

# Women's Wisdom on Solidarity and Differences (On Not Rescuing the Killers)

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*We do not sweat and summon our best in order to rescue the killers; it is to comfort and to empower the possible victims of evil that we do tinker and daydream and revise and memorize, and then impart all that we can of our inspired, our inherited humanity.*

THESE WORDS ARE from the black feminist theorist and writer June Jordan

i have been pondering them in relation to this panel and also what they may have to say in reminding me why i do what i do

and how

and in what ways

for me, to talk about standing with one another

to conjure solidarity across differences

to spark women's wisdom on solidarity and differences

is, at first glance

(and i must admit on several glances

looks

mullings later)

to tempt the agony of the absurd

i feel as though i have been cast back in time

to that 60s cocktail party in which Ralph Ellison

the author of *Invisible Man*

spoke in “clipped, deliberate syllables” to his peers

“Show me the poem, tell me the names of the opera/the symphony that will stop one man from killing another man and then maybe” he gestured toward the elegant bejeweled assembly with his hand that held a cut-crystal glass of scotch—“just maybe some of this can be justified.”

i am relieved to say that tempting the agony of the absurd

does not leave me in Ellison’s condemnatory despair

but it does leave me in a frustrated hope

a hope that is imbued with Jordan’s words

as they echo

“we do not sweat and summon our best in order to rescue the killers”

there are days, in fact,

that i’ll be damned if i rescue any killer

or someone even approaching such a grotesque status

to work in solidarity with those who are like me

unlike me

or resemble me

does not demand or require that i save those who would see others dead or annihilated

either through neglect

indifference

calculation

or theo-ethical musings

i will not rescue the killers

of dreams and visions of a world better than this

of hopes that continue to pulse, however faintly, in the midst of  
disaster and ruin

i will not rescue the killers

who create optional reading lists

that signal to me

that some actual or alleged scholars really believe

that there are optional peoples, cultures, lives, ideas,  
hopes, realities

and secondary lists are little better

when they traffic people's yearnings and expectations as  
ideologies and abstractions

i will not rescue the killers

who remain silent when the innocent are murdered

and it is called patriotism or cleansing or white male  
rage

when people starve on our streets

while there is more than enough food for everyone to eat  
three squares a day and at least one snack

when children die unloved and unwanted and thrown away

and we shake our collective pious heads and shut the  
doors of homes and our hearts, our churches, our  
seminaries

when money determines right and wrong

good and evil

unity and dissent

diversity and blandness

hope and despair

promise and lies

damnation and  
salvation

no, absolutely no, i will not rescue the killers

when the church functions like an efficient corporation

and numbers and spaces in parking lots and the joy of  
multiple worship services

serve as the markers for spirit and love and  
mercy and justice

hear me now, i will *not* rescue the killers

when the academy devolves into gigantic public holding pens  
for creativity and intellect

in other words

for me and my house

standing with others across differences

does not require that i be run over in a mad teleological drive toward a  
misbegotten notion of solidarity

that i accept a specious deontological notion of a disinterested love

that asks us to sacrifice our very souls

so that others may find comfort and ease in the macabre  
spectacle of our collective self abnegation

or the obliteration of whole peoples

womanist wisdom on solidarity does not find it acceptable that i  
acquiesce to a least common denominator justice

that is really no justice at all

it does not require that i check my passions

my insights

my communities

at the door to enter the hall of kumbaya

and if there is any wisdom that can come

from this black woman

on notions of solidarities and differences

it is that

to engage in such work is absolutely dangerous

it may, in fact, not be good for one's health at all

it can lead to heart and soul-ache

it can make us old before our time

it can make us eat and drink too much or too little

of all the unhealthy things

it can turn us bitter and sarcastic

it can make us ornery and mean as a snake

it can turn justice into vengeance

it can turn us into killers

but the danger does not stop here

it is dangerous because it means that we refuse the emotional  
numbing panaceas

of acquisition and status and privilege and competitive  
spirit that does not seek excellence, only winning

we see through the straw figure of a free market (whatever that  
is)

and speak with increasing precision and accuracy about  
the impact of transnationals

from agribusiness  
to munitions  
to clothing manufacturers

to western tastes and cultures passing them-  
selves off as neutral or *the* markers of progress

we become dangerous when

we speak the truth that the king *is* naked

when it comes to the U.S. prison industrial complex

when folk hide behind conveniently literal  
interpretations of scripture that support their views

on homosexuality, abortion, the roles of women  
and men, the place of clergy and laity, the  
pillaging of the environment, religious  
traditions that are not christianity, and just about  
anything else

except individual and corporate sinning  
in the name of individualism and the  
alleged common good

yes, this is a naked butt king

when it comes to public policy that is really the personal agenda  
of moralizing rhetoricians

who are dangerous because they now hold elected office  
and someone believed that they should bring us back to  
the good old days

that were, for many of us, deadly days

no i am not here for the killers

when it comes to solidarity

which i assume is another way to say justice

i am not interested in them

except for how to decrease their numbers

and their power

i have no wish to be objective about their behavior, methods, ideologies,  
or strategies

when i do the work of justice

it is with and as an advocate for the victims as well as a victim  
myself

actual

possible

imagined

of evil

it is subjective, it is emotional, it is passionate, it is *very* interested  
and if i cannot find others who are not interested and committed to this

then there is no solidarity

and our differences not only separate us

they make us adversaries

or enemies

in other words, for me, i do not *assume* solidarity

when i join others in the work of justice

solidarity is something that is nurtured and grown

in the yearning for and living out of justice

solidarity comes from hard work

listening

hearing

analyzing

questioning

rethinking

accepting

rejecting

it comes from a place of respecting and being respected

and that, i think, does not come easily or naturally for most of us

if it were so natural, then we wouldn't be in the fix we are trying to get  
out of

for to respect others

means we must also respect ourselves

and centuries of inherited messages about the inherent evil of humanity

(with a large measure of this brutalizing swill aimed at women)

poses a wall of judgment and condemnation

that is hard for many of us to scale

so as we seek to work together, we must always be working on ourselves  
and perhaps this is where the comforting begins

as each of us has that dawning and then awakening in us

that the point is *not* some religious version of perfection

but that we *live* our humanity with passion and vigor—  
regardless

that we live our lives in justice and hope and even love—  
relentlessly

that we recognize that none of us has the corner on righteousness

that we are the ones we have been waiting for

and ultimately, there is no one to do this work for us

this, then, is the first light of empowerment

when we realize that we cannot do the work of justice

to end structural injustice

by individual acts of valor and conviction alone  
they may help, to be sure

but tackling structural evil takes a whole bunch of folks

with varieties of skills and insights

because structures of domination rarely come in such pristine  
forms as

circles

triangles

rectangles

or rhomboids

no, structures of domination are like demonic ink blots



they have cores

but the splatter marks are far and wide and absolutely  
dangerous

and can cause so much collateral damage that it  
disfigures and maims

to speak of solidarity

to conjure standing *anywhere* together

is, then, to tempt the agony of the absurd

but frankly, i simply don't know what else to do

and remain faithful

and although Jordan's description of tinkering, daydreaming, revising,  
and memorizing

does not sit well for this womanist ethicist

i do believe in strategizing, envisioning, challenging, debunking, and  
transforming

but always with an eye to sharing and receiving the dignity and  
gift of humanity and creation

this means that a solidarity seeking the status quo is not one i can  
embrace

a solidarity that teaches a studied silence that rewards blind,  
thought-less, clueless obedience

and punishes vital curiosity

is not one that i can come near

a solidarity that only tolerates oppositional knowledge on playgrounds,  
streets, homes, popular culture

but never in strategy sessions or in policy development or  
curriculum design

is not a solidarity that is actually concerned about justice

and it does not deserve our time

but it does need to be watched, monitored, like a hawk  
 and if need be, be destroyed  
 what ever wisdom i have on solidarity and differences  
 has been crafted from the hard experiences  
 of learning over and over again  
 that just because folk espouse solidarity does not mean  
 they either know it or mean it  
 that there are *many* good works being done to bring in  
 justice  
 but that there is only *one* of me  
 and that i must, as each of us must  
 make some choices about who we stand in solidarity with  
 and how we will or will not deal with the differences  
 that can enrich us  
 challenge us  
 deny us  
 destroy us  
 but to remember also that we must not take so long to choose  
 that the choice gets made by our indecision or inaction  
 we may choose wisely or foolishly  
 but the point is that we develop the ability to recognize where  
 our actions are leading us  
 and where we have actually gone  
 and reformulate and assess on a continual basis  
 if we are truly working for justice or if we have fallen  
 into co-optation  
 or complicity  
 or betrayal

there are *always* options

i've learned this from the trickster tradition in my  
culture

but they cut both ways and sometimes even slice and dice like  
veg-o-matic

to move beyond the tight circle that we often seem caught in that is  
hollowed out by conservatism and liberalism

means that we stop collapsing difference and diversity and  
plurality

and all those terms we use to signal humanity and  
creation is large

into such neat and pristine buzz words

and instead realize that

we will not always agree

there will be times of reasoned (and unreasoned) dissent

that we may *not* be able to work

together on everything or every issue

sometimes it is to recast

from our worldviews

the things we've learned through the years

but even as small children:

the police are *not* always your friend

it is *not* always wise to wait to cross at a  
corner

or even to cross only at corners

in other words, there are few absolutes in life

and solidarities and differences are just as caught up in this  
reality as episodes or steady diets of disaster and ruin

no, i do not sweat and summon whatever best there is in me to rescue the  
killers

but i do try to give all of who i am to the work for justice

and hang in there with others who recognize that  
solidarities and differences are messy

and ultimate human

and in some small way this marks our humanity

and turns the absurdities

into living, breathing, active hope



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