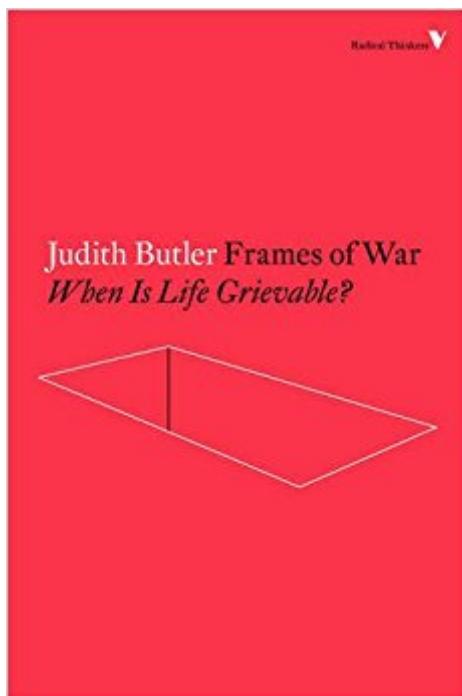


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Frames Of War: When Is Life Grievable? (Radical Thinkers)



Synopsis

In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler explores the media's portrayal of state violence, a process integral to the way in which the West wages modern war. This portrayal has saturated our understanding of human life, and has led to the exploitation and abandonment of whole peoples, who are cast as existential threats rather than as living populations in need of protection. These people are framed as already lost, to imprisonment, unemployment and starvation, and can easily be dismissed. In the twisted logic that rationalizes their deaths, the loss of such populations is deemed necessary to protect the lives of 'the living.' This disparity, Butler argues, has profound implications for why and when we feel horror, outrage, guilt, loss and righteous indifference, both in the context of war and, increasingly, everyday life. This book discerns the resistance to the frames of war in the context of the images from Abu Ghraib, the poetry from Guantanamo, recent European policy on immigration and Islam, and debates on normativity and non-violence. In this urgent response to ever more dominant methods of coercion, violence and racism, Butler calls for a re-conceptualization of the Left, one that brokers cultural difference and cultivates resistance to the illegitimate and arbitrary effects of state violence and its vicissitudes.

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Customer Reviews

The dehumanizing rhetoric of war, especially the Iraq War, is examined but not illuminated in this turgid study. Berkeley literature professor Butler (*Gender Trouble*) asks why the lives of Muslims

and Iraqis are treated by the U.S. government and media as less important—less grievable—than those of Americans, and develops an obscure theory of the precariousness of life as a rationale for opposing this bias, and state violence in general. She applies murky linguistic and aesthetic analyses to a hodgepodge of topics, including the notorious Abu Ghraib photographs, and claims that Islamic sexual puritanism poses a threat to gays and lesbians, a notion she contests at length. Butler's famously impenetrable, jargon-clotted style conveys no fresh thinking. The state works on the field of perception and, more generally, the field of representability, in order to control affect—in anticipation of the way affect is not only structured by interpretation, but structures interpretation as well, reads her laborious statement of the commonplace observation that the government tries to suppress upsetting photos that might provoke opposition to the war. The sludginess of Butler's prose and the banality of her ideas make the book virtually unreadable. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Judith Butler is the most creative and courageous social theorist writing today. *Frames of War* is an intellectual masterpiece that weds a new understanding of being, immersed in history, to a novel Left politics that focuses on State violence, war and resistance.”•Cornel West

Her writing style is dry but the topics are timely in this climate of uncertainty.

Warfare has become part of the fictive character designations that can be imposed like Plato's demography for a society that functions with rulers and those who are ruled, but Judith Butler prefers to think of all the people involved. Many have precarious lives whether we expect to defend them or consider them a population center filled with human shields that will die of weapons that match the strategic thinking of the rulers. I find it difficult to read the abstract nature of reasoning in this context. My life included some military training and ground combat operations that were almost winding down for draftees like me, as the number of American bodies declined while I was serving, but the sanctification rituals were tough if the biggest threat was the stupidity of your peers. There is an extremely perverse praise of irony when Judith Butler mentions Hegel as a thinker she is perversely attracted to for insight into society's way of coming out on top in the individual subjection racket. People being set up illustrate a meaning of framing. I was born with a spleen of ill humor, or I

would not have read so much in my life.

This is not Butler's best book. It is, however, one of the more interesting books she's written. But theoretically it is kind of weak. She argues that we have a responsibility not to life as such (because people dying is a part of life); but rather our responsibility is to sustain the conditions which allow life to flourish. The problem is she doesn't define 'flourish', so all her talk about philosophy informing social policy is hollow. The other problem is she doesn't connect the dots: if our responsibility is to sustain the conditions which allow life to flourish, and we acknowledge that present conditions don't do that, then don't we also have a responsibility to change our conditions? She shies away from this issue. The other problem is her notion of 'frames' -- this is conceptually retrograde. D&G's concept of abstract machine + assemblage is a much more efficient concept.

Butler continues her profound reflections in *Precarious Life*, offering insightful analyses of torture, photography, and the problem of mourning in the context of war. It is not just about media analysis of war, but about the question of recognition, survival, destructiveness, and non-violence

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