

Feminism and Israel Hatred

It Never Stops and It Only Gets Worse

By Phyllis Chesler

Just today I received a notification for Barnard's 50th year of their "The Scholar and Feminist Conference: Fifty Years of [Meeting the Moment](#)." Of course, Judith Butler, whose work I find totally incomprehensible, is their keynote speaker. Berkeley-based Butler is celebrated for her anti-Israel stance and for her pro-trans and "queer" advocacy.



This is what counts as feminism in our times. That, plus defining "feminist scholarship" as a form of action, a way of "confronting the most pressing issues at any given moment." Such scholarship is not conceived of as a form of knowledge but as "a robust response to contemporary crises."

Barnard describes this conference using many words. Not one of those words is “woman” or “women,” nor do any of the other words mention “rape,” “sexual harassment,” “female poverty,” “female sexual slavery,” “trafficking,” “female degradation via pornography and the common culture,” “murder of girls and women in war zones.” Nowhere could I find the phrase: “rape is a war crime, not an act of resistance,” etc.

What words there are include “intersectional feminist knowledge.” Let me quote their paragraph that describes this conference.

“The conference’s history of meeting the moment with a vigorous feminist response provides a toolkit for understanding the present. This year, it asks: what are feminist responses to the global rise of authoritarianism and fascism, white Christian nationalism, ethnic cleansing and colonial violence, attacks on higher education and academic freedom, and assaults on queer and trans rights? Which practices of solidarity and feminist arts of transformation can mobilize resistance, provide sustenance, and produce social change? What can we learn from moments in our past, and how do they serve as a springboard for action today?”

The only place where the word “Woman” or “Women” is mentioned is in the description of some of the speakers’ affiliations. Invariably, those departments are “Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies,” but many speakers are identified merely as Emerita Professors, or Professors of Sociology, History, English and Comparative Literature, etc. Professors who are still associated with a university are in the “Department of Feminist Studies and the Program in Critical Race and Ethnic Studies,” “Black Studies,” the “Center for Research in Feminist, Queer, and Transgender Studies.” The only exception is that of Margot Kotler, the “Senior Associate Director, Barnard Center for Research on Women.”

Please note that we are given no indication of whether any of

these scholars, artists, and professors study the works of women—be they women of color or impoverished women or women on any continent, any continent at all, or novelists such as Zora Neale Hurston, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Buchi Emecheta, Chimamanda Adichie, Lady Murasaki, Arundhati Roy, Alice Walker, or the white girls such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, etc.

One is left to wonder whether the Barnard panelists' curriculum includes any of the most visionary and radical of the Second Wave thinkers, activists, and artists, including Ti-Grace Atkinson, Kathleen Barry, Susan Brownmiller, Gena Corea, Mary Daly, Lin Farley, Shulamit Firestone, Judy Grahn, Judith Lewis Herman, Jill Johnston, Renate Klein, Audre Lorde, Midge MacKenzie, Kate Millett, Juliet Mitchell, Joan Nestle, Robin Morgan, Pat Parker, Adrienne Rich, Sheila Rowbotham, Valerie Solanas, Barbara Seaman, Dale Spender, Diana Russell, Andrea Dworkin, Naomi Weisstein, Monique Wittig, etc. This is a very short list of honorable names. 'Tis a pity. Many of them were also rabidly and profoundly anti-Israel. (Alas, most Second Wave era women of color did not begin to publish books until the 1980s. Someone should study the possible reasons.)

Then there are the chosen Barnard speakers. They include some people with whom I'm familiar and with whom I've crossed swords, so to speak. Lila Abu-Lughod, [for example](#). Expectedly, we [disagreed](#) about [head and face veiling](#) and about honor killing. As for Judith Butler—alas, we've never engaged in a public or private debate, but you may find my point of view on anti-Zionism and on the trans cult in something that I published in the fall of 2024 at *Academic Questions* titled "[The Transgender and Anti-Israel True Believers](#)."

Over the decades, I've welcomed expanding the Women's Studies' literature to include scholars, artists, and activists from outside the Western canon, to include women and feminists on every continent and in every ethnic and religious culture.

I've worked with women of color from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Japan, Iran, Turkey, Iraq (the Yazidis, in particular) and with feminists who fled their countries to escape the worst tyrannies on earth and also from being honor killed by their families for becoming even a bit too westernized. I conducted four academic studies on honor killing—work that was embraced by feminists of color abroad but not by most (white) feminists in America, who viewed such work as “Islamophobic” and “racist.”

One of the greatest compliments of my career took place only a few years ago. Iranian feminists contacted me; they had pirated and translated my book [Woman's Inhumanity to Woman](#) into Persian, sent it to me, together with the most beautiful cover, and requested that we have a Book Talk on Zoom. I cautioned them. “I'm a well-known Zionist and alleged Islamophobe. Are you sure you want to do this?” And these brave, brave women did, and so we met on Zoom.

In 2021, together with a grassroots feminist team, Mandy (Mandeep) Sanghera and I co-led [the rescue of 400 women](#) from Afghanistan. I'd say that this is a prime example of putting one's feminist beliefs into action. I hope that Barnard's feminist panelists will consider launching such research and engaging in such actions. Perhaps they already have. Maybe they'll even be talking about it at the conference.

Ya think?

This is a recurring theme at Barnard. I covered one such previous Barnard Conference in March 2022, which I had attended in great good faith—but [ran into the same](#) weirdness (I am so retro!). That conference took place nearly four years ago. The organizers and the panelists also had interests that did not exactly include woman's condition or woman's fate.

My Girls of Summer, our Second Wave revolutionaries, are increasingly lost, lost in the mists of time. Oh, do read the

great Dale Spender's [work on the disappearance](#) of feminist knowledge century after century.

First published in [Phyllis' Newsletter](#)