very Orthodox. I found that there is an audience of people who have been reading my poetry and my research in conjunction, and they created a dialogue for me – which will be expressed in my next book of poetry – between those two realms of creativity which they actually strengthened for me. I can't say that my work on rabbinic literature or on any other realm of Jewish culture has been done in search of spirituality. I don't deny spirituality; I think it's a very interesting and important component of life, but it has never been a goal for me. And all of a sudden I found myself in this very exciting dialogue, which has since been continuing in smaller groups.

So for me, feminist practice, both academic and political, has in recent years proven to concentrate very much around the concept of dialogue, and I think this leads back to important theoretical issues that have been coming up in different realms of feminist discourse. In the last ten years, for example, dialogue has become a very important term in anthropology. So I find myself going back to theory in search of more inspiration to introduce into my research from this point of view.

"GO DOWN MOSES": TEACHING IN THE NEW M.A. IN GENDER STUDIES PROGRAM AT BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

Susan Handelman, Department of English, Bar-Ilan University

In Fall 2000, after several years of planning, Bar-Ilan University's new Interdisciplinary Master's program in Gender Studies officially began. That inaugural semester coincided with my own first semester as an *olah hadashah* (new immigrant) to Israel and as a new professor of English at Bar-Ilan. I had just left the University of Maryland, College Park, where I had taught literature and literary theory for twenty years. The following are my descriptive reflections on what changes and directions I perceive in Gender Studies in Israel from my perspective as a recent arrival – and also my prescriptive reflections on the directions I would like to see Gender Studies take.

Two years prior to my starting to teach at Bar-Ilan, I had been in Jerusalem and attended the first international conference of Kolekh, an Israeli organization of Orthodox Jewish feminists. Listening to the lectures, I remarked to an Israeli colleague about the seeming gap between academic and Jewish activist women's discourse in America, on the one hand, and

what I was hearing in Israel, on the other. To my American ear, there was a lack of theoretical discourse about all the issues which have so strongly engaged feminist theorists in North America for the past several years: globalism, multiculturalism, post-modernism, deconstruction, body studies, queer theory, cultural studies, post-colonialism, and so forth. "It hasn't really come here yet," she responded.

As the saying goes, however, "Be careful what you ask for, because you may get it." And so, two years later, I found myself asked by the head of the new Bar-Ilan Gender Studies program, Dafna Izraeli, to teach in Hebrew one of the four required core courses that each of the twenty beginning students was required to take. This one was entitled *Sifrut, lashon umigdar*, "Gender in Language and Literature." No one who had organized the program or was preparing to teach in it really knew what to expect in the pioneering first year. For me, that year was full of surprises, shocks, and swift and dramatic ups and downs (like life in Israel in general). At the end of the course, I told the students that teaching it, for me, had been like trying to ride a bucking bronco.

I had been given many warnings by veteran immigrants and teachers about "Israeli university students." Israeli students, I was told, are tough. They just want to sit back and copy down notes; they do not want to think; they are pressured and busy. They have to cope with work outside school, families, and army service, and they have little time for studying. They don't like to read English, and they won't do a lot of reading. So I wondered and worried: would the teaching techniques that had worked so well for me in America work here too? Techniques such as collaborative letter-writing in the classroom, discussion rather than frontal lectures, giving power to the students, trying to create a "community of learning"? Yet I was also determined to teach in a way that embodied this kind of pedagogy, for it is critical to me that feminist criticism and Gender Studies in the university, if they mean anything serious, also demand changes in power relations in the university and in its constructions of knowledge, and changes within the four walls of the classroom itself.

One of my favorite quotations on this aspect of teaching theory is from the well-known feminist critic Jane Tomkins:

> But I have come to think more and more that what really matters as far as our own beliefs and projects for change are concerned is not so much

> what we talk about in class as what we do. I have come to think that teaching and learning are not the preparation for anything but are the thing itself. ... The classroom is a microcosm of the world; it is the chance we have to practice whatever ideals we may cherish. The kind of classroom situation one creates is the acid test of what it is one really stands for. And I wonder, in the case of college professors, if performing their competence in front of other people is all that it amounts to in the end.[1]

As it turned out, my students in "Gender in Language and Literature" were mostly adult women who came for the one day a week on which all the courses were scheduled. Most had professional careers of various kinds; there were journalists, social workers, teachers, artists, and TV personalities, and some graduate students from other fields. They included two young Arab women who had advanced degrees in social work and were working in their own communities in crisis and counseling centers for women. There were also two men, one a young rabbi interested in Foucault, and the other an older army officer working on a graduate thesis dealing with wives of injured soldiers.

I put together the kind of syllabus I would have constructed for a graduate seminar in America, with the most up-to-date issues in feminist theory in literary studies: global feminism, multiculturalism, sociolinguistics, deconstruction, postmodernism, cultural studies, body studies.

Simply put, for the first half of this year-long course, I ran headlong into a wall – and got a royal headache. Where it came to feminist pedagogy, colleagues advised me not to give the students articles on this topic as part of my course; they thought it was a waste of time. As for practicing it, most of my students refused to sit in a circle, wanted me to lecture, angrily told me I was wasting their time with the letters and discussion, and asked why I wasn't teaching them about Israeli literature and culture. I realized that although Israel is a very multicultural society, with immigrants from all corners of the globe, not to speak of Arabs and many other non-Jewish minorities, there is very little public or theoretical discourse of multiculturalism. Furthermore, only a few of my students had any background in literature. One of the brightest and most hard-working women surprised me by asking, somewhat roughly, "What does poetry have to do with feminism? I thought it was about social action!"

I found, on the whole, that the climate and mood of the classroom was more like that which one would have found in an American Women's Studies course about fifteen years ago. There was much expression of "anger at the patriarchy"; feminism was still conceived mostly as a movement for middle-class, well-educated women; and feminist consciousness was still fighting for recognition in the university, the government, and on the streets – it was beginning to make some headway, but it still had a siege mentality.

There is a conventional mapping of the history of contemporary feminism as coming in "three waves": the First Wave came with the political suffragette movements and writers such as Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir; the second with the radical political movements of the 60s; while the third is the postmodern, multicultural, global, postcolonial variety of the mid-1980s and 1990s. My students seemed to be somewhere in the Second Wave, and like Second-Wave feminists had been in America, they were burning for social action. For them, that was much more what feminism was about than the theories or literary criticism that I was teaching them, or the self-conscious epistemological skepticism of postmodernism. Body Studies, however, was something to which they could very much connect; anxieties over one's body and how it is symbolically constructed seem to be a universal women's issue. Queer theory – gay and lesbian theory – is just being introduced here.

However, I do not at all want to sound patronizing – as if Israel is a slightly backward child that just needs some extra tutoring to catch up. If Israeli culture is just beginning to absorb postmodernism and the kind of feminist theory produced in the last fifteen years in the U.S., I do not think these should be adopted uncritically. Israeli feminists and Gender Studies practitioners here will need to deal with and reflect the unique conditions of this country (which I often compare to living in an emergency room). For various historical and political reasons, Israel is still fighting some of the intellectual and social battles of modernity and, alas, even of premodernity. Gender Studies in Israel also needs to sort out and attend to the many complex issues of Jewish and Israeli identity in their particular expression in the Land of Israel. "Postmodernism," furthermore, seems to have just about run its course in American intellectual circles, and the events of September 11th have caused a seismic cultural shift whose consequences are yet unknown. Perhaps Israeli Gender Studies will even

skip the Third Wave altogether and move directly to a "post-theoretical" Fourth Wave.

In sum, I do not yet know what will be the nature of a uniquely Israeli-inflected feminism. As a new immigrant, I myself am living in a kind of Gloria Anzaldúa "Borderlands" situation between cultures, speaking various tongues. But in a deep sense, that is what Israel itself is all about in the year 2001.[2]

The Breakthrough

Although most of my Gender Studies students in that first semester were perplexed and impatient with my teaching methods and with the abstract theories being thrown at them, those who had warned me that such attitudes were due to Israeli students' laziness were wrong. Instead, I found that my students were passionately committed to learning and ferocious in their desire for the material to connect with their lives as women and with their aspirations for the betterment of Israeli society. And despite their careers and their endless duties at home with their families, they worked hard to read and study and to try to keep up. As time wore on, they began graciously to share themselves, their lives, and their experiences with each other, through their letters, class comments, arguments, and questions

The breakthrough came at the end of the first semester, when, on the verge of despair, I had decided simply to wave the white flag. I would abandon my practice of asking students to write letters to the class, grit my teeth and teach out the rest of the year as best I could, and then I would release myself from the program and go back to teaching all my courses in English, in the English Department. I also announced to the students that I would give them six weeks of the next semester to choose and organize the reading and lecturers themselves and invite whomever they wanted to speak to them about issues in Israeli literature and culture, since that was not my area of expertise. This announcement seemed to take them by surprise. It made them realize that I was not the bureaucratic enemy so endemic to Israeli universities and that I was indeed open to their needs and criticisms. I also explained to them that what they perceived as my lack of response sometimes was due not to indifference or lack of attention, but to my not always quite catching the nuances of their Hebrew or

being able to express myself as quickly and fluently in Hebrew as I do in English, especially about highly theoretical issues, which even when taught to native English speakers in English sound like a "foreign language." (So goes the well-known joke: "What do you get when you cross a Deconstructionist with a Mafioso?" Answer: "An offer you can't understand.")

My experience of living in Israel has shown me that just when I am on the verge of utter despair, ready to give up and unable to see any solution, some kind of "redemption" appears from an unexpected place. That week, the two Arab students, who had been silent all semester and had never participated orally or in writing, each wrote very poignant and personal letters about their lives. One was written in response to an essay we had read by Felly Nkweto Simmons, "Naming and Identity,"[3] on the experience of trying to have her own name in her culture. The second letter was written by the student to her ex-husband, describing her stifling marriage and her therapeutic work with abused women. She wrote of the need to "sound the voice of her soul."

I always ask students to read their letters aloud to the class, and when these two students read their letters, there was a sudden, radical change. The class was breathless; it hung onto every word, entering into the space of mutual exchange and understanding, of the connection of theory to life and of impersonal classroom to personal experience, for which I had been striving fruitlessly all semester. It was also a rare moment that transcended the bitter politics of Arab–Jewish relations. Both students gave me permission to reproduce their letters below. One asked specifically that her name be published in full; the other I will call "Fatimah." I translate them here from the Hebrew.

Letter no. 1

Dear Felly Simmonds,

To mark "International Struggle against Violence Day" on November 25th, we organized at our "Women against Violence" center a panel on the subject of violence against women and a presentation on "The Silence," based on the drama, "Mother, Is It OK to Cry?" Interestingly, the social worker, whose name is Iman, was astonished that no one knew the name

of the "battered woman." What was her name? She only knew that the woman was called "Um Faddi" – Faddi's Mother.

I was not surprised or astonished. I asked myself, after I read your article on the subject of "Naming and Identity," what my mother would have said if she had read your essay. What would most of the women in my society have said? Would they have wondered why they did not know the name of "Faddi's Mother"? I doubt it. For she was raised and educated as the "Daughter of X," the "Wife of Y," the "Mother of Z," the Sister of Q," and the "Widow of R."

But what is her name and what is her identity? No one knows, not even she herself. ...

Once, at one of the workshops I led, I asked an older woman, "Who are you?" She answered, "Ursan's Mother." "Yes, but who are you?" "Samikh's Wife, Said Alshikh's Daughter."

Ursan's Mother and Faddi's Mother are just a few of the thousands of women who define themselves and their names this way. They were educated to be dependent, and they survive and exist by virtue of this dependence. If we try to wean them from it, they will simply become completely lost; they will not find themselves (as if today "they really do find themselves"??).

As " Neila," I do understand this. These women have simply internalized the values that were instilled in them; and the path of change, the search for new values, is very long, until each one will be able to arrive at the stage of speech, of speech about herself and about her existence as a woman who has her own name and identity card, her own career, successes and failures, who exists in her own right and not for the sake of anyone else (who most of the time is a male).

Once I went to the corner grocery store and there met an older woman whose name is Um Abdullah, Abdullah's Mother (no surprise). She asked me: "Whose daughter are you?" I answered, "The daughter of Nagat Awad." And this is correct, because my father, of blessed memory, died ten years ago. But to this woman the name sounded strange, and she supplemented my words, and my identity, by saying: "Aha! You are the daughter of Jerris Awad!!!"

When I returned home, I told my mother. She was very angry with me and asked, in pain, "What do you want? That people will say of me that we have forgotten your father? How dare you do such a thing?"

This is indeed the situation. We are so afraid to identify ourselves by our names, and we do not want to take responsibility. And this, of course, is not because we are not responsible but because we have been brought up that way – to destroy our identities and our names, so that the oppression will continue.

Yours truly,
Neila Awad

Letter no. 2

To you? Yes, I have decided to write to you, my dear ex-husband. It has been two and a half years since we parted.

I am doing fine – if it would interest you to know how I am. I decided to study in a program on Gender Studies at Bar-Ilan University. As soon as I heard about the program, I was attracted. I enrolled right away, and this was not accidental. It certainly would not surprise you that I am there. For as long as you have known me, I have been there. And when it was hard for me to speak with you without embellishing my sentences and putting them in a form that would not injure your sense of selfhood, I escaped again to places in which I could make my voice heard and which helped sound the voices of other women and girls – the conditions of whose lives had forced them into silence and completely repressed the inner murmurings of their souls. In the voices that I succeeded in eliciting from each one of them, I also felt that something of my own silenced voice had emerged.

You remember I told you that one of my patients, "Rita," began to scream and rage at me. She was demanding attention after three men from her family – father, uncle, grandfather, from the honorable family dynasty – had raped her for two years. I wanted to respond to you that I enjoyed feeling how her soul began to revive, to feel pain, anger – and afterwards, to my great gratification, much love and joy. I thought then that you would understand the language of the soul.

But you, dear sir, unfortunately you forgot, or you did not succeed in understanding mine. I have my own soul, my own voice, and they are very valuable entities; and the portrait you painted of me in your imagination was very unlike my soul. For I, yes, I have my own self. I know that every

time I mention this, I injure you again and again in the depths of your heart, and for this I am sorry.

I want to share all this with you because today, at this temporal remove from you, I am succeeding in sounding pleasant voices and tones, different from the harsh, angry voices and tones that you knew. Then I did not know and did not understand why this pleasant and joyous voice of mine was choked, and why my soul felt imprisoned in my body. I thought perhaps that my beautiful voices and sounds had been exhausted. I forgot the feeling of freedom and liberty in which my soul floats and escapes from my body, diffusing love and warmth.

I know I sound unclear to you. But I think this lack of clarity on my part flows from your inability to free yourself from the rigid hierarchical patterns that your honored father instilled in you. In order for you to understand me, you have to decide to be you, because your "I" – the one I knew, who was a gentle soul – is the one with whom I feel in love.

I assume that you did not intend to be the murderer of my soul, but that you are also a victim, unaware of the continuing oppression. In order for you to cope with the experience of oppression, you would project this difficult experience onto me, "the same experience in which you were forced to sacrifice your voice to the voice of your father." So I learned in the university. And so I learned form the oppressed patients whom I counseled, who helped me to heal from your projected oppression.

I do not know if I am sounding too forgiving here, if I am trying to give sophisticated explanations for your behavior, or if I again sound like a therapist using the defense mechanism called "rationalization" in order to cope with the experience of being silenced and with the oppression that I experienced with you. But that is not important today. What is important to me is for you to know that, unlike you, I have decided to free my soul. And therefore I had to leave – for you, consciously or unconsciously, took the role of prison guard, to use a "gentle expression," and in order to free my soul I had to free myself from you.

I am writing this letter in the framework of a course called "Gender in Language and Literature." I learned in this course, from reading women's literature, that their voices and their language are part of the expression of our "I" as women and as free human beings. Back then it would not have occurred to me write to you. For I knew that my writing would not have appeared important and interesting enough, like "Popolitika" [a popular

Israeli political talk show] and the soccer games that you never stop watching.

So, I often was silent. I tried to prepare the home-made schnitzel with bread crumbs that you thought I prepared better than any other woman in the family, including your mother. And so we spoke of my success in preparing schnitzel. But unfortunately for you, sometime I did not succeed in being quiet, and I rebelled, and then I refused to prepare the schnitzel for you. Which caused you to think that I did not love you enough – as if preparing the schnitzel that you love, and ironing your shirts with my own hands, were the expressions of our love.

This hurt, incited, and angered me, and so, sometimes, I let out my harsh voices and cries, which frightened you. I apologize for scaring you. I did not intend to do so. These voices came out uncontrollably when you behaved in ways that slaughtered my soul.

And now I must finish my letter so that I will not bore you. I know that the great effort required of you for reading my letter is spent. You see that I still adapt myself to you. So you will not think that I have stopped loving you, as you thought when I decided not to prepare schnitzel for you.

But ultimately I want to tell you the truth, that I indeed stopped loving you, and to remind you again and again that I am succeeding in bringing forth those sweet voices and sounds, joyful, musical – and my soul can again fly and dance. Today I – the true "I" – am loved.

Shalom to you,
"Fatimah"

After she finished reading in her quiet, gentle voice, the class burst into spontaneous applause, and one of the students said it would really be too bad if we stopped the letter-writing and missed opportunities to share such things as this. "Fatimah" smiled and said that writing the letter had been very helpful to her, and she would like to try it with her daughters. So, at the last moment, my "feminist pedagogy" was saved, and the practice continued.

A few weeks later, at the end-of-semester party, Neila came up to thank me for the opportunity to express herself. I was gratified and asked, "But what happened? What made it possible for you to do that after being quiet all semester?" She answered: "When you asked us on the first day of class

to write these letters, it was very threatening. In my entire university career I have never been asked to give my personal thoughts and opinions, and I was also not sure I would be accepted in the class."

By the end of the year, many other students told me how writing the letters was the best part of the class, and some who were teachers wanted to try it out with their students. In the second semester, an elected class committee held a lecture series with well- known Israeli authors, feminist activists and artists, and I simply sat in the back with the students and listened.

I also felt strongly at the end of the first semester that it was time for me to write them a letter of my own, about my personal conflicts and desires in relation to contemporary feminist theory. I did this in the context of the end-of-semester letter review assignment, in which I asked everyone to look back over all the letters that had been written and pick a few key quotes from other people's letters or from those of the authors we had read which they had found especially meaningful. They were to explain why they had chosen those particular quotes and summarize how their minds had been changed by what we had read.

I wanted to take the opportunity to address the students more personally as an "Orthodox Jewish" feminist. And I wanted to write about an issue which concerns me deeply in my own general academic work and is part of the discourse of the American academic scene, but which has not quite arrived on the Israeli university scene: "religion, spirituality and higher education." I myself want to see a "Fourth Wave" of feminism and feminist theory, one that could develop a new sense of the value of the spiritual and religious. I have written theoretically about this relationship of postmodernism to religion in my books on hermeneutics and Jewish thought in the works of Freud, Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Derrida.[4] But most of the feminist theory I teach, which the students read and by which they are inspired, is based on a purely material, secular worldview. In other words, I am seeking a fourth wave that will not view the world solely through the matrix of power relations, race, class, and gender.

One of the ways in which I found a common ground on this issue with my Israeli secular students was through the writing of African-American women whose spiritual identities were inseparable from their feminism. When I discussed this with my colleague, Shandy Rudoff, who taught African-American literature to Bar-Ilan students, she remarked to me

cogently, that in the U.S., religion is largely scorned by intellectuals and academics, except when it appears in the discourse of African-Americans. I found that my Israeli students were also very moved by African-American women writers and open to their expressions of religion. Below is the letter I wrote them, which speaks for my own position.

Review Letter, December 24, 2000

Dear Class,

Well, it's about time – I have asked you to write letters all semester, and I have not yet contributed one myself. Wanting to express myself as best I can, I will write this in English. I sat down this afternoon to write, knowing the general idea I wanted to present, and I had picked out the writers I wanted to quote: Alice Walker's essay "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens," the first class letter by Anat, and the last one by "Fatimah." I tried to think of how to begin, and just then, on the radio, I heard a beautiful, haunting voice that I recognized well, that of a famous African-American singer of the 1940s and '50s named Marian Anderson. She was a great soprano and conducted herself with great dignity in the face of terrible racism, which barred her from having the kind of career she should have had and subjected her to many humiliations. In a famous episode, she was at the last minute barred from singing in Constitution Hall, one of the great auditoriums of Washington D.C., because she was black. Instead, with great dignity, grace, and solemnity, in protest, she went to the broad open steps of the Lincoln Memorial and performed the concert there, to thousands of people standing out in the open air with her. It was a very famous and moving movement in American history, a great triumph for her and for African-Americans.

On the radio today, Anderson was singing one of the great African-American "spirituals," a famous, mournful song called "Let My People Go." African-Americans in the U.S. greatly identified with the biblical story of *Yetziyat Mitzraim* [the Exodus from Egypt], seeing themselves, too, as being like "slaves to Pharaoh," suffering, groaning, and yearning for their freedom. In a slow, sad, quivering voice that slid up and down the scales, she was singing, urging, and pleading, sometimes almost moaning: "Go

down, Moses, way down to Egypt land. Tell Old Pharaoh to let my people go." Over and over – just those simple words comprise the song.

It was a fortunate accident that this song came on just as I was sitting down to type, because I was thinking about Alice Walker as an African-American woman and her special relationship to what, for want of a better word, I will call "spirituality." Walker herself uses it in the first line of her essay:

> When the poet Jean Toomer walked through the South in the early twenties, he discovered a curious thing: black women whose spirituality was so intense, so deep, so unconscious, that they themselves were unaware of the richness they held.

Later in the essay, she says: Some of these were our grandmothers:

> For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints, but Artists; driven to a numb and blessed madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release. They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality – which is the basis of Art – that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane. Throwing away their spirituality was their pathetic attempt to lighten the soul to a weight their work-worn, sexually abused bodies could bear.

And then she asks what it meant for a black woman in her grandmother's time to be an artist. She speaks of how song and the notion of song kept them alive, and she spoke of her own mother planting and tending her beautiful garden. That was her Art:

> I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible – except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in the work her soul must have. Ordering the Universe to her personal concept of Beauty.

Walker continues, "Her face, as she prepares the Art that is her gift, is a legacy of respect she leaves to me, for all that illumines and cherishes life."

It was appropriate, then, that Marian Anderson should be singing in the

background as I read over those passages, because what I want to convey here is something more of my personal take on all the material we have read, where I stand with it. As a *datiyah* ["religious" woman] – though I really dislike those kinds of labels – I resonate with a feminist writer who speaks in terms of the "soul." Having had many African-American students in my twenty years of teaching in America, I also got to know up close something about the intensity of the African-American spiritual tradition and the Black church. As the divisions between Blacks and Jews grew in America, I often thought we ought sometime to reconstruct our alliance based on our mutual rootedness in biblical tradition. Marian Anderson singing "Go Down Moses" – so close in its own way to a hasidic niggun – real "soul music."

Most of the other writers we have read so far came from a more – for want of a better word – "secular" worldview. And so will most of those we will read next semester. I have been reading literary theory now for about twenty-five years. I have lived through the second and third waves of feminism. I remember the excitement of the feminist movement in the late 60s, the fresh new angle it gave, the marches and protests, the way women then struggled to find a voice. Then, in the '80s and '90s, as feminism penetrated the academy and as theorizing about gender, epistemology, and linguistic signification came to a peak, I was immersed in very abstract theoretical discussions of these issues. This, too can take you far, but it can also separate you from life as lived – and involve you, sometimes, in what seem to be remote intellectual games. I always wonder who, outside our classroom, is listening, and does this really have an effect on the world? What is the relation between theory and practice, between what we say in the academy and what makes a difference in people's lives? Gloria Anzaldúa also wrote about creating an alternative to the classical high theory of the academy. The writers who speak with passion and combine the personal with the political and theoretical attract me most. Adrienne Rich did it so well, as does Anazaldúa.

I suppose that after twenty-five years of studying Theory with a capital "T," I feel somewhat restless and want to connect it to the community and to life as lived. Remember how Rich wrote:

> A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how

> we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us.

So that is also why I originally asked the members of the class to write letters. I wanted to try to make some connection between all this mass of "material" and how we live, not just in our brains, sitting at the hard desks of a classroom in a corner of the campus, but also in the other parts of us – hearts, souls, bodies, and in our lives at home, at work, and on the street. Anat's first letter, in the second or third week of class, was about discovering how, to her surprise, she, too, had been "silenced," by the gap that had arisen between her and her combat soldier son. She saw that she had inadvertently been trying to find another "language to speak to him" – a nonverbal language, as it were, through cleaning his room and cooking and ironing for him. This letter, for me, made a very forceful kind of connection between the abstract issues I had introduced, of Speech and Silence and women "finding a Voice," and how that played out in her own home. And "Fatimah," in her recent letter to her ex-husband, also spoke so honestly, to use her own phrase, about the "silencing of her soul," and how she is now seeking to make her own voice heard – as she put it: "pleasant voices" and the sounds of her soul.

I think the material in a course such as ours is potentially explosive in many ways, because it is so "close to the bone," and so it raises a lot of intense feelings. Some of these are very critical – "the critique of patriarchy, anger at injustice and oppression," and so forth. As an observant Jewish woman, I closely follow the Orthodox feminist movement, in all its permutations. Several of my closest friends, observant, very learned and committed Jewish women, do so as well. We often speak, though, of how we do not want to be stuck in a mode of anger and of how we love Jewish tradition and Torah with a great passion. As in any love affair, there are always things to work out.

A friend asked me this past week in my synagogue on Shabbat about what I was teaching, and when I mentioned this course, she asked, "Is it from a Jewish point of view?" "No," I said, "just giving the history and trajectory of classical feminist literary and cultural criticism." But I realize that I am always, somewhere in the back of my mind, looking at these texts from a "religious Jewish point of view" – because that is such a strong part of who I am. Yet this is not something I bring to the class. "Gender

and Religion" is next semester, another course, with another professor. Yet can it really be separated from Gender in Literature and Language? So I, too, often feel that I am in a "borderland," to use Anzaldúa's term – straddling so many different worlds and cultures at once. How do my identities as Orthodox Jew, Orthodox Jewish woman, teacher of Gender Studies, and Professor of English Literature come together? I do a lot of delicate tightrope-walking on the borders of all these areas.

To conclude: I wanted to take this opportunity to clarify for you a bit more where I am with it all. I think I am itching for a Fourth Wave of feminism now, one filled with "pleasant voices," to use "Fatimah's" phrase, and one that has all the spiritual depth of a Marian Anderson singing "Let My People Go."

All the best,
Susan

It is safe to say that when the end of the year finally came, we were all glad we had been through the experience together and satisfied that we had come a long way on our journey, and we had learned much from each other. The courses I had taught in English in the English Department had gone smoothly and well, without all the *angst* and storms of Gender Studies, but in retrospect the course in Gender in Language and Literature had been an invaluable experience for me. I agreed to teach in the program again, aware that I would need to do a lot more explaining of my teaching methods and their rationale right at the beginning of the semester and to modify my syllabus to fit Israeli students better. In my last letter to the class, I wrote:

> An American friend who has lived in the country for several years once contrasted American and Israeli cultures in the following way: In America, everyone, on the surface, is very polite and seems willing to be helpful and kind. Say you go to a bank or an office with a problem. They'll say, softly, "Yes Ma'am, I would love to help, and I do understand, but I am really sorry." They keep smiling and keep their cool, and there is no way they will ever bend a rule for you. So things seem smooth and easy at first, but they get hard and frustrating in the end.

Here in Israel, the clerk or person you are dealing with will give you an awful headache and be a terrible pain at the beginning. They will shout, scowl, tell you there is *no way* such a thing can be done – *forget it* – but then, suddenly, they will relent, wink, and say, "OK, just for you, I will do this." That is, they give you a very hard time at the beginning, but in the end they will somehow manage to work it out for you. As my friend says, she has learned that when someone in an office here says to you, "there's a problem" – *yesh be'ayah* – it just means, "Wait a minute," so she no longer gets upset when she hears that at the start of an encounter. I think we started the course that way: y*esh be'ayah*. We started hard and had a lot of difficulties, but then we overcame them. It was hard and tough at the beginning but sweet at the end. Thanks to each one of you.[5]

Notes to Susan Handelman's presentation:

1. Jane Tomkins, "Teaching Like It Matters: A Modest Proposal for Revolutionizing the Classroom," *Lingua Franca*, August 1991, p. 26. Reprinted as "Pedagogy of the Distressed," *College English*, 52 (1990).
See also bell hooks, "Toward a Revolutionary Feminist Pedagogy" (1989), reprinted in David Richter (ed.), *Falling Into Theory: Conflicting Views of Reading Literature*, 2nd edition (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), pp. 80–81. Both Tomkins and hooks are influenced by Paolo Freire's classic work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Hooks writes:

> A liberatory feminist movement aims to transform society by eradicating patriarchy, by ending sexism and sexist oppression, by challenging the politics of domination on all fronts. Feminist pedagogy can only be liberatory if it is truly revolutionary. ... Given the way universities work to reinforce and perpetuate the status quo, the way knowledge is offered as a commodity, Women's Studies can easily become a place where revolutionary feminist thought and feminist activism are submerged or made secondary to the goals of academic careerism. ... Feminist education – the feminist classroom – is and should be a place where there is a sense of struggle, where there is a visible acknowledgment of the union of theory and practice, where we work together as teachers and students to overcome the estrangement and alienation that have become so much the norm in the contemporary university.

2. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

3. Felly Nkweto Simmons, "Naming an Identity," in Deborah Cameron (ed.), *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 33–37.
4. For my further reflections about these issues see my articles: "We Cleverly Avoided Talking About God': Personal and Pedagogical Reflections on Academia and Spirituality," in *Courtyard: A Journal of Research and Thought in Jewish Education*, 1:1 (1999), pp. 101–120; "'Knowledge Has a Face': The Jewish, the Personal, and the Pedagogical," in David Bleich and Deborah Holdstein (eds.), *Personal Turns in Teaching and Scholarship* (Utah State University Press, 2002), pp. 121–144; "'Stopping the Heart': The Spiritual Search of Students and the Challenge to a Professor in an Undergraduate Literature Class," in Andrea Sterk (ed.), *Religion, Scholarship and Higher Education: Perspectives, Models and Future Prospects* (Notre Dame University Press, 2002), pp. 202–230.
5. In honor of all my students and the Bar-Ilan program, I wish to add here that three months after completing the written version of this essay, I returned to teach the course again in the spring semester of 2002. This time, I *began* the course with a discussion of what had happened to me in the previous year, and with essays on feminist pedagogy by bell hooks, Jane Tomkins , and Paolo Freire, an essay of mine on my letter-writing pedagogy, and some sample letters from last year's class, including Neila's. These students had already been together as a group for the first semester, had coalesced well, and had studied some basic feminist and literary theory in the first semester. I am happy to report that they were far more open to the more interpersonal kind of teaching I wanted to do and to the material. Sharing the ups and downs of my personal teaching experience with them, and my analysis of it, sparked them into writing very eloquent letters from the beginning. One of them, addressed to Neila, was about the writer's own Israeli mother and her problem reclaiming her self and name after she was widowed. I knew it was going to be different when they all agreed right away, after the first class, to sit in a circle!