Jill Stauffer

Interview with Judith Butler

Ethics of Non-violence *

"Peace as awareness to the precariouosness of the other."
Emmanuel Levinas

→ JUDITH BUTLER: I'm always glad to talk about gender—maybe we'll get to that later. But it seems to me that, with the start of this war—which started just 72 hours prior to the start of this conversation—questions arise about how human beings characterize what they're doing and, in particular, how people deal with violence: inflicting it, being on the receiving end of it, and how it gets made unreal somehow in the media. And I suppose these are philosophical questions if you ask at a basic level what our obligations are to other human beings and why it is that we may need to consider whether there are ever situations in which it is justified to do violence to another human being. This seems to me to be a very important

→ JILL STAUFFER: I was going to begin by asking you about your work on gender, and you indicated that you wanted to talk about philosophy and peace. So I guess it's fair to ask: What does philosophy have to do with peace?


→ JIL S TAUFFER: Сакав да го започнам интервјуто со прашање за Вашата работа поврзана со родот, но Вие напоменавте дека сакате да разговараше за философијата и за мирот. Според тоа, претпоставувам дека е логично да Ве прашам: Каква е врската помеѓу философијата и мирот?

→ ЏУДИТ БАТЛЕР: Секогаш со задоволство зборувам за родот—можеби ќе се навратите на таа тема подоцна. Ми се чини дека се отпочнувањето на оваа војна—која започна само 72 часа пред почетокот на овој разговор—се наметна прашањата за тоа како ќуѓето го дефинираат тоа што го прават и, поконкретно, како ќуѓето се справуваат со насилството: кога го предизвикуваат, кога се изложени на него, и како истото станува на некој начин нереално во медиумите. Претпоставувам дека оваа философска прашања ако се запишеме на најсуштинско ниво кои се нашите обврски кон другите човечки сущности и зошто е вошто потребно да се разгледа дали постојат

situation in which it is assessed whether the actions are justified and whether they result in unjust treatment of others. This is a philosophical question. In my own view, I've become more and more interested in the problem of non-violence lately. In particular, as a Jew, I've been looking into what the sources of non-violence are within Judaism. I think many people consider Judaism to be a religion based on revenge, and I think that's not true. Revenge may certainly be one part of Judaism, but there are also several strains of Jewish philosophy that believe that the way to handle conflict is through protracted interpretation.

→JS: Why would you say that Judaism is based on revenge? And what does it mean to handle conflict through interpretation?

→JB: The prejudicial notion is that Judaism is about “an eye for an eye” and that Christianity somehow champions “turning the other cheek.” This is a traditional way of distinguishing between the two, and I think it’s not quite fair. I think much of Talmudic interpretation rests on the presumption that there are conflicts that people get into all the time and that there are ways of approaching the law, and interpretations we might bring to the law, that actually help us to adjudicate those conflicts through debate and other reasonable means. I understand the spirit of Talmudic interpretation to be non-violent in that respect.

When people engage in a process of textual interpretation of a certain kind in order to figure out what the conflicts at hand are, that can provide a model for an open and antagonistic human exchange that refuses the alternative of violence. I suppose I am interested in non-vio-
Претпоставувам дека сум заинтересирана за ненасилство бидејќи се обидувам да разберам како одредени циклуси на одмазда може да се спречат. Што и кой интервенира за да се спречи еден циклус на насилство, точно во моментот кога другата страна се обидува да го возврати ударот?

На пример, ако го погледнеше конфликтот помеѓу Израел и Палестина, се чини дека и двете страни имаат причина да бидат апсолутно разгневени и одмаздолубиви. Но, во даден момент е апсолутно етички потребно, откако едната страна е длабоко повредена, другата да не возврати на исток начин. Ваквото ненасиливо движење го прекинува циклуст на одмазда. Многумина сметаат дека одбирането да се возврати ударот е маохистички начин на спротиване со себеси кога човек е во состојба на нанесена повреда или кога ваквото одбиране е еднакво на политичка парализа но, според мене, тоа е непокоеблив и претпазлив став, многу цврст став против самото насилство. И САД во еминативен период дејствуваа поттикнати од одмаздолубина. Тие сакаа да ја одмаздат неправдата направена на 11-ти септември и воопшто не им е грижа дали оние што ги уништуваа се или не се одговорни за конкретната неправда. САД се почувствуваше понижени од овие настани и сега бараа начин да „шокираат и предизвикаат страховочит” за да го „обноват” своето нарушено чувство на непробојност и надмок.

⇒ ЦС: Ако одмаздата станува циклична затоа што еден удар води кон друг ad infinitum, еден начин да се прекине циклуст е да не се прави она што се очекува, односно да се возврати ударот, туку да се направи нешто друго што многумина би го нарекле „да не се прави ништо”. Мислам дека е наспроти интуицијата за многу удуге да размислуваат на таков начин, односно кога еден е повреден другиот да не прави ништо. Сепак, Вие веднеше нешто како „да не се прави

For instance, when you look at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it seems to me that both sides have reason to be absolutely infuriated and vengeful. But at a certain point it is absolutely ethically necessary, after one has been injured very deeply, that one not respond in kind. That movement of non-violence breaks the cycle of revenge. Many people consider that refusing to strike back is a masochistic way of handling oneself when one is in a condition of injury, or that such a refusal is tantamount to political paralysis, but I actually think it is an adamanent and vigilant stand, a difficult stand against violence itself. The U.S. as well during these times is acting out of vengeance. It seeks to revenge the injustice done to it on 9/11 and it doesn’t care if those whom it destroys were not responsible for that particular injustice. It felt itself to be humiliated by those events, and now it seeks to ‘shock and awe’ in order to ‘restore’ its damaged sense of impermeability and supremacy.

⇒ JS: If revenge becomes cyclical because one strike leads to another ad infinitum, one way to stop the cycle is not to do what the cycle expects, which would be to strike back, but rather to do something else, or what a lot of people would call “doing nothing.” I think it’s counter-intuitive to many people to think that when one is wounded one ought to do nothing. But yet you’re saying something like
“doing nothing” is not doing nothing but rather is a fertile kind of an action.

→JB: Well, I think refusing to respond violently is doing something. It’s just not doing the thing that is expected. There was a brief moment after 9/11 when Colin Powell said “we should not rush to satisfy the desire for revenge.” It was a great moment, an extraordinary moment, because what he was actually asking people to do was to stay with a sense of grief, mournfulness and vulnerability. Revenge tries to solve the problem of vulnerability. If I strike back, then I am not vulnerable but rather the other person is. I transfer vulnerability from myself to the other. And yet by striking back I produce a world in which my vulnerability to injury is increased by the likelihood of another strike. So it seems as if I’m getting rid of my vulnerability and instead locating it with the other, but actually I’m heightening the vulnerability of everyone and I’m heightening the possibility of violence that happens between us.

I think there is a way of living with vulnerability and grief that for most Americans is not easy. It is not easy to abide with grief and not to resolve grief really quickly into action. Grief marks something. It marks loss. I think it was only September 21 when Bush said “We’ve finished grieving and now it’s time to act.” And I thought, “Oh, that’s not bad. Ten days of grieving and we’re done with it?” And then what? And then military action, striking back, doing harm to others in the way they’ve done harm to us.
→JM: The quick move to action is a way of foreclosing grief, refusing it, and even as it anaesthetizes one’s own pain and sense of loss, it comes, in time, to anaesthetize us to the losses that we inflict upon others. I think that an entirely different politics would emerge if a community could learn to abide with its losses and its vulnerability. It would know better what its ties to other people are. It would know how radically dependent it is on its interrelationship with others. I think that would lead in fact to a multi-lateral international understanding of justice, or at least it could. I think we would be able to understand something about the general state of fragility and physical vulnerability that people—as human—live in. Our increased attunement to that could only make us more humane. But I’m afraid that we’ve gone in the opposite direction and sought to eviscerate our own vulnerability and to establish our own impermeability. What results is a kind of horrid masculinism. There, we got to gender pretty quickly, didn’t we?

→JS: Ha! But first, you’re talking a lot about vulnerability and I think people don’t like to think of themselves as vulnerable and they certainly don’t like to talk about politics from the standpoint of vulnerability.

→JB: Why not?

→JS: Because politics is about making citizens feel secure, right? Isn’t security what a liberal politics aims at?
JB: Well, security is the banner right now. But is politics what makes us feel secure or is politics what places us mutually at risk?

JS: A good question. Perhaps this will allow us to pursue it. You said, in a recent talk you gave at Harvard, that "if we think that moral authority is about finding one's will and standing by it, we may miss the very mode by which moral demands are relayed." That, too—saying that will is not what gives us moral authority—is counter-intuitive to a lot of people, so I wonder if you could say more about what that means.

JB: The question is: What are the conditions under which we find that we are responsive to other human beings? Becoming responsive—seeing or sensing suffering, responding to it. I should say here that it's not just responding to other human beings, it's responding to an entire ecosystem that is also destroyed through war. It's responding to the evisceration of the conditions of life itself, not only human life. So what are the conditions under which we care about the conditions of life itself? Why do we care about living beings including human beings? Where or how does that happen? I worry that if we locate notions of political responsibility in a willful subject, then we become preoccupied with our own willfulness and our own calculations, and that means we are not necessarily responding to what is outside of ourselves or understanding that outside—the world—as essential to who we are.
Идентитети

Светот и другите луѓе се надвор од нас и се единствената причина поради која политика пред сè има значење.

Да, според мене одговороста е подобар извор за разбиране на природата на моралните начела и како тие влијаат врз нас.

И одговоростата се темели врз некој „други”, бидејќи таа одговорност се додека некој друг, па, според тоа, е средна со ранговоста зашто не е нешто што човекот како своеволен човечки агент може да одира.

Да, секако. Мислам дека ние сме под влијание од другите на многу начини. Можем да разбера како да ја контролираем условите под кои можеме да бидеме под влијание од другите човечки суштества, но никој од нас ја нема таа можност.

Да држи сè под контрола.

Не. Ние не контролираме, но тоа не значи дека не практикуваме одредена условена дејствителност. Тоа значи дека се живее во заедница. Тоа значи дека се живее во општество. Не гмечат во автобус и така натаму. Може да се обидеме да се зборате толку многу па да можеме целосно да ја контролираме нашата средина. Нели? Па така, одејки по улицата, се дури може и да нема улица - постои само нашата приватна возачка лента каде влегуваме во својата приватна кола и некој приватно не вози до некое место каде приватно одне. Постојат луѓе кои веќе се внесени, до одреден степен, во успешен во контролирането на својата животна средина. Но, дури и некои кои мора да одат во болница или во Одделот за моторни возила. Знаяте, во Одделот за моторни возила навистина ги дозволате границите на самата волја. [се смее] Таму со сите се постапува исто.

The world and other people are outside of us and are the only reason why politics would matter in the first place.

Yes, it seems to me that responsiveness is a better source for understanding what moral claims are and how they work upon us.

And responsiveness relies on an “other,” because it responds to an other, and therefore it is related to vulnerability because it’s not something that you as willful human agent necessarily choose.

Well, yes, I think we are affected by others in all kinds of ways. I do understand what it’s like to wish to control the conditions under which we can be affected by other human beings, but none of us really are.

In control.

No. We’re not in control, but that does not mean we don’t exercise a certain kind of conditioned agency. That’s what it means to live in community. That’s what it means to live in society. We get jostled on the bus and so on. We could try to become rich enough so that we could completely control our environment. Right? So that, walking down to the street, or there’s no street—there’s only our privately owned driveway where we get in our privately owned car and someone privately drives us to wherever we privately go. There are people who are probably to some degree successful at controlling their environment. But even they have to go to the hospital at some point, or to the Department of Motor Vehicles. You know the Department of Motor Vehicles really lets you know the limits of will itself. [laughs] There everyone is treated the same.
It just seems to me that there are ways in which we have to accept something like our own permeability to other people. We are affected by others. I mean, 9/11 was being affected in a very big way, in a violent way that we radically did not choose. But that doesn’t mean that we can now turn around and foreclose or somehow get rid of the fact that we are affected by others in ways we do not choose. We have to figure out what we can do in light of that very condition of vulnerability. That produces a notion of agency that is not the same as individual will.

→JS: OK. So it’s easy to see how one is affected by others despite oneself on a daily basis when one walks down the street and is ashamed that there are homeless people living in one’s midst or when one is angry because one’s neighbors constantly play their music too loudly. But what about when it comes to people whom we’ll never meet, who are really far away? Can I be affected by those people?

→JB: I don’t know. What do you think?

→JS: You know what I think. But I’m not being interviewed. How does one explain having a response, or a responsibility towards people to whom one has no formal, or legal or political obligation?

→JB: Well, you know, in the current situation I would say the U.S. does have an internationally understood legal responsibility towards the people of Iraq. I think the U.S. has decided to suspend its obligations under international law. That didn’t just start with this war. It was true in Guantanamo Bay, when they suspended the jurisdiction of the Geneva Conventions, and it was true when they withdrew from the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty. And it has refused to support the International Criminal Court,
поддержка на Межнароднот кривичен суд, што можеби претставува нафлагрантен пример за намерно бензинизиране на САД од Межнародната заедница. Веќе подолго време САД ги затенуваат мултилатералните односи и ги суспендираат своите обврски кон межнародното право.

Сепак, мислим дека е интересно што National Public Radio и неколку други медии емитуваат културни прикази за Ирак и притоа прашуваат: „Кои се Ираканите? Кои се шпингци, а кои се сунитите и каде живееат? Дали е точно дека во Басра новиниот живот е исключително интересен? Какви се нокните клубови? Каква музика се пушта во нив?“ Од ова се гледа дека сепак некои Америци се трудат да разберат какви се Ираканите. Исто така, даваат описи на војниците кои се предале - во што биле облечени, нивните стари алишта, дека не јаделе или не е истуширале, дека предедувале старци руски пушки што не функционирале баш добро и така натаму. Слушкајки го ова, човек добива слика за огромната сиромаштија што владее таму, како и за уништената инфраструктура. Додека ние зборуваме, светлата во Багдад се исключени. Човек не може, а да не се запрашива како изгледа тоа да живее во град без електрична енергија, не може да не помисли на оние на кои им е потребна електрична енергија за медицински потреби или пак на децата чие млеко се скиселува. За потоа да слушнеме за загинатите деци од Басра. Дали оваа ситуација е толку незамислива? За чем, на некој начин, не ги познаваме? Сметам дека постојат одредени заеднички услови за живот што ги делиме со оние поединци. Така не издерживаме.

ЦС: Точно. Овде гледаме на тоа како на втора Заливска војна, но можеме да кажеме дека во Ирак всушност никогаш не заврши, што поради првичните бомбардирања, а потоа и поради санк-

But I find it interesting that National Public Radio and a few other media outlets find themselves running cultural stories on Iraq, asking “so who are the Iraqi people? Who are the Shiites and who are the Sunnis and where do they live? And is it true that there is an extraordinary nightlife in Basra? What are those nightclubs like? What kind of music do they play?” Here we see some effort on the part of some Americans to figure out who the Iraqis are. And the descriptions we got, even yesterday, of the soldiers who were surrendering—what they were wearing, their old clothes, they hadn't eaten or showered, they had old Russian rifles that don't work very well anymore. In hearing this one could get a sense of the enormous poverty of that place and its broken infrastructure. The lights are off in Baghdad as we speak. One can't help wondering what that is like, to live in a city without electricity, and wondering who needs the electricity for medical reasons, and what about the children whose milk is going sour. And then we hear about the dead children of Basra. Is this situation really so unthinkable to us? Do we really not, in some sense, know them? It seems to me there are certain shared conditions of existence that we have with these individuals. Grief equals us.
lot to do with information that we get from the media, or that is available to us in some other form, or that we bother to seek out.

JB: I think that’s true. And then we have to ask how the mainstream media works against certain kinds of identifications. What I mean is how the mainstream media makes it impossible for us to understand what the real human costs are, or the costs more generally to life, of this military bombardment. This whole strategy which they insidiously call “Shock and Awe” seems to me to exploit the visual aesthetics of the media representation of the bombing. So we get an aerial or otherwise distant view of the bombings. You’re never going to see the bomb drop from beneath, only from above. And you’re never going to see any portraits of human beings as they run, or as they cower, when the bombs are dropped. And you’ll never see the decimated bodies. You’ll never see the close-up. The mainstream media won’t show this. It’s the panoramic aesthetic that allows for this nefarious sublimity, where you get “shock and awe” which is only possible from a distance.

And so it is important to remember that the dominant media has ways of closing that distance if it wanted to. But it won’t. In a certain sense the perspective of its camera identifies with the perspective of the bombers. So we’re in some sense posited as those who are above it all, producing it but immune from it, as if we ourselves don’t live on the ground. The internet has provided an important counter to the dominant media, since that is where one
can get the stories, find the testimonies, that find no voice on the dominant airwaves.

~JS: So “shock and awe,” seen from above, is a way of keeping us—if we’re kept—from seeing the suffering of people whose lives we can barely imagine.

~JB: That’s right. So if you want to get back to the philosophical question, “what are our obligations to people we do not know?” or “why is it that we might have an obligation to follow an ethic of non-violence toward people we do not know?” we have to ask a prior question, which is “how does our relationship to those other people get represented for us in the media such that we cannot answer such questions?” What determines that those kinds of questions do not become salient questions for us? In other words, it seems to me that the philosophical question I want to pursue is being systematically undermined by the conditions under which “those other people” are represented to us, because they are represented at such an infinite distance and through a moral shroud of sorts.

~JS: Bush claims to be protecting and liberating them.

~JB: Yes, but we’ve not heard from them. Bush is protecting and liberating a construction of them and their desires, a construction in which they had no part. We don’t have their voices, we don’t know their wishes, we’ve not been invited. And even the recent uprisings in Basra have no voice for us as of yet.

~JS: We started out talking about philosophy and peace and now we’re talking about war. Does war have anything to do with peace?
→JB: I think the Bush government, as conveyed in the words declaring the opening of the war, thinks that we'll have this war, and that will lead to peace because we'll uproot the sources of evil in the world and then there will be no more. That is of course a false argument. War begets war. It produces outraged and humiliated and furious people. That is almost invariably the case. In this instance it seems to me that the war will only foster more virulent anti-Americanism amongst a wide range of either Arab people or Muslim people or both, not to mention the rest of the world. Indeed, it may well succeed in converting moderates into extremists. This war is a way of launching the U.S. into a nearly endless wartime economy and cycle of revenge.

So no, I don’t think there’s any way that war can have a place in peace. To the question whether war has anything to do with peace, I don’t think so. I think that peace is the active and difficult resistance to the temptation of war; it is the prerogative and the obligation of the injured. I think that peace comes up as an issue precisely when one is injured.

→JS: We are back to vulnerability.

→JB: Right. When one has been injured—which is only possible when one is vulnerable—does one have to strike back, and then produce injury elsewhere? Or does one find a way of actually affirming the vulnerability which allows injury to take place? Does one find a way of living with that as a permanent risk of life itself? I think that is a much harder task.

→JS: So war and peace, rather than being the obverse of each other, are two different reactions one could have to
the human condition of injury or vulnerability.

→JB: I think so. Or at least that is what I've just said! At least I think that is where the issue comes up. I don't want to give an explanation of what causes war. But I am saying that peace is something that has to be vigilantly maintained; it is a vigilance, and it involves temptation, and it does not mean we as human beings are not aggressive. It does not mean that we do not have murderous impulses. This is a mistaken way of understanding non-violence. Many people think, "oh, we need to be non-violent; humans can somehow get violence out of their souls; we're not constituted by aggression." Rather I think it is precisely because we're constituted with aggression, it's precisely because we are capable of waging war, and of striking back, and of doing massive injury, that peace becomes a necessity. Peace is a certain resistance to the terrible satisfactions of war. It's a commitment to living with a certain kind of vulnerability to others and susceptibility to being wounded that actually gives our individual lives meaning. And I think this way of viewing things is a much harder place to go, so to speak. One can't just do it alone, either. I think it needs to be institutionalized. It needs to be part of a community ethos. I think in fact it needs to be part of an entire foreign policy.

→JS: Where would one begin to form such a foreign policy?

→JB: I think it would begin in a new approach to internationalism, in what meanings internationalism can have for this time. Let's look at it this way. In the U.S. Bush says, 'just as in WWII, there was Hitler and he was a dic-
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"as long as the Second World War, the dictatorship and the murder of people involved in the country's population, the United States found it necessary to invade the sovereignty of that country in order to depose that tyrant, so now, we invade Iraq and seek to depose that tyrant." The Europeans for the most part take a very different lesson from WWII. If we were to see the European commitment to multi-lateralism in this time as a result of WWII, it would be precisely because they see that nationalism is a huge problem and that it fosters certain kinds of violence. They see that an international set of institutions, identifications, affiliations, commitments, is actually what keeps the prospect of peace alive.

←JC: One nation acting on its own truth is decidedly not the answer.

→JB: Right. Thus aggressive counter-nationalist trends in Europe tend always to be internationalist, so we get the World Court, the International Criminal Court, we get the Geneva Conventions, we get lots of different kinds of interesting bodies of law that represent a process of consensus among several nations, and require consensus for acts of war.

The idea is that any nation, any ruler, has to operate in consensus with others. Of course, committing oneself to that is committing oneself to a process that one may well lose, or in which one's own parochial perspective may be disoriented by another perspective, such that the good of the whole prevails. That takes a certain amount of humility, to function within an international frame of that kind. It means that one cannot pursue one's private or inde-
рамките на меѓународна рамка од таков вид. Значи, не сметат да се застапуваат приватните или личните интереси по секоја цена. Исто така, ова значи дека едно меѓународно тело, како на пример Обединетите нации, не треба да се смета за „инструмент” со чија помош ќе се застапуваат личните интереси, па ако тој инструмент не функционира тогаш да искористите друг инструмент, како што е војната. Човек треба да гледа на интернационализмот како на заштита на определени интереси кои обврзани на таквата консензусна структура. Можно е ова да подразбира одредена жртва на сопствените интереси или ревизија на сопствените интереси во однос на интересите на другите. Постои еден начин на давање, предавање или покорност, што според мене е спротивен на она што се го наредуваат американска маскулинистичка воена идеологија. Таа би била ужасната од едно вакво гледиште. Но, станува збор за меѓународен еквилибит на она што го подразбирајќи под одговорливост на индивидуално ниво.

ЦС: Дали ја гледате серијата „Западно крило“ (The West Wing)?

ЏБ: Сум ја гледала.

ЦС: Дали забележавте дека заврши во минатата сезона со истовремено убивање на терористичкот диктатор и на Марк Хармон, лик во серијата, со кој Алисон Цени, друг лик во серијата, има пле романса?

ЏБ: Сум ја пропуштила епизодата.

ЦС: Ха! Тогаш сега ќе слушнете за тоа. Бидејќи NBC може да се гледа во Сан Франциско само ако имаш кабелска телевизија, а јас пак одбивам да ја гледам таа шема, секогаш ја гледам „Западно крило” подоцна

JS: Do you watch The West Wing?

JB: I have watched it.

JS: Did you note the way it ended last season with the killing at the same time of a terrorist dictator and of the Mark Harmon character with whom the Alison Janney character was developing a romance?

JB: Missed it.

JS: Ha! But now you will have to hear of it. So, because one can only view NBC in San Francisco if one has cable television, and because I refuse to fall prey to such a scheme, I always see The West Wing long after the fact,
on videotapes made for me by my father. In any case, long before I saw it on tape, I heard from various people and
various TV critics that last season’s last episode was a let-
down that used a cheap emotional device for its plot. When
I finally saw it I couldn’t believe how wrong they had all
been. The story placed two deaths in parallel on purpose
in order to illustrate how the death of every human being
has an impact on the many people attached to the life
taken. It also demonstrated how fragile life is. This is true
of someone who loves a White House press secretary and
is killed in a liquor store robbery as much as it is of some-
one who is a dictator who may or may not support terror-
ism and who is killed by political assassination. That was
a message from outside of politics, about what it means
to be a human being. It was striking to me that no one
seemed willing or able to note that. It seemed to have to
do with how we are used to seeing a dehumanization of a
certain “other”—the other for whom we need not care—
as opposed to the other to whom we ought to be respon-
sive. But that pull away from politics into the meaning
of human life itself had a political point to make: who has
enough power to decide questions of life and death? Cer-
tainly the President of the United States does. But so does
someone robbing a liquor store. And then tell me, who
ought to go to prison for their actions? Who is the crim-
inal?

→ JB: I appreciate the parallel you see between the two
lives in their equivalent fragility. I think there are ways in
which we have developed an idea of what a recognizable

→ ЦБ: Јa ценам паралелата што ја направите помеѓу
овие два живота во нивната еквивалентна кревост.
Мислам дека некој начин сме развили одредена
I think, maybe, we have to ask more specifically about the notion of “civilization.” There are different ways of defining it, but it seems to be a framework within which we see human beings as human. There are lots of modes of knowledge that seem to think that human beings achieve their humaness once they become “civilized.” There are forms of developmental psychology that seek to civilize children, that is, to make them into adult humans. More recently we've been told by people like Samuel Huntington that there is something called the clash of civilizations, between what he calls the Western world and the Islamic world. When you look more closely at his thesis it turns out that although he claims that there is a kind of civilization that belongs to Islam he obviously sees it as inferior and he also sees it as incapable of achieving a democratic political culture. This is why some people, including Thomas Friedman, then say, “oh, Islam has not yet achieved its modernity” or it hasn't yet achieved the civilizational status that would make it eligible for a certain kind of political culture.

But in fact I think you can look at metropolitan areas like Cairo where you've got lots of Islam, you've got lots of modernity, you've got lots of democracy going on at the...
on democracy. Chastepati nie nastojivame da stvaramo laggini jedinstva koga zboruivame za ruktu kao islam, a isto koga zboruivame za Zapad - to je ocbigledno jedno laggino jedinstvo.

→JC: Bresem sute na Zapad se isti i sute koj verujuvati vo islamot se isti.

→JB: Da. I togaw luge koj giznaeme i koj живеat vo tne svetovi stanuvati ikoni na nekakva si lagnina, fiktivna ideja za toa što je islamot. Sme videle, na parmer, kako vo medjumate Binc Laden vo gomni razmeri pochina da go pretstavava islamot, što e skakno eina ogromna lagga. No, ne znaemo koe je uspunost Binc Laden. Toj zastavuva nekto. I koga poedinicete ke potpadeat pod vakvi reprezentativni strukturi, koe ke stanat chisti pretstavi na nekoa fiktivna uninija, tageh mali se shenstite za nivna humanizacija ili humanizacija na koj bilo od „drugite“ koj tne odednash gizi zastavuva, a koj se efecktivno izbrizani presku vakvoto lagnino reprezentiraane.

Повекето луте ke кажат „воопшто не mi важно dati Binc Laden ke se очовечи. Jas i ne sakam da go очовечам.“ Poentata e deka toj ja zastavuva, kako pretstavnik, celokupnata islamска заедница, i negovoto obecjovevanje se prosriruva, asocijativno, na ostanatite koj toj lagnino gizi pretstavuva. Toa e опасно.

→JC: I toko toa e rizikot pri очовечувањето или обесчовечувањето на некој чин вредности или мотивации не ги разбираме или не sakame da гi разберемe?

→JB: Vажno e poradi slednive pravci: Kakvo da гi разбереме fomritte na politicka aktivnost koj se slučuvaat vo Kairo ili vo severen Alżir? Koj se same time. Very often we tend to produce false unities when we talk about something like Islam, and also when we talk about the West—clearly a false unity.

→JS: As if everyone in the West were the same, and everyone who practices Islam were the same.

→JB: Yes. And then the people whom we come to know who live in those worlds become icons of some false, some fictitious idea of what Islam is. We’ve seen on a large scale in the media how bin Laden come to represent Islam, say, which is of course a terrible lie. But we don’t know who bin Laden is. He stands for something. And when individuals get collapsed into those representative structures, when they become pure representations of some fictitious unity then there’s very little chance of humanizing them or any of the “others” for whom they suddenly stand, who are effectively erased through this bogus representation.

Most people would say “I don’t really care whether bin Laden gets humanized. I don’t want to humanize him.” The point is that he comes to stand, as a representative, for an entire Islamic community, and the dehumanization that attends to him extends, by association, to the rest of those he falsely comes to represent. That’s dangerous.

→JS: And that’s what is at stake in humanizing or not humanizing someone whose values or motivations we do not or don’t want to understand.

→JB: It matters because of these questions: How do we understand the forms that political agency takes in a place like Cairo or in northern Algeria? What are the cultural
I think Americans have certain ideas about freedom and rationality that we've inherited from classical liberal philosophy, but also from the American ideology that prizes individualism and self-determination. But I think agency—how a person acts as a person—is a broader word than individualism and self-determination allow. It allows us to imagine various kinds of practices that may well even be exercises of freedom that are not necessarily generated from the individual or from some kind of internal notion of self-determination.

→JS: Like the freedom to wear a Burka?

→JB: Ha.

→JS: In your Harvard speech you pointed out that not wearing a Burka is not necessarily the liberation that we think it is. That there is something more there that ought to be understood by people who think that allowing women not to wear a Burka is in itself the achievement of liberty.
→ JB: The person who has taught me most about this is Lila Abu-Lughod, an anthropologist at Columbia University. She has worked in Egypt as an ethnographer and has written extensively on women’s agency in Islam. Over against a certain feminist point of view that always thought that, well, women in Egypt are simply repressed, Abu-Lughod has shown that a lot of the poetry, for instance, that Bedouin women have sung turns out to be extremely politically subversive. More recently she has tried to make clear that the Burka signifies lots of different things. It shows that a woman is modest, that she is still connected with her family, that she has not been exploited by popular culture, that she has pride in her family and community. It signifies modes of belonging to a wider network of people. To lose the Burka is to undergo some loss of those kinship ties that is not to be underestimated. It can be a very powerful experience of estrangement or indeed of compulsory Westernization that leaves its scars. So we shouldn’t assume that Westernization is always a good thing. Very often it overrides important cultural practices that we don’t have the patience to learn about.

→ JS: So more than just enabling ourselves to see the loss of life and the suffering of people far away, we ought to be able to envision as well other kinds of loss, losses that are not simply of life—cultural losses imposed by an unwillingness on our part to expand our idea of what is meaningful, and even a free, human life.

→ JB: This moves me to another point. I think that one of the tasks of philosophy—as well as of practitioners of non-violence, of internationalism, and for a responsible media—would be to engage in a serious process of cultural translation, so that we might actually have a broader con-
ception of how human beings do make meaning in their lives and what gives their lives meaning. I'm afraid that right now we're living in a time when we're imposing our ideas of what makes human life worth living at the very moment that we are undergoing, more generally, a desensitization to the problem. We're imagining the worthy life as an American life where voting is the ultimate political act and consumer freedoms are the most important freedoms. But if we're successful in imposing that idea on the people of Iraq then we will be decimating a culture without ever having known anything about how meaning is made and sustained within that culture.

I think there are forms of internationalism that clearly involve cultural imperialism, say, in international human rights work where what counts as "human rights" is generated somewhere in Washington or New York and then exported elsewhere without ever figuring out how people approach the notion of rights or entitlements, or how they conceive of autonomy or freedom in places that don't necessarily subscribe to our kind of human rights framework. In order to be non-imperialist it seems to me one has to engage in a process of cultural translation where the translation works two ways, where the point is not simply to assimilate another's point of view into one's own, but to interrogate the sites of proximity and overlap within cultures under conditions of globalization and hybridization. The categories of "east" and "west" are hardly stable anymore, if they ever were. And this means that there are sites of contact that make translation possible and fortuitous.
<JC: Треба да ја надминеме потребата од вклопување на другите животи што сметаме дека имаат значење во рамка што однапред сме ја одобриве.

<JB: Това има врска со очувувањето и обесочувувањето. Како луѓето се очувуваат, како ние почувуваме да ги разбираме како човечки существа, а не како некој даден ентитет за кој ниту се надеваме ниту сакаме да го разбереме? Дозволете ми да се обидам да объясним што мислим. По 11-ти септември, во New York Times беа објавени неколци во секој број и тоа со слика. Лицата секогаш беа насмеени, а подолу имаше нивен краток опис или нешто за нивното семејство. Тие секогаш имаа надежи и соништа, доаѓаа од некое место, имаа хоби. Загубата на животот беше солидувана, тогаш, како реална жална загуба. Мислам дека јавното оплакување е добра работа. Луѓето треба да се оплакуваат; загубата треба да се признае јавно бидејќи помага да се сподели чувството за реалноста на загубата но, исто така, и се кажува дека ставувало збор за вистински живот. Неколци во прават тоа. Животот едностојно не се брише. Се впечатува и се помни. Ова ми изгледа како нешто достојно.

Ова што ми загрижува е фактот дека хомосексуалците и лезбејките кои починнаа на 11-ти септември немаа вешност животи кои можат да се рассказат, така што нивните животи беа замерени или минимализирани. Или пак бездомниците кои случајно се најдоа „на патот“ – измина многу време додека се идентификуваат ид на фуге или пак додека се кажа нешто за нив. Игледа дека единствените животи кои беа интерпретирани како живеели беа оние кои беа одживеани на одреден начин, во согласност со одредено множество норми; горди што се Американци, живеејќи на еден

<JS: We need to get beyond requiring other lives we deem meaningful to fit into a frame we have approved beforehand.

<JB: It has to do with humanization and dehumanization. How do people become humanized, how do we come to understand them to be human beings rather than some distant entity we could never hope or desire to understand? Let me try to explain what I mean. One thing that happened post 9/11 was that the New York Times ran obituaries. They appeared in every issue, with a picture. The person was always smiling, and then there was a vignette about them or something about their families. They always had hopes and dreams and they always came from some place, had hobbies. The loss of life was viewed, then, as a real grievous loss.

I think that public grieving is a good thing. People need to be grieved; loss needs to be acknowledged publicly, because it helps to confer a sense of reality on the loss but also because it makes it known that this was a real life. Obituaries do this. The life doesn’t simply get erased. It gets imprinted and remembered. This strikes me as a dignified thing to do.

But I did worry when the gay and lesbian people who died on 9/11 didn’t really have lives that could be narrated, so that those lives were left out or they were minimized. Or the homeless people who were “in the way”—it took a long time for those identifications to be made and for any kind of statement to be made about them. So it seemed like the only lives that could be construed as living were living in a certain way, conforming to a set of norms: proud to be Americans, living in an upwardly mobile way, having certain consumer-based hobbies that are readily recognizable. Those lives could be acknowledged, because there
is a certain frame for what an American life is, and those lives fit the frame.

→JS: So in addition to there being the short 10-day post-9/11 grieving process, there was also a kind of normative grieving process.

→JB: Well, there was a production of a life that was worth grieving and a life that was worth living. And if your life fit that frame, or if it could be made to fit that frame, you could be openly grieved.

Even today, I heard a radio announcer read the names of the American soldiers who had been killed. Now supposedly there are already 200 Iraqis who are dead but we will never hear those names. We’re never even going to learn how to pronounce those names. We won’t have little vignettes, narratives about where they lived, what they were doing and what they wished for in their lives, what their deepest connections were or their most passionate loves.

I think that manipulating the terms by which lives are acknowledged as lives, and deaths are grievable is part of a kind of effort to dehumanize those to whom we do violence.

→JS: So that we can do violence to them without grieving!

→JB: Yes. How can you eviscerate a life that is not considered to be a life? So I worry about the obituary as a form of nation-building in this way. Here is a good example of what I’m getting at. An Arab Christian group in

напреден динамичен начин, имајки одредени потрошуначки навики кои лесно се препознаваат. Овие животи можеа да се признаят бидејки постои одредена рамка за тоа што е американскиот начин на живот, а овие животи се вклопија во рамката.

―ЦС: Значи, како дополнение на краткиот десетденевен процес на жалење по 11-ти септември, имаше и еден вид нормативен процес на оплачување.

―ЦБ: Па, имаше живот кој вредеше да се оплачува и живот кој вредеше да се живее. И ако нечии живот се вклопуваше во рамката или ако можеше да се направи да се вклопи во рамката, по истот можеше отворено да се жали.

Дури и денеска, слушам на радио како најавуваат ги чита имињата на загиналите американски војници. Претпоставувам дека веќе има 200 мртви Ирачани, чии имиња никогаш нема да ги дознаеме. Ниту пак некогаш ќе научиме како се изговараат тие имиња. Нема да има кратки описи за тоа каде живевеле, што правеле и што посакувале во текот на своите животи, кои биле нивните најдлабоки врски или која била нивната најстрашна лубов.

Мислам дека манипулацијата со условите под кои се признаваат животите како животи, а смерните случаи се оплачуваат, е обид да се обесочеват оние врз кои вршиме насилство.

―ЦС: За да можеме пак да извршиме насилство без да оплачуваме!

―ЦБ: Да. Како можеш да отстариш живот кој и не се смета за живот? Затоа ме загрижува што некролозите користени на овој начин се еден вид форма на градење идентич. Еве еден добар пример како поткрепа.
Една арапско-христијанска група од Сао Франциско доде San Francisco Chronicle ги доставила имената на неколку Палестинци кои настрадаа од јаудско насиљство. Составиле некролог и го доставиле до редакцијата на весницот. Од Chronicle рекле дека не можат да го прифатат овој некролог без доказ за смртта. Тогаш истата група нашла доказ во Ha’aretz, што е относно прогресивен израелски весник каде се објавуваат важните смртни случаи. Откако се увериле во веродостојноста, од Chronicle рекле дека тој некролог не е во согласност со стандардниот формат за некролог - без да дадат објаснение што е тоа така - но дека може да се објави како помен. Така, истата група состави на помен и повторно го доставила до весницот. Еве што пишуваат:


San Francisco submitted names to the San Francisco Chronicle of some Palestinians who were killed by Israeli violence. They put it in obituary form and submitted it to the paper. The Chronicle said that they couldn’t accept it without proof of death. Then the same group went and found the proof of death in Ha’aretz, which is a relatively progressive Israeli newspaper which reported on these deaths. Once the proof of death was submitted, the Chronicle said, well, this doesn’t fit our obituary format – no reason was given for why this was so – but you can submit it as a memorial. So then the same group wrote it up as a memorial and submitted it again. The submission was as follows:

In loving memory of Kamla Abu Sa’id, 42, and her daughter, Amna Abu-Sa’id, 13, both Palestinians from the El Bureij refugee camps. Kamla and her daughter were killed May 26, 2002 by Israeli troops, while working on a farm in the Gaza Strip. In loving memory of Ahmed Abu Seer, 7, a Palestinian child, he was killed in his home with bullets. Ahmed died of fatal shrapnel wounds to his heart and lung. Ahmed was a second-grader at Al-Sidaq Elementary school in Nablus, he will be missed by all who knew him. In loving memory of Fatime Ibrahim Zakarna, 30, and her two children, Basset, 4, and Suhair, 3 all Palestinian. Mother and children were killed May 6, 2002 by Israeli soldiers while picking grape leaves in a field in the Kabatiya village. They leave behind Mohammed Yussef Zukarneh, husband and father and Yasmina, daughter and age 6.
The memorial was rejected with the claim that the Chronicle was worried that if they published this memorial it would offend a certain number of their readers, that it would be publicly offensive.

This makes the point in a rather outrageous way, since it seems to me we have to ask under what conditions does the grieving of lives become publicly offensive? In Sophocles' Antigone, Creon didn't allow the public grieving or burial of Polynices, his nephew who attacked the city, and that ended up bringing down his entire kingdom.

⇒JS: Because Antigone could not be commanded not to grieve.

⇒JB: Yes, well-put. There is no commandment that can outlaw grief, even as it seeks to outlaw its public form. I think we are in a similar situation. Because if it is the case that those Palestinians, including young children, can't be named—we can’t know what school they went to or what they were doing when they died, what their aspirations were, because it might offend us to know who has been killed—then we're basically saying that if we are pro-Israel, or if we identify with the Israeli cause, then we don't want to know anything about the actual human lives of those Israel has killed. The San Francisco Chronicle assumes this about people who may well be attached to the state of Israel, but my guess is that many of them would reject this attribution or, at least, I hope they would.

⇒JS: We can't be commanded not to grieve, but we can be complicit in producing ideas of persons for whom no grief is necessary.
JB: For me, as a progressive Jew, that would just be the death of Judaism itself, since, in my mind, one of the most valuable things about Judaism has always been its insistence on public grieving, and its insistence that an entire community needed to come together to grieve. It won’t do just to grieve one’s own. We need to extend our notion of who is grievable so that we are not just grieving on the basis of established identifications. Until we learn that other lives are equally grievable and have an equal demand on us to be grieved—especially the ones that we’ve helped to eliminate—I’m not sure we’ll really be on the way to overcoming the problem of dehumanization.

JS: This reminds me of your article in The Nation about prisoners detained at Guantanamo Bay (“Guantanamo Limbo,” 4/1/02). You pointed out that the prisoners weren’t offered the kind of protection that the Geneva Conventions ought to offer them in part because they weren’t acting on behalf of a recognized state and the Geneva Conventions are bound up with an idea about state sovereignty. So you showed that there’s a way in which we’ve failed to expand our conception of human rights to include those whose values or affiliations may well test the limits of our own. This is, like the question of who can be grieved, a question of what is intelligible within our framework of justice. In the article you wrote, “whether we continue to enforce a universal conception of human rights at moments of outrage or incomprehension,” that is, whether we take human rights to apply even to those who have acted outside what we usually consider the sphere of human behavior, that “is a test of our humanity.” In other words, no matter what someone else has done, it still matters how we treat people. It matters to our humanity that we treat offenders according to standards that we recognize as just. Justice is not an eye for an eye, or revenge—it is deciding for a solution that is ori-
entitled toward peace, peace being the harder but more human way of reacting to injury. That is the very basis of the idea of rights.

→JB: Rumsfeld has said that human rights are all well and good, and rights that are guaranteed by the Geneva Conventions are all well and good, but every nation has the right to put its own security above any other right, and that the suspension of constitutional rights—not just international conventions, in this instance—was justified by virtue of putting national security first. And of course he made sure that Guantanamo Bay is outside of the jurisdiction of the U.S., so that an appeal wouldn’t be effective here. U.S. Courts simply say they have no jurisdiction. And by a sleight of hand, he argues as well that these were illegal combatants and so not covered by the Geneva Convention or international law.

We have to ask, however, whether the demands of security actually do mean that we are somehow entitled not to let prisoners have legal counsel, or that we are somehow entitled not to follow the humane treatment protocols established by the Geneva Conventions, that we can deprive prisoners of rights of redress or even rights to know of what they are being accused. I think what has happened is that Rumsfeld and others—obviously the Administration in general—think that the demands of national security, the "state of emergency," justify the suspension of basic human rights. And yet my understanding of what human rights do is that they are supposed to act as durable safeguards precisely during states of emergency.

6, заради нашата човечност, кон прекршителите на законот да се однесуваме во согласност со стандардите кон ги признаваме како праведни. Правдата не се естон во максимата око за око, или во одмаздата - таа одлучува да прифати решение кое е ориентирано кон мирот, при што мирот е потешкиот, но и почовеч- нит начин на реагирање на повреда. Ова е самата основа на идејата за правата.

→ДЈ: Рамсфелд (Rumsfeld) рече дека човековите права се во ред и добри, дека правата загарантирани со Женевските конвенции се во ред и добри, но дека секоја нација има право да ја стави соопштената безбедност над секое право, и дека сусепдирањето на уставните права—не само на меѓународните конвенции, во овој случај—е оправдано заради поставување на националната безбедност на прво место. И секако, тој потврдил дека Заливот Гуатамап е надвор од јуриденцијата на САД, така што тухка жалба не би била делотворна. Судовите во САД едноставно велат дека немаат јуриденција. Како со магионичарски замав, тој тврди дека станува збор за незаконски борци кои не се опфатени со Женевската конвенција или меѓународното право.

Сепак, се поставува прашањето дали барањата за безбедност шеќешност подразбираат дека на некој начин се овлевастени да не им дозволуваме правен совет или дека на некој начин се овлевастени да не ги следиме протоколите за однесување со луѓето востана- новени со Женевските конвенции, дека можеме да ги лишиме затворениците од правото на медицинска помош или од правото да знаят за што се обвинети. Мислам дека Рамсфелд и другите —очигледно администрацијата во целост—мислат дека барањата за националната безбедност, "вонредната состојба", го оправдува сусепдирањето на основните човекови права. Од друга страна, според мене, човековите права
They are supposed to be there during situations of extreme duress when everything in a government tends to militate against them. They're there to check that aggression in the name of justice is broader and more binding than any national security policy.

→JS: Checking aggression in the name of justice, human rights are a source of peace, then, if we follow your argument that peace is the more difficult but more just reaction—more difficult but more just than war—to the human condition of vulnerability.

→JB: Exactly. I suppose this relates to the ethic of non-violence I was talking about before. Human rights emerge precisely in a context in which a given nation—or government—has been injured or worries about its security or has enormously vengeful feelings and wants to be able to override legal protocol but is checked, is stopped, is forced to resist acting on its aggressions, precisely because there are certain kinds of legal rights that pertain to individuals and protect them no matter how heinous their putative acts may have been. This is a basic precept of criminal law. I think it is much harder to institute it at the international level, but it is there. It is there in the Geneva Conventions, though imperfectly so, as the Conventions seem only to acknowledge the rights of individuals belonging to established nations. Subsequent international law has done better than that.

→JS: I think people are wary of universalist arguments, as if such claims might themselves be culturally insensi-
tive. How is universalism—as in human rights as a universal value—compatible with tolerance, multiculturalism or a heterogeneous world society?

→JB: This gets back to cultural translation. My sense is that when we try to figure out what rights are universal or ought to be, that we also have to figure out what the meaning of those rights are for various kinds of peoples. Those rights can’t remain completely abstract. We actually have to find out how they are lived. For me, the process of finding out what meaning they have, and in what idioms they are understood in various cultural venues, constitutes the work of universalisation itself. That is something that has to differ from region to region can still be something on which we all agree, or that becomes a topic for an ongoing, sometimes antagonistic, interpretative practice among us.

It seems to me that if we don’t want a universal right to be an imposition of a Western culture on everyone, then we have to understand that what is “universal” is constantly being made, it is constantly being articulated and re-articulated, under conditions of cultural translation, where different governments and non-governmental organizations are involved in complex questions regarding, say, what would the right to personal liberty look like? Or what would the right to bodily integrity look like? Or what would the right to protection from violence look like in a given culture? How would that right be implemented and what effects would it have? What kinds of tensions would emerge between the assertion of that right and local traditions or national laws? It seems to me that the struggle there, the struggle between those competing notions or competing frames of reference is essential to the practice of trying to make certain rights universal. To my mind
that practice of cultural translation is the alternative to a brutal imposition of dominant culture on its "others."

→JS: What relation does the work you've been doing currently bear to the work on gender for which some people would say you are better known?

→JB: Well, I'll probably always be better known for that. I think that the work on gender was and is concerned with figuring out how we're made by norms and conventions that precede us and that are larger than us, and also what possibilities of agency exist for us, of becoming different genders or becoming gendered differently, given how we are made. I've always been concerned to understand subjective agency, that is, the agency we have as persons, as both constrained by certain kinds of cultural forces but not determined by them, and also open to improvisation and malleability and repetition and change.

→JS: So when you say becoming a different gender, you don't necessarily mean "surgery."

→JB: Sometimes I mean surgery. I think people should have rights to surgery, actually, if they want that. And there ought to be ways to gain access to that without having to subject oneself to a diagnosis of “disorder” and pathologization that insurance companies require. For some, becoming a different gender does not mean surgery. There are lots of ways of doing gender that are pre-surgical, post-surgical and surgical (and surgery is not the only medical intervention). I think I'd embrace all of that, and call for a world in which all of that can be embraced.
Early on I felt—and I suppose in my book *Gender Trouble* I wrote this explicitly—that our notions of what a human being is problematically dependent on there being two coherent genders. And if someone doesn’t comply with either the masculine norm or the feminine norm, their very humanness is called into question.

→JS: As was demonstrated, for instance, in the story told by the film *Boys Don’t Cry*.

→JB: Yes. So I suppose the corollary to that is to say that those who are challenging traditional ideas about what gender is are also challenging us to refashion our notion of what is human. I think our current political dilemmas are also challenging us to refashion what is meant by the term “human” so that it becomes more encompassing and more capacious, and finally more human, perhaps in a sense we have only begun to imagine.