



JOURNAL OF EMERGING MINDS IN UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

Volume 1 · Issue 1 · 2026 | jemur.org

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Simone de Beauvoir's Concept of Otherness and Contemporary Gender Politics: An Existential Feminist Perspective

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21923756

Submitted: 17 July 2026 Accepted: 13 August 2026 Published: 31 August 2026

ABSTRACT

Since its publication in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* has remained one of the foundational works of feminist thought, profoundly shaping debates on gender, freedom, and social inequality. Although Beauvoir's existential feminism has been widely examined within twentieth-century feminist theory, limited attention has been paid to its analytical relevance for understanding contemporary forms of institutional and technological patriarchy. This article examines the extent to which Beauvoir's concepts of otherness, freedom, immanence, transcendence, and anti-essentialism remain applicable to twenty-first-century gender politics. Employing an interpretive qualitative research design and a comparative case study approach, the study analyses four institutional contexts: the legal regulation of women's bodily autonomy in Iran following Mahsa Amini's death in custody, the systematic exclusion of women under Taliban rule in Afghanistan, algorithmic discrimination in artificial intelligence (AI) systems, and gender inequalities reproduced through digital platforms. Building on Beauvoir's existential philosophy and engaging with contemporary feminist scholarship—including Butler's theory of gender performativity, Crenshaw's intersectionality, recognition theory, and digital feminism—the article develops the Contemporary Otherness Framework (COF) as an integrative analytical model. Rather than arguing that patriarchal domination has disappeared through modernization and digitalization, the study demonstrates how it has adapted to new political, legal, and technological conditions. The findings suggest that while the institutional forms of gender inequality have evolved, the underlying dynamics of otherness, unequal recognition, and constrained freedom identified by Beauvoir continue to shape women's experiences. By bridging existential feminism with contemporary debates on digital governance and AI, the article contributes to feminist political theory and provides a comparative framework for analysing the evolving institutional architecture of patriarchal power in the digital age.

Keywords: Simone de Beauvoir; existential feminism; digital patriarchy; artificial intelligence (AI); Contemporary Otherness Framework (COF)

To cite this article: Tabirlioglu, İ. (2026). Simone de Beauvoir's concept of otherness and contemporary gender politics: An existential feminist perspective. *Journal of Emerging Minds in Undergraduate Research*, 1(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21923756>

1. Introduction

Ever since the publication of the book *The Second Sex* in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir has remained one of the most influential figures in feminist branch of political thought and existentialist philosophy. Her works on women's oppression fundamentally transformed the study of gender and discipline of gender studies by criticizing biological determinism and stating that femininity is not a fixed condition but a socially constructed identity shaped through historical, political, and cultural processes. Beauvoir's famous assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" has become one of the most frequently used statements in feminist school of thought, providing the basis for debates on gender construction, subjectivity, embodiment, and social inequality (Beauvoir, 2011, p.283). Even after seven decades passed from its publication date, *The Second Sex* continues to shape discussions over gender politics, illustrating the relevance of Beauvoir's existential feminist ideas in grasping the structural mechanisms through which patriarchal societies reproduce inequality.

Unlike earlier approaches that explained women's condition through biological or theological arguments, Beauvoir argued gender inequality is rooted within the broader existential condition of human existence (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 25). Drawing upon existential phenomenology and engaging critically with the philosophical traditions of Hegel and Sartre (Moi, 1999, p.60), she conceptualized women as the "Other," stating that patriarchal societies establish men as the universal and autonomous subject while women to a secondary and dependent position (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 6). Within this framework, women are not naturally inferior; rather, they become subordinated through historical institutions, cultural norms, and social practices that construct men as the normative subject and women as the "Other" (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 6). Consequently, Beauvoir redirected feminist inquiry away from biological essentialism toward an existential analysis of freedom, oppression, and social construction, an approach that later became a milestone for existentialist feminism (Moi, 1999, p. 60).

The importance of Beauvoir's theoretical contribution to the field extends even further beyond the 20th -century debates on women's emancipation process. Modern societies continue to witness persistent forms of gender inequality and gender-based oppression through discrimination, despite remarkable legal, political, and economic progress in many parts of the world. Gender-based violence, discriminatory labour markets, unequal political representation, and restrictions on reproductive rights continue to demonstrate the resilience of structural gender inequalities (Fraser, 2022, p. 5). Meanwhile, online harassment, algorithmic discrimination, and the commercialization of women's bodies through digital platforms reveal how patriarchy has adapted to emerging technological sphere (UN Women, 2023).

Against this background, this study seeks to reinterpret Simone de Beauvoir's theory of otherness through the perspective of modern gender politics by integrating existential feminist theory with current developments in feminist political thought and digital society studies. Rather than treating Beauvoir's work only as a historical milestone in feminism, this study aims to illustrate that her philosophy continues to provide a strong analytical basis for understanding the persistence and transformation of patriarchy in modern societies. To achieve this objective, the article addresses the following research questions: First research question seeks to answer to what extent does Beauvoir's concept of "the Other" remain relevant for explaining contemporary forms of gender inequality? Second, how can Beauvoir's concepts of freedom,

transcendence, and immanence be reinterpreted in light of contemporary debates on digital patriarchy and gender politics?

Rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, this article seeks to develop an interpretive framework that connects Beauvoir's existential feminism with contemporary debates on gender inequality. Accordingly, the analysis is organized around three interrelated objectives. First, it examines whether Beauvoir's concept of otherness continues to provide a meaningful analytical perspective for understanding the persistence of gender inequality in contemporary societies. Second, it explores how emerging forms of digital patriarchy—including algorithmic governance, artificial intelligence, and platform economies—can be interpreted through Beauvoir's concepts of freedom, immanence, and transcendence. Third, it assesses the extent to which integrating Beauvoir's existential feminism with contemporary feminist theories contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of twenty-first-century gender politics.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in interpretive political theory and a comparative case study approach. Rather than testing causal hypotheses, the research seeks to interpret Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminist framework and examine the extent to which its central concepts remain analytically relevant for understanding contemporary forms of gender inequality across different institutional settings. Interpretive political theory is particularly appropriate for this purpose because it emphasizes the analysis of political ideas, meanings, and normative assumptions rather than the identification of causal relationships through hypothesis testing (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

The research employs a comparative case study design to explore how patriarchal power is reproduced under diverse political, legal, and technological conditions. The empirical analysis focuses on four illustrative cases: the Mahsa Amini protests in Iran, restrictions on women's rights under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, algorithmic discrimination and AI-enabled gender inequality, and platform economies associated with digital visibility and aesthetic labour. These cases were selected through purposive sampling because they represent distinct institutional configurations of gender inequality while enabling systematic comparison across different contexts (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Rather than seeking statistical generalization, the selected cases provide analytically rich examples that facilitate theoretical interpretation and comparison.

The study relies exclusively on qualitative data derived from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, together with legal documents, reports, and policy publications produced by international organizations concerning women's rights, digital governance, and artificial intelligence. Secondary sources consist of peer-reviewed scholarship in feminist political theory, existential philosophy, intersectionality, digital governance, artificial intelligence, and gender studies. Since the objective is conceptual interpretation rather than empirical measurement, the study does not generate original data through interviews, surveys, or quantitative techniques.

The analytical process proceeds in three interconnected stages. First, Beauvoir's principal concepts—including otherness, freedom, immanence, transcendence, and anti-essentialism—are reconstructed through conceptual analysis. Second, these concepts are critically examined

alongside contemporary feminist scholarship on intersectionality, recognition theory, digital patriarchy, and algorithmic governance in order to identify both theoretical continuities and conceptual developments. Third, the proposed Contemporary Otherness Framework (COF) is comparatively applied to the selected case studies to examine how different institutional settings produce distinct configurations of patriarchal domination. Rather than assuming that the same mechanisms operate uniformly across all cases, the framework identifies which of its five analytical dimensions become dominant within each context, thereby enabling systematic comparison while preserving contextual specificity.

The comparative application of the COF also defines the scope of the framework. The model is intended to analyse institutionalized forms of gender inequality reproduced through political, legal, economic, and technological structures. It does not seek to provide a universal explanation for all manifestations of gendered experience or to replace context-specific analyses of culture, religion, ethnicity, or local historical conditions. Instead, these contextual factors are treated as variables that shape the institutional expression of patriarchal domination across different cases. Accordingly, the COF functions as a comparative interpretive framework that explains variation in the institutional reproduction of gender inequality rather than proposing a deterministic theory applicable to all societies.

3. Theoretical Analysis

The rise of existential feminism cannot be understood independently from the philosophical tradition of existentialism that developed throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Rejecting rationalist and essentialist human nature concepts, existentialism states that individuals are not born with predetermined identities or purposes but create themselves through freedom, choice, and responsibility. Its central premise—that existence precedes essence—places human beings in a condition of radical freedom while simultaneously imposing ethical responsibility for their actions (Sartre, 2007, p. 24).

Among existentialism's foundations, Søren Kierkegaard emphasized subjectivity, individual choice, and personal responsibility concepts in opposition to abstract philosophical systems (Kierkegaard, 1985, p.40). Martin Heidegger further developed this tradition by introducing the concept of *Dasein*, stating that human existence is situated within historical and social contexts rather than existing as an isolated rational consciousness (Heidegger, 1962, p.80). These philosophical developments eventually influenced Jean-Paul Sartre, who reformulated existentialism around the idea that freedom is the defining condition of human existence and that individuals are responsible for creating meaning through their choices (Sartre, 2007, p. 27).

Building upon this tradition, Simone de Beauvoir transformed existential philosophy into a critical framework for analysing systemic gender inequality. While Sartre mainly examined freedom as an individual existential condition, Beauvoir demonstrated that freedom is also shaped and constrained by social institutions and unequal power relations. Rather than simply applying Sartrean existentialism to women's condition, she reconceptualized freedom through the realities of embodiment, social oppression, and gendered subjectivity, thereby establishing the theoretical foundations of existential feminism (Moi, 1999, p.60). As Kruks (1990, p. 87) argues, Beauvoir should therefore be understood not as a follower of Sartre but as an independent theoretician whose reinterpretation of existentialism fundamentally transformed

feminist theory. Ever since the publication of *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir had a central position in feminist philosophy, political theory, and gender studies. Challenging essentialist understandings of gender and determinist school of thought, Beauvoir stated that femininity is not biologically predetermined but historically and socio-politically constructed, thereby shifting feminist scholarship from biological explanations of women's subordination toward an analysis of the political, cultural, and institutional mechanisms through which gender inequality is reproduced. Consequently, *The Second Sex* is widely regarded as one of the founding texts of modern feminist theory (Simons, 1999, p.2).

Beauvoir's anti-essentialist point of view has influenced feminist theory. Butler (1990, p.25) extended Beauvoir's arguments by conceptualizing gender as a performativity repeatedly produced through continuous social practices. While Beauvoir stated that femininity is socially produced rather than biologically predetermined, Butler further radicalized this argument by suggesting that gender itself is continuously constituted through the repetition of social performances rather than expressing any pre-existing identity (Butler, 1990, p.25). In Butler's words, gender is not something individuals possess but something they repeatedly enact within socially regulated norms through performativity (Butler, 1990, p. 25). Although Butler occasionally distances her work from existentialism, numerous scholars have argued that her critique of gender essentialism would have been difficult to formulate without Beauvoir's earlier rejection of biological determinism (Moi, 1999, p.90). Accordingly, Butler should be understood less as a rejection of Beauvoir than as an extension of Beauvoir's anti-essentialist project. Another significant development stresses on the relationship between recognition and structural inequality. Beauvoir mainly worked on domination through the existential relationship between subject and Other, emphasizing how patriarchal societies decline women equal recognition as autonomous subjects (Beauvoir, 2011, p.5). In this respect, Axel Honneth deepened this thought by saying that struggles for recognition constitute a fundamental dimension of social justice, linking individual identity formation to broader institutional patterns of respect, rights, and solidarity (Honneth, 1995, p. 95). Similarly, Nancy Fraser states that gender justice requires both cultural recognition and material redistribution, illustrating that symbolic exclusion and economic inequality are mutually reinforcing rather than analytically separable (Fraser, 2022, p.3). Together, these perspectives broaden Beauvoir's existential analysis by situating struggles for freedom within institutional, economic, and political structures. Accordingly, recent scholars increasingly examines Beauvoir's concepts of otherness, freedom, and transcendence to emerging issues such as digital surveillance, algorithmic discrimination, online gender-based violence, and platform governance (Noble, 2018, pp.1–2). Nevertheless, these studies often address these developments separately, while relatively few provide a holistic framework connecting Beauvoir's existential feminism with contemporary debates on digital patriarchy, intersectionality, and algorithmic governance. Addressing this theoretical gap constitutes one of the principal objectives of the present study.

To illustrate the theoretical basis better it is crucial to do an analysis of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. It represents another major expansion of feminism. Beauvoir's analysis primarily examined women's subordination through the universal category of gender, paying comparatively limited attention to how race, ethnicity, class, disability, sexuality, and colonial histories shape different experiences of oppression. Crenshaw (1989, p.140) challenged universalizing approaches by demonstrating that gender discrimination cannot be

fully understood independently of other systems of power that created unfair practices. Black women, for example, experience forms of discrimination that cannot be explained solely through gender or race in isolation but emerge from their simultaneous interaction. Intersectionality therefore is a complementary aspect to Beauvoir's concept of otherness by unveiling that processes of exclusion are multidimensional and historically situated rather than uniform across all women.

Iris Marion Young further contributes to this discussion by shifting attention from individual experiences of discrimination toward structural forms of oppression embedded within social institutions. Young (1990, p. 36) states that injustice is created through institutional processes that normalize exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural domination, and violence. This structural perspective reinforces Beauvoir's claim that women's inequality cannot be reduced to individual prejudice or personal attitudes but instead reflects deeply embedded institutional arrangements. However, Young extends Beauvoir by providing a more systematic account of how political, legal, and economic institutions reproduce unequal power relations across society.

Recent feminist scholarship has also expanded these debates into the realm of technology and digital governance. Scholars such as Safiya Umoja Noble (2018, p.2) states that algorithmic systems continuously constructs gendered and racialized inequalities through search engines and digital infrastructures. Likewise, D'Ignazio and Klein (2020, p.8) states that data practices are never politically neutral but instead reflect the social values embedded within technological systems. These contributions suggest that contemporary patriarchal domination forms increasingly operate through algorithmic decision-making, platform governance, and AI rather than only through traditional legal or cultural institutions. Consequently, feminist theory has gradually expanded from analyzing institutional patriarchy toward examining the governance of gender within digital societies.

Despite these significant theoretical developments, an important gap remains within the literature. Existing studies generally pursue one of two directions. The first examines Beauvoir as a foundational philosopher of existential feminism, while the second analyses contemporary issues such as algorithmic bias, digital violence, and platform governance through more recent feminist frameworks (Noble, 2018, p.2). Comparatively few studies have systematically integrated Beauvoir's existential concepts with contemporary analyses of digital patriarchy within a single analytical framework. This fragmentation limits our ability to understand the continuity between classical and technologically mediated forms of gender inequality. Addressing this limitation constitutes one of the principal objectives of the present study and provides the rationale for developing the Contemporary Otherness Framework presented in the following sections.

While Beauvoir's existential feminism remains one of the most significant definitions of women's oppression, modern gender politics has been transformed by globalization (Fraser, 2022, p.7), digitalization, AI, algorithmic governance, and platform capitalism (Noble, 2018, p.2). Although these developments have generated feminist scholarship, the literature remains fragmented. Studies inspired by Beauvoir mainly sheds light on philosophical understanding, whereas research on digital patriarchy and algorithmic discrimination often develops

independently of existential feminist theory. Consequently, existing scholarship offers limited integration between classical feminist concepts and contemporary forms of gendered power.

To address this gap, this article proposes the Contemporary Otherness Framework (COF) as an integrative analytical model that extends Beauvoir's existential feminism by incorporating contemporary debates on digital governance, intersectionality, recognition, and structural power. The framework conceptualizes gender inequality as a dynamic process in which patriarchal institutions adapt to changing political, technological, and social conditions while preserving the fundamental logic of othering.

The COF comprises five interconnected dimensions:

(1) otherness, refers to the institutional construction of women as subordinate subjects; (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 6; Honneth, 1995, p.95)

(2) freedom, examines how structural inequalities restrict women's existential and political agency; (Young, 1990, p.33)

(3) immanence and transcendence, analyses how patriarchal institutions limit opportunities for self-realization while women continue to challenge these limitations; (Beauvoir, 2011, p.726)

(4) anti-essentialism, understands gender as socially and institutionally constructed rather than biologically predetermined (Butler, 1990, p.25) and

(5) adaptive patriarchy, explains how modern technologies—such as AI, algorithmic governance, digital surveillance, and platform economies—creates historical patterns of gender domination through new institutions (Noble, 2018, p.2).

Table 1: The Definition of COF Components

COF Component	Operational Definition	Empirical Indicator
Otherness	Institutional construction of women as secondary subjects	Legal restrictions, discriminatory discourse, algorithmic bias
Freedom	Capacity for autonomous agency and decision-making	Access to education, work, political participation, bodily autonomy
Immanence	Institutional confinement to repetitive or subordinate roles	Domestic confinement, exclusion from employment, platform-driven aesthetic labour
Transcendence	Individual or collective practices challenging domination	Protest movements, digital activism, underground education, feminist mobilization
Anti-essentialism	Rejection of biologically predetermined gender roles	Legal reforms, inclusive policies, counter-narratives, resistance to gender stereotypes

Source: Prepared by the author.

Unlike existing feminist frameworks, the COF does not treat existential philosophy, recognition theory, intersectionality, and digital governance as separate analytical perspectives. Instead, it conceptualizes them as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single adaptive process through which patriarchal domination is continuously reproduced under changing institutional conditions. Consequently, the COF offers an original theoretical contribution by bridging classical existential feminism with contemporary debates on digital societies within a unified explanatory framework. Rather than functioning solely as a reinterpretation of Beauvoir's philosophy, the framework provides a transferable analytical model that can be applied comparatively across diverse political, legal, cultural, and technological contexts to explain both the continuity and the transformation of gender inequality in the twenty-first century.

The distinctive contribution of the COF lies not only in integrating Beauvoir's existential concepts with contemporary feminist debates but also in differentiating how patriarchal domination operates across diverse institutional settings. Rather than assuming that the same mechanisms of inequality function uniformly across all cases, the framework identifies the dominant configuration of its five analytical dimensions within each context. In Iran, institutional otherness is primarily reproduced through state regulation, compulsory veiling, and legal restrictions, while women's resistance illustrates the tension between immanence and transcendence. In Afghanistan, the dominant mechanism is the systematic restriction of existential freedom through the exclusion of women from education, employment, and public life under Taliban rule. By contrast, digital societies are characterized less by direct legal coercion than by adaptive patriarchy, in which algorithmic governance, platform capitalism, and artificial intelligence mediate recognition and reproduce gender inequality through computational systems (Noble, 2018, p. 13; D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020, p. 8). Accordingly, the COF does not assume that all five dimensions are equally salient in every case; rather, it enables comparative analysis by identifying which dimensions become institutionally dominant under different political, cultural, and technological conditions.

At the same time, the explanatory scope of the COF is intentionally limited. The framework is designed to analyse institutionalized forms of gender inequality in which relations of domination are socially organized through political, legal, economic, or technological structures. It is not intended to explain all dimensions of gendered experience, nor does it replace context-specific analyses of culture, religion, ethnicity, or local historical conditions. Instead, these factors are treated as contextual variables that shape how the five dimensions of the COF are expressed in particular cases. Consequently, the framework should be understood as a comparative interpretive model whose analytical value lies in explaining variation in the institutional reproduction of gender inequality rather than proposing a universally deterministic theory of patriarchy.

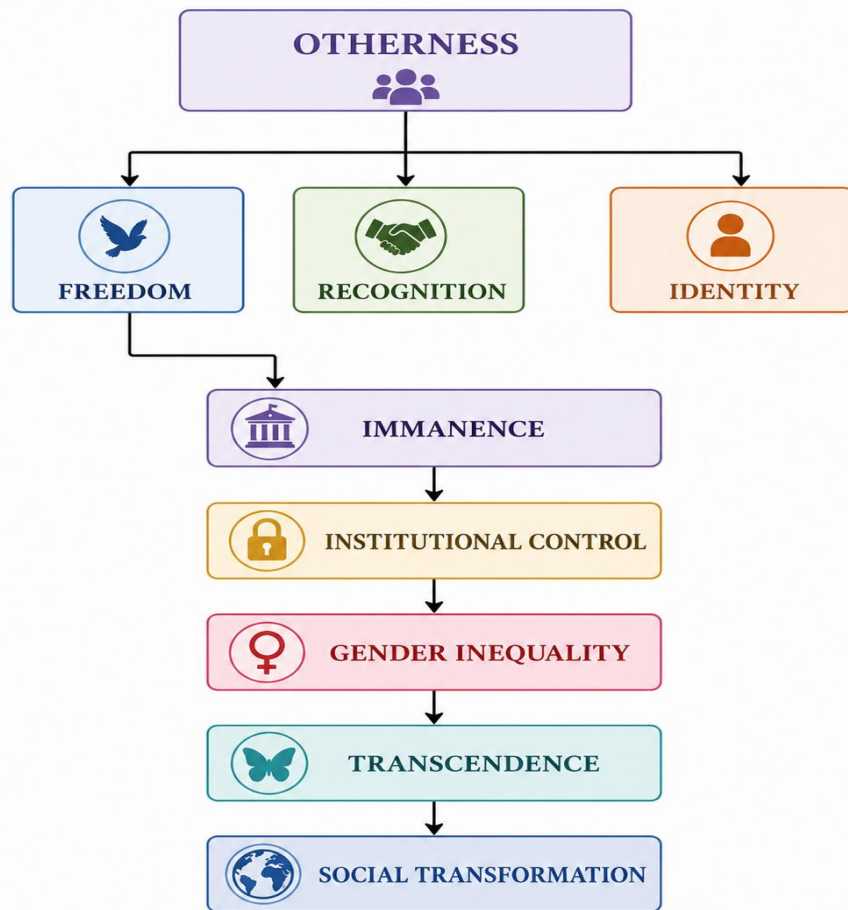


Figure 1: Components of Contemporary Otherness Framework

Source: Prepared by the author.

Table 2: Comparative Analytical Contribution of the Contemporary Otherness Framework (COF)

Case	Dominant Analytical Dimension(s)	Form of Patriarchal Domination	COF Contribution
Iran	Otherness; Immanence–Transcendence	Legal and state-centred domination	Explains how institutional otherness generates collective resistance and the pursuit of transcendence.
Afghanistan	Freedom; Immanence	Systematic exclusion through political and religious institutions	Demonstrates how the denial of existential freedom becomes the dominant mechanism of patriarchal control.
Digital Governance	Adaptive Patriarchy; Otherness	Algorithmic governance and AI	Shows how historical patterns of domination are reproduced through computational infrastructures rather than direct legal coercion.
Platform Capitalism	Adaptive Patriarchy; Anti-essentialism; Immanence–Transcendence	Platform economies, digital beauty culture, and commercialized visibility	Illustrates how patriarchal power adapts to digital capitalism by transforming identity, visibility, and self-presentation into market-oriented practices.

Source: Prepared by the author.

4. Case Studies and Analysis

4.1. Mahsa Amini and the Politics of Otherness: State Control, Bodily Autonomy, and Existential Freedom

Mahsa Amini's death in custody in September 2022 represents one of the most clear modern examples of how patriarchy repeatedly regulate women's bodies through legal, political, and ideological institutions. Arrested by Iran's Guidance Patrol for allegedly violating compulsory hijab regulations, Amini died while in police custody, under surveillance, triggering nationwide protests that rapidly evolved into the largest challenge to the Islamic Republic in decades. The demonstrations, organized under the slogan "*Woman, Life, Freedom*" (*Zan, Zendegi, Azadi*), extended far beyond opposition to compulsory veiling and developed into a broader movement asking for bodily autonomy, political participation, and fundamental human rights (Amnesty International, 2024).

From the lens of Beauvoir's existential feminism, the case of Mahsa Amini demonstrates the institutional construction of otherness. Beauvoir states that patriarchal societies maintain political authority by defining women not as autonomous subjects but as objects whose identities are determined through external norms and institutional control (Beauvoir, 2011, p.5). In Iran, compulsory dress regulations function not only as religious obligations but also as mechanisms through which the state shapes legitimate femininity and disciplines women's presence within public realm. Consequently, women become subjects of regulation rather than agents capable of determining their own bodily identities.

This institutional creation of otherness restricts existential freedom. Beauvoir further argues that freedom demands individuals to participate freely in determining the conditions of their own existence rather than merely complying with externally imposed identities (Beauvoir, 1948/1976, p.10). The compulsory regulation of women's appearance therefore represents more than a limitation on personal choice; it constitutes a rejection of existential agency. Women's bodies become political objects through which state authority is continuously reconstructed, decreasing opportunities for autonomous self-definition and reinforcing domination relations.

While Beauvoir's concept of otherness provides a valuable analytical lens for interpreting the institutional subordination of women in Iran, this case also illustrates the limitations of applying a framework developed within the intellectual traditions of twentieth-century European existentialism to a non-Western context. The Kurdish experience is shaped not only by gender but also by the interaction of religion, state authority, national politics, and ethnic identity, particularly in the case of Mahsa Amini as a Kurdish woman. As postcolonial feminist scholars argue, universal applications of Western feminist theories risk overlooking the historical and cultural specificities of non-Western societies (Mohanty, 1988, pp. 61–63; Abu-Lughod, 2002, pp. 784–785). Accordingly, Beauvoir's framework should not be understood as a universally exhaustive explanation but rather as an interpretive perspective that gains analytical depth when combined with intersectionality and context-sensitive feminist approaches (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). As a woman subjected to state regulation, her oppression emerged through the interaction of gender, ethnicity, religion, and authoritarian governance, illustrating Crenshaw's argument that systems of domination operate simultaneously rather than independently (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140).

The case likewise illustrates the analytical value of the COF proposed in this study. The Iranian state institutionalizes otherness through legal regulation, restricts existential freedom by limiting bodily autonomy, reinforces immanence through compulsory gender norms, and justifies these practices through essentialist understandings of femininity, which eventually creates a false consciousness for consent-building. However, at the same time, public resistance shows that processes of othering continue to be historically contingent instead of being immutable. In this respect, the *"Woman, Life, Freedom"* movement represents not only political opposition but also an existential struggle for recognition, subjectivity, and equal participation in public realm. Therefore The case of Mahsa Amini is a concrete example of Beauvoir's theoretical insights that remain highly relevant for explaining how patriarchal domination continues to evolve under modern political conditions while simultaneously illustrating the explanatory capacity of the COF.

4.2. Taliban's Afghanistan: Institutionalized Immanence and the Denial of Existential Freedom

Following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Afghanistan has experienced one of the most extensive reversals of women's rights in the 21st century. Through successive decrees, the Taliban prohibited girls from attending secondary schools and colleges, restricted women's employment in governmental and non-governmental organizations, imposed restrictions on freedom of movement, and progressively excluded women from the public realm. International organizations have characterized these measures as systematic forms of gender-based discrimination and oppression that affect almost every dimension of women's social, economic, and political participation (UN Women, 2023, p.4). Unlike temporary restrictions, these measures constitute a comprehensive institutional framework designed to redefine women's social existence. Education, employment, political participation, mobility, and public visibility have increasingly become conditional upon gender, creating a social order in which women are expected to remain primarily within domestic and family spheres which leads to long term segregation. Consequently, gender inequality is reproduced not only through individual acts of discrimination but through an interconnected system of legal, political, religious, and administrative institutions.

In this respect, the field of education occupies a crucial place within this framework. Beauvoir argues that freedom demands the capacity to pursue self-determined projects and continuously transcend existing circumstances (Beauvoir, 1948/1976, p. 25). Denying girls access to secondary and higher education therefore constitutes more than an educational policy; it represents a structural limitation on the development of agency, critical reasoning, and future life opportunities. Restricting education simultaneously narrows access to employment, political participation, and economic independence, reinforcing cycles of institutional dependency across generations.

The segregation of women from employment further supports Beauvoir's distinction between immanence and transcendence. Participation in economic life enables individuals to exercise autonomy, gain public recognition, and engage in collective decision-making. However, in contrast, the systematic exclusion of women from professional occupations corners them to socially reproductive labour while decreasing opportunities for independent social existence. Beauvoir stresses that oppression becomes institutionalized when individuals are prevented

from choosing among multiple choices that shape life and are instead assigned predetermined identities in accordance with socially constructed gender roles (Beauvoir, 2011, p.489). The exclusion of Afghan women from education, employment, and public life similarly reflects intersecting structures of gender, political authoritarianism, religion, and economic dependency. Consequently, the Taliban's policies demonstrate multiple and mutually reinforcing forms of inequality rather than a single axis of gender discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140).

The Case of Afghanistan also illustrates how the continuing relevance of Beauvoir's concept of otherness is relevant. Taliban regulations construct women not as equal political subjects but as individuals whose public presence requires continuous supervision and restriction which puts women under surveillance. Women's participation in education, employment, and public sphere is regulated through externally imposed norms rather than individual autonomy. As Beauvoir argues, patriarchal systems maintain domination by defining women through dependence and difference rather than equal subjectivity (Beauvoir, 2011, p.5). In the case of Afghanistan, this process becomes institutionalized through formal legal and administrative mechanisms, illustrating how otherness operates as a principle of governance rather than merely a cultural attitude.

Modern feminist scholars further stresses on this interpretation. For example Nancy Fraser states that gender injustice cannot be evaluated separately from a wider perspective of institutional arrangements that organize social reproduction and political participation (Fraser, 2022, p.3). Likewise, Iris Marion Young conceptualized oppression as a structural phenomenon reproduced through institutional processes rather than isolated acts of discrimination (Young, 1990, p.36). These perspectives complement Beauvoir's existential analysis by illustrating that women's exclusion from public life reflects systemic patterns of domination embedded within political institutions rather than individual prejudice alone.

However, although Beauvoir's concepts of freedom, immanence, and otherness illuminate the structural exclusion of women from education, employment, and public life, the Taliban's gender regime cannot be fully understood through existential feminism alone. The political significance of religion, tribal traditions, prolonged armed conflict, and state fragility creates a context that differs substantially from the historical conditions under which Beauvoir developed her theory. Consequently, this study interprets Beauvoir's concepts as analytical rather than universal categories and complements them with intersectional and institutional perspectives that recognize the contextual diversity of gender oppression (Mohanty, 1988, pp. 61–63; Fraser, 2022, p. 11).

The COF developed in this article provides an integrated understanding of these dynamics. Within the Afghan context, patriarchal institutions construct women as the "Other," restrict existential freedom through legal prohibitions, reinforce immanence by excluding women from education and employment, and legitimize these restrictions through essentialist interpretations of gender roles. The interaction of these mechanisms produces a self-reinforcing system in which legal regulation, institutional authority, and cultural norms collectively reproduce women's exclusion from public sphere.

At the same time, Afghan women's repeated initiatives to access education, establish underground schools, engage in digital activism, and document human rights violations

demonstrate that existential freedom cannot be completely extinguished by institutional domination. These forms of resistance demonstrate Beauvoir's assumption that human beings remain capable of projecting themselves beyond oppressive conditions, even when opportunities for transcendence are severely constrained (Beauvoir, 1948/1976, p.72). Accordingly, the Afghan case confirms both the continuing explanatory power of Beauvoir's existential feminism and the analytical utility of the COF for understanding contemporary forms of institutionalized gender oppression.

4.3. Digital Patriarchy, Artificial Intelligence, and Algorithmic Governance

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, algorithmic governance, and data-driven decision-making has fundamentally transformed the institutional mechanisms through which gender inequality is produced and reproduced. Contemporary digital technologies increasingly influence access to information, employment, finance, healthcare, security, and political participation by relying on automated systems that classify, rank, and evaluate individuals according to computational criteria. Although these technologies are frequently presented as objective and politically neutral, growing evidence demonstrates that algorithmic systems often reproduce existing social inequalities because they are trained on historical datasets and embedded within unequal institutional structures (O'Neil, 2016, p.3). Rather than replacing traditional patriarchal institutions, digital technologies have enabled patriarchal power to operate through increasingly sophisticated computational mechanisms.

From the perspective of Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism, these developments should not be interpreted as entirely new forms of domination but rather as contemporary transformations of otherness. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir argues that patriarchal societies deny women full subjectivity by constructing them as the "Other," whose identity is determined through external definitions rather than autonomous self-determination (Beauvoir, 2011, p.5). Algorithmic governance reproduces a similar logic by reducing individuals to data profiles, behavioural predictions, and automated classifications that influence opportunities for participation, visibility, and social recognition. Consequently, women increasingly become subjects of computational evaluation rather than autonomous agents exercising control over the conditions of their own existence.

One of the clearest manifestations of this transformation is the emergence of deepfake technologies and AI-generated synthetic media. Advances in generative AI enable the creation of highly realistic fabricated images and videos without the knowledge or consent of the individuals represented. Publicly documented cases demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of victims of deepfake pornography are women, whose digital identities become objects of technological manipulation, commodification, and sexual exploitation (Chowdhury & Lakshmi, 2023). This causes women's bodies to not function as expressions of autonomous subjectivity and instead become digitally reproducible objects detached from individual agency. In this sense, AI does not merely facilitate new technological harms but reproduces the same logic of unequal subjectivity.

Algorithmic bias constitutes another important mechanism through which digital patriarchy becomes institutionalized. Machine learning systems frequently rely on historical datasets that reflect existing inequalities, allowing discriminatory assumptions to become embedded within

automated decision-making processes. Research has demonstrated that algorithmic systems may reproduce gender bias in employment recruitment, credit assessment, predictive policing, image recognition, healthcare, and online content moderation (O'Neil, 2016, p. 3; Noble, 2018, p. 13). Rather than eliminating human prejudice, computational systems frequently inherit and amplify structural inequalities already present within society. Consequently, algorithmic governance should be understood not as a neutral technological innovation but as an institutional mechanism capable of reproducing historically embedded relations of domination through automated processes (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020, p.8).

These developments also have important implications for Beauvoir's understanding of existential freedom. Beauvoir argues that freedom requires individuals to participate actively in shaping the conditions of their own existence rather than merely adapting to externally imposed identities (Beauvoir, 1948/1976, p. 19). However, algorithmic governance increasingly influences access to employment opportunities, financial services, public information, and digital participation through opaque computational systems that remain largely inaccessible to those affected by their decisions. As a result, women's opportunities for autonomous agency become constrained not only by legal or political institutions but also by technological infrastructures operating through invisible forms of surveillance, prediction, and automated evaluation (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020, p.8).

The relevance of intersectionality further strengthens this analysis. Crenshaw (1989, p.140) argues that systems of domination rarely operate through a single axis of inequality but instead emerge through the interaction of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and other forms of social differentiation. Digital technologies reproduce similar dynamics. Algorithmic systems frequently generate disproportionate disadvantages for women belonging to racial, ethnic, religious, or economically marginalized communities because historical patterns of discrimination become encoded within computational models. Accordingly, digital patriarchy should be understood not only as gendered domination but also as an intersectional process in which multiple forms of inequality become institutionalized through technological infrastructures.

Viewed through the Contemporary Otherness Framework (COF), these developments demonstrate that patriarchal domination has undergone institutional transformation rather than historical disappearance. Within digital societies, otherness is reproduced through algorithmic classification, existential freedom is constrained by opaque systems of automated governance, and unequal recognition is increasingly mediated through computational decision-making rather than solely through traditional legal or religious institutions. The mechanisms of domination have changed substantially, yet the underlying logic identified by Beauvoir—the denial of women as fully autonomous subjects—remains analytically intact. The COF therefore extends Beauvoir's existential feminism beyond its original historical context by demonstrating how contemporary digital governance reproduces classical structures of patriarchal power through technologically mediated institutional arrangements.

Table 3: Classical and Contemporary Patriarchy Comparison

Classical Patriarchy	Contemporary Patriarchy
State	State + Algorithms
Religion	Platforms
Family	AI
Labour Division	Platform Economy
Domestic Space	Digital Space
Physical Surveillance	Digital Surveillance
Bodily Control	Data Control
Objectification	Algorithmic Objectification

Source: Prepared by the author.

4.4. Platform Economies, Digital Beauty Culture, and the Reconstruction of Immanence

While algorithmic governance institutionalizes gender inequality through automated decision-making, digital platforms transform patriarchal power through the commercialization of visibility, identity, and self-presentation. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become central arenas in which femininity is produced, evaluated, and commodified through platform-specific economic logics. Rather than functioning merely as communication technologies, these platforms constitute economic ecosystems that convert visibility into symbolic and financial capital by rewarding continuous user engagement, aesthetic conformity, and audience attention (Abidin, 2016, p.90; Duffy & Hund, 2015, p.3). Consequently, women's digital participation increasingly occurs within commercial environments where personal identity itself becomes a marketable asset.

The platform economy further intensifies these dynamics by transforming personal visibility into economic value. Influencer marketing, sponsored content, affiliate advertising, and creator monetization systems enable individuals to generate income through digital self-presentation, thereby blurring the boundaries between personal identity and commercial performance (Abidin, 2016, p. 91). While these developments have undoubtedly created new opportunities for women to participate in digital economies, they also establish institutional incentives for continuous self-optimization and commercial self-branding. Success increasingly depends not only on professional competence but also on maintaining algorithmically desirable forms of femininity capable of attracting sustained audience engagement (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p.5).

Digital beauty culture further illustrates Beauvoir's critique of essentialist understandings of femininity. Photography filters, facial enhancement applications, and AI-assisted image-editing technologies continuously normalize particular facial proportions, body shapes, skin textures, and visual styles through repeated exposure and platform circulation. Rather than simply reflecting pre-existing beauty ideals, these technologies actively participate in producing and reinforcing socially constructed standards of femininity (Elias et al., 2017, p.26). This process directly supports Beauvoir's anti-essentialist argument that femininity is not biologically predetermined but socially produced through institutional and cultural practices.

Contemporary feminist scholarship conceptualizes these developments as manifestations of digital patriarchy, emphasizing that technological innovation does not automatically eliminate

gender inequality but frequently reorganizes existing relations of domination within new institutional settings (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p.147-152). Digital infrastructures increasingly influence whose bodies receive visibility, whose identities become commercially valuable, and whose experiences remain marginalized. Accordingly, platform governance should be understood not merely as an economic model but as a cultural institution that shapes social recognition by defining the norms through which femininity becomes visible, desirable, and economically profitable (Bucher, 2018, p.85; Gillespie, 2014, p.173).

These developments also reveal that recognition within platform societies has become increasingly dependent upon measurable indicators of popularity, including follower counts, engagement metrics, shares, comments, and audience interaction. Rather than achieving recognition solely through autonomous political agency or social participation, individuals increasingly negotiate recognition through platform metrics that reward continuous visibility and emotional labour (Honneth, 1995, p.95). As a consequence, women's identities become embedded within systems that simultaneously promise empowerment while reinforcing market-oriented forms of self-discipline and commercialized femininity.

Viewed through the Contemporary Otherness Framework (COF), platform economies demonstrate that patriarchal domination has adapted to contemporary digital capitalism by reconstructing rather than eliminating the historical distinction between immanence and transcendence. Women's opportunities for agency have undoubtedly expanded through digital participation; however, these opportunities remain conditioned by institutional expectations that reward continuous aesthetic performance, emotional availability, and commercial visibility. Consequently, platform capitalism does not simply reproduce historical forms of patriarchy but transforms them into economically mediated systems of gendered recognition. The COF therefore illustrates that contemporary patriarchal power increasingly operates through the interaction of market logics, digital infrastructures, and socially constructed ideals of femininity, extending Beauvoir's existential analysis into the political economy of platform societies.

5. Conclusion

This article examines the extent to which Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminist thought remains relevant for interpreting contemporary forms of gender inequality and explores how her key philosophical concepts can be adapted to contemporary debates on digital patriarchy and gender politics. While *The Second Sex* was written within the political and social context of the mid-twentieth century, the evidence shows that Beauvoir's central philosophical concepts continue to provide a powerful analytical framework for explaining how patriarchal power is reproduced under changing historical conditions. Rather than becoming theoretically obsolete, Beauvoir's concepts of otherness, freedom, immanence, transcendence, and anti-essentialism remain remarkably applicable to contemporary political, legal, and technological environments (Moi, 1999, p.63).

The first research question asked whether Beauvoir's existential feminism remains relevant for analysing twenty-first-century gender politics. The comparative analysis clearly suggests that the answer is affirmative. Across the four case studies examined, patriarchal domination continues to operate by limiting women's autonomy, regulating bodily agency, restricting

access to public participation, and reproducing unequal systems of recognition. Although the institutional mechanisms differ significantly between authoritarian political regimes and digitally mediated societies, the fundamental process identified by Beauvoir—the construction of women as the "Other"—remains a central mechanism through which gender inequality is reproduced (Beauvoir, 2011, p.5).

The second research question examined how Beauvoir's framework can be adapted to explain contemporary forms of gender inequality emerging within digital societies. The evidences indicate that technological innovation has not fundamentally transformed the logic of patriarchal domination; rather, it has altered its institutional expression. AI, algorithmic governance, platform economies, and social media infrastructures increasingly participate in shaping visibility, identity, and recognition. These technologies expand opportunities for participation while generating new forms of surveillance, commodification, algorithmic discrimination, and image-based gendered violence. Consequently, digital environments should not be interpreted as politically neutral realms but as institutional settings in which historical patterns of inequality acquire technologically mediated forms (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020, p.8).

To address these developments, this study proposed COF as its main theoretical contribution. Unlike existing approaches that examine Beauvoir's concepts independently, the COF integrates otherness, freedom, immanence, transcendence, and anti-essentialism into a unified analytical model capable of explaining both classical and contemporary aspects of patriarchy. The framework argues that gender inequality emerges through the interaction of institutionalized otherness, constrained existential freedom, socially organized immanence, historically constructed gender identities, and the adaptive transformation of patriarchy. By combining these dimensions within an explanatory structure, the COF extends Beauvoir's existential feminism beyond its original historical context while preserving its central philosophical insights.

The comparative case studies further elaborates that patriarchal domination should not be conceptualized as a static or culturally specific phenomenon. Instead, it represents a dynamic process capable of adapting to different political systems, legal arrangements, and technological infrastructures. In Iran and Afghanistan, domination is mainly conducted through regulation, religious authority, and direct restrictions on women's education, mobility, and bodily autonomy. In digital environments, however, domination increasingly operates through algorithmic recommendation systems, AI, platform capitalism, and computational governance. Despite these institutional differences, both contexts reproduce unequal relations of recognition that restrict women's opportunities for autonomous subjectivity and existential freedom (Honneth, 1995, p.95).

It also contributes to broader feminist theory by illustrating that Beauvoir's existential philosophy remains compatible with important contemporary perspectives. Rather than competing with Butler's theory of performativity (Butler, 1990, p.25) Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, p.140), or Fraser's theory of redistribution and recognition (Fraser, 2022, p.11), Beauvoir's existential feminism provides a philosophical foundation upon which these later approaches can be situated. The present study therefore supports a complementary rather than competitive understanding of feminist theory, highlighting that

contemporary gender inequality studies require analytical frameworks capable of integrating existential, structural, institutional, and technological dimensions simultaneously.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this research also carries practical implications. Policymakers, international organizations, and technology companies continuously face with challenges associated with gender-based segregation, online violence, algorithmic bias, and unequal digital participation. The evidence suggest that effective policy responses should extend beyond legal equality by addressing the institutional and technological mechanisms through which unequal recognition continues to be reproduced. Regulatory frameworks governing AI, platform accountability, digital privacy, and online gender-based violence should therefore incorporate feminist perspectives that recognize the interaction between technological innovation and social power (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020, p.8).

Several limitations should nevertheless be underlined. This article is mainly conceptual and interpretive in nature and therefore does not seek to establish causal relationships through quantitative analysis. Future research could empirically operationalize the COF by employing comparative fieldwork, interviews, survey research, computational social science methods, or cross-national datasets. Additional studies may also highlight how emerging technologies—including generative AI, immersive virtual environments, biometric surveillance, and automated governance systems—reshape gender relations in different regional and cultural contexts (Noble, 2018, p.13).

In conclusion, more than seventy-five years after the publication of *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism continues to offer one of the most comprehensive philosophical approaches for understanding the persistence and transformation of gender inequality. While the institutional settings of patriarchal domination have evolved, the existential struggle for recognition, autonomy, and freedom remains central to women's experiences across globe. By proposing the COF, this article illustrates that Beauvoir's philosophy should be understood not merely as a historical contribution to feminist thought but as a living theoretical tradition capable of explaining the complexities of gendered power in the twenty-first century (Moi, 1999, p.63).

Declarations

Ethics Statement

This study did not involve human participants, human subjects, interviews, surveys, experiments, or the collection of personal or identifiable data. The research relied exclusively on publicly available primary and secondary sources, including academic literature, legal documents, institutional reports, and policy publications. Therefore, ethical approval from an institutional research ethics committee was not required. The study was conducted in accordance with applicable research and publication ethics standards.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no financial support, grant, scholarship, or institutional funding.

Acknowledgements

The author has no acknowledgements to declare. No individual or institution other than the author contributed to the research, analysis, or preparation of this manuscript.

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