and dance halls. She writes: "What a difference from the strained coldness of white American women. And when you see these men dance, their sensual life unrestrained by an armor of Puritan virtue, you understand

how much sexual jealousy can enter into the white Americans' hatred of these quick bodies. . . . It's this relaxation that also allows dreaming, feeling, loafing, and laughing of the sort that's unfamiliar to most white Americans" (ADD, 38).

Simons argues that Beauvoir in the first instance is torn between universalism and essentialism; on the one hand, denying any difference between white and black men and on the other mysticizing difference, "in a celebration of black music and dance," describing these not as cultural creations, which require intellect and discipline, but as natural expressions of unrestrained bodies (Simons 2002, 275). Through Wright's thorough rejection of essentialism, Beauvoir would have become aware of the necessity of employing the concept of "situation," for instance, where Beauvoir concludes that "the obvious differences between the two castes come from differences in their historical, economic, social, and cultural situations, and these could—at least theoretically—be abolished" (ADD, 353–54). (The word "theoretically" seems to indicate that this will only be the case in principle and not *de facto*, but this is not spelled out in the text.) However, for her situational approach to the position of the black population in the United States, Beauvoir did not just turn to the theories of Richard Wright, as Simons acknowledges. In several of her earlier essays, such as "Pyrrhus and Cineas" (2004a/1944), "An Eye for an Eye" (2004c/1946), *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948/1947), and in her review of *The Phenomenology of Perception* by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2004b/1945), Beauvoir had already discussed man's situation: instead of focusing only on abstract man she explicitly deals with his or her situatedness (compare Kruks 1990; Vintges 1996). Especially in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she had already described the position of blacks in terms of their situatedness, discussing the historical "situation of the black slaves" (Beauvoir 1948/1947, 37).

In *America Day by Day*, Beauvoir recalls Wright telling her that "there isn't a minute in a black person's life that isn't penetrated by social consciousness. From the cradle to the grave, working, eating, loving, walking, dancing, praying, he can never forget that he is black, and that makes him conscious every minute of the whole white world from which the word 'black' takes its meaning. Whatever he does, a black man is 'committed.' There is no black writer who can avoid the problem of commitment. It is resolved in advance" (ADD, 57–58). In another passage she describes the political attitudes among black Americans as follows: "As for the attitude of black people, it is of course basically one of protest and refusal, but they must also adapt themselves to the conditions they've been given, so their conduct necessarily oscillates between submission and revolt. . . . the black leaders try to invent a policy that is 'adaptive' (therefore, partially submissive to white rules) and at the same time 'progressive' (that is capable of ignoring these rules)" (ADD, 247–48). Beauvoir in *America Day by Day* clearly admires this attitude of black leaders to

critically assume their situation rather than denying it, that is, to accept their situation as black in an anti-black country and at the same time to reject and fight this anti-black racism (compare Simons 2002).

Hence, regarding our third question, "how can members of oppressed social groups be authentic?," an answer can be found in *America Day by Day*, where Beauvoir seems to affirm Wright's attitude of critical assumption of one's ascribed identity. However, with respect to ethnicity, we have not yet found any clear answers to our first two questions. It is not clear, first, whether Beauvoir opts for a critique of existing society on behalf of the social identities of blacks, and second, whether the long-term goal is assimilation or pluralism.

We turn now to Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex*, and look at her conceptualizing of social identities regarding the issue of gender. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir characterizes and describes the situation of women throughout history as dominated by men: society is male in character; women are relegated to an inferior status and position. Discussing the model of women's oppression in this work, Simons (1999) argues that Beauvoir's approach was heavily influenced by the voluminous work of Gunnar Myrdal on American racism, *An American Dilemma* (Myrdal 1944),[5] with respect to its social-constructionist approach to race—and by analogy to gender—in terms of "caste," in opposition to biological approaches to race and gender. Richard Wright, who, among others in his novel *Black Boy* (Wright 1945), focused on the lived experience of the oppressed Other, is another influence, according to Simons.

Simons rightly states that Beauvoir did not merely apply Sartre's philosophy in *The Second Sex*. However, Karen Green convincingly argues that recent feminist scholarship underplays the influence of Sartre's analysis of anti-Semitism on *The Second Sex*'s model of oppression. "Beauvoir's claim that the origin of woman's oppression resides in the fact that men have set her up as Other exactly mirrors Sartre's assertion that it is the anti-Semite who creates the Jew" (Green 1999, 182). Green, furthermore, demonstrates Sartre's influence by showing how "masochism," or the flight from freedom, is presented in both works as a way out of the situation of the Other for the Jew and Woman, respectively (191). We can add that, in fact, many of the other attitudes toward women that are described in the second book of *The Second Sex*, entitled *Woman's Life Today* (*L'expérience vécue*), are conceptualized in terms of the subjective condition of Otherness the way Sartre launched this approach in *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Where Green points to a similar phrase on the Jews in Sartre's book and to one on women in Beauvoir's book, expressing that they have no history of their own (191), we can add to this another literal similarity in the two works where we find the phrase "artificial product" to indicate the position of "the Jew" and of "Woman," respectively (AJ, 135–36; TSS, 428). Furthermore, the social-constructionist approach to "race" is present in Sartre's

Anti-Semite and Jew, whereas Simons refers to Myrdal's work for the roots of this critical approach to race and by analogy to gender.

   In spite of these similarities, however, the theoretical differences between the two philosophers are significant, differences that Green overlooks when she argues that *The Second Sex* is merely "an application, in the case of women, of a model of oppression that had been extracted from the ontological categories of *Being and Nothingness*" (Green 1999, 191). As several studies have shown, Beauvoir's own appropriation of Hegel's master–slave dialectic as well as her own "ethics of ambiguity" are crucial elements of *The Second Sex*'s theoretical model of oppression.[6] In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir elaborated her view of the human condition as "ambiguous," that is, as both empty consciousness and flesh. She argued that through a "moral conversion"—a continual effort of a moral kind—we have to assume our ambiguity by transforming our status as free consciousness into a status as incarnated, situated being, thus rising, so to speak, to the level of our fellow men, temporarily overcoming the separation and antagonism between ourselves and others.[7] However, our ontological freedom is always there in the background of our existence, which means that reconciliation with others in love and friendship is never final. Given our ambiguous human condition, we will never definitively overcome the separation between us and our fellow men, this being the reason why the moral conversion has to take place continually.

   Beauvoir's ethics of ambiguity is present in *The Second Sex*, where she argues that women's secondary status in history has its roots in the refusal of both men and women to assume their ambiguous human condition, namely their status as conscious *as well as* incarnated being, because both sexes project onto their partners that part of their ambiguity that they repudiate. Love, friendship, and brotherhood between women and men will be possible, albeit on a temporary basis, when both sexes assume their ambiguous condition.[8]

   At this point, an answer to our first question, namely whether Beauvoir's work testifies to a critical stance toward assimilating female otherness to the dominant culture, comes into view. Beauvoir's argument in *The Second Sex*—that both sexes must assume their ambiguous human condition in order for them to be able to meet in love and friendship—is a first and important indication that Beauvoir was not in favor of women merely assimilating to the dominant Western—male—identity of the disengaged, "punctual" self. She instead argues for new identities for men and women to come about, and in the final chapter of *The Second Sex* explicitly argues that society has to change thoroughly, in economic, moral, social, and cultural respects, for these new identities to arise. In a later article, entitled "La condition féminine" (Beauvoir 1961), she more specifically states that major changes in the conditions of the upbringing of children and housework should take place, to diminish women's burdens in the family and to allow the couple to share these tasks equally. Our first question,

therefore, clearly can be answered in the positive regarding gender: Beauvoir implies that thorough changes in society are necessary on behalf of women as a social group.

Concerning our second question, whether the goal is a pluralism of identities or assimilation and homogenization, we shall now discuss some relevant passages from *The Second Sex* and from a later article, entitled "It's About Time Woman Put a New Face on Love" (Beauvoir 1950). In the final pages of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir argues that differences between the sexes will always remain, even if society were to move in an egalitarian direction. This is another aspect that Green overlooked in arguing that *The Second Sex* is an application of Sartre's model of oppression in *Anti-Semite and Jew* and *Being and Nothingness*. The social identities of gender as we know them are historical constructions that we should distrust, but this does not mean that any difference between the sexes will disappear: woman thus is not merely an effect of male oppression; she has a reality of her own. There will always be "certain differences" between man and woman, because their sexual worlds have special forms. "This means that her relations to her own body, to that of the male, to the child, will never be identical with those the male bears to his own body, to that of the female, and to the child" (TSS, 740). However, for Beauvoir the way these differences will be experienced is not fixed. She concludes: "New relations of flesh and sentiment of which we have no conception will arise between the sexes." And she adds: "already, indeed, there have appeared between men and women friendships, rivalries, complicities, comradeships— chaste or sensual—which past centuries could not have conceived" (TSS, 740).

In "It's About Time Woman Put a New Face on Love" she again points to certain differences between men and women that will always remain. "I believe that what fascinates each in the other is the discovery of a human world like its own but *different*: the *other* sex has the fascination of an exotic country, it is a treasure, an Eden, simply because it is different." The body and sexuality of men and women are not the same; the sexes differ "in their sensuality, their sensibility, their relation to the world." When men and women accept each other as ambiguous beings, and therefore as consciousness incarnated in flesh, the conditions for mutual magic will always be there. We cannot predict which forms these new relationships between men and women will take. It may be that certain forms of sensibility are bound to disappear while others will be born. But "rather than grimly hanging on to what is dying, or repudiating it, would it not be better to try to help *invent* the future?" (Beauvoir 1950, 77; our italics). For Beauvoir, sexual difference is never a matter of pregiven identities but rather involves a continuous work of invention.

All in all, we can conclude that Beauvoir was not arguing in favor of women's assimilation to dominant male identities, although she rejected any

essential female nature. Concerning our third level of analysis in respect to gender, the question "how can members of oppressed social groups be authentic?," we again find clear answers in *The Second Sex*, where Beauvoir criticizes "the philosophy of the Enlightenment, of rationalism, of nominalism": To these ways of thinking "women . . . are merely the human beings arbitrarily designated by the word *woman* . . . but such a declaration is abstract. The fact is that every concrete human being is always a singular, separate individual. To decline to accept such notions as the eternal feminine, the black soul, the Jewish character, is not to deny that Jews, Blacks,[9] women exist today—this denial does not represent a liberation for those concerned, but rather a flight from reality. It is clear that no woman can claim without bad faith to situate herself beyond her sex" (TSS, 14).[10] According to Beauvoir, women have to fight for their liberation themselves. "They must reject the limitations of their situation and seek to open the road of the future . . . there is no other way out for woman than to work for her liberation" which "must be collective" (TSS, 639). Women have to assume their ascribed identity, but at the same time should struggle for major political, institutional, and moral changes in society, and invent new identities for themselves.

Regarding gender, Beauvoir's answers to the first and second of our three questions turn out to be positive. First, she opted for major political and societal changes on behalf of women as a social group, and second, she opted for sexual difference to exist in the future, albeit a contingent one and one of "invention."[11] The answer to our third question—how can members of oppressed social groups be authentic?—is clear regarding ethnicity as well as regarding gender. Simons rightly argues that "Beauvoir models her concept of moral authenticity and feminist political action on the attitude of American blacks" (Simons 2002, 272). According to Beauvoir, a critical assumption—instead of a denial—of one's oppressed position is the right, authentic attitude. This critical stance must be embodied in practices of critique. Authenticity can neither be just a state of mind nor a state of being; instead it requires a continuous effort.

Although we did not find any direct answers to our first two questions regarding ethnicity, it remains to be seen whether we may find them in a more indirect way. We will compare the three levels of a politics of difference in Beauvoir's approach to women and ethnocultural minorities with Sartre's treatment of ethnicity in the works mentioned, primarily in order to find out more about the kind of politics of difference that is at stake in Beauvoir's existentialist theoretical framework. Do we find in Sartre's discussion of the position of the Jews and blacks any similar advocacies of a politics of difference, or even clearer ones that can elucidate Beauvoir's stances? Why is it that many black American and African thinkers have recognized Sartre as an "African philosopher" or a "Negro philosopher" (Young 2001, xxii)?

THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE IN SARTRE'S WORK

We start with the first of our three main questions, namely whether Sartre offers us a notion of a politics of difference that involves a critique of dominant, liberal thought. At first glance, Sartre's and Beauvoir's radical stress on individual freedom seems to make them somewhat dubious partners in a critique of liberal models of person and society. After all, liberal thought tends to portray social identities, such as ethnic or cultural attachments, as personal choices that take place in the private sphere and for which citizens should not expect to be recognized any more than for a particular hobby.[12] From this perspective, Sartre and Beauvoir seem to be on the side of the sociopolitical hostility against a politics of difference that we witness today in the form of conservative political rhetoric and policy proposals that, especially in Western Europe, often take an implicit or explicit anti-Islam form.

A crucial section in Sartre's text on Negritude, however, immediately makes such an annexation questionable. Sartre's article "Black Orpheus" was written as an introduction to a collection edited by Léopold Sédar Senghor on the Negritude movement.[13] Sartre poses a number of questions that are all situated in a field of tension between the two poles of his early ontology, namely freedom and facticity: "Is Negritude necessity or liberty? . . . Is it a given fact or a value?" (BO, 136–37). Then Sartre argues that we should not be led to believe that we have to choose between identity as an essence or as an ideal to be realized. After all, "Negritude is a shimmer of Being and of an ought-to-be; it makes you and you make it: both oath and passion" (*la Négritude est un chatoiement d'être et de devoir-être; elle vous fait et vous la faites: serment et passion, à la fois*) (BO, 137/Sartre 1948, xl).

So identity—such as Negritude—can be portrayed neither simply as an essence that remains identical to itself in the historical process (after all, you make it), nor as the product of an individual decision (because it makes you). Identity, as Sartre puts it somewhat cryptically, "is all of these at once, and still other things" (BO, 137). However, Sartre cannot possibly mean by this that Negritude is "a little bit of essence" and "a little bit of choice" at the same time. Allowing the suggestion of an essence of Negritude, as a predetermined notion of a collective self-understanding, would be very hard to reconcile with the central idea that is to be found in a number of his works of that time, namely that existence precedes essence (BN, 438; Sartre 2007). As Sartre puts it rather unambiguously elsewhere in the article on Negritude: "in the soul, nothing is given" (BO, 119; Sartre 2004a). Instead, Sartre seems to steer toward a notion of identity that is constantly shaped by individual action and choices, but at the same time is not invented *ex nihilo*, because that individual action is also structured by that sociocultural identity (compare Young 2001).

This notion of identity becomes even clearer in his fierce and articulate critique of the position of the "democrat" in his *Anti-Semite and Jew*. In this work

he argues, as indicated earlier, that Jewish identity as such is the effect of the objectifying gaze of the anti-Semite. The "democrat" is one of the four characters that Sartre investigates, the other characters being "the anti-Semite," "the inauthentic Jew," and "the authentic Jew." The "democrat" represents all the elements of liberal thought that are hostile to a politics of difference in the name of the "Rights of Man." The democrat wants to defend the Jew against anti-Semitism but in the process denies the relevance or even existence of the particular identity of the Jew. Whereas the anti-Semite reduces the Jewish person to his or her particular identity—that the anti-Semite identifies as the principle of pure evil—the democrat reduces the Jew to the abstract universal subject of equal rights.[14] In a way, they both deny a crucial aspect of identity. The anti-Semite reduces the Jew to facticity, defining him or her in terms of fixed and eternal structures (AJ, 37–40), whereas the democrat reduces the Jew to the other aspect of the human condition, namely undetermined freedom. Although the democrat saves the Jew as a man, he—as Sartre puts it—"annihilates him as Jew" (AJ, 56).

The misguided philosophical anthropology that underpins the position of the democrat is the idea of a human being as one perceives it in physical space, with clear boundaries that separate the human body from the surrounding environment (compare Taylor's notion of "punctual self"). Culture and other collective characteristics are simply individual properties or "choices" that are circumstantial, like your weight or the number of hairs on your head. The democrat resolves all collectivities into individual elements: "to him a physical body is a collection of molecules; a social body, a collection of individuals" (AJ, 55).

Sartre's concept of "situation" defies this social atomism. The fact that Sartre affirms both freedom and social attachments is revealed quite clearly in the following formulation where he tries to articulate the idea of freedom in situation, or, as one could refer to it, situated freedom: "That means that he [man] forms a synthetic whole with his situation—biological, economic, political, cultural, etc. He cannot be distinguished from his situation, for it forms him and decides his possibilities; but, inversely, it is he who gives it meaning by making his choices within it and by it" (AJ, 59–60).[15] According to Sartre, the situation shapes the person and his or her possibilities, but at the same time he or she is able to interpret it in a certain way and to make choices within it and on the basis of it.

In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre argues that by recognizing only the moment of choice without the situation, the democrat in fact misrecognizes an important aspect of the human condition in general, namely social attachments, and of the Jew in particular, namely his or her Jewish identity. That is the reason for Sartre's critique in these pages of the idea of forced assimilation as inhuman. Sartre locates this policy of assimilation in the camp of the democrat—the

camp of "liberal democratic models of universal man" (Green 1999, 182)—for this position does not take sociocultural attachments seriously (AJ, 57).

Although Sartre's stress is often on choice and self-creation, even to the point of bordering on voluntarism, the facticity of the human condition in his early work cannot be ignored. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre had already written extensively on the concept of situation, and discussed several aspects that are relevant to the notion of social identity that we are trying to distill from his work (BN, 481ff.).[16]

As Sartre puts it in *Being and Nothingness*: "Without facticity consciousness could choose its attachments to the world in the same way as the souls in Plato's *Republic* choose their condition" (BN, 83). But we are not the souls of Plato's *Republic*. This means in the case of social identity that we are always part of a particular sociocultural context. And although we can choose the *meaning* of this situation, the subject is *not* in a position "*to choose* its position" (BN, 83).[17] This does not imply that one cannot go beyond one's original social context, whether one is born in a certain social class or cultural environment, but rather that one cannot erase the fact that this is part of your past and thus part of who you are.

It is important to stress at this point that Sartre would reject the idea that the *meaning* of this "being part" is somehow given. Here, the conceptual distinction between "facticity" and "situation" becomes relevant. Whereas facticity refers to those aspects of ourselves that are factual and to which we can truthfully ascribe being—for example, our past actions, having a specific skin color, being born into a specific class or in a particular culture, being a man or a woman—the *meaning* of these "facts" depends on our free choices, on the essential project we develop in relation to them (BN, 481ff.). It is these facts and the meaning we ascribe to them that form our situation. "Situation" is constituted both by contingent facticity, for instance, living as a woman in a particular Muslim culture, and one's choices, for instance, the way individual women interpret Islamic traditions and act on these interpretations. In this sense, social identity is part of who you are, but never in the way of a fixed structure or definite state of being. Consciousness always surpasses these contingent facts and develops a relation to them. Your situation is not just an objective state of affairs, but an objective state of affairs *in the light* of the subjective, free project (compare Sartre 1992, 431–33). Hence the formula: identity makes you while you make it.

This is why both essentialism and the democrat's naïve social ontology that perceives freedom as unsituated are contrary to Sartre's theory. Sartre argues for a "concrete liberalism" (AJ, 146) instead of the democrat's abstract liberalism, namely by arguing for treating citizens not as abstract "man" but by recognizing them as *concrete* persons, that is, as persons with social attachments: "This means, then, that the Jews—and likewise the Arabs and the Blacks[18]—from

the moment that they are participants in the national enterprise, have a right in that enterprise; they are citizens. But they have these rights *as* Jews, Blacks, or Arabs—that is, as concrete persons" (AJ, 146). Here is a clear suggestion of a legal system that somehow recognizes minority identities, as in the current discourse on minority rights.[19] The French Jew should be respected and legally recognized not *despite* his particular affiliations, but *through* them: "When it is a question of legal rights of the Jew, and of the more obscure but equally indispensable rights that are not inscribed in any code, he must enjoy those rights not as a potential Christian but precisely as a French Jew. It is with his character, his customs, his tastes, his religion if he has one, his name, and his physical traits that we *must* accept him" (AJ, 146–47).

Immediately after this expression of radical pluralism, however, Sartre—and here we move to our second question and level of analysis—makes the following statement: "And if that acceptance is total and sincere, the result will be, first, to make easier the Jew's choice of authenticity, and then, bit by bit, to make possible, without violence and by the very course of history, *that assimilation to which some would like to drive him by force*" (AJ, 147; our italics). Hence, the relevance of our second question becomes clear: to what extent is Sartre's long-term goal the assimilation and homogenization of minorities? The recognition of difference that Sartre argues for seems, *in the end*, a temporary gesture that becomes superfluous once the socialist revolution is in place. In that sense it is, in the words of Michael Walzer, "difference now, unity later" (Walzer 1995, xx). Sartre just assumes that the preoccupation with particular identities is an effect of capitalist society, of a particular "situation," just as with another division in society, namely between workers and bourgeoisie. Thus the Jewish identity has no particular content of its own. It is an abstract, not a historical, community, and the collective memory that keeps it together is one of "a long martyrdom," "a long passivity" (AJ, 67).[20] The sense of being a Jew is wholly the effect of the objectifying gaze of the anti-Semite: "it is the anti-Semite who creates the Jew" (AJ, 143).[21] Anti-Semitism in its turn is the consequence of class differences: "anti-Semitism would have no existence in a society without classes" (AJ, 150). So if the anti-Semite came into being as a consequence of class differences, and the existence of the Jewish identity is in its turn an effect of the existence of anti-Semitism, the end of class differences should, according to this logic, put an end to the Jewish identity, which after all has no positive content of its own.

The same goes for Negritude in Sartre's "Orphée Noir," much to the irritation of those who thought, as did Frantz Fanon, that Sartre was "a friend of the colored peoples." But this friend, as Fanon puts it outspokenly, "had found no better response [to the Negritude movement] than to point out the relativity of what they were doing" (Fanon 1967, 133). Sartre characterizes Negritude as an antiracist racism that should play a temporary role in the run-up to the

worldwide socialist revolution. That is why he characterizes Negritude as a negative moment that "passes"—as he puts it with reference to Hegel—"into the objective, positive and precise, notion of the *proletariat*." In that sense, Negritude ought to be understood as a "minor moment of a dialectical progression," and as a "sad myth" (BO, 139; compare 118).[22]

Sartre's long-term goal of assimilation is also prominently present in the last pages of *Anti-Semite and Jew*, although it is a voluntary assimilation that he seems to be after, not a forced one. One of the radical measures that Sartre proposes is, again, classless society. The solution to the position of the worker—namely the liquidation of class—should, according to him, be applied to the phenomenon of social pluralism as such (AJ, 149–51).[23] Not surprisingly, Sartre's conviction that minorities like the Jews were eager to assimilate has turned out to be wrong (Walzer 1995, xxii). Although the worker might strive to escape his class, the same cannot simply be assumed with regard to the situation of cultural and religious minorities, who in many cases do not regard their particularity as a burden they want to get rid of. In fact, nowadays we witness the opposite, because minorities appear in places where they were invisible for a long time (Roosens 1989).

Here, we arrive at our third question and level of analysis. Jewish authenticity, according to Sartre in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, consists "in realizing one's Jewish condition," "in accepting it in pride or humiliation" (AJ, 90, 136). Authenticity is, for the Jew, "to live to the full his condition as Jew" (AJ, 91). At the same time, his or her sense of Jewishness is an effect of anti-Semitism. After all, "the authentic Jew . . . thinks of himself as a Jew because the anti-Semite has put him in the situation of a Jew" (AJ, 150). Hence, the authentic attitude for Jews is one of a temporary acceptance of an other-ascribed social identity. The Jew, if he wants to be authentic Sartrean-style, has to accept himself or herself as the creature of anti-Semitism until anti-Semitism is wiped out by socialism. Then Jews—as well as blacks and other minority identities—will finally assimilate.

It is important to stress that this is the almost unavoidable outcome of Sartre's problematic conception of social identity as, *in the end*, a by-product of class society. Assimilation as the long-term goal as well as the problematic notion of authenticity in the face of oppression are both closely related to this premise. If the Jewish community had a sense of identity before or independent of anti-Semitism, then the moment of self-identification—identifying yourself as part of the Jewish culture and traditions—would have a critical potential with reference to the picture of "the Jew" that the anti-Semite reflects back to him or her. However, if a critical, internal sense of identity is missing and the only sense of identity is the effect of the objectifying gaze of the anti-Semite—an effect that in itself is pertinent enough[24]—then authenticity as acceptance of one's situation becomes intolerable, as was indicated by Jewish commenta-

tors as well as by black leaders in response to Sartre's similar argument regarding the Negritude movement.[25]

<div align="center">COMPARING SARTRE AND BEAUVOIR</div>

We now can compare the views of these two existentialist thinkers on the role of ethnicity and gender with the primary aim of getting a clearer picture of Beauvoir's stances regarding a politics of difference *avant la lettre*. We deal with the three levels of analysis in reverse order, starting with the existential question of how to be authentic as a member of a marginalized social identity group within a nation-state.

How to be authentic? Both Sartre and Beauvoir agreed that the denial of one's position in society as a member of a suppressed social-identity group—be it as a woman, a Jew, or a black—is not the right attitude but rather an avenue of flight. However, whereas Sartre's notion of authenticity is developed mainly against the background of an opposition between denial and acceptance of one's situation—the latter being the authentic mode of behavior—Beauvoir works with slightly different alternatives, namely denial and *critical assumption* of one's situation, in the case of black Americans as well as women.

The adjective "critical" is important, for it means acknowledging a difference between accepting a humiliating notion of identity attributed by others to you, and the acceptance of a social situation as a situation that calls for taking one's identity into one's own hands. Although Sartre sometimes indicates that "authenticity" is not simply achieved by the admission that one is what others see in you (AJ, 108), he comes very close to this position on numerous occasions in his texts on the position of Jews and blacks that we have discussed. A striking example is when Sartre writes that the authentic Jew living in a condition of anti-Semitism "accepts all, even martyrdom" and that he "derives his pride from his humiliation" (AJ, 137). Sartre was of the opinion that the fight against anti-Semitism should be fought mainly by other citizens (AJ, 151–53). This stands in stark contrast to the emphasis that Beauvoir puts on protest by minorities themselves in her notion of authenticity, for instance, in the context of black Americans in the period when she was visiting the United States. With regard to the oppression of women, she did not just hope for a revolution, accepting martyrdom in the meantime; she explicitly argued for a notion of authenticity that rejects the stereotypical image of woman and that puts new faces on life and love as a woman.[26]

Is the long-term goal assimilation and homogenization? From Sartre's concept of social identity as a product of classed societies, the goal of assimilation of these groups is the logical outcome. In contrast, in the writings of Beauvoir gender is not to be seen as merely a by-product of class differences, but as a difference that has significance in its own right. Although she stresses the fact that this

"difference" is not related to any essential mental properties and that it involves a continuous work of invention, she argues that between man and woman there will be always certain differences related to differences in their sexual worlds.

Although Beauvoir is quite clear in rejecting assimilation and homogenization in the realm of gender, such a rejection is less clear in the realm of ethnicity. It would be rash to conclude on the basis of the texts we have discussed that she rejects, implicitly or explicitly, the classless society as the dawn of a new society in which ethnocultural differences would dissolve. In principle, she could make a distinction between ethnic and gender identity in respect to this question, and make room for differences after the socialist revolution only in the latter case. There is, however, no clear evidence that she defends this position. To the contrary, we have seen that in *America Day by Day*, she stated that for blacks the differences in their historical, economic, social, and cultural situation "at least theoretically" could be abolished. If we read this in the light of her general stress on the *critical* assumption of identity, we could perhaps distill from this that for her, social pluralism in ethnic respects is not to be abolished *de facto*.

We finally come to the most important aspect of a politics of difference, namely its critique of *liberal Western models of person and society* on behalf of oppressed or marginalized social identities, which is the topic of our first question and level of analysis. As we have seen in Sartre's essays on Jewish identity and Negritude, there is a strong sense that we should respect different social attachments and that this respect should somehow be institutionalized in terms of legal recognition. This moral commitment, which is most passionately expressed in Sartre's critical evaluation of the democrat, is based on the notion that individuals are not disengaged but caught up in unchosen social bonds that constitute their sense of self without determining it, hence, the importance of respect for people's cultural and ethnic identities. We want to conclude that we *can* take Sartre's plea seriously without accepting his references to ultimate revolutionary social unification—references that are not, after all, an integral part of his argument for a politics of difference. It is for his critique of the abstract liberalism of the democrat and for his positive—be it temporal—affirmation of black identity or Negritude that Sartre was recognized by black intellectuals as an "African" philosopher, a post-colonialist *avant la lettre*.

We do not find such an explicit argument for a politics of difference regarding ethnicity in Beauvoir's writings. But her concept of critical assumption of one's ascribed identity suggests that she endorses Sartre's arguments in the realm of ethnocultural identity. Because she is keen to argue for critically assuming one's ascribed identity without simply taking over its humiliating or degrading stereotypes, Sartre's critique of the democrat is even more in tune

with *her* work than with his own, because Beauvoir's position implies a more positive notion of social identity than Sartre's.

All in all, we can conclude that Beauvoir, in comparison to Sartre, has developed a more critical notion of assuming one's identity and is less keen on assimilation of group differences, at least with regard to gender, by way of the socialist revolution. However, with regard to the first level of analysis, Sartre is more outspoken in his defense of the recognition of diverse ethnic and cultural identities. We suggest that this should not be construed as an opposition to Beauvoir but instead could be interpreted as an elucidation of her philosophy of social identities. In this way, without assuming their thought is identical, we can read them as elucidating each other and also implicitly exposing weak and strong points in their philosophies on ethnocultural relations and social identity.

After studying this highly relevant material for contemporary discussions of cultural pluralism, we can conclude the following. Both Sartre and Beauvoir do not fit easily into the ideology of Enlightenment thinking, including Enlightenment feminism with its particular interpretation of civilization and individual freedom. Both philosophers are highly critical of policies and politics that do not take the person's particular situation seriously. Although they certainly are "freedom-loving people"—to use a catchphrase—and would be very critical of practices of suppression of anyone in the name of "tradition," their work testifies as well against assimilating otherness in the name of the "universal rights of man." As Sartre has put it quite clearly: "*man* does not exist; there are Jews, Protestants, Catholics; there are Frenchmen, Englishmen, Germans; there are whites, blacks, yellows. . . . [So] drastic measures of coercion would mean the annihilation of a spiritual community, founded on custom and affection, to the advantage of the national community" (AJ, 144–45). Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* opposes the dream of a universal science with universal power, which developed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a "dream, dreamed by reason . . . hollow like all dreams" (Beauvoir 1948/1947, 121). Claiming Beauvoir's name and work for a radical Enlightenment feminism, as was done by the French feminists mentioned earlier, involves a backlash for the cross-cultural feminist coalitions throughout cultures that have emerged in recent years, and for which Beauvoir's work offers an inclusive paradigm.[27]

Notes

This article is a substantially revised version of van Leeuwen and Vintges 2008.

1. Since the 1990s, new perspectives and new practices have been developing that demonstrate that Islam and gender justice are compatible. Scholars like Leila Ahmed, Aima Wadud, and Asma Barlas highlight the egalitarian spirit of Islam's ethical spiritual

message, and the active role of women in the past and present of the Islamic world, demonstrating that Islamic women are far from being the passive, oppressed creatures that Western feminists hold them to be. In many countries, Muslim women organize with a feminist agenda (e.g., Malaysia's "Sisters in Islam," the United Kingdom's "Women Living under Muslim Law," and the Dutch organization "Al Nisa"). These movements argue for the full social participation of women and for sharing household duties and child-rearing between husband and wife. For an overview, see Vintges 2005.

2. We do not discuss here Beauvoir's and Sartre's articles and interventions regarding anti-colonialist struggles and the Algerian war especially, because these struggles are the topic of a politics of difference on a global level, whereas we focus on the struggle of identity groups within nation-states. For interesting discussions of Beauvoir's views regarding anti-colonial struggles, see Murphy 1995; Kruks 2005; and Vintges forthcoming; concerning Sartre's views, see Young 2001.

3. For example, Sartre's later work will be addressed only marginally, because it was of less influence on Beauvoir's own theoretical framework than the early Sartre—roughly from 1935 to 1950. Their theoretical frameworks exhibit substantial parallels especially in this period.

4. In what follows we make use of Simons's discussion of Beauvoir's notes in her book *America Day by Day* on the racist situation she experienced (Simons 2002).

5. Myrdal's was the leading study at the time on "the negro problem"—which in his work he redefined as "the white problem." The work includes an appendix on women by Alva Myrdal entitled "A Parallel to the Negro Problem."

6. See, among many others, Kruks 1990; Lundgren-Gothlin 1996; Vintges 1996; Simons 1999; Bauer 2001; Altman 2007.

7. Beauvoir argues: "In Hegelian terms it might be said that we have here a negation of the negation by which the positive is re-established. Man makes himself a lack, but he can deny the lack as lack and affirm himself as a positive existence. He then assumes the failure." Yet, contrary to Hegel's dialectical model, instead of an act of surpassing, an act of "conversion" is at issue here. "For in Hegel the surpassed terms are preserved only as abstract moments, whereas we consider that existence still remains a negativity in the positive affirmation of itself. . . . The failure is not surpassed but assumed" (Beauvoir 1948/1947, 13).

8. Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex* as follows regarding both sexes: "Instead of living out the ambiguities of their situation, each tries to make the other bear the abjection and tries to reserve the honour for the self, . . . projecting into the partner that part of the self which is repudiated." She concludes: "If, however, both should assume the ambiguity with a clear-sighted modesty, correlative of an authentic pride, they would see each other as equals and would live out their erotic drama in amity" (TSS, 737). See, especially, Bauer 2001 for elaboration on this point.

Earlier in the text she stated: "It is possible to rise above this conflict if each individual freely recognizes the other, each regarding himself and the other simultaneously as object and subject in a reciprocal manner. But friendship and generosity, which alone permit in actuality this recognition of free beings, are not facile virtues . . . it requires man to outdo himself at every moment. We might put it in other words and

say that man attains an authentically moral attitude when he renounces *mere being* to assume his position as an existent. Through this conversion* also he renounces all possession, for possession is one way of seeking mere being; but the conversion* through which he attains true wisdom is never done, it is necessary to make it without ceasing, it demands a constant tension" (TSS, 172). (*Our translation. English translator Parshley translated the French "conversion" as "transformation.")

    9. Our translation. In French, Beauvoir uses the word "Noirs."

    10. The last sentence has been omitted from the original English translation.

    11. For further discussion on this point, see, especially, Moser 2008, 169ff.

    12. As, for instance, Barry argues in Barry 2002, 40.

    13. Coined in 1936–1937 by the Martinician poet Aimé Césaire, the word "Negritude" denotes a literary, cultural, and intellectual movement that strives for a re-evaluation and self-conscious affirmation of African and Caribbean identity.

    14. For a phenomenological-existential analysis of the position of "the anti-Semite," and more generally for an interpretation of racism from a Sartrean existentialist framework, see van Leeuwen 2008a and van Leeuwen 2008b.

    15. Concerning the notion "biological" in this general description, Sartre was highly skeptical of the notion of "race" as an indicator of mental qualities (AJ, 61).

    16. In this regard, it should be noted that as early as *The Transcendence of the Ego* Sartre was arguing that the ego is always already in the world instead of being an inner entity, an "'inhabitant' of consciousness" (Sartre 2004a, 1, 50–52). However, in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre backtracks from his claim in the *Transcendence* that this insight solves the problem of solipsism (BN, 235).

    17. "Freedom is not the Stoic detachment from loves and goods at all. On the contrary, it supposes a deep rootedness in the world . . ." (Sartre 1984, 293).

    18. Our translation. In French, Sartre uses the word "Noirs."

    19. For the relevance of the formal dimension of a politics of difference, see van Leeuwen 2007.

    20. Sartre was strongly criticized about this idea. Michael Walzer, for example, critically characterizes "Jewishness" in Sartre's text as "an empty category," or simply as "empty Jewishness" (Walzer 1995, xiii, xxii). According to Azzedine Haddour, this notion of empty identity ties in with a particular Marxist "eschatology": "Sartre envisaged the solution to the problem of racism in a Marxist eschatology: a classless society. . . . One of the consequences of this solution in existential-humanist Marxism is the perceived reduction of difference to a negative concept: the voided character of the Jew and the negativity of *Négritude*" (Haddour 2001, 11). For more critical reactions in this vein, see a number of contributions from Hollier 1999. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, Sartre acknowledged his neglect of Jewish history and culture. In his lecture on the subject of anti-Semitism in June 1947, he seems to have already compromised somewhat on this radical idea. There he states: "being Jewish is neither belonging to a religion nor to a race but rather *to a certain culture, to a history*, to a religious proclivity or a series of persecutions" (Sartre 1999, 44–45; our italics). In his later work, especially in *Critique of*

Dialectical Reason and *Search for a Method*, Sartre, in general, paid more attention to the historical dimension of the human condition (Sartre 1963; Sartre 2004b).

21. "The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew: that is the simple truth from which we must start . . . it is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew" (AJ, 69; compare 72).

22. Sartre, in his essay "The Burgos Trial," discusses the struggle of the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Freedom) and the Basques in Spain in terms of the singular universality. In his view, the Basque people are justly opposing "the abstract centralism of the oppressors" and the "universalist humanism of the central powers" that is based upon a type of "abstract man" (Sartre 1977/1971, 160, 150, 136). He then raises the crucial question (for us) of whether their struggle for recognition implies an "ultimate end" or a "temporary solution," that is "a step toward the moment when universal exploitation has come to a close and all men will participate on equal terms in a true universality, through a common overcoming of all singularity" (160). He concludes that only through a "cultural revolution which creates the socialist man on the basis of his land, his language, and even his re-emergent customs . . . man will little by little cease to be the product of his product and become at last the son of man" (160–61). Again, Sartre seems to imply that true universality *in the end* will be an "overcoming" of singularity, as in his earlier essay "Black Orpheus" and in *Anti-Semite and Jew*. His essay, however, convincingly argues for "the need of all men, even centralists, to reaffirm their particularities against abstract universalism," as he did in *Anti-Semite and Jew* in his critique of the position of "the democrat."

23. "Thus the authentic Jew who thinks of himself as a Jew because the anti-Semite has put him in the situation of a Jew is not opposed to assimilation any more than the class-conscious worker is opposed to the liquidation of classes. . . . The authentic Jew simply renounces *for himself* an assimilation that is today impossible; he awaits the radical liquidation of anti-Semitism for his sons" (AJ, 150).

24. On the basis of Sartre's analysis of racism and "being for others," Fanon wrote on racism from the point of view of the receiving end. He paid much attention to the moment of self-reification as an effect of the objectifying gaze. Just one example: "'Dirty nigger!' Or simply, 'Look a Negro!' I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. Sealed into that crushing objecthood . . . I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho' good eatin'" (Fanon 1967, 109–12). See the entirety of chapter 5 of Fanon 1967, "The Fact of Blackness." Incidentally, the title of this chapter has been mistranslated from the original French: "L'expérience vécue du Noir" (Fanon 1952). Compare van Leeuwen 2008a, 59ff.

25. Sartre's problematic conception of authenticity in *Anti-Semite and Jew* is in line with its conceptual development in what Ronald Santoni refers to as Sartre's formative text on the subject: *The War Diaries* (Santoni 1995, 89ff.). Sartre defines it here as follows: "To be authentic is to realize fully one's being-in-situation, whatever this situation may happen to be" (Sartre 1984, 54). This involves adopting "it as one's own, exactly *as if* one had given it oneself by decree, and, accepting that responsibility . . ."

(95). But why should I conceive of discriminatory action against me *as if* I had given it to myself "by decree," and accepting "responsibility" for it? Sartre might have realized this to some degree. He does admit that "there is something intolerable here . . . this obligation to *shoulder* what happens to me" (Sartre 1984, 113). Perhaps this is one of the reasons he never published his attempt to base a moral system on his ontology. For the same "intolerable" quality appears on the pages of his posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics*, namely with regard to what he refers to as an "ethics of resignation" (Sartre 1992, 393ff.). The slave in a situation of institutionalized slavery should follow a route of "resignation" (*résignation*) according to the Sartrean master–slave dialectic: "The slave deprived of freedom, reduced to the status of a thing through the will of the Other, inessential, receiving his existence from outside himself as a destiny, wants himself to take up this situation which is imposed upon him in order to remain human." Sartre refers to this assuming of the situation as "an affirmation of human dignity" and as "wisdom" (393). Furthermore, he calls resignation "the profound act by which the slave chooses himself as slave" (394). In this way "the slave will manifest his freedom in obedience" (394). To be fair, Sartre qualifies this strategy as "abstract freedom" and believes that this is the wise response given slavery of an institutionalized nature, thus when it "appears as natural" (396, 394). Violent revolt is the alternative, although Sartre is ambivalent regarding its status (398ff.). Sometimes he writes as if violent revolt by the oppressed is superior to resignation, a step forward in the dialectic (398), but at other moments he is very negative with regard to this option, calling it "a dead end" that "can benefit no one" (406; compare 173–77). On these types of ambiguities of Sartre on the subject of violence, and also in his later work, see Santoni 2003.

26. In Sartre's later articles on colonialism and neo-colonialism (Sartre 2001), however, especially in his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon 1965), he explicitly calls for revolt and even for the use of counter-violence by the colonized themselves in the liberation from the colonial situation. In these writings, Sartre is less inclined to argue for accepting a situation of oppression, even as a temporary mode of authenticity. But see n. 2.

27. See Vintges 2006 and Vintges forthcoming.

ABBREVIATIONS

TSS = Beauvoir, Simone de. 1974. *The second sex*, Trans. H. M. Parshley. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
ADD = ———. 1999. *America day by day*, Trans. Carol Cosman. Berkeley: University of California Press.
AJ = Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1995. *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Trans. George Becker. New York: Schocken Books.
BN = ———. 2001. *Being and nothingness*, Trans. Hazel Barnes. London: Routledge.
BO = ———. 2001. Black Orpheus, Trans. John MacCombie and Robert Bernasconi. In *Race*, ed. Robert. Bernasconi. Oxford: Blackwell.

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