



Understanding political violence: concepts and definitions

CDSN4002 POLITICAL VIOLENCE

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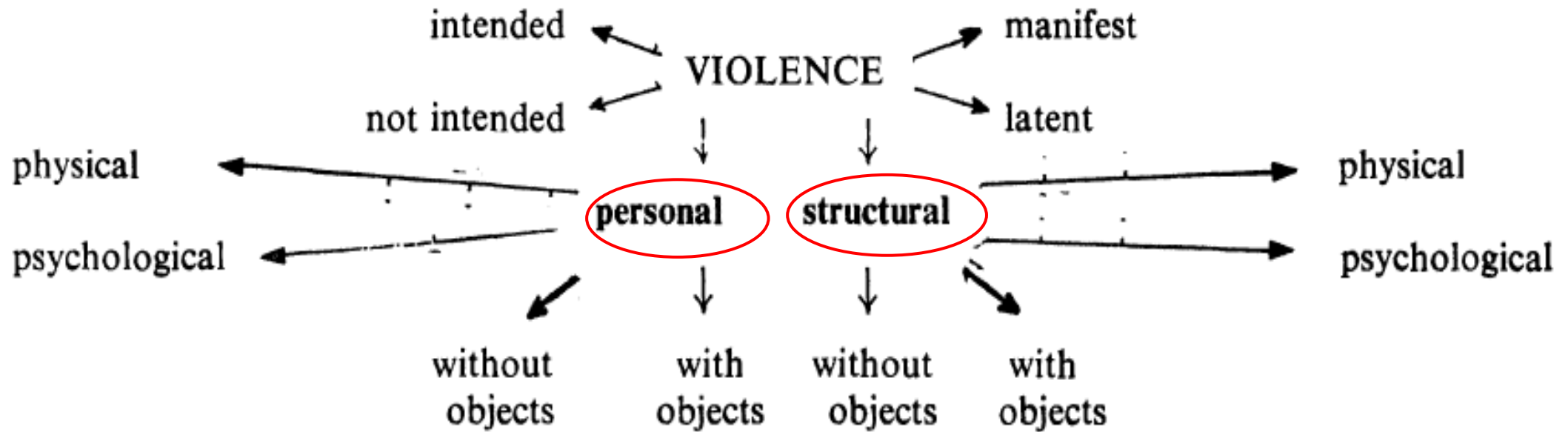
Agenda

- ▶ What is violence?
- ▶ What makes violence political?



What is violence?

Galtung's understanding of violence



Young's understanding of violence

- ▶ Structural violence: injustice, oppression
- ▶ “**systemic** constraints on groups not necessary the result of the intention of a tyrant”
 - ▶ “the vast and deep **injustices** some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious **assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes**, and structural features of **bureaucratic hierarchies** and market mechanisms – in short, the ***normal processes of everyday life.***”
- ▶ Focus on social groups and their sense of identity
- ▶ *Faces of oppression*: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, violence

Young's understanding of violence

- ▶ Fear of random, unprovoked attacks
- ▶ *Social context* that makes attacks acceptable
- ▶ Aimed at members of a group because they are members of that group
- ▶ Violence as **a social practice** (everyone knows it happens and will happen again)
- ▶ Group violence is *tolerated*
- ▶ Random, systematic violence is irrational

What counts as violence?

- ▶ Why are some acts of violence seen as being senseless and beyond comprehension, while others are seen as necessary and legitimate acts needed to secure a better, more just, and secure world?

Violence and Politics

- ▶ Clausewitz: violence is a continuation of politics by other means
- ▶ Historical, cultural, social conditions make violence possible
- ▶ What counts as violence is normative and has changed over time.

Political violence

- ▶ Mostly questions about power and legitimacy
 - ▶ *Is violence an expression of power or powerlessness? When is violence (ill)legitimate?*
- ▶ About power that renders “othering” possible and that creates the **conditions** of possibility for war or torture.

Violence and power

- ▶ **Hannah Arendt:** violence is not the *continuation* of politics (as Clausewitz wrote), but the *opposite* of politics.; it occurs when political regimes lose their legitimacy and credibility
 - ▶ Violence as an expression of powerlessness

A thought

- ▶ What happens when we make distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate violence?
- ▶ The lines are deeply political...