Ambiguity, Existence, Cosmopolitanism: Simone de Beauvoir and a Global Theory of Feminist Recognition

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Introduction

Given the diverse violations of human rights affecting women throughout the world, and the likelihood that such violations misrecognize their moral worth, a cosmopolitan feminist theory of recognition seems timely. While the term 'cosmopolitanism' has been understood in different ways,¹ in essence the movement entails a shift away from normative political theory's usual emphasis on the nation-state. That is, cosmopolitans claim that all individuals in the world count as objects of moral concern, with their geopolitical, cultural and class differences still acknowledged (Beck 2006; Hall 2002). Yet, some feminists have questioned the ability of current cosmopolitan theories to recognize gendered power relations in the world today (Reilly 2007; Vidmar-Horvat 2013). Furthermore, although the politics of recognition has become a key movement in contemporary political theory, feminists are often sceptical about this approach. A central concern is that to be recognized for one's gender has been a source of much oppression in history, and that it is therefore unsatisfactory to rely on the concept of recognition in pursuing feminist goals (McNay 2008; Nicholson 1996).

While these concerns are significant, a cosmopolitan feminist account of recognition still retains attractions. Although differences in age, class, gender, able-bodiedness and culture clearly matter, the central cosmopolitan idea that citizens of the world are connected through their common humanity seems to appeal to feminist moral intuition. At least, the focus on the moral arbitrariness of the nation-state appears rightly to emphasize that women around the world, and indeed all human beings, deserve moral concern beyond state borders in an

age of globalization. Given long-standing debates about the false universalism of much feminist theory, or about its covert focus on First-World women's experiences, it seems that feminists cannot avoid the ethical obligation to 'recognize', in the sense of understanding and seeking to assist, the lives of distant others. Therefore, the cosmopolitan movement away from excessive forms of nationalism, and its acknowledgement of bonds outside the classic social contract, remain important feminist goals. Briefly, to combine obligations to the distant needy with attention to the physically near appears crucial for gender justice today. The challenge lies in how to understand and theorize these commitments.

A recent and prominent approach to feminist recognition has been offered by American critical theorist Nancy Fraser (2008b; 2013).² Although Fraser herself steers away from the 'cosmopolitan' label, she convincingly contends that feminist theory in an age of pluralism cannot remain focused on territorially defined nations. She proposes a promising tripartite approach to gender justice, including recognition, redistribution and representation, which aims to apply to all the world's women. Yet, as Fraser's approach risks homogenizing women's experiences in terms of objectively harmful social structures worldwide, it risks disregarding the lived realities of those who are impacted differently by globalization. In light of this problem, this chapter defends a different route to feminist cosmopolitan recognition, which focuses on the diverse, often hidden and unarticulated experiences of social suffering in the earlier existentialist feminism of Simone de Beauvoir (1948, 1972, 1968). Contesting charges that Beauvoir's thought fails to respond adequately to contemporary feminist concerns, I suggest that a close re-reading of her theory yields a promising framework for a global feminist politics of recognition, which may speak more firmly to contemporary realities of globalization than some alternative approaches.

With these points in mind, the chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 considers the difficulties with Fraser's formulation of gender misrecognition, which motivate the chapter's turn to Beauvoir's feminist existentialism in *The Second Sex* (1972). Section 3 identifies in Beauvoir's earlier text *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) her understanding of the struggle for recognition as an ambiguous tension between human agency and the constraints of the body and situation. Suggesting that Beauvoir's cosmopolitan universalism lies firstly in the common risk of repressing the human capacity to create meaning in the context of such tension, I label this dimension of the problem the *suppressed potentiality moment of gender misrecognition*. Section 4 extracts from Beauvoir's account the more complex cosmopolitan insight that the plight of the distant

needy, across state borders, may take priority over duties of care and reciprocity towards fellow citizens within a nation. The emphasis in this dimension is still on lived experience rather than objective social structures, as the very deprived in remote regions may experience their constraints in very different ways. I call this potential diversity in female experiences worldwide, the *resistance within commonality moment of gender misrecognition*. Section 5 concludes that Beauvoir's cosmopolitan feminism involves an interactive understanding of the two moments of misrecognition, or a dialectic between equality and diversity, which sustains hope for coalitions between near and distant women. While this account meets Fraser's key objective to establish duties of empowerment and care across borders, it goes further by requiring the self to confront crucial ambiguities in what it fails to understand or represses – that is to say, the Other within oneself (Kristeva 1993). In summary, this chapter's turn back to Beauvoir's post-war existentialism suggests an ambiguous world community, always in a process of becoming and perpetually incomplete. It advocates a truly cosmopolitan feminist practice of empowering those who seemingly exist beyond either rights or a more standard politics of cultural recognition.

Cosmopolitan feminism: Misrecognition as subjection to objective social structures?

As I suggested at the outset, one of the few writers currently offering what might be deemed a cosmopolitan feminist approach to recognition is critical theorist Nancy Fraser (2008b; 2013). While Fraser explicitly avoids labelling herself a cosmopolitan, her recent aim is to show that social movements like feminism cannot remain with the frame of state-territorial justice alone, or within a narrow recognition theory which focuses on cultural identity. Doing so would, she believes, underplay the role of forces such as neoliberal markets in undermining the quality of diverse women's lives. By highlighting sources of gender disempowerment such as the disproportionate burdens on women through neoliberal economic policies, Fraser (2008b: 39) urges engagement of the world's most deprived in a dialogue about the source, or 'frame', of injustices affecting their lives. She thus offers a compelling three-dimensional analysis of gender injustices, including symbolic misrecognition, resource scarcity and lack of political representation. In spite of her rejection of the label, she suggests cosmopolitan hope for diverse women's engagement as agents of their own needs and rights.

While such aims are clearly noteworthy, certain blind spots in Fraser's formulation of misrecognition seem to impede her diagnosis of the challenges facing a truly cosmopolitan feminism. For, while the effects of economic globalization may be deeply gendered, how the concept of misrecognition is understood seems crucial to addressing the situation of women worldwide. Although Fraser's emphasis on the objectivity of social and economic structures is compelling in many respects, understanding misrecognition in these terms only seems to risk homogenizing human experiences. One risks failing to notice the hidden, inarticulate nature of social suffering, which often exists in spite of institutional recognition such as equal resources, representation or rights. On this reading, Fraser's approach might not so easily secure the twin aims of cosmopolitan feminism, namely to recognize our common humanity (Diogenes' *kosmoupolitês* or world citizenship),³ and to acknowledge diverse forms of female suffering, which may resist shared understanding in a transparent self–other relationship.

To analyse this point more deeply, I shall briefly survey Fraser's account of gender recognition, with the caveat that a more detailed discussion would be ideally needed to do justice to her account. Fraser's interest in recognition politics began two decades ago, in the notable relation that she charted between redistribution along class lines, and an identity politics oriented to unequal status or misrecognition (Fraser 1995; Thompson 2006: 11). Over time, Fraser has insisted that redistribution and recognition should be analysed together, and she appeals to the 'bi-valence' of gender disadvantage in particular, or the location of female oppression in both distributive inequality and status subordination (Fraser 2007). The solution that she proposes, of ensuring participatory parity, or the capacity to interact as the social equal of others with dignity, seems a worthy cosmopolitan feminist premise. The concept of participatory parity seems to acknowledge the complexity of women's experiences of social disadvantage, without reducing them simply to a lack of confidence or of compromised self-esteem.

The rejection of a psychological account of misrecognition, however, brings both advantages and drawbacks. Unlike other notable recognition theorists (Honneth 1995; Taylor 1994), Fraser opposes a focus on individual psychology in an analysis of misrecognition. She distinguishes her 'status' model from an approach based on 'identity' (2003: 31). Charles Taylor, a proponent of the identity model, famously claims that misrecognition produces an internally damaged relation-to-self, and 'inflicts a grievous wound, saddling its victims with crippling self-hatred' (1994: 26). Similarly, Honneth (1995) argues that the psychological experience of being denied self-respect forms the motivation for most social justice movements. Fraser does not deny such psychological harm, but claims

that this does not, in itself, explain misrecognition. Rather, the injustice lies in the status order of society. She holds this view for at least three reasons (Thompson 2006), which seem relevant to understanding her approach to cosmopolitan duties of care and empowerment for women across national borders.

To be specific, one of Fraser's central worries is that if misrecognition is measured by the individual's state of mind, then it is a short step to 'blaming the victim', or paternalistic intrusion into the minds of the oppressors (2003: 31). Her concern is also that if the psychological theory through which the harm is explained were discredited, then a person's claim of unjust misrecognition would fail. Furthermore, and perhaps most relevant for cosmopolitan feminism, Fraser is anxious that any account of misrecognition based on a theory of the human psyche would appeal to a controversial, and probably sectarian, concept of the good life which would not be supported by all globally (Fraser 2003: 31). From these critiques, Fraser suggests an alternative 'status' model of recognition, which assumes that human identities are discursively constructed (2008b: 152) from mutable institutional practices, such as norms of gender segregation. Individual subjectivity is relevant to understanding gender misrecognition; but, for Fraser, it must be seen as constructed in relation to objective patterns of social disrespect, which result from systematic institutional and material structures that denigrate certain human lives.

The ethical commitments arising from Fraser's account of gender misrecognition seem productive. It seems right to focus on deconstructing the objective structural norms that denigrate women's identities by, for instance, marginalizing the value of domestic labour. Yet the complex realities of contemporary globalization seem to invite cosmopolitan feminists to envisage a richer account of structure-agency relation to better understand struggles against misrecognition. They seem to involve acknowledging the diversity of ways that human beings 'live' these social structures. Without appreciating the variable relationship between individual subjectivity and macro-social structures, one risks underestimating the obstacles confronted by real people in articulating their needs and rights in the most restrictive environments. While social structures may be objective, they are mediated through concrete human experiences in the symbolic dimensions of social life.⁴ To this extent, a cosmopolitan feminism built on Fraser's insights might elide crucial issues, because to overemphasize social structures is perhaps not to explain misrecognition as a distinct mode of oppression.

An added problem is that Fraser's key distinction between 'identity' and 'status' recognition seems overdrawn, and, arguably, fails to provide a viable

theoretical insight for global feminists. Fraser believes that the identity model presupposes an authentic self which the oppressed aspire to reclaim through positive social acknowledgement (2003: 32). Fraser takes this affirmative identity mode of recognition, in contrast to her 'transformative' approach grounded on parity of social status, to presuppose an individual who seeks recognition by identifying with ascribed social identifications. However, while the pursuit of authenticity in this sense seems applicable to cultural or national groups, and is keenly reflected in social movements such as German Romanticism (Zurn 2003: 530), it does not appear to flow logically from the psychological, identity-based conception of recognition as such. Moreover, the distinction between pursuing authenticity and transforming unequal status does not seem to apply very well to non-cultural movements such as global feminism.

Of course, cosmopolitan feminists might wish to contest any ideal of gender recognition which advocates conformity with accepted conceptions of womanhood. However, they might still view authenticity as a central goal, at least where it is a matter of recognizing one's humanity, or, to use Hegelian language, one's status as a 'being-for-oneself'. To this extent, identity-models like Honneth's seem right to focus on lived experience, and to suggest that self-alienation in severely restricted environments provides a reasonable indicator of injustice (1995: 22; Zurn 2003: 221). If this is true, it seems that a focus on objective structures risks failing to recognize the complexity of misrecognition in a global era. While Fraser aims to theorize the *post*-socialist condition, her most recent feminist writings (2013) seem to draw on a grand theory of economic oppression which may be opposed to the deterritorializing impulse of a critical cosmopolitanism, or its desire to engage with diversity and unfamiliarity (Vidmar-Horvat 2013). If all female experience were reducible to objective social structures, it would be hard to conceptualize the human differences which form the real challenge of cosmopolitan theory. Indeed, it is likely that any grand theory of social structure would be as controversial globally as the psychological theories which Fraser criticizes. The objectivist approach might return feminists to earlier worries about the tendency of cosmopolitanism to ambitiously declare universal law in ways that are insensitive to the real problems faced by ordinary people (Vidmar-Horvat 2013: 3). The specificity of social movements would be lost, along with diverse human beings' everyday experiences of injustice.

While acknowledging the acuity of many of Fraser's insights, then, this chapter responds to the difficulties of her approach to recognition by turning back to feminists' long-standing emphasis on lived experience, in order to propose

more realistic duties of empowerment across borders. The approach will aim to theorize ethical ties to a shared humanity without homogenizing the experiences of the near and the distant. Although cosmopolitanism assumes that 'there are reciprocal moral obligations and bonds of human solidarity that transcend other identity-categories' (Colas 1994), the task is also to recognize variety in human experiences *within* processes of globalization. As transparent understanding between self and other might always be elusive, the aim must be to embrace this ambiguity, and to recognize that the empowerment of distant others is not only a matter of economic reforms or asserting a charter of rights. As Martha Nussbaum (1997) observes, the cosmopolitan desire to respond to common humanity must be combined with a concern sympathetically to understand the predicaments of the distant needy, who may be located in different ways in multiple oppressions. Moreover, the aim of cosmopolitan feminism would be to acknowledge the *aporia* in relations of recognition, or the fact that the Other is never reducible to the same, nor entirely other, but both familiar and partly obscure (Kristeva 1991). Recognizing existential unfamiliarity as the challenge for world citizenship encourages a view of recognition as always in process of 'becoming'. Such a cosmopolitan feminist theory of recognition would, it is hoped, support relations of recognition which are constantly formulated and reformulated, never fully or perfectly achieved (Weir 2008: 111).⁵

Beauvoir, ambiguity and the cosmopolitan universalism of lived experience

Even if cosmopolitan feminists appreciate the need to focus their account of recognition on lived experiences of social suffering, they might have doubts about turning back to the post-war feminist existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir (1948, 1968, 1972). While Beauvoir's notable portrayal of woman as the Inessential Other appears strongly cosmopolitan in its universalist aspiration, certain third-wave feminists later charged her with drawing only on her own 'First-World', middle-class context (Spelman 1990). Furthermore, although Beauvoir might be read as seeking to embolden women to overcome a subordinate sexual identity, her feminist proposal has been thought a 'masculine' ideal, and even a 'revolt against femininity' (Young 1985: 173). Although such concerns are significant, I shall emphasize the relevance of Beauvoir's thought to contemporary feminist theories of recognition, by highlighting its potential to establish cosmopolitan solidarity between women without homogenizing their experiences.

To begin, Beauvoir's acclaimed feminist treatise in *The Second Sex* (1972) reflects her earlier outline of the human condition in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948). This earlier essay puts forward insights about embodied human experience which seems to underpin a productive cosmopolitan feminist claim. Following Kruks' (1998, 2012) analysis of the concept of ambiguity in Beauvoir's thought, I suggest that Beauvoir's concern with the denial of women's human ambiguity provides a compelling initial ground for a feminist cosmopolitan theory of recognition. I shall call this initial claim the 'suppressed potentiality moment of gender misrecognition'. Beauvoir does not deny that objective structures sustain gender inequality, and in partial accordance with Fraser, locates female oppression in biological, historical, economic and psychoanalytical processes (1972: Chapter 2). However, misrecognition for Beauvoir principally involves a human being's personal experience of a risk to their potential to create meaning in the world, and of being defined by others in such a way that denies their essential ambiguity.

This rather complex idea can be best understood by seeing that Beauvoir's central feminist claim that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (1972: 293) builds on her earlier insistence in *The Ethics* that human beings are without biological or any other essence: we become what we will ourselves to be. Thus, it is the vulnerability of all to a suppression of our potentiality to create original meaning in the world that explains, for Beauvoir, the problem of misrecognition. We are all at risk, because human life is ambiguous in a number of ways. Firstly, although we must act, our agency is constrained by our bodies and situation. Moreover, our ends are ambiguous owing to a potential conflict between our goals. Finally, as we project our life-plans into an unknowable future, we have insufficient control over the world to ensure these projects (1948: 18). In these senses, Beauvoir premises her account of misrecognition on the lived experience of social suffering. Rather than appealing to metanarratives of historical materialism or biological determinism, she submits that it is women's ambiguity, and, in relation to it their trans-cultural need for 'ethical-spiritual self-creation' (Vintges 2006: 214), that explains their common proneness to misrecognition.

More specifically, in contrast with Sartre's (2003) account of freedom as disembodied consciousness, Beauvoir takes human action to arise from the constraints of the body and social relations, which provide us with the concrete location from which 'we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting' (1948: 2–3). While Beauvoir therefore does not deny Fraser's insight concerning the restrictiveness of social structures, her consciousness of the excesses of fascist movements of her time leads her to question the metaphysical givenness of these

structures and to insist on the normative responsibility of human beings to create humane values and modes of living together (Kruks 1998: 52). Beauvoir invokes her reading of Hegel, Merleau-Ponty and Kojève to insist that true humanity involves acknowledging ambiguity rather than succumbing to totalitarianism. In fact, it is the former that defines human beings and explains the necessity of ethics itself (Kellner 2006: 11).

If this interpretation is plausible, Beauvoir's feminist insight is not that women's oppression is so pervasive that their achievement of recognition is impossible (cf. Lundgren-Gothlin 1996).⁶ Rather, her key thought is that, while they are socially construed as inessential (1972: 29), women are nonetheless involved in the species-wide struggle for reciprocal recognition (1972: 195).⁷ This is because human life is not a matter of transcending our facticity through a struggle *against* others, as Sartre would have it, but a question of seeking mutuality or reciprocity (1948: 28; 1972: Conclusion).⁸ Like all humanity, women confirm their existence by creating meaning intersubjectively, as life is impossible without friendship and generosity (1972: 140; Ward 2006: 154). The risk that one's effort to create intersubjective meaning will be stunted is thus reflected in Beauvoir's account of misrecognition as a suppressed potentiality for self-definition in dialogue with the Other.

Rather than assuming the futility of women's efforts for recognition,⁹ then, Beauvoir seeks in the *The Second Sex* to show how all human beings risk misrecognition of their distinctive humanity. For Beauvoir, this risk afflicts women particularly, because they are prone to assume the social roles foisted upon them, falling into what she calls, following Sartre, the condition of 'seriousness'. On this account, external (religious, political or patriarchal) values are taken as given. To fall into seriousness is to deny one's ambiguity, which is common not only because human beings typically evade the anguish of assuming responsibility for creating meanings. It is also because, in the struggle for recognition, for Beauvoir man is the Subject that defines himself in contrast to all that he perceives as different. Femininity thus becomes ambiguous in the further sense that women are cast as whatever man as Subject decides that he is *not*. The attributes of femininity in any society may thus be 'diverse and incompatible' (Kruks, 2012: 69). As Beauvoir further explains, 'it is this ambivalence of the Other, of Woman, that will be reflected in the rest of her history... But this will be ambiguous: by complete possession and control, woman would be debased to the rank of a thing' (1972: 112).

Gender misrecognition for Beauvoir thus inflicts a serious wound in Taylor's sense because women's ambiguity is suppressed by the male–female dualities that human consciousness has produced; *and* because society creates ambiguities for

women by foisting on them diverse and conflicting roles (Kruks 2012: 70). The possibility of misrecognition arises readily because women become mired in the infantile world in which established meanings are accepted unquestionably (1972: 52). This is why Beauvoir famously dismisses the possibility of a female revolution, claiming that women's rebellion has never been 'anything more than a symbolic agitation' (1972: 19). While contemporary feminists might be concerned about what seems a dispiriting account of women's experience, Beauvoir's insight is not ultimately pessimistic. As I hope to show, the fact that women of all national and cultural contexts, from the Independent Woman to the woman in the Harem (Beauvoir 1972: Chapter 10), live with their human ambiguity provides a productive premise for contemporary cosmopolitan feminist theories of recognition.

To support this idea, however, the issue of whether Beauvoir presents an exaggerated picture of gender misrecognition requires further attention. Later feminists (e.g. Irigaray 1992; Spelman 1990) complained about a seemingly problematic tendency in Beauvoir's writings to regard gender as the primary axis of power. However, this criticism is questionable, as Beauvoir's key point is that alterity, or the process of othering, is central to all human relations. She is wary of essentialist identities such as 'the Slav soul, the Jewish character, the primitive mentality, or *das ewige Weib*, the eternal feminine' (1972: 3) – images which have led to fanaticism in history and which deny human ambiguity. This is so, even though she believes in a 'common basis that underlies individual feminine experience' (Beauvoir 1972: 1).

If this is right, Beauvoir's concept of gender misrecognition is not limited in principle to women's campaigns for sexual and reproductive freedoms in European societies, important though such movements have historically been. As Stavro (2007) observes, Beauvoir recognizes the historical contingency of the structures that uphold gender oppression, thereby breaking down the oppositional gender binary that *The Second Sex* seems to construct, and confirms that diverse women address their human ambiguity through *various* social structures in different cultural and political locations. For instance, as Stavro (2007: 449; citing Beauvoir 1972: Chapter 4) observes, Beauvoir recognizes that women in pre-industrial societies were actively engaged in village life; and she praises the financial independence of working-class women. Thus, women live their predicaments in different ways in different social contracts; but what unites them is their ambiguous location between mind and body; the fact that they are 'not free not to be [women], for that is how the social world designates [their] embodied existence' (Stavro 2007: 449).

As it is, however, this account of Beauvoir's concept of feminist recognition may fall short from a cosmopolitan perspective. While her narrative concerning misrecognition as the suppression of ambiguity seems instructive, one might worry about the solutions that she envisages, such as equal rights and institutional reforms favouring equal pay and reproductive freedom (Beauvoir 1972: Conclusion). Reflecting her post-war, middle-class French experience, the concern is that the national specificity of the struggles for gender recognition that she describes render her account of the struggle against misrecognition rather parochial. The implication may be that women inevitably address their ambiguity within a particular sphere of gendered meanings such as a nation. On this reading, Beauvoir's emphasis on liberalizing norms of sexuality and motherhood in *The Second Sex* presumes shared understandings about gender roles which are most likely sustained within a particular territorially bounded historical form such as the nation. The account might fall short of explaining women's connection with, and duties to empower, others in radically different social, economic and political locations.

Cosmopolitan feminists would presumably wish to acknowledge an ethical connection between 'First World' women and those who might experience different, and even more severe, deprivations in radically different locations. The way the latter experience misrecognition might be distinct from women who perceive tensions between, say, conventional Western norms of beauty, and the pressure to conform to an ideal of motherhood, for instance. Yet, as we shall see, Beauvoir's thought offers resources for re-imagining relations of recognition and duties of care beyond borders. The framework of her thought addresses the challenge that cosmopolitan feminist theories confront by explaining human solidarity realistically across the deep social and economic divisions between human lives, and across the boundaries of different public spheres in the contemporary world. Beauvoir's concept of ambiguity, as I hope to show next, promises a global vision of gender recognition and care that does not replicate the problems with older cosmopolitanisms, which, arguably, often asserted ideals of 'peace' or 'human rights' in ways that were not truly helpful for emancipatory causes (Reilly 2007: 182; cf. Archibugi, Held and Kohler 1991).

To pre-empt my discussion below, then, Beauvoir's cosmopolitanism is robustly anti-parochial, in that her underlying but qualified commitment to (early) Marxist ideas enables her to envisage, with Fraser, that women's lives diverge radically around the world, with some existing below nutritional adequacy, without shelter, bodily security or opportunity. Thus, seriousness is not just one condition, but one of many; it affects women diversely. Beauvoir

acknowledges that sometimes social norms are so entrenched in distant parts of the world that a person's failure to revolt, and hence their descent into seriousness, may not be thought voluntary. Arguably, this is the situation of the world's disenfranchised and deprived, a distressing proportion of whom are women, who seem to exist beyond rights and recognition (Jaggar, 2001). For Beauvoir, while all are united by their experience of ambiguity, personal experiences diverge across different regions of the world, and diversity is found even within the most destitute regions. The idea that the more fortunate have duties to empower the distant Other may be extracted from Beauvoir's thought, thus taking post-war existentialism beyond the fraught twentieth-century European feminist causes, which formed the impetus for Beauvoir's groundwork in *The Second Sex*.

The diversity of global misrecognition: The 'resistance within commonality' moment

Although Beauvoir's focus on the lived experience of ambiguity seems, then, more attractive than Fraser's objectivism, a question that arises is whether her approach assumes that individuals may always, even outside the Western liberal democracy on which her writings focus, act voluntarily to contest social meanings in the globalizing world. Such an assumption might disregard the fact that globalization has been thought to lead to severe economic burdens and intense forms of fundamentalism for women of developing countries in particular (Moghadam 1999; Ngan-ling Chow 2003). In this context, would Beauvoir's cosmopolitanism acknowledge the wide gulf between experiences of women of richer and poorer nations, where no common framework of gendered meanings could be assumed? While such shared meanings might provide a basis for solidarity between women in a particular social contract or national public sphere, the challenge is to establish feminist duties of empowerment and care globally, in a manner which is still cognizant of diversity.

While Beauvoir distinguishes in *The Second Sex* the twentieth-century Western woman from the African slave of the past (1972: 145), she could not, in fairness, have anticipated the range of diversity that feminist cosmopolitans encounter today. Moreover, even within her own context, her sweeping survey of women in history, literature and psychoanalysis¹⁰ seems marred by reductive statements, such as, 'We shall study the evolution [of femininity] in the West. The history of woman in the East, in India, in China, has been in effect that of a long

and unchanging slavery' (1972: 113). In spite of this, I shall now contend that Beauvoir's notion of ambiguity contains normative means to establish feminist obligations between the near and the distant realistically, in a cosmopolitan account of gender misrecognition. One finds hints of this wider concept of misrecognition in her claim that women in different societies have contributed assiduously to productive labour, without 'a definite conquest of [their] social dignity' (1972: 168), even though Beauvoir admittedly assumes middle-class French society to be 'typical' (1972: 168 fn. 6). I shall call the broader dimension of misrecognition in Beauvoir's thought the 'resistance within commonality moment of gender misrecognition'. It suggests how women of vastly different economic and social regions may experience their condition differently than women in more privileged circumstances, and differently too than others who share their material situations. Beauvoir's thought enables a conception of misrecognition that establishes duties of empowerment, connection and care by addressing these divergent experiences directly.

This second moment of gender misrecognition may be explained by considering Beauvoir's acceptance of the early Marx's ideas (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996), in contrast to the orthodox communism prevalent in France in the 1940s. *The Second Sex* appeals repeatedly to concepts of alienation and false consciousness to explain women's oppression, even though Beauvoir ultimately avoids communist rationalism and urges instead an 'ambiguous humanism' (Kruks 2012), which views socialist transformation as a means to realize diverse modes of living and of social organization (cf. Stone 1987).¹¹ While she accepts the material base of oppression, Beauvoir's psychological understanding of subjugation leads her to acknowledge that, even in conditions where people enjoy very little option, they share with the more fortunate the necessity of negotiating and responding to their situations uniquely, owing to the ambiguity of all human projects and ends. As Stavro observes (2007: 440), Beauvoir defends a notion of 'connected existences' between all human beings, recognizing class difference without assuming its unique causal power and without economic reductiveness.¹² Against Engels, she insists that class conflict does not explain gender inequality (1972: Chapter 3);¹³ and that women do not form a class. As women 'have no past, no history, no religion of their own' (1972: 20), the interweaving of gender with different axes of power is recognized. Bourgeois women often feel solidarity with men of their class rather than with working-class women; and white women often disregard the concerns of women of other 'races' (1972: 19).

Yet the implications of this apparent pessimism with regard to global solidarity are mitigated by Beauvoir's deeper belief in reciprocity and friendship

(1972: Conclusion). The possibility Beauvoir envisages of human connections in the face of class differences and colonial power emerges in her essay about Djamila Boupacha, a member of the *Front de Libération Nationale* during the Algerian struggle for independence. Boupacha had been raped and tortured by French soldiers. Her cause was taken up by Gisèle Hamili, an Algerian attorney, with whom Beauvoir worked to assist the young woman (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962). Stavro summarizes Beauvoir's attitude in the following way:

Beauvoir never assumed that she could understand Boupacha...nor could she speak for her; however, she did not abandon all efforts to understand her. As their work proceeded, Beauvoir came to appreciate their cultural differences. Her perspective was enlarged, but this did not give her licence to speak for women of colonial status, nor as an Algerian nationalist. (2007: 453)

The first stage of establishing care and connection was Beauvoir's acknowledgement of the wide gulf between the women's experiences and their division through colonial violence. So much so that the words 'I am French' became 'scalded on [her] throat like a hideous deformity' (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962: 454). Beauvoir thus suggests that, while it is possible to challenge bourgeois women for failing to take responsibility for their freedom and their human ambiguity, the other's failure to resist may not be a voluntary act of bad faith. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the more fortunate to acknowledge this difference, and to struggle on behalf of the least well-off (Beauvoir 1948: 71).¹⁴ While Beauvoir's cosmopolitan premise is that all human beings are prone to the suppression of their potentiality to create meaning, some in the most materially deprived and politically unstable regions experience this condition differently. It is important that Beauvoir offers this insight, to avoid the charge of defending an abstract feminism which would fail to respond to the real gendered dynamics of the postcolonial world. As we shall see, Beauvoir acknowledges qualitative difference in women's embodied experiences globally, encouraging an open dialogue between the 'privileged' and the 'oppressed' about their needs and rights.

Conscious of her colonial privilege, then, Beauvoir's thought is that, while people in remote locations might seem without options or choice (Kruks 1998: 43), they never lose their agency or humanity. Even the severely oppressed retain what Beauvoir calls ontological freedom (1948: 41, 21; Lisenbard 1999); thus, they retain their ambiguity. To deny this fact risks further dehumanizing them. Beauvoir therefore emphasizes both commonality and difference in the experience of gender misrecognition, in order to refute absolute distinctions between 'First' and 'Third World', or 'privileged' and 'most oppressed' women

while still maintaining the Marxist insight that the experiences of the more and least fortunate differ qualitatively.¹⁵ As Weiss (2006) observes, Beauvoir does not follow through the implications of her thoughts in this regard. However, such openness is productive for a cosmopolitan feminist theory of recognition. It demonstrates that, while women may share a common structural disadvantage globally, the Other's experience might always challenge and disrupt a stable understanding of what misrecognition or oppression concretely mean.

We shall return to this issue, but the key point for now is that Beauvoir recognizes the disparity of life-conditions in different regions of the world, and encourages cosmopolitan solidarity between near and distant others in the face of this difference. In conditions of extreme exploitation and gender stratification, it is not that a person loses their ambiguity; rather, it is that their field of interpretive possibilities is very closed (Butler 1986). Here, the anguish of the suppressed potentiality moment is, arguably, surpassed by a different condition. A person who is without food, education, political freedom or real opportunity may not even be able to conceive the open future which those from the outside might observe (Weiss 2006). Hence, a woman who opts to abort her unborn foetus in a developing nation may think and decide, but may not be able to conceptualize a path to individual or collective emancipation. She may respond, react and resist; but, ultimately, 'living is not dying', and even, at the very extreme, perhaps in cases of torture, 'human existence [becomes] indistinguishable from absurd vegetation' (1948: 82–3). Revolt becomes unlikely, as individuals are nearly reduced to facticity.¹⁶ Kruks (1998: 56) interprets Beauvoir to mean that the very misrecognized have internalized their thing-like status to a point that their ontological freedom is modified. But this extreme reading is contradicted by Beauvoir's insistence on ontological freedom even in the most constrained circumstances (1972: 41; Linsenbard 1999: 153). That the most downtrodden share human traits with the more fortunate, while also, potentially, suffering a different, 'resistant', experience is reflected in Beauvoir's discussion of female genital mutilation in Africa late in her life (Wenzel 1986). This practice is as much 'our' problem as it is that of the 'other' woman, because women who undergo these surgeries still experience their ambiguity; they resist the thing-like designation. 'The Other is multiple' (Beauvoir 1948: 144).

Beauvoir therefore reads Marx in a specific way, and as usual refuses to accept received sociological or philosophical narratives uncritically. Against the French Communist Party, she argues that 'the very notion of action would lose all meaning if history were a mechanical unrolling in which man appears only as a passive conductor of outside forces' (1948: 15). Following the labour theory of value,

she agrees that the work of the extremely oppressed can become meaningless, or reduced to 'the repetition of mechanical gestures' (1948: 83). Yet human experience still takes primacy over social structures, as facticity is always variously interpreted. So, even if a woman in an economically deprived setting cannot decide to act in a way that would radically change dominant social relations, her interpretation of and reaction to her situation, owing to her culture, social standing, age and able-bodiedness, might differ from that of a woman in a similarly deprived region elsewhere. This diversity is exemplified by the ambiguous figure of the hetaira in *The Second Sex* (1972: 580). On the one hand, she gains social power and recognition from her beauty and sexuality, but, ultimately, to Beauvoir's mind at least, 'does not reveal the world, [and] opens up no avenues to human transcendence'.

The crucial point in regard to a feminist cosmopolitanism is that Beauvoir's awareness of this diversity between women's experiences motivates her to contest universal civil and political rights as the certain route to feminist justice (1948: 133). For Beauvoir, the unquestionable assertion of rights in any sphere, whether culture, nation or world, is a form of seriousness which, like the materialist conception of history or the pursuit of socialist revolution, denies the ambiguity of humanity (Zakin 2006: 42). Thus, Beauvoir urges unsettling any one social contract or field of ethical concern, as we cannot evade our responsibility to make difficult choices about how to effect our duties of care in particular cases. To Beauvoir's mind, the problem with ambitious declarations of *jus cosmopoliticum* or universal law is that if we 'dissimulate our subjectivity' into one static form of citizenship, absolutizing a single cause such as postcolonial liberation or world hunger, we risk failing to respond appropriately and contextually to others' humanity (Beauvoir 1948: 49).

This idea should be carefully understood. Beauvoir does not deny the value of human rights and equality, as she concedes that democratic societies 'strive to confirm in citizens a feeling of their individual value' (1948: 106). For this reason, she continually insists that liberal feminist reforms in post-war France, such as equal pay, reproductive rights and access to clinically safe abortion, would be necessary for citizens to realize their ambiguity (1948: 106–7). However, as Zakin explains, ultimately she suggests the limits of any concrete universal morality, and points to a dimension of meaning-creation excessive of them (2006: 43). Thus, while later French feminists have tended to identify Beauvoir's feminism disparagingly with conventional equality reforms for middle-class French women only (Irigaray 1992; Kristeva 1986; cf. Beauvoir 1972: 736–7),¹⁷ Beauvoir's commitment to the ultimate ungroundability of absolute values moves her theory beyond any unproblematic assertion of citizenship rights, and to question any sphere of

ethical concern, whether 'the Nation, Empire, Union, Economy, etc.' (1948: 145; Bergoffen 1997). Absolutizing any social or political value in any location not only risks totalitarianism, but it mystifies the fact that human beings must decide what to do in the face of equally compelling claims, where the outcomes of our projects are ambiguous. Moreover, absolutizing one moral scheme cannot resolve all the human suffering encountered in the world. This is not only because such suffering is diverse and complex, but because neither the pursuit of economic equality nor liberal rights can bring about the symbolic changes needed for human beings to recognize each other's ambiguity fully (Zakin 2006). Hence, these moral frameworks cannot ground First World women's commitment to the well-being of the Other. They cannot ground our pursuit of human connection or care.

To summarize, the 'resistance within commonality moment of gender misrecognition' suggests that the experience of oppression, while depending on our shared human condition, may be experienced in different ways even by those in similar material situations. While Beauvoir assumes this point as a trans-cultural, trans-historical truth about the human condition, the problem of misrecognition cannot be resolved through historical materialism or universal rights. Only by appreciating human ambiguity fully can we understand the 'choice' of a woman, in the example given earlier, in a context of severe material deprivation and gender disadvantage, to abort the foetus of the unborn female child (Moazam 2004; Rogers et al. 2007). This is not to dismiss the value of universal rights or to tolerate injustice, but it is to recognize the contestability of the meaning of those rights and universal prescriptions. The more fortunate should foster this contestability because, as human beings are ontologically free, they make the most rational choices that they could possibly make in their circumstances. Moreover, at times people exercise rights in a very restricted field of interpretative possibilities. By insistently pursuing rights, communist revolution, or any other concept of universal justice, one might fail to appreciate the material and psychic specificity of other lives. Thus, the 'resistance within commonality' moment responds to and encourages the aspiration for women to articulate their own needs and rights in both Fraser's and Beauvoir's senses. Commonality between women may be acknowledged, without reducing each to an instance of the same. This second moment in Beauvoir's thought enables feminists to acknowledge the location of women in the same oppressive social structures, without presuming too much from this commonality. As Stavro aptly summarizes, Beauvoir establishes unity in diversity without fully reducing women's situations to either subjective 'free' choice or the objective constraints of social and economic class (2007: 474).

Being-for-the-misrecognized in Beauvoir's cosmopolitan feminist theory

At this late stage, it is worth pressing on the cosmopolitan implications of the two moments of gender misrecognition in Beauvoir's thought. I would like to suggest finally that, when the two ambiguous moments are construed as an interactive dialectic between equality as sameness and diversity, Beauvoir's philosophy supports a commitment to a negotiated, unfinished cosmopolitanism, which recognizes the complexities of care across borders, and which is open to learning from the misrecognized rather than simply assisting through static commitments to rights. Rather than rejecting the value of human rights and equality, Beauvoir in fact encourages movement beyond them, as we have seen. Instead of following the familiar feminist campaigns for 'equality in difference', Beauvoir's cosmopolitan feminism recognizes 'differences in equality' (Zakin 2006: 47). As Zakin explains, Beauvoir urges an ideal of human recognition which speaks to the 'diversity and multiplicity of sexed subjects, towards the demassification of the universal' (2006: 47) and its rootedness in the particularity and locality of real human beings' lives. This must be so because, as Beauvoir says, 'particularity is precisely a universal fact' (1972: 180). It is because of this emphasis on the locality of our experiences that we cannot wait on the metaphysical guarantee of a charter of rights or communist manifesto. We may rely only on the humane values and projects that we create together, as a response to our human ambiguity.

The ideal of reciprocal recognition extracted from Beauvoir's thought in my view provides new inspiration for cosmopolitan recognition theory. It responds well to the concerns of writers who contend that cosmopolitan feminism must avoid narrowly defined, Western understandings of human rights (Reilly 2007: 180; Robinson 2003); and that it should clear space for democratically grounded emancipatory projects. Beauvoir's thought is productive here not only because, contrary to charges of liberal conventionalism and masculinism, she envisages symbolic change towards recognition of femininity as the major solution to gender disempowerment (Beauvoir 1972: 740). In a sense, this is to point to the fact that the universal, for Beauvoir, may only be accessed *through* the embodied specificity and diversity of human lives, the content of which continually re-forms and revises the shared terms of social cooperation. In Zakin's apt words, for Beauvoir 'there is no utopian community in which the separation between subjects might be dissolved or restored' (2006: 38–9).

We thus learn from Beauvoir's thought the need to, and the risks of, engaging in what Lugones (1987) calls world-travelling, or a metaphorical shift

to the perspective of the other in deliberating about rights, and the project of attempting to reach an understanding, however imperfect that inevitably will be. There is always incompleteness in the self–other relation, no perfect *Mitsein*, because human interactions always prompt both self-reflection and awareness of a remainder, or some aspect of the other's situation that one does not understand. The attempt to locate the shared *and* resistant aspects of a cosmopolitan community is important for feminists, an insight which is further supported by returning to Beauvoir's analysis of being-with-others in the first part of *The Ethics*. At its most fundamental, Beauvoir's thought in this respect anticipates her later readers' cosmopolitanism based on strangeness and unfamiliarity (e.g. Kristeva 1991; 1993; Kruks 2012; Zakin 2006).

In particular, Beauvoir's defence of being-with-others rejects Hegel's assumption of a perpetual antagonism between the self and other. As Beauvoir argues, 'this hatred of "the other" is naïve; and the desire immediately struggles against itself. If I were really everything, there would be nothing besides me: the world would be empty' (1948: 29). In this striking passage, Beauvoir stakes the importance of reciprocity and the need to make the freedom of the Other one's cause in order to avoid the absurdity of one's facticity (1948: 30). Against many Marxist and liberal humanists, however, the assumption is not that all good will harmonize. Beauvoir warns that while being-with-others suggests that each must form and pursue a project that serves the good of all, ultimately others are separate and distinct beings (1948: 31).¹⁸ Beauvoir's generous but cautious reciprocity therefore recognizes both unfamiliarity and familiarity of the Other. As one's existence is a matter of existing for humanity, the ideal is for an *ambiguous* world community, in which moments of commonality and irreducible difference are acknowledged in a shared struggle to understand the underlying ethos of universal rights.

Beauvoir's two moments of gender misrecognition therefore suggest a dialogical feminist approach to recognition, empowerment and care across borders. It claims that those who are, in a sense, fortunate enough to experience their ambiguity as anguish should take responsibility to engage the least well-off in dialogue about their needs and rights, or at least to provide them the minimal material conditions through which they might pursue their struggle. However, the theory also suggests that there is no unambiguous or disinterested way to empower others (1948: 41; Kruks 2012: 118).¹⁹ In her interaction with Boupacha, as we know, Beauvoir became acutely conscious of her complicity in structural injustices and of the impossibility of purity in politics.²⁰ Some questioned Beauvoir for her intellectual abstraction in this case, and her refusal

to get involved practically in the Algerian woman's situation (Caputi 2006). However, as Caputi explains, Beauvoir's limited involvement indicated her prescient awareness of Markell's later suggestion in *Bound by Recognition* that the challenge of intervening for the well-being of the least well-off is to do so in a way that addresses the social and economic forces that have made the misrecognition possible (Caputi 2006; Markell 2003). Ultimately, Beauvoir knew that she could not speak for or even know Boupacha. She sensed the contradictions and limits of the cosmopolitan encounter between self and other.

The implications of Beauvoir's commitment to cosmopolitan recognition are finally highlighted by briefly contrasting certain concepts in *The Ethics*, namely charity, which Beauvoir takes as a denial of human ambiguity; and reciprocity, generosity and friendship, which are worthwhile, in Beauvoir's eyes, because they are psychologically demanding. The problem with charity is that, as it is exercised from the outside, 'it is according to the caprice of the one who distributes it and who is detached from its object' (1948: 86). It need not require ethical involvement or obligation. Duties to assist across borders are therefore not best conceived as charity, but as reciprocity and friendship, which require engagement with the existential conditions of others' lives (Beauvoir 1948: 731). For Beauvoir, friendship and generosity are not 'facile virtues', but rather 'humanity's highest achievement' (1972: 154). Beauvoir never really specifies how reciprocity can be brought about in deeply unequal, patriarchal societies. However, it involves a symbolic change, on account of which each person begins to see themselves as both subject and object, not only remaining for the other as another, but seeing the other within themselves (Beauvoir 1972: 140).

As has been noted, Beauvoir's awareness of the difficulties of reciprocity in the Boupacha case limited her involvement to intellectual argument. She recognizes that the pursuit of one end might involve sacrificing another, which is the ambiguous condition of human political action. Given the conditions under which feminists exercise concern and care, the two moments of gender misrecognition in Beauvoir's account thus offer cosmopolitan feminists the possibility of cautiously fostering sympathetic understanding between those differently located in power, forging spaces of friendship in the absence of transparent understanding. The interaction of the two moments fosters awareness that the self–other relation involves appreciating that 'we', for 'them', are also unfamiliar objects (Kristeva 1991). Thus, although the challenge is always to ascertain the political conditions under which genuine reciprocity and friendship may be secured, for Beauvoir community and care are only possible when each recognizes oneself as at once a subject and object (1948: 7). The fortunate risk confronting their own existential

groundlessness in order care for the Other in such a way that unsettles, and hopes provisionally to reconstitute, the universal.

Finally, Beauvoir evidently did not wish to speak for all women or to claim to represent their experiences and, for this reason too, any cosmopolitanism extracted from her thought remains ambiguous in a further sense. However, her core idea concerning the self conceived as both subject and object suggests the hope of coalitions between women across borders (see Vintges 2006: 225). Significantly, this idea has not remained unnoticed in feminist theories. The core ideas of Beauvoir's feminist theory of recognition are indirectly taken up and pursued in some of the most intriguing contemporary cosmopolitan accounts. For instance, one of Beauvoir's severest critics, Julia Kristeva (1991), later develops the idea of the unknowability of the other in the constitution of a world community. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva builds on the insight that Beauvoir articulates only minimally, namely the unfinished remainder beyond the struggle for recognition. While Kristeva openly criticizes what she takes to be the feminist-existentialist ideal of interjecting women into masculine project, time and history,²¹ in fact she extends certain ideas that come to light in reading Beauvoir closely (Zakin 2006: 47). She develops Beauvoir's understanding, on the one hand, of the always imperfect recognition between self and other and, on the other, of the concept of being estranged from oneself, perceiving oneself as the object. Crucially, then, Beauvoir's framework for feminist recognition takes contemporary recognition theory beyond the logic of rights, representation and redistribution. Her insights redound in late twentieth and early twenty-first century feminist theories, which focus on the symbolic, and not only social-structural, changes necessary for human beings to exist in their realities differently. The approach that she provides to bringing recognition theory within 'the international' nourishes the attempt to ground justice in the world today by accepting ambiguity, and identifying the Other not only in a distant region but, crucially, within ourselves.

Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that, in spite of criticisms raised by her interpreters over time, Simone de Beauvoir's feminist existentialism may support a more convincing cosmopolitan approach to recognition than an approach that grounds misrecognition in objective social structures alone. In summary, when the 'suppressed potentiality' and 'resistance within commonality' moments of gender misrecognition extracted from Beauvoir's framework are read as an

interactive dialectic of equality and difference, cosmopolitan feminists might reconceive the project of empowering the Other on somewhat deeper terms than through static rights charters or mandated economic reform. This approach to recognition theory arguably speaks to the complexity of contemporary structures of globalization today, realistically appreciating that women even in the most constrained circumstances are differently impacted by their life-conditions, in ways that cut across gender binaries and class divisions, exemplifying the ambiguity of the human condition. As Michèle le Doeuff (2006: 12) recently suggested, ‘Times have changed. We have changed them, and it is no longer possible to claim that... Beauvoir is obsolete’. If le Doeuff is right, it seems plausible to pursue a cosmopolitanism inspired by Beauvoir’s thought. It seems right to envisage agency within the experience of misrecognition, and to hope to empower those who apparently exist beyond liberal rights or more familiar struggles for cultural recognition.²²

Notes

- 1 ‘Cosmopolitanism’ may be broadly taken to refer to a universalistic theory that encompasses the whole world rather than only the nation-state. While it is historically associated with Kantian universalism, current cosmopolitans such as Beitz (2005) focus on duties of redistributive assistance owed to citizens of distant countries. More recent, critical forms of cosmopolitanism, associated with Continental writers like Julia Kristeva (1991), focus on a symbolic decentring of the citizen as a member of a world community in order to foster global justice projects which are not confined to issues of resource distribution as such.
- 2 While I focus here on Fraser’s approach, other approaches to feminist cosmopolitanism should not be ignored; for instance, Nussbaum’s (1997) capabilities-oriented and Benhabib’s (2006) rights-based accounts.
- 3 The Cynic Diogenes, famous for introducing the idea of cosmopolitanism in Western discourse, did not offer a political theory favouring a world-state, however. Rather, his idea of cosmopolitanism focuses not so much on structures of global governance as on the individual’s *attitude to the world*, and, specifically, on their critical stances towards local prejudices.
- 4 In addition to Simone de Beauvoir, other feminist writers who attribute a greater emphasis to lived experience are, to some extent, Young (2005) and Bartky (1990).
- 5 Stavro further argues that ‘since we are not solitary or monistic entities, our experiences are not closed onto themselves, and hence are partly communicable; however, the particularity of our situations means that our experiences are never wholly accessible’ (2007: 447).

- 6 As Beauvoir writes: 'Thus, humanity is male and man defines women not in herself but as relative to him; she is not *regarded as an autonomous being*... she is the incidental, *the incidental as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute*' (1972: xix, my emphases).
- 7 I use the term 'reciprocal *recognition*' here to reflect Beauvoir's reading of Hegel, for whom the concepts of acknowledgement or recognition seem crucial. However, while these concepts may be inferred from Beauvoir's discourse on 'reciprocity', she does not herself frequently invoke the word 'recognition' as such, or its equivalent in French, *reconnaissance*.
- 8 'Thus, we see that no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself. It appeals to the existence of others. The idea of such a dependence is frightening, and the separateness and multiplicity of existents raises highly disturbing problems. One can understand the men who are aware of the risks and the inevitable element of failure involved in any engagement in the world to fulfil themselves outside of the world' (Beauvoir, 1948: 28).
- 9 Lundgren-Gothlin rather controversially argues that for Beauvoir, woman is not analogous to the slave of Hegel's master-slave dialectic because, since woman does not demand recognition from man, she is in a situation of perpetual stasis.
- 10 Beauvoir does often refer to women in different cultures who appear to be 'empowered' to some degree, such as Egyptian women (1972: 108) and the Brahmins in India (112). Yet, she concludes rather pessimistically that 'in truth, that Golden Age of Woman is a myth' (102).
- 11 Beauvoir argues against Engels by insisting that it is 'the imperialism of human consciousness, seeking always to exercise sovereignty in objective fashion' (1972: 58) which constitutes the real origin of sexual difference.
- 12 While, for Beauvoir, material well-being is necessary for human beings to realize their humanity, she vacillated in the emphasis that she would give to the material base of oppression. In *The Force of Circumstance*, she asked: 'Why did I write *concrete liberty* instead of *bread*?' Yet, even then, Beauvoir's theory views oppression always as a 'psychological mechanism' (see Arp 2001: 123).
- 13 As Beauvoir argues in response to Engels' thesis regarding the origin of patriarchy in a shift in the economic mode of production of early societies: 'If the human consciousness had not included in it the original category of the other, and an original aspiration to dominate the other, the invention of the bronze tool could not have caused the oppression of women' (Beauvoir 1972: 89).
- 14 Caputi, however, further suggests an ambiguity about where Beauvoir's humanitarian demands take us. 'How', she asks, 'can we respond to every human being? And if we do not suffer as they do, what can we know authentically about their suffering?' (2006: 117). This is obviously an important issue which cannot be discussed fully in this chapter for reasons of space.

- 15 As Beauvoir explains: 'Oppression divides the world into two classes: those who enlighten mankind by thinking it ahead of itself and those who are condemned to mark time hopelessly in order merely to support the collectivity' (1948: 35).
- 16 As Weiss observes, in contrast to those who live in 'bad faith', for Beauvoir there are also those who 'live in the universe of the serious in all honesty, for example, those who are denied all instruments of escape, those who are enslaved or those who are mystified' (1972: 47–8; Weiss 2006: 248).
- 17 Beauvoir seems to envisage the conventional politics of equality as a stepping-stone to a deeper psychic transformation of society: 'woman cannot be transformed unless society has first made the equal of men... It seems sooner or later they will arrive at complete economic and social equality, *which will bring about an inner metamorphosis*' (1972: 738, my emphasis).
- 18 For Beauvoir, charity is ultimately an act of bad faith, as we cannot fully fight the Other's fight for them. While we have to assume the minimal well-being of the least well-off as our project, it is also true that 'the oppressed are more totally engaged in the struggle'. This is so even though the better-off cannot fulfil themselves morally without taking part in their struggle (1972: 36). In a sense, this is the paradox of altruism.
- 19 Beauvoir suggests here not only that the means of assisting are ambiguous, *and* that worthy causes and political concerns are multiple. Not only can one 'never respect all freedoms at the same time' but also we must 'accept the tensions in the struggle' (1948: 43). Realistically, what order should be followed? What tactics should be adopted? 'For each one, it also depends on his individual situation' (1948: 38).
- 20 Many French intellectuals of Beauvoir's time similarly failed to get involved practically in the pro-Algerian struggle. This situation motivated Frantz Fanon's complaint that the French intellectuals' 'horrified' reaction to colonial atrocity was self-indulgent and arose from their perception of the 'colonial tragedy' as an assault on French honour (Caputi 2006: 119–20; Fanon 2008). However, Fanon did not direct his complaint against Beauvoir particularly. Also, given Beauvoir's critique of nationalism in *The Ethics*, it seems at least ungenerous to interpret Beauvoir's reactions as pure self-indulgence.
- 21 In fact, in her famous essay 'Women's Time' (1986), Kristeva does not name Beauvoir as a proponent of the 'first-wave' existentialist feminism. However, she has been widely understood to refer critically to Beauvoir's philosophy in this text.
- 22 I would like to thank Patrick Hayden and Kate Schick for very kindly inviting me to contribute to the research project which gave rise to this volume, and for their constant encouragement. This research would not have been possible without their support, patience and kindness. I am particularly indebted to stimulating and valuable conversations with them and the other participants at the workshop held at the University of St Andrews in April 2014, at which an early draft of this essay was presented.