A review of any Israeli publication will demonstrate widespread concern with human rights, including the treatment of minorities. Any poll will likewise demonstrate that a majority of Israeli citizens (not a small minority, as Barghouti claims) continue to favor the establishment a Palestinian state alongside Israel, despite constant terror attacks and shelling of Israel proper by Islamic militants, who repeatedly declare that their goal is to destroy Israel, politically, militarily, and demographically (hence the attempt by Palestinians to give birth within Israel, which is itself an abuse of Palestinian children by their own parents).

The cost of pointing at the world's favorite scapegoat and implying that if only Israel behaved a hundred percent correctly the whole world would be full of love and order is that, in the meantime, more alarming abuses of human rights are overlooked. Millions of children languish in brothels, are raped in Africa, are infected with AIDS, die of treatable diseases, and are sent to blow themselves up, but the world convenes to congratulate itself on exposing Israel's failings, both real and trumped up.

If *PMLA* has decided to publish material unrelated to the study of language and literature, one would hope that at least it would subject this material to a refereeing process as rigorous as that through which its standard articles are passed.

Yael Halevi-Wise
McGill University

Reply:

In her response to the paper I presented in 2005 at The Humanities in Human Rights, a conference cosponsored by the MLA and the Graduate Center, City University of New York, Charlotte Berkowitz defends Judaism and Jews as if they were the object of my attack. By doing so, she not only misses the point—Israel's view of Palestinians as relative humans—but adopts the classic canard of equating criticism of Israel and of Zionism with anti-Semitism, the chief objective of which is to stifle debate on Israel's racist and colonial policies. Instead of recognizing that fundamentalist interpretations of the Halakha constitute one of the main factors nourishing Israel's racial discrimination against the indigenous population of Palestine, Berkowitz tries to portray such interpretations as "atypical." Her claim is readily refuted by the fact that fanatic interpretations of Jewish law are propagated by influential rabbis and internalized by a wide proportion of Israeli society, secular and religious sectors alike.

Even before the creation of Israel, a core concept in this fundamentalist worldview was publicly espoused by religious Jewish leaders of immense influence, like Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Kook, the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Palestine, who said, "The difference between a Jewish soul and the souls of non-Jews . . . is greater and deeper than the difference between a human soul and the souls of cattle (qtd. in Israel Shahak and Norton Mezvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* [London: Pluto, 1999] ix).

My contribution to the conference, however, did not revolve around the above point. My main contention was that Western-dominated approaches to human rights often leave out people in contexts of colonialism, military occupation, and other forms of national oppression, where "material and institutional foreclosures . . . make it impossible for certain historical subjects to lay claim to the discourse of rights itself," as the philosopher Judith Butler argues ("Israel/Palestine and the Paradoxes of Academic Freedom," *Radical Philosophy* 135 [2006]: 16). Israel and Zionism, the political ideology on which the state was created, have always perceived—and consequently treated—the native Palestinian Arabs as inferior and not fully human, shedding doubt on their equal entitlement to basic human rights.

This is precisely why Israel is so frequently compared to apartheid South Africa nowadays, even by key political figures, like Jimmy Carter in his recent book, *Palestine: Peace, Not Apartheid*. Years earlier, Desmond Tutu, in his article "Apartheid in the Holy Land" (*Guardian* 29 Apr. 2002, 21 Mar. 2007 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/comment/0,10551,706911,00.html>) wrote:

> I've been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa. . . . Have our Jewish sisters and brothers forgotten their humiliation? Have they forgotten the collective punishment, the home demolitions, in their own history so soon?

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Many Jews have not forgotten—even in Israel. Roman Bronfman, an influential member of the Israeli Knesset, criticized what he termed "an apartheid regime in the occupied territories," adding, "The policy of apartheid has also infiltrated sovereign Israel, and discriminates daily against Israeli Arabs and other minorities" ("The Hong Kong of the Middle East," *Ha'aretz* 20 May 2005, 21 Mar. 2007 <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=578338>). Esther Levitan, a famous Jewish grandmother once condemned to indefinite solitary confinement without trial in South Africa for her activism in the African National Congress, admitted that she considered Israel appallingly racist, adding, "Israelis have this loathsome hatred of Arabs that makes me sick. . . . They will create a worse apartheid here" (qtd. in Thomas O'Dwyer, "Parts and Apartheid," *Ha'aretz* 24 May 2002). The former Israeli education minister Shulamit Aloni once stated that Israel commits war crimes, utilizes "terror," and is "no different than racist South Africa" (qtd. in Roee Nahmias, "Israeli Terror Is Worse," *Yedioth Ahronoth* 29 July 2005, 21 Mar. 2007 <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3119885,00.html>).

As early as 1967, the famous Jewish American writer I. F. Stone summed up the dilemma of Zionism thus: ". . . Israel is creating a kind of moral schizophrenia in world Jewry. In the outside world the welfare of Jewry depends on the maintenance of secular, non-racial, pluralistic societies. In Israel, Jewry finds itself defending a society in which mixed marriages cannot be legalized, in which non-Jews have a lesser status than Jews, and in which the ideal is racial and exclusionist" ("Holy War," *New York Review of Books* 3 Aug. 1967, 21 Mar. 2007 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/12009>).

Most recently, John Dugard, the United Nations's special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, issued a definitive condemnation of this racism:

> Discrimination against Palestinians occurs in many fields. Moreover, the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid appears to be violated by many [Israeli] practices, particularly those denying freedom of movement to Palestinians. . . . The international community has identified three regimes as inimical to human rights—colonialism, apartheid and foreign occupation. Israel is clearly in military occupation of the OPT. At the same time elements of the occupation constitute forms of colonialism and of apartheid, which are contrary to international law.
>
> ("Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967," *Human Rights Council, Fourth Session*, 29 Jan. 2007, 7 Mar. 2007 <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/4session/A.HRC.4.17.pdf>)

I have always endorsed a moral approach to decolonization, recognizing the great difference between justice and revenge. In the context of national liberation struggles against settler-colonialism, absolute justice, which implies a comprehensive reversal of historical wrongs committed against the indigenous people, is practically and morally unattainable. Even if it were achievable, pursuing absolute justice may lead to the commission of fresh injustices against the settler community, which would call into question the ethicality of the process. The more ethical approach is therefore to seek relative justice, which entails redressing the fundamental rights of the indigenous people while avoiding the infliction of any unnecessary or unjust suffering on the settler community. In Algeria, that meant the wholesale flight of the settler-colonist community to its country of origin, France; in South Africa, relative justice was achieved through ending racial privileges in the laws and practices of the state and giving all the citizens an equal right to vote and to run for office, among other economic and social measures.

In the Palestinian-Israeli case, the path to justice and peace must take into account the particularities of the conflict, its origins, and its international context. At its core, Israel's perception of Palestinians as relative humans is expressed in its three-tiered system of oppression: denial of Palestinian refugee rights, including their right to return to their homes; military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem); and racial discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel. A just peace would have to ethically and practically address all three components as a minimal requirement of relative justice. A prerequisite

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for all that is Israel's recognition of Palestinians as equal humans entitled to equal rights.

Omar Barghouti
Jerusalem

Once and Future Feminism

To the Editor:

The October 2006 *PMLA* Theories and Methodologies section focusing on feminism(s) testifies to the importance of the topic and the vitality of our professional journal (121 [2006]: 1678–741). All the essays it contains demand an attentive reading.

There is no doubt that feminism—like all historical phenomena—has undergone great changes through the years. Any social and political movement must change. However, I find very problematic the dismissive tone of some of the quoted statements about the so-called second wave of feminism. To simplify, downplay, or disparage past efforts is a disservice to truth, our understanding of our past, and the interests of all human beings who are working toward a changed world.

The ones among us who were alive and active forty years ago know that even then we sensed that we were embarking on a long and complex journey. Nothing was simple, there were no paths already open. History books had erased our past as well as that of many other people. We had to reinvent feminism and ourselves. The relationship between what has become customary to view as an undifferentiated middle class of "white women"—in itself a fallacious abstraction—and women of color and other until-then-ignored female human beings was even then much more nuanced than the metaphors of first, second, and third wave suggest.

As to the new perspectives in feminist theory, I fear that scholars have become too nervous about focusing on the universe of femaleness. Its exploration must be somehow justified by being subsumed under more general and worthier topics of research, even though that universe cannot but intersect with all forms of otherness. Naming women continues to carry the stigma of limiting oneself to the study of something exclusive, "secondary," less important, and to be somewhat disguised.

More problematic still is the tendency of intellectual discourse to adopt new abstractions. Race, class, ethnicity, yes; but those categories, whose listing has become almost an obligatory mantra, have meaning only if refracted by the diversity of individual human beings. Each of those elements of identity, like gender, is lived differently by different people.

On the other hand, to deny the existence of people's common experiences is absurd and damaging to those who are now living them. The almost universal coercion to which women and girls are subjected in matters of sexuality is indeed a common experience, no matter how mild or horrendous a form that coercion may take. Even the rape of men is predicated on their being "lowered" to the level of women, as Abu Ghraib and many other of the world's hellholes have taught us. Women's long exclusion from the universe of learning is yet another common experience, which today's scholars would do well to remember. Although we do not belong to the so-called underdeveloped world, our full participation in public life is a recent acquisition and by no means eternally assured.

As Toril Moi so aptly says, "If feminism is to have a future, feminist theory—feminist thought, feminist writing—must be able to show that feminism has wise and useful things to say to women who struggle to cope with everyday problems" (1739).

Angela M. Jeannet
Franklin and Marshall College

Shakespeare at Oxford?

To the Editor:

The point of Robert F. Fleissner's recent Forum letter (121 [2006]: 1743–44) is that Shakespeare may have spent some time at Oxford, and the principal argument is that "[t]he dramatist's works were too learned not to have been inspired by such academic influence." It is a familiar argument that is usually employed by the anti-Stratfordians, who insist that the "Shake-speare" plays were too learned to be written by a mere commoner and so must come from an aristocrat, the most popular claimant now being Edward de Vere, the seventeenth earl of Oxford. His partisans might be called the old Oxfordians (although Oxford himself was educated at Cambridge), while Fleissner, as a new Oxfordian, claims not that the playwright was Oxford but merely that he studied there.

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