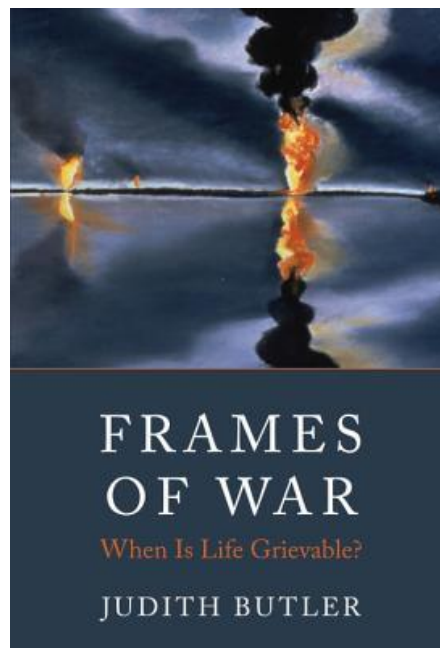




Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?

Judith Butler

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Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable? Judith Butler

Frames of War begins where Butler's *Precarious Lives* left off: on the idea that we cannot grieve for those lost lives that we never saw as lives to begin with. In this age of CNN-mediated war, the lives of those wretched populations of the earth—the refugees; the victims of unjust imprisonment and torture; the immigrants virtually enslaved by their starvation and legal disenfranchisement—are always presented to us as already irretrievable and thereby already lost. We may shake our heads at their wretchedness but then we sacrifice them nonetheless, for they are already forgone.

By analyzing the different frames through which we experience war, Butler calls for a reorientation of the Left toward the precarity of those lives. Only by recognizing those lives as precarious lives—lives that are not yet lost but are ever fragile and in need of protection—might the Left stand in unity against the violence perpetrated through arbitrary state power.

Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable? Details

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Kit says

Wicked smart.

Lobstergirl says

Each of these essays had been published previously. (Sometimes this makes a book less cohesive, or repetitive.) There are good ideas here, but unfortunately the academic jargon limits the number of readers who will find them accessible. A discussion of the Abu Ghraib photographs (as a locus of the homophobia of the U.S. military, Islam's shaming of homosexual acts, and viewable and re-viewable pornography) was highly readable, as was one on a Dutch policy that asked immigration applicants to look at pictures of two men kissing and state whether they found the pictures offensive. (Approval of homosexuality being a sign of modernity, a requirement for anyone who wanted to join in society. The policy has since been abandoned.)

Nawara Zantah says

It contains five essays inspired by contemporary war; they focus on cultural modes through an eclectic framing of violence. I like when Butler states how the viewer forms moral criticism in response to photography like for example in Abu Ghraib' photographs when the camera angle, the photographs' frames, and the presented subjects all suggest that photographers who captured the violent events were involved in its scene!

I totally agree that the impact of photography on the viewer takes place in contrast to the viewer's will! It is an important and rhetorical book! I recommend it

James says

i love Judith Butler... sure, there are times when she name-drops/concept-drops and drops me, not being as amazingly well-read and damned-smart like she is, but she makes me think and reorganize myself and my approaches to just about everything... she makes me feel dumb, but in a nice way... she forces me to read more, to understand more, to wonder more, to question more... this book really takes aim at the US/West and its continual war on The Other... she poses the challenges: who matters? how to grieve lives that don't matter? who decides who matters? how do we fight state power attempting to define us, erase others? lots of discomfiting passages, if the reader is a pro-US/pro-Western Civilization type... prepare to be disabused of many notions and concepts you thought to be rather concrete and unassailable... a fantastic framing of life... essential reading, anytime.

Fleur says

She lost me a bit in the last chapter with all the talk about ego, psychoanalysis is just not my thing. But the rest of the book was super interesting. In true butler style it was incredibly detailed and well thought through, but luckily it was much more pleasant to read than bodies that matter.

Especially the chapters on photography (2) and the one about the neoliberal discourse of sexual liberation as the supposed meter of modernity (3) were cool and inspiring.

Because this book's subtitle is: "when is life grievable?" I was surprised that the book was so little concerned with analysing the power structures that make some bodies more grievable than others. I was hoping to find this for a paper, but I have to look elsewhere.

Nevertheless very interesting, especially if you're looking for theory to understand the war on terror and other civilising mission, the framing of religious minorities, like Muslims and how we talk about war and violence.

Yvonne says

I think *Frames of War* is a very important book that is definitely worth engaging with. It gives valuable insight into politics and its connection to aesthetics, with "Torture and Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag" as the strongest chapter in my opinion. Sometimes the connection between the individual chapters is a little bit too forced (as some of the chapters had been published as articles before). However, I advise everyone interested in politics, ethics or the representation strategies of the media in general, to read this book.

Cynthia says

All the ideas in this book are in *Precarious Life*, just not developed so well. These two books should have been one, more carefully developed, collection of essays.

Rodrigo Ferrari says

O título original deste livro de Judith Butler – *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* – utiliza o termo “frames”, traduzido para o português como “molduras”. Assim como no cinema, na tela, no enquadramento que é dado a determinada cena, “as molduras pelas quais apreendemos [...] são em si mesmas operações de poder”. Seu objetivo, de acordo com Butler, é “delimitar a esfera de aparição enquanto tal. Por outro lado, o problema é ontológico, visto que a pergunta em questão é: O que é uma vida?”.

Uma vida específica só pode ser considerada lesada ou perdida se, primeiro, for considerada viva. “Se certas vidas não são qualificadas como vidas ou se, desde o começo, não são concebíveis como vidas de acordo com certos enquadramentos epistemológicos, então essas vidas nunca serão vividas nem perdidas no sentido pleno dessas palavras”.

Steffi says

Ugh. Tough one. Bigger picture: the book, from what I understand (as always, Butler lost me at times), calls, among other things, for a reconceptualization of the left united in opposing and resisting interventionist military action and violence. This is probably one of the more important philosophical projects of our time.

Today's mainstream 'centre-left' of Democrats/Labour/Social Democracy by and large support 'humanitarian or human rights based military interventions' 'R2P' etc. There is little point, philosophically speaking, in making the case against interventionist military action purely on the grounds of their failed effectiveness, e.g., that the taliban is just as strong as 2001 or that the Iraq and Syria wars have essentially created ISIS, that the whole region is on fire. Nor just on the grounds that they work in the interest of the wrong guys aka imperialists.

The five essays written between 2004 and 2008 aim to 'deconstruct' or 'critically analyse' how popular assent to war is cultivated and how war waging acts upon the senses so that war can be thought of being 'inevitable', 'good' and even 'morally satisfactory'.

The opposition to war has to take place, in part, through remaking the conditions of its possibility and probability.

Indeed it would help the anti-war left if the what I call 'uncritical Left' actually deconstructed modern wars and violence (torture, secret prisons but also certain immigration policies and links with the weapons industry) in that way rather than wholesale adopting the humanitarian interventionist con and being unable to understand the direct link between, say, the US air base Ramstein in Germany and German weapon exports and escalating conflicts in other parts of the world.

While I - courtesy either Butler's peculiar language and/or my own limited cognitive abilities - did not understand everything, a key concept is that of 'precarious life'. Butler aims to revive the 'discourse of life' for the left (not an unproblematic one for the left which favours reproductive freedoms as pro-choice etc). According to Butler, there's no life without the conditions of life, and those conditions are pervasively social and, as such, precarious. To say that 'life is precarious' is to say that the possibility of being sustained relies fundamentally on social and political conditions. This mode of 'social ontology' of life has concrete political implications. Our (ethical, political) obligations are to the conditions that make life possible, not to life itself, to provide those basic supports that seek to minimize precariousness in 'egalitarian ways' (the focus on egalitarian / differential distribution of precariousness is key here).

Second: We cannot easily recognize life outside the 'frames' in which it is given, and those frames not only structure how we come to know and identify life but constitute sustaining conditions for those very lives. Within certain frames some lives are recognized as lives and, as such, grievable (eg victims of Assad or victims of a terrorist attack in Paris) and some are not recognized as lives per se (eg hundreds of thousand casualties since the beginning of the Iraq war, thousands of refugees drowned, millions dying from famine).

Wars attempt to maximize precariousness for others, while minimize precariousness for the power in question. The differential distribution of precariousness is both material and perceptual since those whose lives are not 'regarded' as potentially grievable are made to bear the burden of starvation, underemployment and differential exposure to violence and death.

The shared human condition of precariousness leads not to reciprocal recognition, but to a specific exploitation of targeted populations, of lives that are not quite lives, populations that are 'lose-able' or can be forfeited precisely because they are cast as threats to human life as we know it rather than as living populations in need of protection from illegitimate state violence, famine or pandemics. A critique of war must start with deconstructing these frames.

Yeah, sounds a little WTF. I realize, as I am writing this, that there is little to no point in isolating a few key thoughts without reproducing the wider theoretical/conceptual framework. You'll just have to read the whole book, wrestle the beast (unless you are very familiar with her overall work and used to the fucking painful language it does, at times, feel a bit like a struggle).

Justiina Dahl says

Is rocking my hybrid PhD theoretical framework.

Nathan says

Dense, obviously, but piercingly intelligent and thought-provoking. I felt it started to unravel towards the end (or maybe it was my mind unravelling).

Jason says

Chapter 2 was a standout.

nico says

i was interested as fuck but then i was bored as fuck

Jessica Zu says

Typical dense prose ... but if she loosens it up, peppers them with relevant anecdotes, then the book will be 1000pages long ...

or she could leave thoughts undeveloped, as Barthes did, giving her writing an aphoristic quality, then that's not Butler any more.

What a dilemma!

Anyway, She is still my hero. the arch-deity in my pantheon XD

Lynn says

Butler argues from a we're all, that is, ALL, precarious beings. Recognition of the vulnerability of our lives is a great place to begin her protest against humans engaging in war. Fabulous book so far. More to write when I finish.

Guilherme Smee says

Neste livro, a palavra quadro - frame, em inglês - faz todos o sentido. Judith Butler examina a guerra e a violência através desses quadros, seja no enquadramento da foto ou de televisão, seja no ato de enquadrar determinado grupo a um lugar predeterminado. Em cinco capítulos, Butler analisa os poemas feitos em copos plásticos pelos prisioneiros de Guantánamo e como a expressão do sofrimento ajuda tanto a expiar o mesmo como a dizer quem somos. Em seguida ela analisa a divulgação das torturas na prisão de Abu Ghraib feita por fotos e vídeos de abusos sexuais pelos soldados americanos aos prisioneiros afegãos. Depois, ela traça um paralelo e tenta cruzar semelhanças e discrepâncias sobre o enquadramento de ser homossexual e muçulmano, se são identidades passíveis de uma multiculturalidade ou se são impraticáveis. No quarto capítulo ela tenta explicar se e por que existe algo normativo. Para encerrar tentando explicar que a súplica pela não violência pressupõe já uma violência em si. Por fim, só tenho a dizer que quanto mais leio de Judith Butler, mas me identifico e faz ressoar em mim e para mim seus escritos.

Erdem Tasdelen says

Very well articulated as always, but quite repetitive. Didn't really make me think about anything I hadn't already thought about.

The two essays "Sexual Politics, Torture and Secular Time" and "Non-Thinking in the Name of the Normative" were great. The other ones aren't really necessary to read if you've already read Precarious Life.

Madeleine says

sooo good, very thoughtful and probably perfect tho some chapters are more enthralling than others. a follow-up to "precarious life"-- this book is "precarious life: applied" of sorts, examining what a framework of mutual constitution and shared precarity would mean when examining situations that entangle our daily lives.

jose coimbra says

Judith Butler no livro 'Quadros de Guerra: Quando a vida é passível de luto?', publicado originalmente em 2009, sendo a edição brasileira de 2015, retoma as linhas de força de seu livro de 2004, 'Precarious Life'. Do título original, 'Frames of War: When is Life Grievable', Butler sublinha a relação entre 'frame', quadro, e o ato de enquadrar, realizar enquadramento, produzir molduras pelas quais apreendemos a vida dos outros.

O ponto de partida do ensaio de Butler é a importância de se notar a condição precária como constituinte de qualquer concepção relativa ao sujeito ou à subjetividade, tanto quanto capital para a compreensão da relação com o outro. Daí a autora também questionar a ideia de pessoa como individualidade.

O questionamento acima tem como corolário o uso das normas como vias de reconhecimento de formas de diferença. Esse reconhecimento está pautado na primazia do entendimento de que a moldura pela qual a realidade é apreendida deixa sempre escapar algo, um resto que a ultrapassa e que deve se fazer presente seja na definição de si, que não se resume a uma individualidade, seja na relação com o outro, que se constitui

como alteridade.

A linha seguida por Butler acaba por revelar os motivos pelos quais ela não se vale de preceitos comuns ao multiculturalismo. Isso porque, segundo o argumento, o multiculturalismo pressuporia comunidades constituídas e, por conseguinte, sujeitos já estabelecidos.

Não partir de um dado a priori é importante para Butler, uma vez que seu foco não é o de ressaltar políticas identitárias, mas, antes, o de fazer surgir a precariedade que nos constitui e suas distribuições diferenciais [55]. É por essa via que ela indaga a possibilidade de que "talvez possamos repensar a liberdade [...] como uma condição de solidariedade entre minorias, e perceber como é necessário formular políticas sexuais no contexto de uma crítica incisiva da guerra" [196].

O movimento adotado pelo livro, tal como em 'Precarious Life', é o de investigar como novas constelações podem propiciar outros entendimentos sobre a normatividade [207]. Nesse sentido, outra vez ressalta a distinção entre performatividade e construção [238], sobretudo quanto à impossibilidade de se determinar uma origem das normas. Ou seja, não se trata de partir de algo dado, mas de constituir a subjetividade a partir de atos. Daí o uso do termo iterabilidade [237], também proposto por Derrida, que ressalta a possibilidade de repetição e alteração, mudança e deslocamento, sem o apelo a um referente.

O projeto ético e político apresentado por Butler ressalta que o reconhecimento do outro implica a apreensão da precariedade que é própria à vida e que não está adstrita a um indivíduo, dependendo de condições sociais e políticas. É assim que ela afirma que "as condições sociais da minha existência nunca são completamente determinadas por mim" [241]. É por esse motivo também que a precariedade seria a "condição generalizada para toda e qualquer estratégia, somos precariedade compartilhada" [256]. A conclusão de Butler mostra o fio da navalha onde seria preciso encontrar o lugar a partir do qual estabelecer a luta que se exigiria agora: "Nenhum sujeito tem o monopólio sobre 'ser perseguido' ou 'ser perseguidor', nem mesmo quando histórias fortemente sedimentadas (formas de reiteração densamente combinadas) produziram esse efeito ontológico" [255].

O desafio proposto por Butler é patente igualmente nesta citação:

"Reconhecer a violência não garante, de modo algum, uma política de não violência. Mas o que pode perfeitamente fazer diferença é considerar a vida precária e, portanto, também a condição de violável uma condição generalizada, em vez de uma maneira diferencial de marcar uma identidade cultural, isto é, como um traço recorrente ou atemporal de um sujeito cultural que é perseguido ou violado por definição e independentemente da circunstância histórica" [250-1].

BUTLER, Judith. Quadros de guerra: Quando a vida é passível de luto? Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2015.

Cerebralcortex says

Frames of War was highly insightful, and Butler's perspicacious observations and conclusions are necessary in today's political and social climate. Her proposed notions of generalised precarity, grievability, and the need for critical discursions on the framing of norms provide tools for getting ourselves out of the impasse

upon which current formulations of multiculturalism, identity, and liberalism have foundered. To be sure, Butler does not advocate for the disposal of these norms, but for them to be critiqued and appropriated into a “novel Left politics” that draws attention to the coercive nature of the State, and differentials in precarity, in an effort to reframe the dominant narrative of antagonism for a more egalitarian coalition. As has been highlighted (to the point that Butler had to address it in her preface to *Gender Trouble*), her prose is difficult and several passages required extensive rereading, sometimes out loud. Chapter 5 might also come across as abstruse to those either dismissive of or without a grounding in Freudian psychology. Nevertheless, the refreshing poise and intellectualism prevalent throughout the text makes it very much worth the effort, with chapters 2 and 4 being my personal standouts of such delight commensurate to the exertions required of my weak mind.
