

Who participates in (political) violence?

CDSN4002 POLITICAL VIOLENCE

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Agenda

- ▶ Who participates in political violence?
- ▶ Why do ordinary people partake in direct and structural violence?

Ordinary people and direct violence

- ▶ Two forms of politically-authorized slaughter:
 - ▶ 1) the large-scale slaughter of service-personnel (i.e., soldiers killing soldiers)
 - ▶ 2) the slaughter of civilians

Ordinary people and direct violence

- ▶ ***Most perpetrators deny feeling responsible or guilty even in cases of atrocity and genocide – why is that?***
- ▶ History textbooks (e.g., Japan after WWII – ‘aggression in North China’ vs. ‘advance into North China’)
- ▶ Complicity: the role of “allies”
- ▶ Highlighting the aggression of enemies (“they killed us”)

Retribution: “no prisoners”

- ▶ Lack of willingness to take prisoners during war
 - ▶ Experience, risk

Obedience: “only obeying orders”

- ▶ ‘obeying orders’ as a way of minimizing emotional conflict
 - ▶ generates the ‘appropriate’ response in combatants (i.e., murderous aggression)
 - ▶ recognized by military instructors who insist on instantaneous obedience to orders
- ▶ officers experience more ‘collective guilt’ about the war than privates
- ▶ killing could be re-conceptualized as something other than murder

Parallel response: “either him or me”

- ▶ War is about ‘kill or be killed’
- ▶ Reinforced through a certain representation of war in combat art and literature, battle films, war games, propaganda

Eagerness to kill

- ▶ Survival depended on the ability of combatants to forge some degree of pleasure from the world around them.
- ▶ “the thrill of killing” – e.g., airforce personnel, drones

Language

- ▶ With mass killing, language becomes divorced from experience
- ▶ Dehumanization through language (a substitute language to speak about death)
- ▶ Technological language, euphemisms, racist language
 - ▶ Killing re-conceptualized as 'action', 'severe measures', or 'giving special treatment'
 - ▶ In Japan during WWII, Anglo-Americans described as demons (*oni*), devils (*kichiku*), and monsters (*kaibutsu*).
 - ▶ In Rwanda, Tutsis described as 'cockroaches', with the Hutus simply engaged in 'bush-clearing'. Hutus were ordered to 'remove tall weeds' (adults) as well as the 'shoots' (children).

Collective memory

- ▶ Collective memory as a social representation of the past
- ▶ Not history – collective memory simplifies events, may reduce them to myths
- ▶ Links collectively shared past emotion to present events

Ordinary people and structural violence

- ▶ **How** and **why** do ordinary people participate in structural violence?