

BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

**The Importance of the Feminist Movement and Its Continued
Relevance to Modern Society**

BACHELOR THESIS

Vivien Slíž

Bratislava, 2021

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is the work of my own and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All used literature is attributed and cited in references.

In Bratislava, February 15, 2021

Vivien Slíž

Abstract

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This thesis focuses primarily on showcasing the continued relevance of feminism and its arguments. The author believes that the findings of this thesis will contribute to the understanding that there should be some new and necessary adjustments made not only in the political but also in the social sphere in order to fulfill the feminist requirements. The paper will examine the historical context of unequal treatment and its reasons as well as it discusses the inequality in different countries, discrimination, hatred amongst societies, religion, intolerance towards feminism, the arguments of the anti-feminist and the radical feminist movements, and many more essential themes. The study will investigate the effect feminism has on society: its benefits and contributions. A major part of the thesis focuses on arguments proposed by a French feminist and writer Simone de Beauvoir whose work and philosophy had an immense influence on feminist thinking. As for the conclusion, the author aspires to make an original suggestion based on Simone de Beauvoir's ideas to promote feminism in the future.

Abstrakt

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Táto práca sa predovšetkým zaoberá tematikou feminizmu, jeho relevanciou a argumentmi. Autorka verí, že zistenia tejto práce prispievajú k pochopeniu toho, prečo je potrebné zabezpečiť nové a nevyhnutné úpravy nielen v politickej, ale aj v sociálnej sfére, aby sa splnili feministické požiadavky. Práca skúma historický kontext nerovnosti a jej hlavné dôvody. Taktiež skúma nerovnosť v rôznych krajinách, diskrimináciu, nenávisť medzi spoločnosťami, náboženstvo, intoleranciu voči feminizmu, anti-feministické a radikálne feministické hnutia a mnoho iných tém týkajúce sa tejto problematiky. Štúdia skúma aj vplyv, ktorý má feminizmus na spoločnosť ako takú: jeho výhody a príspevky. Veľká časť práce sa zameriava na argumenty francúzskej feministky a spisovateľky Simone de Beauvoir, ktorej diela a filozofia mali obrovský vplyv na feministické zmýšľanie. V závere tejto práce sa snaží autor prispieť vlastnou myšlienkou, vychádzajúc z teórie Simone de Beauvoir. Cieľom tejto príspevkovej práce je rozšíriť vedomosť o feminizme v modernej spoločnosti.

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Introduction

Why should anything be permitted to one person and denied to another? The division of mankind into two castes, one born to rule over the other, is simply a misconception that undermines the idea of equality. There should be no fear that women would overtake any occupation men excel in if both men and women can be given the same chance to prove themselves and their capabilities. Feminism tackles questions and matters like this so that people in the future can live equally. The emergence of the feminist ideology marked the start of controversial discussions within many societies which included paying attention to women, their essence, importance and essentially, their political and human rights. As Simone de Beauvoir is the key figures of this thesis, the author will use her arguments to prove that feminism still remains the main pillar of a democratic society that ought to be respected in every country, including Slovakia.

It seems indisputable that feminism has come a long way and improved the world. Nevertheless, there is a growing number of people who tend to despise this movement and forget that there are still things which need to be improved. Gender inequality has been an issue affecting men and women all around the globe, such as the problem of inequities in academic employment, incomes, access to education, clothing requirements, or even rights regarding divorce. The aim of this thesis is to show that the feminist movement is still relevant and not something society should hold in disdain. The feminist movement was, at first, regarded as something both important and urgently needed during the 1960s. It was thought then that it would continue to grow in power until it reached its goal of achieving equality of women. Women from that time are surprised to see that the movement seems to have lost some of its momentum, despite the fact that the goal of equality seems as distant as ever. Today there are some who regard the feminist movement as at best irrelevant and at worst a socially negative force. How did it happen that the feminist movement fell into disfavor?

The feminist movement is also known to be an incredibly strong means of empowering women in every way, not only socially but also politically. It is a belief that wishes to define and establish equal political, economic, personal, and social rights. Many scholars in the humanities and the social sciences along with political commentators are astonished today by the resurgence of reactionary tendencies such as

nationalism, nativism, and racism. Given the horrors of the 20th century, the revival of these movements seems difficult to understand and explain. One element in this disturbing development is the rise of different forms of anti-feminism, which reject what were long thought to be established truths produced by the feminist movement. This development has also confounded scholars who have sought in vain to explain it and to find effective tools to combat it.

Anti-feminism argues that the feminist movement as such is outdated and there is no need for it to continue. The basic idea would be to see feminism as a completed process which is unnecessary in the 21st century due to the fact that women have already acquired the rights and benefits given by the modern society. Furthermore, the anti-feminist movement claims that men are in a crisis because there has been a radical feminization of society which also contains the shift of gender roles. In this study, the author aspires to refute this theory by providing empirical evidence based on historical research.

In this thesis, the author will revisit the work of Simone de Beauvoir, a French philosopher and a feminist in order to demonstrate that feminism and its arguments are now more needed than ever. The author wishes to argue that Simone de Beauvoir has key insights that are valuable and relevant in our world today and hopes to use these insights in order to combat the forms of anti-feminism that have appeared since her time and which have sadly flourished in our day.

Chapter I.: Historical Background of Feminism

The aim of this chapter is to look at the historical context as a proof of the perennial re-appearance of oppression and its boundaries towards women. In history, many things of great importance took place which formed our present times, and therefore, history, to certain extent, ought to function as a tool to see the previously made mistakes in order to learn from them. This chapter examines the reasons as to why women were diminished and provides many examples of how women were treated.

While women from different parts of the world had different goals, approaches, intentions and dreams, all movements which aspired to fight for equality and women's rights can be considered as feminist movements. The fact that in the 21st century in which still many women face the harsh reality of not being taken seriously or acknowledged as equal to men, proves that there is something fundamentally wrong in society and its structure. By looking at any historical period, one can see not only the matter of oppression and frustration but also the bigger picture as to what is the core issue. The emergence of feminist thinking marked the start of very controversial discussions within many societies which included paying attention to what women wanted to say, their essence, importance and essentially, their political and human rights.

1.1 Early Feminist Thinking

Many people assume that the very beginning of feminism started in New York at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. However, it has been stated that Plato with his revolutionary thoughts argued for political and sexual equality for everyone, including women, 24 centuries ago (McMillen, 2008). As another fascinating example would be the famous Greek play by Aristophanes called *Lysistrata*, regarded as an ancient feminist text, in which Lysistrata asked other women to refuse sex with their companions until a peace treaty would be created between Spartan and Athenian leaders. Even though it was nothing but a fiction, this was a completely revolutionary idea in ancient Greece. The fact that Aristophanes, despite being a man, recognizes the hidden potential of women and even influence society, even politics when they act collectively.

Religions and philosophical movements were formulated and had great impact on how women were perceived. For instance, Christianity as such comes from a patriarchal context, Jesus Christ being the center of the religion, all the prophets, Church leaders or apostles are represented by men, which ultimately did not really help to widen the perspective on female leadership and capability. In the Old Testament story of creation in Genesis, there are two accounts of the creation of man and women, and in one of them (Genesis 1:27) they are created together, equally, but in the other version (Genesis 2:7, 2:22) God creates Adam first and Eve second, from his rib, thus seeming to show the priority of men over women. However, the New Testament seems a bit better on the question of women. Jesus is consistently being shown to extend his kindness and mercy to women and is in no way focused just on men. Women made up a very important part of the early Christian movement. This thinking would naturally incline to see women and men as equals but unfortunately, that was almost never the case. Even though, women's importance had been highlighted, Catholic women are still not allowed to become priests, which seems to contradict the major idea of everyone being equal before God.

While mentioning the fight for equality the French and Italian representatives cannot be left out. In the 14th century, Christine de Pizan denounced misogyny as one of the earliest acknowledged feminist writers (Brown-Grant, 1999). The idea of the Renaissance within the scope of women's thinking meant approaching the theme of economic and property injustices within the society. This way of thinking definitely contributed to change Italian humanism, mostly due to the emergence of female intellectuals within Europe.

1.2 Modern Feminist Thinking

The women's empowerment began to change how men understood fairness within society. The 17th and 18th centuries mark the age of Enlightenment, which saw flourishing philosophical and intellectual thoughts within different streams. This inspired many people like Jeremy Bentham to pursue his career as a reformist and the historical father of feminism. He believed in the importance of public utility and liberty (Rosen, 2017). His arguments were meant to change the asymmetrical sexual morals between women and men since in that period, society subordinated the female gender to the male gender.

Furthermore, the Victorian age brought the idea of the feminine ideal, mostly touching upon the theme of clothing and representation of womanhood. The Victorian society as such had its ridiculous ways to dictate what to wear, not to mention the fact that the required clothing was uncomfortable and even caused considerable physical damage to a woman's body. Those who dared to argue against this were judged and diminished by society. Another reason for the frustration was the (un)official separation of the sexes. Men, portrayed as the leaders, creators, providers, represented the public sphere. On the other side of the line were women. Those who took care of the household and family were put into the private sphere. They were not able to enter the workplace, and essentially this led to their exclusion from public life. The existence of such ideologies and philosophical streams are represented as forms of protofeminism.

The European Perspective

To focus a bit on the European side of feminist thinking, a British philosopher and women's rights advocate must be mentioned. In the 19th century, one exceptional work has caught the attention of many. The *Enfranchisement of Women*, written by Harriet Taylor Mill, showcases how struggling it is for women to exercise the benefits of liberal individualism, especially when only the other half of the population appears to have access to it. She argues that the exclusion from such privilege stems from the historical background of humanity. Physical force, as the main factor, provided men the ability to rule over those who were weaker and therefore, inferior. Nevertheless, since the modern world does not rely on physical forces anymore, equality ought to be granted. The time has come to see that women's nature is not something that can be ruled by men. As women have always been denied their basic rights such as the liberty of choice, they had never been able to explore their nature and potential. The author claims that the root of exclusion lays in circular reasoning. To claim that women should be excluded from pursuing a career because the possibility and, might I add, the necessity of motherhood disqualifies them, is to say that the reason is purely the question of maternity— according to Taylor Mill, this is entirely discriminatory and women should not be limited by what society expects from them. However, courageous women who decided not to wed nor bear a child are just as limited in applying for a job as mothers or wives. Taylor Mill suggests that the patriarchal organization and the limitation of women offered by the English society occur only because men like to feel

superior. Given the absurdity, Mill argues that no one is qualified to decide who belongs in which sphere, and only the individual can choose what they seek. Everyone ought to live for their sake, and their sake only (Mill, 1852). Society's job is to adjust and reform the long-lasting traditions and customs that excluded women for centuries. The reason why I have chosen the *Enfranchisement of Women* as substantial historical work is because her arguments are relevant in our modern society. Women still face the problems of being excluded from certain jobs or when they are hired, they often earn less than men in the same positions. Harriet Taylor Mill was one of the many who aspired to change the perspective on women abilities and limitations.

The American Perspective

As the European narrative to change the social and economic position of women was presented, the initial American attempt to better the situation for women also must be mentioned. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized the Seneca Falls Convention in New York. On July 18th, despite its scarce publicity, over 300 people joined the convention in order to discuss inequality and women's rights in the United States. The discussion took up some of the problems of the Declaration of Independence and how it had been formulated in a way that it excluded woman. In the document created in 1776, the authors stated the following: "All men are created equal...". Those who joined the Seneca Falls Convention argued that this statement was highly unethical and degrading to women (Wellman, 2010). Firstly, women were not asked while creating and formulating the laws to which they had to submit. This questions the legitimacy of the government, since for the government to be legitimate it must have the consent of the people. So, if women have not given their consent or asked for it, how can the government bound them by the laws? Secondly, the claim that women need to stay behind their husband and the creation of an environment which acted in the most hostile way, made women dependent on another human being. The sense of individuality and independence has been completely eliminated. How is it possible to design a declaration which should involve everyone and protect the rights of the American citizens, without mentioning women? What is more, the declaration itself had many flaws. For instance, blacks were also excluded since the law that abolished slavery was passed only in 1865 and after a civil war. So, a better translation to the argument of equality could be that all men and only men who are white are created

equal. Therefore, not only women were left out of the conversation but also everyone of different color and ethnicity. The women and men at the Seneca Falls Convention felt obliged to criticize such principles by creating their own declaration— Declaration of Sentiments, in which they corrected the original version by adding women into the picture. “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Stanton, 1848).” The events included in this paragraph marked the beginning of the first-wave feminist movement and the era of women suffragettes began. This historical overview is brief account of the state of things prior to Simone de Beauvoir’s work which is a vital milestone in feminist thinking.

1.3 Him vs Her– What is the reason?

In the last few paragraphs, I have been discussing society and position of men in the matter of discrimination and gender inequality. Should men be considered dominant based on their physical strength? Historically speaking, physical strength played an essential role and not a while ago it has been a central tool of human affairs. In general, while men embraced their strength and provided food by hunting for their tribes or families, women stayed at home nurtured their children and managed the household. Not everywhere, of course, there were exceptions such as in ancient Greece where the Amazons were women warriors. Also, in the ancient Scandinavia, the Valkyries or shield-maidens were the female warriors, known to be the strongest and boldest of all Vikings. But overall, even when women were portrayed as strong and capable, at the same time they remained inferior to men because they ruled and made the decisions. “The biological and social sciences no longer admit the existence of unchangeably fixed entities that determine given characteristics, such as those ascribed to woman, the Jew, or the Negro (de Beauvoir, 2014).” This passage is from the *Second Sex* which was written in 1949 by Simone de Beauvoir, but people in 2021 still believe that women ought to be feminine and fragile while men are masculine and powerful.

As the population evolved into civilized societies and abandoned hunting, the necessity and dominance of physical strength slowly started to lose its significance. The intellectual capacity and the capability to produce a civilized and educated society had a far-reaching effect. Most people consider science as a sufficient tool that provides

objective truths without prejudices about human beings (Saine, 2017). Nonetheless, this has proved to be false. From the very beginning, the biological differences were put forward as a satisfactory argument as to why were women inferior to men. Even now, some think of women as less capable than men, because of their feminine side.

Biological differences should not determine how people live and how they are positioned in society. Gender stereotypes are alive and well even in the 21st century due to science's and society's inability to get rid of them. Over time, these stereotypes are fueled more excessively than before. The same goes for men for whom it is unacceptable to be in touch with their feminine side due to toxic masculinity that has been promoted for many centuries. When you think about it, from the first moment someone is born, people are put in separate categories. Women and men. Pink and blue. Barbies and trucks. Care takers and businessmen. Women ought to be feminine, emotional, delicate human beings, while men ought to be masculine, tough and never cry. This theory has been celebrated and ridiculed throughout the history. Women are depicted as helpless, inferior and intellectually inadequate, while men are praised for their strength and ability to carry the world economy. People should be given the same opportunities in life regardless of their gender, sexuality, color and ethnicity. Simone de Beauvoir, who wrote the feminist movement's bible, argues that such artificially constructed lies about femininity and masculinity disable people from pursuing happiness and freedom.

Chapter II.: Simone de Beauvoir

2.1 Beauvoir's Life and Philosophy

Simone de Beauvoir was born in the picturesque city of Paris on 9th of January, 1908. Little did her parents know that she will grow into an internationally prominent feminist thinker. She is known as an existential philosopher, French writer and social theorist who tackled the problems of gender inequality in the hope of finding potential solutions. Philosophy, politics, moral and feminist issues interested her the most. She attended the University of Paris in 1926, where she began her lifelong journey tied closely to philosophy and Jean-Paul Sartre (Moi, 2008). As she entered the male dominated institutions of higher education, she came to a realization that being an educated female is not quite similar as being an educated male. The moment she understood the struggle between the sexes, she started to write the *Le Deuxième Sexe* in 1949. She discussed problems of her time, which are, sadly, still present and relevant to modern society of the 21st century.

Many other authors discussed the reason as to why women are subordinated and how can they break out of this circle of oppression. To me, what Simone de Beauvoir did differently was examining the situation to its very core. Perhaps her existentialist background and philosophy was able to capture the essentiality of the issue. She questioned the patriarchal systematic obstacles that women have to overcome as well as paid attention to how women could comport themselves differently. She emphasized that women shall not seek validation or attention from men or anyone but themselves.

As to why women were described as the inferior other, Simone de Beauvoir's theory mentioned in *The Second Sex* will be used in this paper. The very nature of gender inequality lies in the societal ontology of what it is to be a woman. For all intents and purposes, the aim of this section is to deconstruct the meaning of womanhood in order to undermine the everyday oppression by using Simone de Beauvoir's philosophical theories.

2.2 Femininity as a Social Construction: Natural or Artificial?

Simone de Beauvoir sparked the start of the feminist ideology by proposing a simple question. What is a woman? Since too few in the course of the world's history questioned the essence of the female gender, she found it intriguing to dive into the

topic of what it truly is to be a woman. “One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman (de Beauvoir, 2014).” The famous passage from *The Second Sex* elaborates on her theory that femininity is indeed a construction of society according to which women should adjust themselves. Simone de Beauvoir argues that femininity, which is supposedly a characteristic of a woman, is not an inborn and fundamental female feature but rather a construction learned through socialization that keeps men dominant in today’s society. There are certain artificial standards within womanhood, including the way of dressing, expressing oneself, talking, walking, arguing, etc. Norms of beauty, diet and fashion limit how women acknowledge themselves. In order to be liberated one must come to a realization that all of these concepts are constructed by society. The deconstruction of these norms is essential in the process of achieving gender equality.

Simone de Beauvoir tackles the reasons behind the inferiority of women. There are three reasons why the oppression preserved its precedence. Firstly, girls, from a very young age, are taught to focus on the needs of a man in order to have a future husband, and thus a successful and comfortable life. Secondly, the validation, as the society dictates it, should not come from themselves, but from others. In this scenario, women should act and behave in a way which compliments the social standards. Thirdly, due to the fact that women have far fewer rights, they had less public influence, which eventually degrades them, and the society excludes them from the discussion. All of these points direct women to objectify themselves.

2.3 The Other

The Second Sex articulates her perspective on women and men. The book was published in 1949 and contained a detailed analysis of women’s oppression. Her work is considered to be the underlying foundation of contemporary feminism. Simone de Beauvoir sets up the scene by proposing examples from history and anthropology to illustrate male dominance. The presence of the autonomous male has always been crucial. It is not that women were not mentioned, but it is more about the significance of men’s position. Historically speaking, the fact that hatred and alterity within mankind maintained its precedence from the very beginning of our times proves that there must be something fundamentally innate in people that dictates them to distinguish one from another. There was always one group that was capable of imposing itself on another

either politically or in other ways. For instance, the discrimination of Jews, Afro-Americans, or minorities in general. But women are not a minority, in fact, both women and men are essential for the existence of the human race. This othering stems from seeing one group as the opponent and rival to the other. The fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness works as a mechanism that separates us from them. Her theory explores the question of why people put themselves in a position of the opponent and how this relates to gender differences.

To elaborate on Beauvoir's theory, one must understand the Hegelian dialectic and concept of the Other. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a German philosopher and idealist of the 19th century, served as an inspiration to Simone de Beauvoir's theory of the Other. The Hegelian dialectic unites two different determinations into one. In his work the *Phenomenology of Spirit* he proposes that self-consciousness cannot exist on its own because it has to exist through another consciousness; a reflection which provides recognition. Beauvoir uses this concept to understand the realization of a man through the eyes of a woman. By using Hegel's theory, Beauvoir claims that the category of men is represented as the self and the one, while the female category is always the other.

For centuries and even up till now, women have been viewed as objects which allows men to stay in their dominant position and reassures them of their oneness. The main question is why does this not work the other way around? Should not there be a dynamic in this type of a relationship? As Hegel described it, the awareness of another's awareness of oneself includes two individuals who seek recognition. Therefore, it should work equally both ways according to this theory. If one group perceives itself as the One, then naturally, anybody who is not in the group becomes the subject– the Other. Therefore, men defined themselves as the One which led to creating a category of the Other– female gender.

2.4 The Need for Empowerment

Simone de Beauvoir claims that there is an apparent existence of the male consciousness that did not clash with the general female consciousness. By this she means that the male consciousness has always been so undeniable, vocal and heard whereas the female consciousness lacked this element of unity and outspokenness. "Women lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit (de Beauvoir,

2014).” The reason behind it is the lack of such unified awareness from women’s side and little to no demand to be recognized.

Once again, Hegel plays an essential role in Beauvoir’s theory of self-awareness. She compares the relationship of men and women to that of a master and slave. The master does not acknowledge the need for the slave nor does he believe that the slave is necessary for his life. The master was capable of realizing his self-awareness through the eyes of the slave which justified his position and vice versa. The problem arises in the matter of dependence. The slave is indeed dependent on his master and is fully aware of this. Nevertheless, the master does not acknowledge his dependence on the slave. Beauvoir uses this example to point out the relationship between men and women. Men being the masters, while women are the slaves. For centuries, women have been dependent on their husbands, father, male companions, while men were described as individual and independent beings. This seems more than irrational to Beauvoir because both men and women are the basis of human life. Neither of them should be superior to the other. Women have always been dependent; “the two sexes have never shared the world in equality (de Beauvoir, 2014).”

Beauvoir also blames the societal structure and women as such due to their incapability to speak up and construct a powerful general view of female consciousness. The very structure of society enables the inequality to be in a continuous loop. Women contributed to this deal by staying silent, tolerant, and, sadly enough, for a considerably long time they accepted themselves as the Other.

Simone de Beauvoir is a perfect example of how difficult it was to be acknowledged as a female intellectual within a patriarchal society. In the 19th century, female philosophy writers were not considered as legitimate writers. Philosophy written by a woman was not philosophy during her time. The fact that the translation of her book called *The Second Sex* was biased due to the translator’s agenda being pushed forward, proves that her work was disregarded and not taken seriously enough (Grosholz, 2006). The main reason behind revising Simone de Beauvoir’s theories about the very nature of inequality is the need to see that her arguments are relevant in the present. In some parts of the world women are still oppressed and viewed as secondary to men. The main argument would be to see that from the beginning women and men are put in distinct categories which eventually fuels the othering. Hence, gender inequality proceeds to exist in a constant loop. The only way to break up the

loop is through education; teaching children from a very young age that yes there are biological differences but it should not mean that it is us versus them.

The anti-feminist groups suggest that feminism has reached its peak a long time ago and now it is time to move on. As a counter-argument, I would like to show how each wave of feminism worked towards different goals and that each wave carries a gradual significance even in 2021. For instance, women in Vatican City still cannot vote and essentially, first wave feminism aimed to guarantee women suffrage. Hence, there are countries which can already say that they have tackled the issues presented by the first, second and third wave of feminism but not every country progressed as, for instance, the United States. Therefore, to see the relevance of feminism and its waves is to see the bigger picture and not just focus on one particularly progressive and modern country while leaving the others behind.

Chapter III.: Waves of Feminism

The core idea of feminism did not shift over the decades, even though some might think the exact opposite. Every wave of feminism focused on the different issues related to the same problem— oppression. Each dedicated its full attention to make life easier for women and contributed to the feminist idea by opening up different opportunities. As some argue that feminism reached its full potential since women are not as oppressed as they were before, I find it crucial to point out how each wave of feminism brought light to different problems and that just because in some parts of the world women acquired their rights does not mean that every country adjusted to the feminist requirements. In certain parts of the world the first, second or third wave of feminism still plays an essential role in the battle of achieving equality. In order to demonstrate why it is still crucial to cherish the feminist ideology, I will aspire to point out each wave's essential goals as well as how each wave focused on different aspects of oppression.

3.1 Brief History of the First, Second, Third/Fourth Wave of Feminism

The first wave feminism strived for equal treatment that was not judged based on gender. One of the main issues for women was the inability to vote which excluded them from any important decision-making processes in the political sphere. Therefore, women and feminists in the early 19th century fought for suffrage and recognition as an individual capable being. Clara Immerwahr, as the very first woman ever allowed to study at a university, received her Ph.D. from chemistry. She had to beg for special dispensation. It is baffling to think that historically speaking this was not that long ago. Women in this period had many obstacles regarding the ability to fulfill their potential. If a woman decided to marry, due to certain societal expectations, her position was purely limited to her household and marriage. Clara could only help her husband, Fritz Haber, conducting his research, but her choices and options regarding her scientific work were regulated. After she committed suicide, the newspaper wrote only this: “The wife of D. H. in Dahlem, who is currently on the front, has set an end to her life by shooting herself (Dietter & Friedrich, 2017).” During this period, Simone de Beauvoir constructed her arguments against women's position in the society as well as her critique of the domestic job of women in her book *The Second Sex*.

The second wave feminism was still concerned with equality and discrimination. Women in the 1960s were preoccupied not only with how women were treated but also that there is a significant distinction in equal treatment between black and white women. They sought attention and aspired to raise awareness of the situation within society by talking about their experiences. Essentially, the aim was to raise consciousness about the patriarchal oppression. The availability of abortion rights or even any kind of contraception, i.e. birth control, was highly frowned upon. In the United States, abortion rights were granted only in 1973.

The third wave feminism marks its beginning around the 1980s. Since the media and press published certain misconceptions about womanhood, this stream yearned for reclaiming, reshaping, and questioning the ideas about gender, sex and feminism in general. What does it mean to be feminine or masculine? Could it only be a socially constructed nonsense that would work as a tool to create differences between sexes? What burdens does womanhood carry within itself? In essence, the third wave of feminism embraced diversity and individuality. The fourth wave of feminism, although some argue that it is only a continuation of the third wave, focuses on debating the troubles that were more highlighted thanks to the internet, technology and modernity as such. Therefore, the main issues are body-shaming, sexual harassment, rape culture and victims of sexual harassment. All of these things were happening during the first, second and third waves, but there was little to no conversations addressing these problems. The fourth wave feminism or the continuation of the third wave, in my perspective it does not matter what form is used, broadens the horizon of understanding the day-to-day struggles of women in the present.

Simone de Beauvoir argued that up until someone told her directly, she did not consider herself a feminist. At first, she did not want to write a book based on women because she was well aware of the fact that it is not a very pleasing topic, especially to women, and that it has been frequently discussed too many times. But she simply thought that it ought to be common knowledge to see that oppression is a severe immoral issue, and, therefore, she decided to tackle this issue with the tools of philosophy. There has been a systematic strategy, whether intentional or unintentional, that disabled women from flourishing. "...her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly (de Beauvoir, 2014)." This passage explains how the patriarchal society excluded women from excelling and then accused them for being too feminine, weak and replaceable by men. Throughout every wave of feminism, women were

encouraged to question their position in society and strive for improvement. As the world is changing, other problems regarding women occur fairly easily. Each wave tackles different problems and brings them to light. Therefore, the feminist journey is not over, as anti-feminism claims.

Once women were given the chance, the world could see their potential and that they can be destined for bigger things too. To showcase the greatness of women's capabilities, I would like to point out what happened during World War I. The first world war took place in 1918 and its impact on the American economy serves as an excellent example of how underestimated women were before. The American soldiers were well fed, better clothed and were overall better prepared for the war, but someone had to ensure that the United States and its economy would remain as glorious as before entering the war. At this time, women were the ones who maintained the economy and needed to replace the jobs of those men who were called up for the draft and were instantly recruited to the warzone.

The World's Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA), strived to achieve gender equality mostly in the workplace in respect to access to work and receiving fair wages. During the war, many employers encouraged women to join the workforce. However, many of those employers were more inclined to choose unmarried, childless women. The programs of the YWCA also supported women from different positions in life and offered various trainings, housing and advocacy. The main reason why the YWCA and its programs were established was so that women cannot be discriminated.

As a major form of persuasion, a poster demonstrated the magnificent importance of the female workforce during World War I. In 1918, "For Every Fighter A Woman Worker" was used as the main slogan used in a variety of posters and campaigns. The YWCA alongside the United War Work Campaign (UWWC) helped in raising money to support troops who were participating in war and their families. Later on, they also coordinated relief services during the war by collaborating with the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. By this act, they helped many people and made an even greater contribution to the American society. Today, the YWCA is known to be the largest as well as the oldest women's organization in the United States.

As one might assume, throughout the decades, feminism focused on different aspects of life, dealing with patriarchy, human rights, abortion rights, suffrage, pay gaps and much more. But all in all, the aim of this movement and the organizations created

under the feminist influence represents the idea of equal treatment in the public and private spheres as well as granting equality in healthcare, education and workplaces.

Even though, many women were fortunate enough to belong in a progressive modern country, in which all of the mentioned things were granted, many still live in an oppressive environment where they cannot exercise their potential and are victims of unequal treatment. The next passage of the thesis focuses on providing specific examples and situations that women have to face on a daily basis.

3.2 Why Do We Need Feminism?

To me it is very easy to answer this question. The reason why we need feminism is to reduce gender inequality in every aspect of our lives. The tougher question would be, how to achieve it? “My idea is that all of us, men as well as women, should be regarded as human beings (de Beauvoir, 2014).” Perhaps that sounds a bit too unrealistic to some, but this is the core idea of what feminism ought to be— seeing each other as equal human beings. As we live in the 21st century and face the horrors of climate change and economic crisis, especially the one resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, gender inequality still prevails as a current issue in almost every country. Most commonly, when people mention gender inequality, one assumes that the term implies the income gap, which, of course, plays a major role but also the quality of life is now considered as a crucial factor. According to Gini Index, gender inequality, in terms of income redistribution, is the worst in South Africa, Namibia, Haiti, Botswana and the Central African Republic. Women living Saudi Arabia and South Korea are no strangers to unfair treatment. Surprisingly enough, Ukraine, Slovenia, Norway, Slovakia and the Czech Republic represent the most equal nations (Datablog, 2017). Research, conducted in 2020, suggests that gender inequality can be a barrier to economic growth. If women were granted equality in education and in obtaining political leadership, it would make a great difference for developing countries (Altuzarra, Gálvez-Gálvez, & González-Flores, 2021).

Now that all of these problems regarding women and society were slowly but surely brought to light, it would be logical to assume that most of the problems would be resolved or minimalized, but sadly enough, it is not true. Gender inequality remains a big issue despite certain reforms that included women in economic or social organizations. Many argue against feminism and claim that it has reached its limits. Anti-feminism is on the rise, while people live in segregating conditions and political

systems which forbid them from exercising their basic human rights. All waves of feminism were inspired by seeing a more equal and safer world. Before I jump into specific examples of such countries, I would like to present some data based on research, made by the United Nations Development Programme, which clearly states the following general statements about women and the situation they live in. First, women make up two thirds of people in the world who cannot read. Second, almost 70% of the world's poorest people are female. Third, women's representation in national parliaments above 25% are only in 16 countries out of 195 (countries registered in the UN). Fourth, one-half of all women have experienced physical abuse. Fifth, women's labor remains undervalued in national accounts, even though women's contribution to the global economy is growing (Shakir, 2012). All of these statements prove that gender inequality is still present, and therefore, the feminist goals and ambitions play an essential role in bettering the future for women and men.

3.2 Examples of Inequality

South Korea

Many women suffer from the harsh reality of oppression, physical abuse, income gaps, secession of rights to their own bodies on daily basis. Most certainly, countries in the Middle East and Asia are where gender equality fails to exist. For instance, up until 1991 women in South Korea struggled with family law. The Confucian ideology maintains the belief that women are inferior to men due to their inability to carry a life-giving force that men carry, and many people in Korea still believe in this. South Korean women advocates fought for reshaping the society, which was created under the influence of Confucian patriarchal customs, in order to align certain policies, laws and rights with gender and sexual equality. Even though, women in South Korea were granted the legal right to family law, the Confucian customs are placing women in the unfortunate loop of continual inequality (Kim, 1994). Nevertheless, many countries, like South Korea, are aware of gender inequality and aspire to minimalize it.

Saudi Arabia

Religion, in many countries, is a major part whether it serves as a spiritual guidance or a sufficient argument as to why are things done in a certain way. Often it is used as a discriminatory reasoning against women. This is the case with Saudi Arabia.

Women in Saudi Arabia are constantly fighting for being recognized as equals to men. They are excluded from the decision-making processes not only in workplaces but also in their homes. Some rely on Islamic principles and claim that is the one and only reason why women do not have the same access to certain things as men. Nonetheless, the Islamic principles as such do not forbid women from having their basic human rights such as freedom of choice and equal treatment. In theory, whether a Muslim woman is married or single, she has to right to obtain economic independence and to own properties. Islamic principles promote brotherhood and highlight that Muslim men and women have the same obligations which ought to be equally rewarded. Therefore, to claim that the reason why women are oppressed in Saudi Arabia are the Islamic principles is nonsense. Or people only use it as an excuse but do not really see into what the Islamic principles should represent. Nevertheless, research has shown that the lowest rates of female education are in countries that encourage Islamic restrictions (Alsaleh, 2012). Thus, the problem must be deeply indoctrinated in the cultural history of the country. Fortunately, there are activists such as Malala Yousafzai, whose campaign for the education of girls and young women in the Islamic world helps to overcome these difficulties.

What is more, women in Saudi Arabia continue to struggle with domestic violence which gets little to no attention. Fourth wave feminism is concerned with vocalizing this issue as well as mentioning the importance of seeking help. On the positive note, to modernize the country, the Saudi Arabian government has made many changes which improved the status of gender equality by providing access to education, employment and health. As a result of the modernization, women acquired the right to drive a car and have a driving license in 2018. It is somewhat disturbing that women gained this, in my opinion, regular right only in 2018, but on the other hand, if women can be recognized as equal to men in the future by these baby steps then this action also carries a significant relevance to Saudi Arabia. This can be seen as a big sign of the feminist reform. The most vital aim and challenge facing Saudi Arabian women is granting equality in both workplaces and households, as well as in education, health and political leadership.

South Africa

South Africa as such deserves a chapter of its own. Apartheid, femicide and gender-based violence, poverty, overpopulation and rape– all of these words represent

the negative part of what it means to live or have lived in South Africa. The circumstances under which women in South Africa have to live might appear unbelievable to those living in the United States or Europe. Violence against women remains one of most immense and wide-spread problems. Women who are physically, emotionally and sexually abused by intimate partners, such as husbands and boyfriends, are hardly noticed by the police. Again, fourth wave of feminism vocalizes this issue and aspires to tackle it. Furthermore, marriage is considered to be of great magnitude in South African culture, traditions and institutions, which indicates that it is much harder for a woman to simply divorce her “significant” other. A woman and her social status are fully dependent on her husband. Not so long ago, it has been hard to find reliable statistics on violence against women mostly because the vast majority of the cases went unreported or were given no attention. Nevertheless, now the world is much more aware of this problem.

Unfortunately, one in five women under the age of 18 experience physical violence in South Africa, according to research conducted in 2016 (Sibanda-Moyo, Khonje, & Brobbey, 2017). This proves that the problem of gender-based violence continues to exist even today. Despite the fact that the country pays attention to these atrocities against women now more than ever, they still face a very high rate of violence and rape. This is not an issue that straight-forwardly addresses the problem of gender inequality but it mainly concerns the area of human rights. Nevertheless, gender inequality is no mystery to South Africa. According to research conducted in 2019, black and colored women are still under-represented in high-skilled positions as well as under-paid (Espí, Francis, & Valodia, 2019).

There are many countries that are in great need of help in terms of equality and safety. The first reason behind choosing South Korea, Saudi Arabia and South Africa to demonstrate my point was that all of these countries have acknowledged the issue and aspired to brighten the future of a much safer and equal environment. The second reason is that these countries offer a baseline for comparison for my analysis of Slovakia. Feminism questions, investigates, and analyzes the issues of unequal and dangerous treatment so that this and the next generation can live in an improved society.

Slovakia

I have chosen to portray Slovakia's current situation regarding gender inequality because I am a Slovak citizen and to demonstrate my point and suggest reasonable implications that could better the position of women in society. Slovakia does not belong to a typically gender unequal category however; just like any other country it has undergone many changes that affected women's lives and positions in society. The biggest change came with the Czechoslovak coup d'état in 1948. As the Communist regime gained its precedence in Czechoslovakia, women experienced many unseen privileges. Czechoslovak citizens were offered something new, the support of the Soviet Union, and they were ready for a radical change. At that time, there was hardly any kind of opposition, and to the people at the time, Communism seemed like a fairly good deal especially to women who, for the first time, were considered as important as men since they were also contributing to society. By inviting communism, the working class was able to enjoy many benefits which they did not have before, such as paid vacation and better health insurance. These benefits were also given to women then, and thanks to the adjustments made by the communist regime, they were able to join labor forces and obtain a university degree. Naturally, Communism had its flaws and it was not all dreamy, but nevertheless, it is important to note that women were given a chance to change their lives for the better. Slovakia has undergone many social, political, cultural and overall systematic transformations since then, but nowadays, Slovakia is the fourth most equal country in the world, according to the Gini index.

One of the European Union's core values is that men and women are equal. Member states, such as Slovakia, took necessary steps to align with this value. For instance, a legal document of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family of the Slovak Republic, written in 2014, shows gender inequality, in both political and social spheres as a matter of representation in corporate governance. Essentially, the aim of it is to create a strategy to achieve more equality in Slovakia. However, there is still a long way to go since women's representation in managerial positions is still low, and the income gap is very much visible. Still, on average, Slovak women earn 18% less than men. The most significant reason as to why there are more men in managerial positions is that employers take into consideration the fact that there is a possibility of motherhood that awaits women. Therefore, employers usually take into account this factor and prefer male employees. Overall, this results in lower employment rates as

well as less hourly earnings which leads to fewer years at work. This is a current problem that prevails in many countries in Europe, not only in Slovakia.

The smallest pay gaps between men and women, living in Slovakia, are mostly in positions where the wages are already low. For instance, in public administration and schooling systems— usually everything from nursery up to high schools. Nevertheless, some argue that it might be because there is little male participation in those positions in the first place. The biggest differences can be clearly viewed in higher managerial positions that require university education. Nonetheless, the most striking fact is that in positions like logistics, transport and postal services women earn half of what men do. The first problem is that women automatically represent a group of people who are more likely to leave their job due to maternity leave. Whereas, men fall into a category of reliable employees. Therefore, women do not even get the chance to earn as much as men do. The second problem connects to the issue of not earning as much as men do in the same positions. Even if women get the chance to work at a managerial post, the salaries immensely differ (PwC Slovakia, 2018).

Equal pay for equal work continues to be one of the basic human rights that the European Union promotes. On average, women earn 16% less than men. Sadly enough, in Slovakia it is 18%. What is the reason? The light has been shed on this issue, and it needs to be addressed. Ľudmila Guerin, manager of PricewaterhouseCoopers Slovakia, argues that: “In Slovakia, we still do not have a culture established that employers publicly communicate their commitment to apply equal remuneration in equal positions, even though EU legislation does not allow the creation of pay gaps in equal positions (Guerin, 2018).” Pay gaps should not exist, according to EU legislation; however, it is one of the most current problems. Feminism ought to tackle issues that concern both men and women, and it should pay attention to where injustice and inequality is occurring in order to create an equal environment.

Slovakia needs corporations and companies that vocally communicate their efforts towards a future where equality is exercised by promoting the fact that people at their company can earn the same amount of money regardless of their gender. Perhaps, it might seem as a rather unrealistic ideal, but it is crucial to vocalize this problem so that more companies and employers can be confronted to the point where they would be obliged to change their policies and attitudes. This cannot be done in one month or one year. Just as every other nation, Slovakia has a history of its own, and even though at first it was under the influence of the Communist regime, which forbade

everyone from exercising any religious faith, nowadays Slovakia is considered to be a deeply Christian republic that is more leaning towards conservative policies. Women were mostly perceived as wives and as a secondary gender. The Christian religion acknowledges the importance of women, as wives since marriage is viewed as a key concept. Christianity promotes the idea of a traditional family with traditional gender roles; a man being the head of the household, working, taking care of the family, making the decisions whilst a woman's priority is to bear children and be supportive wife as well as a nurturing mother. Nevertheless, even in Christianity many roles that embody leadership have been prohibited for women. Coming from this standpoint and as Slovakia relies on its religious belief, if equality perishes within the nation's religion, it can be rather problematic to create an equal environment where women can be leaders or occupy managerial positions. All of these problems concern the feminist movement. It is exactly what feminism strives for— equal chances.

The fact that the issue of gender inequality remains a constant problem in Slovakia, which results in income gaps, justifies Beauvoir's argument that women are always regarded as the Other. They have been characterized by men as less capable to hold a job because of possible motherhood. This is one of many limitations, women face by the patriarchally built society. Beauvoir claims that while it is normal for people to evaluate and comprehend themselves in opposition to others, by othering the female gender and positioning it in society as inferior, women are denied their humanity (de Beauvoir, 2014).

Chapter IV. Anti-feminism

4.1 The Evolution of Anti-feminism

Up until the 20th century, there have been two significant movements that changed the perspective on equality. Without both of these movements the world would look completely different, and life would not be the same. The first crucial movement for humanity was against slavery and the second was feminism. Both of these movements succeeded in changing the long-lasting and somewhat pre-historic social norms. While slavery is generally frowned upon, which means that the movement triumphed in achieving its goal, feminism does not sound so appealing to some. Many countries experience having political interest groups or simply people who are promoting the anti-feminist ideology.

As presented before, there are parts of the world in which women can only dream about obtaining their rights, opening bank accounts without their husbands' permission, and acquiring a driver's license. Many women fear to go on a walk when the sun sets but also fear to go home to their abusive husbands. As feminism continues to combat these issues and inequalities that both men and women face in the modern society, anti-feminism is also on its path to let the world know that the fight is over. As a result of only showing the extremes of radical feminism and its absurdities, people tend to feel more connected to anti-feminism even though it is a risky game to play.

Anti-feminism is a not new phenomenon since it began alongside feminism. It is known as a political ideology as well as a reactionary movement that opposes feminism and its policies, aims and arguments. This response to the alleged hatred towards men and feminization of society created by the feminist movement has become fairly popular especially over the past decade by claiming that feminism has reached its full potential and limits. As feminism gave so much attention to women's rights, it lessened the male authority in families as anti-feminism suggests. Many times, this ideology is associated with far-right extremism. Essentially, the anti-feminist rhetoric could be a potential gateway to violent white nationalism. Some argue that feminism could be the reason why there is a lower college entrance by men and that there is a significant decline of manliness or masculinity which results in social problems such as questioning gender roles, stereotypes and the concept of who can be feminine or masculine.

Anti-feminism as a reactionary movement aspired to silence those who tried to break out of the oppression so that change in society would not occur. This movement gained attention in the US, mostly in the 20th century up until the present. In the late 19th century, it has become a large state-level organization. After 1911, anti-feminism was globally known due to the national associations. The movement strived to stop the women suffrage so that women and men could lead separate lives in separate spheres and that the gender roles would be safe. The anti-suffrage movement was at its peak in 1916 when it had over 350 000 members. As the anti-feminist ideology grew along with its members, it became one of the main inspirations that fueled feminism and women to fight for their suffrage legally and acquire a federal amendment. The ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment that granted suffrage in 1920 celebrated the hope in a more equal future. Not so long after that, in 1923, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) came into light as a proposal for equality to all American citizens. Only in 1972 was it passed and ratified in 30 states within 12 months. As an opposition to the ERA, the Eagle's Forum was created, and only 5 more states ratified the amendment by the final deadline in 1982. The Eagle's Forum was and still remains a conservative interest group in the United States that is a pro-family and promotes anti-feminism. On one hand, people who believed in the feminist movement's power as well as its the leaders argued that the reason for a low participation in the ratification of ERA was caused by business lobbyist and male legislators. On the other hand, it has been highlighted that the Eagle's Forum as a conservative coalition simply did a good job as an opposition and managed to stop the ERA from "spreading". The anti-feminist activism sought to mobilize but only after the status quo and the traditional sexual labor division were endangered (Marshall, 1991). Nevertheless, it is important to note that those who supported the ERA, mainly female voters, failed to coalesce into a political interest group which would provide a much clearer vision of what feminism could be in the political sphere.

Today, the main framework of anti-feminism revolves around promoting a traditional family and gender division of labor which, according to this ideology, is inevitable and natural. These arguments are most likely based on cultural and religious norms. The leaders are usually married people, with a lower level of education and low personal incomes. The main question is: Why do people promote the idea of a traditional family more than a heterosexual or same-gendered couple in which one is not dependent on the other? This issue has a historical precedence since at first, there were marriage experts who would help couples cope with divorces or try to prevent

them from happening. This initiative transformed into a pro-family sentiment which resulted in promoting a traditional family; the husband maintaining the finances and pursuing a career while the wife stayed at home, bearing children. For the sake of saving masculinity from pollution and invasion, this traditional way of living should be sacred. And as feminism gave so much attention to women's rights, it lessened the male authority in traditional families which eventually resulted in supporting the idea of anti-feminist arguments.

Some claim that feminism as such is a completed process which only exaggerates the situation. Kristin J. Anderson argues that feminism can be described as irrelevant and unnecessary because the American society has granted such a great deal of equality that feminism is now only a history lesson (Anderson, 2014). The main argument is built on the belief that the world should focus on anti-feminism since it offers a greater chance to achieve equality in the post-feminist age, as she calls it. Her theory is based upon the belief that feminism has simply gone too far and it disrespects men altogether. It must be noted that the United States made an immense progress in the sphere of minimalizing the inequality, but to claim that just because certain adjustments were made throughout history does not mean that feminism is no longer needed. Not so long ago, there were many protests in the past few years advocating gender equality whether in the workplaces, education or essentially, in political representation. Any kind of activism around gender inequality is part of feminism. Therefore, if people are constantly experiencing mistreatment and injustice in spheres where gender is a predominant factor, the feminist ideology very much present.

4.2 Anti-feminist Groups

The United States

Michael Scott Kimmel, a retired American sociologist, specialized in gender studies wrote many books such as *Angry White Men* or *Manhood in America* regarding this topic. Repeatedly and vocally, he argues that he is against women's equality. Firstly, he claims that women should not enter into public sphere since that would significantly and rapidly change the societal order and cause the re-organization in private sphere. Secondly, it ought to be unacceptable for women to gain control over themselves, including their bodies. Overall, women should be kept in their households essentially, without obtaining their general human rights.

However, to a certain point I must agree with Kimmel. As mentioned before, gender inequality has been shown to be a possible barrier to global economic growth. Thus, if gender equality would be granted, income gaps would be minimalized, and surely the society would significantly and rapidly change, but for the better. When it comes to re-organizing the society, I must say that creating a safe and equal environment where independent individuals, both men and women, could reach their full potential sounds much more appealing than promoting an oppressive system which only the men benefit from. Feminism is about granting and maintaining equal freedom of choice, education, healthcare and the rights to obtain birth control and properties. If a woman cannot access these demands because they are viewed as dangerous to society, then why can a man have it all without any questions? Just because it has been this way since humanity can remember? No. As Simone de Beauvoir would note: “All oppression creates a state of war (de Beauvoir, 2014).” Oppression does not have a sufficient reasoning, the change is inevitable in order to progress as society and not to create a hostile, warlike environment.

Michael Kimmel is only one of many who cherish the anti-feminist idea. The Eagle Forum, as mentioned before, and the Concerned Women for America represent the largest interest groups in the United States that idolize the anti-feminist movement. The Eagle Forum was founded in 1972 by an extremely prominent figure in the anti-feminist movement Phyllis Schlafly, who helped the forum to showcase its power in the Stop ERA project as a strong, conservative and pro-family organization that continues to exist up until our current times. As any other anti-feminist interest group, the Eagle Forum focuses on emphasizing the crucial importance of the anti-abortion and pro-family movements. Currently, they are preoccupied with proposing a ban against mandatory vaccination for COVID-19 that also advocates the need of individual liberty that the United States of America ought to guarantee. Furthermore, on their official website they argue for necessity to respect the Second Amendment which grants American citizens to carry guns. Even though, gun violence is a highly debated and problematic topic. Approximately, 58% of citizens living in America have experience gun violence while around 3 million children per year witness gun violence. Statistically speaking, around 100 people are killed and 230 are shot and wounded on a daily basis due to gun violence. As many would argue, by promoting the idea that obtaining a gun from the age of 18 is completely normal because the Constitution in 1791 said so is walking on very thin ice. Women in the U.S are 21 times more likely to

be killed due to gun violence than in any other high-income countries (Everytown Research & Policy, 2021). If the Eagle Forum claims to be protecting people and the societal order, why would they ignore the fact that gun violence continues to be one of the biggest problems in America that threatens not only the societal order but the lives of many people.

Democracy as a political system that grants people the right to take part in the decision-making processes is also based upon one major idea which is the freedom of speech. Essentially, free speech is when everyone ought to be allowed to vocalize their opinions, arguments, thoughts without fear of sanctions. This concept is used as one of the main arguments utilized by the anti-feminist movement or radical feminism. Here I shall portray that both of them evolved into an extreme that can be potentially dangerous. Just as the name invokes, radical feminism tends to create resentment towards men and occasionally even towards transgender women or women of color. The anti-men agenda promotes hatred as such, which under no circumstances is what feminism is about. A lot of times, people will not admit to be feminists mainly due to the fact that radical feminism has taken up all the attention in the media, and so automatically, when someone mentions feminism it already has a negative connotation. Every stream of feminism has different perspectives and goals nevertheless, any kind of extreme could evolve into a threat to society. Quite understandably, anti-feminism belongs to this category and is associated with far-right extremism. Far-right extremism also known as right-wing terrorism is influenced by far-right ideologies which involve religious nationalism, white separatism and nationalism, neo-fascism or neo-Nazism.

Unfortunately, the Christchurch mosque shooting that occurred in 2018 and the El Paso shooting in 2018 are examples of the far-right white supremacist extremism. Both men who committed the mentioned atrocities were charged with domestic terrorism and hate crimes. Both of these young men were inspired by Renaud Camus, a French novelist, who wrote *The Great Replacement*, which invoked the idea of white supremacy and its importance. In his book, the author mentions that nonwhite people are having more children than white people which could result in decreasing the white race. Therefore, nonwhites are a threat to white people. This conspiracy theory has been a very compelling argument and justification for the extremists as to why it is okay to commit massacres, shootings, bombings and genocides. Furthermore, far-right extremism is a growing threat online, and in the media, just as well as in real life which

is why it is crucial to see what a dangerous and threatening game is has become to society and peace as such.

This phenomenon is closely connected to the anti-feminist movement since the theory of replacement and fear of diminishing the white supremacy considers the need of reproduction and the regulation of women's sexuality to be central. This calls into question whether women ought to have their reproduction rights and freedom of choice since that could eventually lead to the great replacement. Statistically speaking, women with higher education focus more on themselves than on having children. In more developed countries, birth rates have decreased since women were given the chance to achieve higher educational levels. Therefore, their focus is primarily on their careers or simply on themselves rather than centering their lives around motherhood. Women who start working and providing for themselves have reached economic independence which granted them the ability to leave any abusive and toxic relationships. Economic and emotional independence goes hand in hand with being in control of their fertility, bodies, bank accounts, and much more (Lewis, 2019). Far-right extremism alongside anti-feminism considers the guaranteeing of freedom and equality to be great threat for the "supreme" white race as well as to the classical order of society. At first, the anti-feminist movement could appear as a very subtle way of expressing discomfort with the feminist idea and with the decline of manliness or masculinity in society. However, it is a very powerful tool for the far-right extremism that leads to hatred, harming one another and essentially terrorism.

4.3 Slovakia's Anti-feminist Tendencies

Slovakia's most prominent problem is that most people have no idea what feminism actually stands for. Little to no attention has been given to this topic and if it ever popped up in political debates, their reactions were very subtle. The term "humanitarian" sounded much more appealing to them than "feminist" since during the past decade, feminism had been portrayed as a demonic religion of unshaved men-hating lesbian women. One of the major problems in Slovakia, and in many countries, is the lack of critical thinking which eventually leads to a very easy access and belief in misinformation and hoaxes. Most Slovakian people usually believe in news that conforms with their point of view even when it contains misinformation. So naturally, few people are aware of what feminism truly represents.

Slovakia proudly voted for its first female president ever, Zuzana Čaputová, who has done an immensely great job so far by promoting the importance of equal treatment. In this paper, Slovakia has been highlighted as a country that cherishes equality and hopes to build a safe environment for everyone. Just as in any other place, political parties and their goals vary, and not every political party agrees with this ideology. Sadly enough, there has been one political party which disagrees with most of the liberal and democratic policies. Kotleba–People’s Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) is a neo-Nazi and far-right political, allegedly conservative party that aspires to ban abortions and contraception in Slovakia which is an intervention on basic human rights as in limiting the freedom of choice. Simone de Beauvoir noted in her book called *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that our greatest ethical imperative is to create the meaning of our lives while protecting the freedom of others. “A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom, must be denied (de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 1948). I suppose she would disagree with any kind of oppressive political party that would aspire to limit not only women, but everyone who is different.

Furthermore, the party publicly announced their anti-LGBTQ+ agenda due to their religious background. Some party members were accused of murder, sexual assault and racist rhetoric on social media and radio and convicted of hate crime for shouting Nazi or racist slogans. It would take one major win for ĽSNS, and democracy in Slovakia would be seriously threatened (Colborne, 2020). The party’s proud member as well as the face of Kulturblog, which essentially functions as an online platform for pseudo-writers that support ĽSNS, Livia Garčalová, who is 19 years old, compared feminism to cancer. She had also mentioned that it is an infectious disease that affects young women and could result in hysterical behavior, paranoia, limited thinking and depression. As an anti-feminist, she claims that feminism is an outdated trend that only tries to lurk in dull and brainless people.

Everyone is allowed to have their opinion, speak their mind, become whoever they want to be, but the main fallacy in Livia’s argumentation is that she fails to see the bigger picture. I was genuinely surprised to see a woman talk about how feminism is just an old-fashioned useless ideology. If feminism had not granted women the ability to vote and break out of the circle that oppressed them for centuries, she would not have the chance today to speak as freely as she does. She would also have to struggle with studying at a secondary school or working because her choices would be limited and would completely depend on her parents, or future husband. The way she disrespects

feminism whilst benefiting from its success makes no sense. Thanks to feminism we can appreciate the fact that women can do what they want, work where they see fit, say what they mean and be part of political or any kinds of debates in general. Before, no one cared for women's opinions, nowadays women can be prime ministers, presidents, doctors, lawyers, and much more. The feminist ideology pushed the limits and questioned whether there could be a better way. It helped in creating a much more equal place for women all around the world, but in many countries, feminism is just starting to be recognized and alive. Women still have to deal with being a secondary, subordinated gender that is primarily seen as weak and feminine. By promoting the anti-feminist ideology or comparing feminism to an infectious disease, one discourages and disrespects the movement's purpose to free other women from the next generation that may not be as lucky as Slovakian women. It is crucial to see how effortlessly one ideology can turn into an extreme that can become dangerous. I consider feminism to be one of the main pillars of a democratic society, and for me it ought to be respected in Slovakia as well as in other countries.

Simone de Beauvoir would question why women accepted that they are subordinate. She pointed out many times that even though there are biological differences there is no scientific justification that supports the claim of women being a secondary gender. The problem in Slovakia is that many women do not realize that they have a choice to say no and oppose the system they live in. They have accepted that they are the "eternal feminine" even though this concept was constructed by men and society.

Conclusion

During my research about feminism and questioning whether anti-feminism is relevant, I have come to the conclusion that anti-feminism is not only a reactionary movement, but can become a hazardous extreme that could lead to violence just as well as radical feminism can lead to hatred. Any kind of extreme represents a threat to democracy and peace. For those who believe that anti-feminism is a harmless ideology, one suggestion from my perspective would be to explore what feminism is truly about. I do not mean radical, conservative or liberal, but perhaps by grasping the basic meaning of what feminism aspires to be, people would reconsider their choices. As many countries were discussed in this thesis, I dare to argue that feminism is still relevant to every country because everyone can improve regarding this issue. The reason why I chose Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* as a baseline for my theory was because her work and arguments, even though they were written 72 years ago, are applicable and relevant in the 21st century and in my society.

Beauvoir presented three basic reasons as to why women are oppressed, and what I argue would be most useful is to consider those three reasons as a sustainable prevention of what not to do in the future and transform it into three essential points of what to teach women. Firstly, young girls should be taught that their capabilities do not depend on their husbands, brothers and fathers and that a woman should place her needs above men's requirements. Secondly, validation from others is wonderful of course, but it should not be their main source of happiness. Validation should mainly come from the woman herself, so that she can appreciate who she is within herself and not rely on other's expectations and justifications. Finally, a woman ought to step out of the men's shadows and rightfully so demand her political and social rights. If every woman in the next generation would have these three rules ingrained in their minds, taught or repeated regularly, that generation of women would be much stronger and independent, and by this collective confidence it would be impossible for anyone to segregate women or describe them as inferior. As a bonus, if men would be taught the same lessons, they could perhaps see women as equal human beings.

If Beauvoir would be alive today, she would probably be both sad and happy. On one hand, she would be delighted to know that her philosophical and existentialist work provided a new language to discuss the feminist theory. Women have come a long way also thanks to her encouraging words and testimonial experience she provided in her

books. On the other hand, the *Second Sex* was written a long time ago and since then 72 years passed, but we are still far away from gender equality and moreover, anti-feminist movements oppose the feminist concept which is essentially, slowing down the whole progress towards an equal future.

Her main concept revolves around the theory that if men are the One while women are the Other then women's essence can only be explained when one knows what a man is. This makes women completely dependent on men and inferior. Nevertheless, what I cherish about this is that her idea would eventually either combine these two categories into one— human beings, or label and position each category equally. In this thesis I have presented countries such as Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Slovakia as countries where women are still the Other and gender inequality prospers. This only proves that Beauvoir's theory should not be neglected but rather revisited again so that people can gain perspective on this matter.

As for Slovakia, everyone would like to believe that one day people will receive an equal pay and treatment. The problem that remains in Slovakia is that women do not feel comfortable enough with having a feminist initiative. Darina Malová, a professor from Comenius University in Bratislava, argues that Slovakian women fear to be seen and would rather stay in the private sphere (Sidorova, 2019). One thing that feminism needs is the confidence of representation. By implementing the three mentioned suggestions based on Simone de Beauvoir's theory, this collective confidence could rise in Slovakia as well. Women have to realize that by staying silent they choose the side of the oppressor, and if we ought to improve the situation in Slovakia, young girls need to be taught how to be confident, independent, hard-working for their own sake.

Ultimately, the goal for most of people is to make the world a better place, and even though it sounds a bit too dreamy or unrealistic, it is something everyone should consider as an important part of their lives. Especially now, when the fragile society is facing a huge crisis, whether due to the pandemic, climate change or violence in general, it is crucial not to allow extremes to take over. Since every country has its unique history, culture, attitudes and political systems, it is hard to find a consensus in which nations could align and set similar policies. Nevertheless, finding ways to fight the oppression whether it is based on gender, social status, wealth, and race, is one of many ways how democracy can persist.

Resumé

Prečo by malo byť niečo dovolené jednej osobe a odoprené tej druhej? Zdá sa, že ľudstvo je rozdelené na dve kasty, v ktorej jedna vládne nad druhou. Táto mylná predstava je dôvod, prečo existuje rodová nerovnosť vo svete. Tieto dve kasty sú reprezentované mužským a ženským pohlavím, pričom to mužské pohlavie je nadradené. Ľudia by sa nemali báť o to, že by ženy prebehli chlapov v ich povolani, ak by mužom a ženám bola poskytnutá rovnaká šanca preukázať seba a svoje schopnosti. Práve feminizmus rieši túto problematiku, aby ľudia v budúcnosti mohli žiť v spoločnosti, ktorá považuje rodovú rovnosť za dôležitú. Vznik feministickej ideológie zaznamenal začiatok mnohých kontroverzných diskusií, ktoré venovali pozornosť ženám, ich podstate, dôležitosti a ich politickým a ľudským právam. Práca skúma historický kontext nerovnosti a jej hlavné dôvody. Taktiež sa zaoberá rodovou nerovnosťou v rôznych krajinách, diskrimináciou, nenávisťou medzi spoločnosťami, intoleranciou voči feminizmu a absurditu anti-feministického hnutia. Autorka tejto práce sa snaží svojimi argumentami založenými na teórii Simone de Beauvoir dokázať, že feminizmus je jeden zo základných pilierov demokratickej spoločnosti, ktorý by mal byť rešpektovaný v každej krajine vrátane Slovenska.

Prvá kapitola skúma historický kontext, ako dôkaz systematického utlačania žien. Vysvetľuje, aké boli začiatky feministického zmýšľania. Mnoho ľudí si myslí, že feminizmus je fenomén 19. storočia pričom sú dôkazy o feministických tendenciách už v 4. storočí pred našim letopočtom v starovekom Grécku. Filozofovia ako Platón a Aristofanes rozoberali tematiku rodovej rovnosti a dôležitosť žien. Ďalej sa v kapitole rozoberá náboženstvo, a to kresťanstvo. Pričom je pravda, že kresťanstvo je založené na čisto patriarchálnych princípoch a ženy do dnešného dňa nemôžu vstúpiť do kňazstva, tak je potrebné dodať, že sa v Novom Zákone rešpektujú ženy oveľa viac a koniec koncov, ženy sú veľmi dôležitou súčasťou kresťanského hnutia. Prvá kapitola spomína aj Christine de Pizan, ktorá medzi prvými odsúdila mizogýniu a taktiež aj Jeremy Benthama, ktorý ako predstaviteľ Osvietenstva veril vo verejnej prospešnosti a slobode. Ženy v Amerike počas roku 1848, na Seneca Falls zhromaždení bojovali za získanie volebného práva. Tento boj je tiež spomínaný v tejto kapitole ako významný krok pre ženy a feminizmus. Kapitola rozoberá tému fyzickej sily v modernej spoločnosti. Hierarchia spoločnosti sa budovala podľa toho kto bol silnejší a zdatnejší, a preto sa mužské pohlavie stalo dominantným. Avšak, žijeme v 21. storočí, kde už

fyzická sila nehrá takú dôležitú rolu a taktiež by naše biologické rozdiely nemali rozhodovať o našej kompetenciách. Podľa Simone de Beauvoir je mužskosť a ženskosť umelo vytvorený koncept, pomocou ktorého sa ľudia rozdelili do rozličných kategórií. Beauvoir, ktorá napísala bibliu feministického hnutia tvrdí, že umelo vytvorené klamstvá o ženskosti a mužnosti sú dôvodmi prečo ľudia obmedzovaní.

Druhá kapitola rozoberá život a filozofickú teóriu známej francúzskej spisovateľky a feministky Simone de Beauvoir, ktorej teória vysvetľuje aké to je byť ženou. Spomína aj ťažkosti v akadémii, ktoré boli zapríčinené jej pohlavím. V jej knihe *Druhé Pohlavie*, ktorú napísala v roku 1949, dopodrobna rozoberá dôvody, kvôli ktorým sú ženy stále na druhom mieste. Taktiež spomína ženskosť ako charakter pomocou ktorého spoločnosť zaškatuľkovala ženy do menej cennej kategórie. Tvrdí, že sú tri dôvody prečo sú ženy utláčané. Prvý je, že dievčatá sú od útleho veku učené nato, aby sa sústreďovali na potreby mužov. Druhým dôvodom je hľadanie validácie od iných a nie od seba. Tretí dôvod spočíva v tom, ako ženy majú menej práv a teda aj menší vplyv na politické dianie. Všetky tieto dôvody spôsobujú, že sú ženy vyčlenené zo spoločnosti. V druhej kapitole sa taktiež rozoberá jej existenciálny filozofický prístup. Beauvoir využíva Hegelovú teóriu z *Fenomenológie Duše* a tvrdí, že sa muž vie realizovať pomocou ženy lebo v nej vidí svoju reflexiu. Prečo to však nefunguje obojstranne? Problém spočíva v tom, že sa mužské pohlavie zadefinovalo ako to pravé a jediné, pričom ženy boli len prostriedkom mužskej sebarealizácie. A keď sa jedna skupina označuje za tú pravú, tak sa druhá skupina prirodzene stáva len subjektom v tomto celom procese. Mužská dominancia a rodová nerovnosť naďalej prevažujú aj v 21. storočí, pričom k tomu dopomáhajú aj hnutia ako anti-feminizmus.

Tretia kapitola sa sústreďuje na vlny feminizmu a ich ciele. Anti-feministické hnutie tvrdí, že feminizmus už svet nepotrebuje, pretože ženy už nie sú utláčané, pričom v niektorých krajinách ženy stále nemôžu voliť alebo robiť rozhodnutia bez manželov alebo otcov. Je pravda, že ženy už nie sú natoľko utláčané ako boli v minulosti, ale v krajinách ako je napríklad Vatikán, Saudská Arábia, Južná Afrika či Slovensko rodová nerovnosť stále existuje. Prvá vlna sa zaoberala volebným právom. Druhá riešila problematiku rodovej a rasistickej diskriminácie. Tretia vlna rozoberá mylné predstavy o ženách a feminizme. Štvrtá vlna diskutuje o problémoch, ktoré sú vyzdvihnuté na internete a sociálnych médiách a to sexuálne obťažovanie, domáce násilie alebo znásilnenie. A aj keď sa tieto témy už v dnešnej dobe rozoberajú, stále máme dlhú cestu pred sebou, aby sme sa týmito veciach vyhli. Feminizmus je potrebný presne preto, aby

sa tieto problémy zdôrazňovali a riešili tak, ako v spoločnosti tak aj v politike a médiách. Na Slovensku pretrváva problém rozdielu v odmeňovaní práce žien a mužov aj napriek tomu, že je to jedným zo základných práv a princípov Európskej Únie. Ženy na Slovensku zarábajú o 18% menej ako muži. Feministická ideológia ponúka riešenia a odôvodnenia, aby sa rodová rovnosť dosiahla v každej sfére života.

Štvrtá kapitola rozoberá dôvody prečo je anti-feministické hnutie závažným problémom, ktorý môže vyústiť aj do extrémistických tendencií. Anti-feminizmus vznikol ako reakcia na feminizmus práve tými ženami, ktoré boli spokojné s ich živobytím. Žili v pohodlí domova a predstava, že by im niekto toto pohodlie mohol zobrať bola nehorázna. V dnešnej dobe už anti-feminizmus fungujú na princípe obavy, že mužské ego, mužnosť a tradičné rodové role sú v ohrození kvôli feminizmu. Micheal Scott, americký sociológ tvrdí, že by ženy nemali vstupovať do verejnej sféry pretože by to mohlo rapídne zmeniť konštrukciu spoločnosti, a že ženy by nemali mať ani kontrolu nad svojím telom. Anti-feministické skupiny, ako napríklad Eagle Forum sú proti potratom a proti zákazu nosenia zbraní. Problémom tohto hnutia je, že je to asociované s pravicovým extrémizmom, pretože anti-feminizmus považuje garantovanie slobody a rovnosti za ohrozenie bielej rasy a klasickej sociálnej štruktúry spoločnosti. Slovenská politická strana Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko Mariána Kotlebu má podobné tendencie. Taktiež odvetvie tejto strany s názvom Kulturblog a jej tvár Lívia Garčalová prirovnala feminizmus k rakovine. Tvrdí, že je to hnusná infekčná choroba, ktorá môže spôsobiť hysterické správanie, paranoju alebo limitované zmýšľanie. Je obdivuhodné, ako Lívia osočuje feminizmus pričom plne využíva feministické benefity. Napríklad by nemohla ani študovať na gymnáziu alebo to, čo by ona chcela bolo druhoradé pretože by o všetkom rozhodoval jej otec alebo budúci manžel. Feminizmus garantoval ženám možnosť študovať na univerzitách, aby sa mohli stať kým chcú bez ohľadu na ich pohlavie, tak ako sa Lívia môže vyjadrovať na Youtube. Avšak, ak sa má propagovať anti-feministická ideológia, tak ďalšie generácie žien možno nebudú mať takéto šťastie. Jednoznačne považujem feminizmus za základný pilier demokratickej spoločnosti.

Ak chceme žiť v budúcnosti, v ktorej bude mať každý rovnaké práva, pričom práca bude odmenená rovnako pre každého, tak je dôležité uvedomiť si, že práve feministické zmýšľanie nám dopomáha k takejto budúcnosti. Simone de Beauvoir spomína tri dôvody prečo sú ženy utlačané a v závere tejto práci som pretransformovala tieto tri body na tri základne dogmy, podľa ktorých by sme sa mali riadiť. Po prvé,

mladé ženy a dievčatá by sa mali naučiť, že ich potreby a ciele sú dôležitejšie ako ciele mužov v ich živote. Po druhé, oni sami rozhodujú o svojich hodnotách a validáciu by mali vždy hľadať u seba, a nie čakať od iných. Po tretie, ženy by mali vystúpiť z tieňa mužov a právoplatne si vyžadovať svoje práva tak ako v politickej, tak aj v sociálnej sfére života. Ak sa ďalšia generácia bude vychovávať v duchu týchto troch bodov, tak je rodová rovnosť dosiahnuteľný cieľ.

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