

## Thinking About Peace

Wahneema Lubiano

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UNC Teach-In: "Understanding Terror: What Is War? What Is Peace?"

[For those of you who saw an earlier announcement of tonight's event, excuse my title change--the earlier one, "Being Brought to Tears," was the title of my presentation at Duke's Women's Studies' Teach-In, a presentation that argued that emotion is not split from thought, that we are taught to feel, and we feel about, or we feel for, those whom we've learned to recognize in some way. Much of what we still need to learn is that there is a whole world of victims for whom we haven't yet learned to grieve. What I want to take up here today is an extension of that pedagogy: peace as teaching.]

Thinking about peace requires understanding peace itself as thought, as knowledge, and as a critique of its others, its opposites: violence, terror, and war. Peace is encyclopedic in terms of the knowledge that it generates as well as the knowledges upon which it draws. My presentation tonight is a brief attempt to explore what the circumstances are for peace as thinking and what goes into that thinking. What I'm saying here rests on three important assumptions: first, we cannot simply point outward to terror and "hit" the right target; second, to have peace one must extend peace; and third, the necessary counter to notions of a "just war" is a "just peace."

There are combinations of circumstances and environments that work against peace. A few examples here will have to suffice--some historical, one current: (1) the circulation of state-supported terror in the form of white supremacist vigilante terror--lynchings--that continued until the middle of the 20th century, (2) general U.S. citizens' refusal and/or inability to grieve for those who were victims of our government's and our government's allies' support of terror throughout Central and South America, and (3) general obedient trust in U.S. authority in times of crisis, exemplified by the willingness of our elected representatives (with the incredible exception of Barbara Lee) to give a blank check and almost unlimited power to George Bush the younger.

I spoke a moment ago of the "others" of peace -- I want to take up one word that represents a most powerful "other," terrorism: terrorism<sup>1</sup>, the act--the use of force or threats of force to demoralize, intimidate, and subjugate--especially such use as a political weapon or policy, and terrorism<sup>2</sup>, the outcome--the demoralization, intimidation, and subjugation so produced.

Terrorism refers both to the act (the verb) and its accomplishment (the noun). The effect of terrorism, the noun, is accomplished by various means. We can "read" back from the effect and recognize the means. The dead bodies are the effects, and we read back from those bodies and their circumstances, the means that produced them. Our understanding of peace as knowledge might productively begin then with the effects of war itself as terrorism--the demoralization, intimidation, and subjugation of people especially as a result of a political weapon or policy. The effect of terrorism is not so very different from the effect of war; in fact, the dividing line between terrorism and war has long depended upon the difference between the

use of force legitimated by a state as opposed to the *laissez faire* or *ad hoc* use of force or threat by individuals and/or non-state groups.

Peace as a form of thinking asks us to critique and counter the legitimizing of force on the part of individuals/groups and the state. Combined with the assumptions with which I began--that we cannot simply point outward to terror, that to have peace one must extend peace, and that the necessary counter to the notion of a just war is a just peace--we have to judge war, as we do terrorism, from its effects: demoralization, intimidation, and subjugation. In this moment, our state is amassing and deploying a vast array of weaponry for war, although not every weapon amassed is being deployed immediately, and although not every deployment of a weapon is seen as weaponry deployment. I refer here to threats and rhetoric as weapons by yet other means. The gathering of refugees on the border of Pakistan is an effect produced by the bombings themselves certainly, but it is also an effect produced by the threats and rhetoric of the U.S. state--threats and rhetorical displays whose power is awesome and visible if we read back from its effect on a country, Afghanistan, already impoverished and ruined by more than a decade of fighting and its control by a group of thugs. In other words, this is U.S. war-mongering as terror.

Peace as thinking requires thinking about everything and rethinking everything--including our own collusion in our state's saber rattling and its effects. As part of this thinking, I want to remind us of what peace has conventionally meant: freedom from civil clamor and confusion, a state of public quiet; a state of security or order; a mental or spiritual condition marked by freedom from disquieting thoughts or oppressive thought or emotion; a tranquil state of freedom from outside disturbance; harmony in human or personal relations; and a pact or agreement to end hostilities between those who have been at war.

Thinking about peace requires us to consider the difference between security as the precondition for civil ease, calm, tranquility, and harmony in the whole world, and security as the means by which our particular national calm, tranquility, and freedom from outside disturbance, is purchased for us at the cost of sacrificing the rest of the world's possible harmony.

What might be included in thinking about peace, or in recognizing peace as thinking? For one thing, it requires considering the varieties of peace. The peace that those of us gathered here tonight want isn't necessarily the same peace that the U.S. state and the corporations want. Listen to and read their rhetoric, their analyses; they want a peace that equals only stability-as-policing in order to maintain solely our sovereign security, a peace in the U.S. that depends upon arming ourselves to the teeth in order to take up those arms against a world that we have been instrumental in arming. They are talking about a peace in the U.S. that comes at the cost of world unease. It is an expense, theft, or transfer of U.S. property protection costs to the world. This is peace as the form of stability so valued by authoritarian states and international corporate conglomerates--stability as a goal of financial interests world-wide: peace, for one example, for Shell's oil interests in Nigeria, and the interests of a tiny Nigerian elite, at the cost of inadequate education and health care for millions of Nigerians. I want us to think about and reject this "stability as peace" as set against the requirements for a just peace, a peace based on an easy conscience, not about the rate of profit being protected, but based on consciousness of others' unease, on awareness of how others fare and are faring in the world. That kind of peace is a just peace.

What are the requirements of thinking a just peace? It requires internationalist conscious-

ness, and here I am not talking about the U.S. state's lining up of an international coalition of allies to bless its military objectives. A just peace is an architecture of everyday life everywhere. It is a rebuilding of the world that counts the cost of U.S. "stability as peace" as too high when it comes at the costs of billions of lives lived or ended in absolute misery--in a desperate search for water, food, medical care, or the exercise of their capabilities regardless of ethnicity, gender, economic class belonging, or sexuality.

A just peace has its own knowledge demands: history, political, social, and economic knowledges. It is knowledge of, and it produces more knowledge of, the relational aspects of our world. It touches all aspects of our minds, of our social being as citizens not just of a country but of a world. A just peace requires radical democratic thinking, attention to all of the world and from all of the world. In the pursuit of radical democracy and its thinking, a just peace requires dismantling the unquestioned commonsense of the supremacy of particular religions or particular practices of religion, dismantling the unquestioned commonsense of capitalism, and dismantling the unquestioned commonsense of market religiosity.

We have to ask geographical questions: Where exactly is the world? Who is in it and under what circumstances? And we have to ask questions about the limitations of our social awareness within our own social formation. If Bin Laden and the Taliban are engaged in an attempt at intra-Islamic policing, the policing of secular governments in the Islamic world, then we must ask about who is attempting intra-U.S. policing and by what means? A just peace protects us at home from what home can become: our very own police state.

Making a just peace demands that we reject the immorality of killing, of starving people, in order to get at something else. This means, for example, that we rethink our sanctions against Iraq; our isolation of Cuba. It means that we reject the spread of "war" rhetoric among ourselves because that rhetoric is a means both of policing the world and ourselves to an end that cannot produce anything but more policing, either by state-sanctioned means of terror--war, or by ad hoc terrorist groups. It means that we reject our state's consistent declaration of itself as above international law.

A just peace is thinking that saves. We can learn to make a just peace to save ourselves. We have to learn to make a just peace to save the world.