

Article

Symbolic Interaction, Power, and War: Narratives of Unaccompanied Young Refugees with War Experiences in Institutional Care in Sweden

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Abstract: This study concerns young people who have experienced war, taken shelter in Sweden, and been placed in institutions. The purpose of the study is to identify and analyze power relations that contribute to the shaping of young people's identities and repertoires of action via stigmatizations and social comparisons with different reference groups. The study's empirical material includes qualitatively oriented interviews with six young people from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan who have experienced war, followed by placement in institutional care in Sweden. Analytical findings with the following themes are presented: (1) concrete—physical exercise of power, (2) blackmail as an exercise of power, and (3) anonymous—bureaucratized exercise of power. The study demonstrates that narratives about war, escaping war, and postwar life in Sweden, constructing and reconstructing an image of a series of interactive rituals that are both influenced by and influence the power dynamic between the actors. This relationship, in turn, creates and recreates an interplay among the stigmatizing experiences of the youths, their social comparisons, and definitions of inequality.

Keywords: symbolic interaction; ethnomethodology; social construction; interactive ritual; social comparison; humiliated self; stigma; disruptive peaceful interaction; disruptive non-power-based interaction; interaction involving wartime exercise of power; social pedagogical recognition; loss of identity; mortification



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1. Introduction

The urgency to flee from war and disasters is an acutely current issue (Some parts of this text were published previously in Swedish in the sociology doctoral dissertation, “When collaboration becomes a struggle. A sociological analysis of a project in the Swedish juvenile care” [1] and in English in the article, “Social pedagogical work with unaccompanied young refugees with experiences of war in institutional care in Sweden: an ethnography-inspired analysis of the narratives of young persons and institution personnel” [2]). War, as it is fought today, often leaves civilians with palpable experiences of armed conflict. They become targets for, and sometimes participants in, acts of war [3–5]. Those who have fled such wars are forced into an identifying framework that defines a large part of their lives. They often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, recurring nightmares, emotional desensitization, and flashbacks to traumatic events [5–12]. Unaccompanied refugee minors develop depression and anxiety, both related to the particular stresses associated with migration and the more general pressures of adolescence [13]. They have worse mental health than their peers who arrive with parents and are more likely to have been subjected to physical and sexual abuse [14]. Previous studies have demonstrated recurrent themes in war and refugee experience, as well as implying strong expectations about how these experiences might be assumed to manifest themselves [15].

This study concerns young people who have experienced war, sought asylum in Sweden, and been placed in institutions. Sweden is among the countries with the most developed immigration laws (as was also pointed out by the Migrant Integration Policy

Index—MIPEX 2020 results) and is open to refugees and other immigrants [16]. Since 2015, more than 35,000 children and young people have come to Sweden unaccompanied by a guardian [17–22]. Most of these unaccompanied children and young people are boys from war-torn countries, and most have been placed in residential homes for children and young persons, called ‘HVB homes’. A residential or care home is a form of institution in Sweden that provides treatment, care, support, or nurturing. HVB homes can, for example, specialize in substance abuse problems or in unaccompanied children.

The present study is part of the research project, “Youth with war experiences in institutional care. A sociological study of young immigrants’ stigma and social comparisons”, which was conducted at Linnaeus, Lund and Kristianstad University in Sweden and Hiroshima University in Japan (Linnaeus University 2022). Two articles have been published in scientific journals within the framework of this project, empirically based largely on the perspectives of staff at Swedish residential care homes for children and young people (HVB homes). In Basic (2018a) [2] the opportunities and obstacles that HVB staff encounter in their work are analyzed from a social-pedagogical perspective, specifically for the client category of young people who have experienced war, sought asylum in Sweden, and been placed in institutions. In Basic and Matsuda (2020) [23] interactive patterns contributing to constructing and reconstructing the inclusion of the clients are analyzed, as are the obstacles to inclusion during practical social-pedagogical work for the client category of young people who have experienced war, sought asylum in Sweden, and been placed in institutions. The previous study demonstrates that social pedagogical recognition, or the lack thereof, of young peoples’ various identities may affect their opportunities for inclusion in the new society [24]. The social pedagogical recognition and loss of identity that occur in various contexts in which young people act or are expected to act, can both contribute to the success of integration and be an obstacle to it.

The focus of the present study is to take the perspectives of these young people as an empirical point of departure. The aim of this study is to identify and analyze power relations that contribute to the shaping of young people’s identities and repertoires of action via stigmatizations and social comparisons with different reference groups. The research questions addressed by the study are as follows: (1) How are power dynamics rendered in the young people’s war narratives? (2) How are power dynamics rendered in the young people’s escape narratives? (3) How are power dynamics rendered in the young people’s narratives concerning their post-war life?

The study’s empirical material includes: (a) qualitatively oriented interviews with six young people from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria who have experienced war followed by a placement in institutional care in Sweden; (b) field notes taken in conjunction with fieldwork at HVB homes; and (c) online media reporting on the category of young people who have experienced war, sought asylum in Sweden, and been placed in institutions.

The research questions are answered through an analysis of the study’s empirical material based on relevant sociological theories. Analytical findings with the following themes are analyzed: (1) concrete—physical exercise of power, (2) blackmail as an exercise of power, and (3) anonymous—bureaucratized exercise of power. By presenting this analysis, the study contributes to the development of knowledge regarding the following: dealing with narratives combining wartime experiences and youth and institutional relationships; the significance of these narratives to the creation and re-creation of the young people’s identities; and alternative approaches to analyzing relatively expected traumatic perspectives. The study also contributes to the development of knowledge regarding the question of how social morals function in relation to the young people’s wartime experiences, their escape from war, and their peacetime existence.

2. Symbolic Interaction, Power, and War

The general theoretical points of departure for the study are interactionist [25], constructionist [26], and ethnomethodological [27]. Collins (2004) writes that social life is formed by a series of rituals. In that analysis, Collins further develops Durkheim’s [28]

view on social life using Goffman's theory (1990a) [29] on the importance of the definition of the situation. Individuals are both regulated and integrated by society according to Durkheim [28]. Durkheim sees regulation as a compelling power that binds the individual to norms through sanctions and law. He sees integration as a way to tie the individual to society through solidarity, cohesion, and rituals. According to Goffman, interpersonal interaction takes place when actors play their parts in front of the audience using a "script" and different props. Every definition of the situation holds a moral character, telling us what we should do and which actions we should find right or wrong. This moral approval as well as a moral rejection may occur during a short moment of interaction or during a long chain of interactions [29].

Collins' point is that when individuals are moved between situations, they cannot disregard past experiences from earlier situations; earlier situations are merged with new ones. Collins designates as "interactive rituals" these repeated interactions in which the participants show respect and regard for sacred objects or sacred symbols that have been given particular importance [30].

According to Berger and Luckmann [31], people interacting with one another attempt to make their social reality comprehensible and, in doing so, construct their identities. Here, typification fulfills an important function. Dividing and categorizing individuals and events into types—identifying them—is necessary if we are to navigate myriad everyday interactions. Typification is not a static process but changes from one situation to the next. One person's actions (such as various exercises of power) provide a motive for and an answer to the actions of others, thereby shaping, modifying, and validating the allegiances and self-images of those involved.

For the purposes of the present study, this implies that wartime experiences, institutionalization, and various types of power dynamic are less interesting in terms of static baggage and more so in terms of institutional and material interactions in the here and now. In the spirit of ethnomethodology, the study analyzes how the interviewees themselves use identity-related and cultural resources (e.g., narratives, metaphors, vocabulary, roles, status symbols) in day-to-day life, such as in describing the exercise of power or their living conditions, formulating criticism, and processing their experiences. Wartime experiences may arouse sympathy and lead to distinct typification ("war child", "traumatized", "victim"), but they also are associated with a certain status: one possesses personal knowledge that others lack. In the present study, I analyze both the content of young people's identity formation and its dynamic: how identities are used, managed, reinforced, or challenged.

Constructionist, interactionist, and ethnomethodological perspectives on the institutionalization of unaccompanied refugee minors capture both the essence of their experiences and their social representation, along with the substance and components of their personal narratives [32]. This study therefore adheres to the social scientific tradition in which oral descriptions are regarded as both discursive and experiential [32–34].

In addition to the study's general scientific points of departure, the following three concepts play an important part in the analysis of the study's empirical material: (a) social comparisons, (b) the mortified or demeaned "self", and (c) stigma.

According to Scheler [35], it is human nature and perhaps essential to view oneself in relation to others. As social phenomena, war, violence, the exercise of power, and equality depend on comparison. Simmel [36], for example, wrote that poverty, rather than being an absolute, is defined in relation to others. This association also applies to war, violence, the exercise of power and care, and how these are experienced. A more contemporary concept is Merton's [37] reference group, which has been used in various ways, including as an identity creator, as a group to which one expects to belong, and as positive and negative frames of reference. Such groups can be anticipatory (a group one expects to belong to in the future), contemporary, or historical: "This is how people in my group lived". The analysis in this study builds on Snow and Anderson's [38] use of social comparison because this concept captures, to a greater extent, a more flexible and dynamic relationship, and an interpretive role is conferred on the actors.

Experiences of power dynamics, comparisons, and definitions of equality play an important role in the evolving identities of young refugees in Sweden. Young people compare themselves with their peers and with others, and evaluate themselves in contrast to others—placing themselves on the same level or above or below. Generally speaking, the modern human has access to several groups. For our young refugees from war-torn areas, some of these groups have been constituted during their escape or while under institutional care in Sweden. They compare themselves with other Swedish youths, with other institutionalized young people, and with groups within their own culture and homeland. This last may lead to questions regarding how life might have been if they had remained in their native country, as well as how significant their background is to the fact that they have been placed in institutional care in Sweden.

In his analysis of total institutions, [39] highlights the mortification of the self, the switch of moral career an inmate undergoes during a stay in institutional care because of factors such as admission procedures, the exercise of power by members of staff, strict regulations, limitations on individual identity, day-to-day restrictions on behavior, and the general air of distrust. Even if today's HVB homes are far from identical to Goffman's total institutions, there are similarities in interaction patterns and therefore a risk of creating a certain type of self, characterized by moral dissolution or exhaustion. One related concept is stigmatization, a term stemming from Goffman's [40] analysis of the lack of equality or degradation of people. He suggests that a person becomes stigmatized if they do not receive full recognition as an equal individual in a desired social (and pedagogical) identity. According to Goffman, different models for living with a stigma can be discerned: being born with it and learning to live with it "from the beginning"; being stigmatized later in life; or being forced into a new, stigmatizing context. This study analyzes wartime, flight, and refugee experiences and the postwar migration situation in Sweden as a series of interacting stigmatizing expressions of the exercise of power. The variation found in the study's empirical material and the theoretical analysis provide an image of the interaction among the stigmatizing experiences these young people endured, their social comparisons, and definitions of equality.

Sociological Analyses of War

Max Weber [41] has touched on concepts of war and collective violence in his analyses. Malešević [3] proposes that many of Weber's key concepts, such as power and the exercise of power, are military in origin. Weber [41] analyzes power as a direct action by an actor X that forces an actor Y to act according to X's will, even if the action is contrary to Y's interests or will. Weber draws attention to two dimensions of power relations. The first dimension is maintained through the practical implementation of pressure(s) or the threat thereof. The second dimension is maintained when those who are vulnerable give up or yield to and accept the power of the executor of said pressure. The power of the executor of pressure often includes an order with content that particular individuals or groups are expected to follow [41–43], Collins' [30,43] analysis of power, conflict, solidarity, resistance, and status is inspired by Weber's perspective. Collins believes that in all social arenas, the exercise of power is always met with resistance from other people and thus generates new conflicts. For Collins, "conflict and solidarity are two sides of the same coin" [44] (p. 40). Mobilization against an enemy often leads to solidarity among individuals and groups, and vice versa.

3. Method

The study was conducted based on inspiration from ethnographic tradition [44–46]. The ethnographic method is distinguished by the production of new knowledge through researcher participation in the everyday lives of the people studied. Experiences, viewpoints, and social phenomena are not always brought up in interviews but can be discovered when the researcher observes and follows the everyday activities and interactions of the informants. By combining interviews with field studies, the researcher can produce a relatively

in-depth portrayal of individual narratives and social phenomena [44–46]. Ethnographic material was necessary to create independent knowledge of this category of young people's experiences of war, escaping war, and their time in HVB homes. The typification and informal taxonomies created by staff and young people in their interactions with one another cannot be found in official presentations, websites, or brochures [47]. The environment in which these young people create and recreate their identities is depicted directly through qualitative interviews and observations.

During an interview, those involved communicate based on day-to-day knowledge of the social context [34,48]. During the fieldwork in this study, an effort was made to give interviewees space in the discussions so that they could talk about topics of immediate interest that they themselves considered to be important [49]. The objective was for the interviewer to adopt the role of an interested listener who wanted to find out more about young people who had experienced a war and who had taken refuge in Sweden, and about the professional participants who work daily with these young people. Conducting interviews in this way created the variation in empirical material required to differentiate—and in the next stage, analyze—those phenomena that are relevant to achieving the study purpose.

The interview material analyzed in the study consists of qualitatively oriented interviews with six boys in institutional care (from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria) who have experienced war and were subsequently placed in a Swedish HVB home. Interviews were conducted with the aid of an interpreter at the HVB home where the youths are living. Four boys were interviewed individually and two together (the interview material also contains qualitatively oriented interviews with nine employees at HVB homes who were working with young people in care, who had experiences of war and who were later placed at HVB homes in Sweden [2,23]. This part of the empirical material is not analyzed within the framework of the current study.) The interviews lasted between 30 min and 2 h and were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. An interview guide designed according to the aforementioned analytical interests was used as a basis for preparing for and conducting the interviews. To create variation in the study's empiricism, efforts were made to keep the interviews conversational, using so-called active interviewing [50], with importance placed on openness and follow-up questions rather than on a strict question–answer model. All interviews were transcribed prior to analysis [33,51].

Empirical material in the form of qualitative interviews was supplemented with first-hand observations at the institutions [44–46]. It also was supplemented with the collection and analysis of documents [51,52] in the form of online media reporting on the category of young people who have experienced war, sought asylum in Sweden, and been placed in institutions (see, for example, [53–58]).

Fieldwork and all interviews for the study were conducted during 2016 and 2018, at and in relation to seven Swedish HVB homes, for a period totaling 25 h and 27 min, and inspired by Emerson et al. [46]. Field notes for the study were written during visits to HVB homes at the same time the interviews were conducted. The situations observed and the discussions between actors during those situations were documented immediately after each situation in the form of a collection of brief rough field notes. Certain parts of these field notes were later expanded into a rewritten field note to provide a running text describing each situation and the discussions that took place.

The study's empirical material was analyzed based on tradition in qualitative methodology (cf., e.g., Silverman [48]). Analytic induction was the guiding principle; i.e., continuous movement between data and explanation (as well as exclusions and reevaluations based on negative cases) with the aim of systematically sharpening the analysis with the help of empirical examples [59]. This approach implies that the study's theoretical interests—the concepts of war, exercise of power, social comparisons, total institution, stigma, and definition of equality—were not simply applied but also nuanced or challenged.

Rather than take, as a sole point of departure, the image of these individuals as traumatized by war [5–12] this analysis strives to achieve an actor-oriented picture, in which the interviewees' narratives are analyzed as arenas in which the narrator, in various ways,

formulates their experiences of their homeland and of Sweden. The interviewees' narratives are analyzed as a multilayered commentary on their own biographies. The analysis, in particular, regarded the war, escape from the war, and postwar life, including their time in Swedish care institutions, as well as the day-to-day dynamics of their relationships with other young people, professional actors, and society at large.

Empirical sequences presented in this study were categorized in the material as "physical exercise of power", "blackmail as an exercise of power", and "bureaucratized exercise of power". The choice of empirical examples was based on the study's purpose and the ability of the examples to elucidate the analytical points.

The interviewees were informed of the purpose of the study and were guaranteed confidentiality and the opportunity to withdraw at any time. In publications and presentations of the results of the study, the names of people and places and other information that could be used to identify the interviewees have been changed or omitted. During the work on the empirical material, not only were the names of individuals omitted or changed, but also the names of regions, municipalities, institutions, and districts, as well as means of transport and anything else that could link individuals (the institution) with various cases. To minimize the risk of identifying individual interviewees in the presented empirical material, the use of the same fictitious name for an individual appearing in the analysis on multiple occasions has been avoided, so that an individual cannot be traced through the analyzed sequences. The interest of the study relates to experiences as general social phenomena, so there is no reason to document personal data [60].

4. Results and Discussions

The empirical material was collected during the informants' early period in Sweden, a period that might be viewed as an overture to a new and better life. War, violence, and the exercise of power appear to live on as a presence in their narratives, even if not always in an expected manner. From time to time, the interviews were emotionally charged. They touch upon painful memories, such as how their entire family and all the members of the village were forced to flee from Taliban attacks or how their best friend was killed in a suicide attack. The narratives also deal with imprisoned friends and relatives who never returned, the death of a father and big sister, a tortuous journey to Sweden, and various professional actors in Sweden. On some occasions, these actors are recalled as empathetic people attempting to assist the youths, whereas in other cases, they are described as wielders of power who mistrust them and contribute to replicating negative emotions, social comparisons, degradation, stigmatization, and inequality. The empirical results of the study are presented in three themes: (1) concrete—physical exercise of power, (2) blackmail as an exercise of power, and (3) anonymous—bureaucratized exercise of power.

4.1. Concrete—Physical Exercise of Power

The social climate immediately before and during a war is characterized by aggressive rhetoric in interpersonal interactions and in the media; economically, politically, religiously, and militarily; in threats against the Other; and in the intensive production of new symbols to be displayed and used by the actors in battle. The interactive spiraling that creates and recreates the climate of war changes in intensity as leaders agitate, troops advance, and civilians are detained, killed, or driven to flee; when buildings are plundered, women raped, borders redrawn, and peace treaties signed; and when the foundations of the state are shaken or, perhaps, crumble entirely [3–5].

The young people's wartime narratives describe war as the practical exercise of power, comparing and relating peaceful interactions (in which there is no exercise of power) to wartime interactions (based on the exercise of power). These narratives are examples of postwar symbol production. In their narratives, young people seem to dramatize the significance of war interactions. This dramatization can be interpreted as the actualization of specific social relationships between actors who view themselves as distanced from other actors in other groupings but with whom they have a bare minimum of routine interaction.

War interactions can therefore be defined as expressions of social identity, inasmuch as they are based on contrasting oneself from the Others. In this war context, the interactive creation of contrasts and comparisons in relation to other actors reveals various categories of actors in the narrative, such as a victim and perpetrator. Five empirical sequences from fieldwork conducted for the study illuminate this reasoning. The first three sequences come from interviews with the youths, Asim, Samir, and Saif, the fourth from the study's field notes, and the fifth from the interview with the young man Dafi.

During an interview, Asim, who is from Syria, depicts life as a civilian in a war-torn community, based on his retrospective account of his childhood wartime memories. During the interview, we discuss societal changes at the outbreak of war. Asim talks about the fear that means the victims are "wetting themselves and crying":

It's enough to hear that the military is on its way to attack the town or village for people to start wetting themselves and crying. Those who find themselves in the hands of the soldiers are as good as dead, finished/ ... /We couldn't sleep at night for fear of being taken by the military. That was our fear. Five or six of my cousins were dissidents. Before the revolution, that's how it was; if anyone in the family is a dissident, the military takes a few family members prisoner.

The same theme is discussed during an interview with Samir, from Iraq, who used a metaphor comparing the life of a civilian in a war-torn society with "a horror film":

The same thing almost happened to me, especially in my area when there were battles between the American soldiers and the militias that patrolled our area. The Americans used to come with their fighter planes, helicopters, and military convoys—you just sit at home unsure of when you might be attacked. Days like that were tough; you feel like you're in a horror film. You couldn't be sure or know what was going to happen. Rockets and bombs might fall at any moment. It happened almost every day and became part of life's everyday events. Once it calms down, the Americans come and ransack and search [the place] with their inspection dogs. My sister, who was older than me, was murdered at the start of the war in Iraq.

In another interview, a father and uncle who were murdered in Afghanistan are portrayed. Saif fled Afghanistan to Iran with his mother when he was 3 years old.

Saif: I will tell you what my mother has said about my childhood, so I'll tell you about from my childhood until I arrived here. I was born in Afghanistan and was 2 years old when my father died. I lived with my mother and my uncle.

Goran: Which part of Afghanistan are you from?

Saif: I was born in Kraina./ ... /I was three when my mother and I were forced to flee to Iran, it was my uncle who helped us escape.

Goran: Why did you have to flee to Iran?

Saif: My father had been murdered by his mates, who knew both me and my mother. My uncle wanted to save our lives. After a year of hiding in various towns in Afghanistan, we managed to escape to Iran.

Goran: Had your father been a soldier or participated actively in the war?

Saif: He was a shoemaker. I don't know exactly how his mates turned into his enemies. I think there had been some falling out between friends.

Goran: I have heard the word "doshmani" during several interviews. What does the word "doshmani" mean?

Saif: It means enmity.

Goran: That word is also used in Bosnian [the word "doshmani" is used in Bosnian to mean "enmity"]. What happened after you arrived in Iran?

Saif: My mother had nowhere to live, so for a while she lived in the ruins of old houses.

Goran: What happened to your uncle?

Saif: He had stayed behind in Afghanistan. My mother began working as a housekeeper for a few families, so I used to go with her when she went to work for those families. Of course, there was nobody to look after me while she was at work. We lived like that for a while, until my mother got a job guarding an orchard—then the owner, her employer, said we could live there. There weren't that many trees; the owner just wanted my mother to keep an eye on the garden./ ... /my father had been murdered and we had escaped to Iran, so she [the mother] was extremely afraid that something would happen to me too. My father had told her that many years ago he had fled from another town to Kraina, so my mother still suspected that the murderer had come from that town; so...

Goran: Does your uncle still live in Afghanistan?

Saif: My uncle died when I was 11 years old, so my mother was left alone and only had me.

Goran: How did he die?

Saif: He was murdered, as well; he was young, I had no idea about what had happened. One day when I arrived home, my mother told me about it.

Goran: Was he in the military or police?

Saif: I don't know, and I never even asked.

In the above renditions, “we” and “they” perspectives appear that create and recreate an interactive relationship between the categories of victim and perpetrator [35–38]. The victim is construed in terms of fear, death, dissidents, and their families and an elder sister, father, and uncle who were murdered. The perpetrator is construed in terms of the military attacking civilians and as “murderers” acting in a war-torn land. These dichotomous categories are an interactive product of the dramatization of the interaction between actors [31]. They can be analyzed as a result of a moral production with its origins in the exercise of power by the military and the murderers [41–43].

This “we” and “they” perspective permeates the young people's renditions. In their narratives, metaphors, and vocabulary, they create and recreate their own roles and status symbols, as well as the roles and status symbols of others (for example, “victims” and “perpetrators”). It seems that, in their narratives, the youths use identity-related and cultural resources when describing the exercise of power by perpetrators and the mortified and stigmatized self as part the living conditions during war (“wetting themselves and crying/ ... /We couldn't sleep at night for fear of being taken”; “ransack and search [the place] with their inspection dogs”; “hiding in various towns/ ... /escape/ ... /nowhere to live”). The “we” and “they” perspective as an interactive product of the military's and murderers' exercise of power, as well as a descriptive resource, also permeates the study's field notes. During fieldwork at an HVB home, three youths and the researcher discuss the importance of news reporting in Sweden.

The boy sitting in the armchair says that even if the news from Sweden is important and he follows it every day, it is difficult to avoid news of the war in his homeland, even if he would rather do so. This particularly applies to “bad news”. This boy explains that he comes from Iraq and that several of his friends and relatives have been detained by soldiers during the war. The detention of his friends and relatives occurred while he was living in Iraq. These friends and relatives have disappeared, explains the boy—they have never returned home. He also says that he recently received information from Iraq that his best friend from childhood has been killed in a suicide attack. I express my condolences and ask if he knows any details about the attack. He tells me that the attack was

aimed at a mosque and that his friend was at the entrance when the explosion occurred, and that he suffered serious stomach injuries and died at the scene. (Field notes)

The above narratives provide renditions of the perpetrator's exercise of power, presented by the study's informants in brief sequences that are not ongoing in the temporal sense. The following interview quotes provide examples of just such an empirical phenomenon. Dafi from Afghanistan recounts a life story marked by war. This narrative also produces an image of civilian life in a war-torn community, taking as its starting points retrospective narratives of a wartime childhood. During the interview, the question is asked: "Can you tell me about life in your hometown in Afghanistan?"

Dafi: All I remember since the day I was born is hardship and war in the country. In a way it feels like you see war almost every day, you see unrest everywhere.

Goran: Who is fighting against whom and with whom did you and your family have problems? Who has persecuted you?

Dafi: It's the Taliban./ ... /There is no security whatsoever; for example, you can't travel from one town to another without meeting them on the road and they stop people and mistreat them. They are against certain races in Afghanistan. Because there are many races, races of people in Afghanistan. And, for example, if you are passing and they're on the road, a bus passes with 40 or 50 passengers and they stop the vehicle and you can't refuse to stop. They forced the driver to stop on the road and they look at the people on the bus and they can see from their appearance which race they belong to. And they are against, for example, a race that is in this population. And then, they're going to have trouble. And they won't be allowed to continue on their way. They kill them./ ... /

Goran: OK, I see; so, it's like that. Have you or anyone, either your parents or relatives, at any time witnessed the Taliban stopping anyone on the road?

Dafi: My family have been stopped by the Taliban.

Goran: And what happened? What did they tell you?

Dafi: They were treated terribly; they were treated in a really bad way when they were stopped by the Taliban. It's difficult to talk about it.

In the above recounting, a symbolic reality is construed in which the perpetrators ("the Taliban") in a wartime society strive to eradicate other ethnic groups ("certain races in Afghanistan") that are not deemed suitable for the particular interactive order created in the society in conjunction with the war. This reality is an expression of the exercise of power ("they stop people and mistreat them") that is part of war interactions where societal development actualizes the need for an opposing group [35–38]. Through narratives, the young people in the study compare their own group—victims in this representation—with an opposing group in the form of the perpetrators exercising power. In this way, the youths create and recreate symbols that, in all likelihood, help them to cope with the pressure in their environment. This pressure is partly their mortified and stigmatized selves [29,39] and partly the group itself—not least in Sweden, where the interview was conducted ("They were treated terribly; they were treated in a really bad way when they were stopped by the Taliban. It's difficult to talk about it"). In this way, the depictions of interactions involving wartime exercises of power in the narratives contribute to an especially strong identity among the youths, characterized by both moral dissolution and exhaustion, and a strong will to continue the fight against those exercising power and the difficult situations in which these young people have found and continue to find themselves.

This specific social identity is a product of a series of interactions involving wartime exercises of power. The identity cannot be analyzed as permanent and unchanging because there is a close relationship between identities and the social circumstances in which they find themselves (society). Identities change because interactive rituals [30] in war and

postwar interactions in society change. To create and recreate new identities during and after the war—in a period of intense change in interpersonal relationships when moral codes are broken and reformulated—a new identity-based symbolism is required, pointing the way to a morally stable reality or lifestyle (“My mother began working as a housekeeper for a few families”; “news from Sweden is important and he follows it every day”). Generally speaking, a social identity is never more essential than when it is interpreted, as threatened by the interactive dynamics that characterize the wartime exercise of power described in the youths’ narratives.

It should be noted that all empirical sequences analyzed in the previous section are based on the young people’s childhood experiences of war, as witnessed or heard in person or recounted to them by others. The identity-based symbolism produced and reproduced in the youths’ wartime narratives is constructed and reconstructed in a continuous context (or chain of rituals) stretching from then to now (when they were interviewed in Sweden). This link to the past seems to contribute to a relative suppression of interactions involving wartime exercises of power in a manner that may have a sedative effect on the individual who, after all, remains in a stressed situation. A stable interactive kernel of belonging, whether then or now, guarantees the individual a level of continuity between the past and present. In such narratives, the past and future are an important source of self-respect and personal authenticity. If the narrator emphasizes interactive rituals [30], a past characterized by peaceful interactions unrelated to the wartime exercise of power, then the narrator also assumes solidarity between his past and future lives. These interactive islands of past peaceful interactions seem to provide significant firm ground, in contrast to the sea of interactions involving wartime exercises of power surrounding these young people. Some of these interactive islands of peaceful interactions are analyzed in later sections dealing with flight from the warzone.

4.2. Blackmail as an Exercise of Power

The youths’ narratives of escape from the war demonstrate that interactions involving wartime exercises of power, while not disappearing entirely, do shift shape during the flight. Like war itself, escape from the warzone is recounted as a practical exercise of power. The youths’ narratives produce an image of the mortified and stigmatized self that limits and hinders any possibility of attaining their aspirational identities. It appears that the realization of the wished-for peacetime life is interactively dependent on the recounted interpersonal interactions and rituals, moral production, and social order of their new situation, which is not characterized by interactions involving wartime exercises of power or by peaceful interactions. The new situation as a refugee is marked by disruptive peaceful interactions (disruptive interactions not associated with the exercise of power) that emerge and disappear on interactive islands of peaceful interactions in the youths’ narratives. Disruptive peaceful interactions do not arise from nothing and do not exist in a void. They are a product of the interactive dynamic that arises when young people talk about the war and escape from war, and they seem to act as a fuel that allows these young people to tell their stories. War and escape from war produces, reproduces, and dispels narratives and also can establish new narratives that, in turn, can be quickly dispelled. Interactions involving wartime exercises of power, peaceful interactions, and disruptive peaceful interactions can be understood as the narrative core of war and peace. It can be grasped as some kind of recounted moral code that is beyond any real control and that can conjure social order from the narrator’s life in the described situation. Three empirical sequences from interviews with the youths Emin, Enis, and Ekrem illuminate this line of reasoning.

All of the young people interviewed in connection with the study’s fieldwork recall memories of both war in their homeland and difficult escape routes, most commonly via Iran, Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Germany, and Denmark. Their flights are recounted as having taken place in stages, lasting anything from 50 days to 13 months. The narratives describe separation from families, detention, dead refugees, and slave labor.

In this regard, the narratives of flight are similar to the wartime narratives analyzed in the previous section. In narratives of the young people's lives in Sweden, the pictures they paint have some hint of bright spots, whereas wartime narratives often contain tales of escape from the war.

The interviews with the youth Emin emphasize flight as part of the war. During one interview, he recounted his memories of the war in Afghanistan and his difficult 50-day journey to Sweden via Iran, Turkey, the Balkans, and western Europe. He described being separated from his family during their journey through Turkey as particularly traumatic. Bright moments in Emin's life are part of the stories of his life in Sweden. During the interview, he describes his memories from the time when he was "between 6 and 7 years old". The question being discussed is, "Can you tell me about life in your town before you came here [to Sweden]?"

Emin: I lived a normal life there with my family: my mum, dad, little brother, big sister, big brother/ ... /. I went to school and then I also worked as a shop assistant in a store. I mean, we lived a perfectly normal life./ ... /When they ["the Taliban"] came to the city, we couldn't resist them or fight them because they beat people, they kill people, and there's nothing you can do. And we were forced to leave everything and just flee/ ... /

Goran: How long did you live in the new town? When you escaped?

Emin: To the new town?

Goran: Yes, exactly.

Emin: It took about a year in the new place before the neighbors came. It was nice and quiet there. They used to come round and say, it's nice and quiet there now, you can come back. And we were able to go back because they had a farm there and we got jobs there and we moved back, just so that we could support ourselves, work, mum and dad, they could work to support us. For example, they grew honey and when people got plenty of money from selling those watermelons, fruits, then the Taliban came back to take the money from them and whatever they had acquired while they were working. They were back and forth several times.

The identity-based symbolism constructed by the young people in their narratives is rooted in comparisons between interactions involving wartime exercises of power and peaceful interactions that are disrupted by the reimposition of wartime power dynamics. Narratives balance between recounting the peace ("it's nice and quiet there now, you can come back") and the war ("then the Taliban came back to take the money from them and whatever they had acquired while they were working. They were back and forth several times"). On an abstract level, these acts of comparative negotiation preserve the previously existing cultural community; neighbors living in the same community in mutual understanding, neighbors capable of interacting, who have agreed on the meaning of symbols—neighbors who do not rob and kill one another.

The next two empirical sequences highlight an interplay between interactions involving wartime exercises of power, peaceful interactions, and disruptive peaceful interactions that are a product of the interactive dynamic actualized in narratives of escape from war. These narratives seem to be some kind of recounted moral code that nobody can really control but that brings about social order in both the narrator's life and the described situation. The youths Ekrem and Enis describe their escape from war to peace (to Sweden).

Ekrem: The journey to Iran took just over a month, then I spent 10 months in Iran, from where I later traveled to Sweden, and that took 2 months. I've been here for 9 months now.

Goran: Would you like to tell me about the trip from Afghanistan to Iran. How does one do that?

Ekrem: You enter Iran illegally. We approached some smugglers on the border with Iran; at first, they said that the road wasn't safe, so they refused to help us. We tried a few times, but the roads weren't safe. To cut a long story short, it took a month before we arrived in Iran.

Goran: Who assessed whether the roads were safe?

Ekrem: The smugglers, they were the ones who received the money to take us across the border into Iran. The smugglers on the other side of the border in Afghanistan are Afghans and as soon as you enter Iran, Iranian smugglers take over./ ... /

Goran: When you pay the smugglers, do you pay for the whole journey or just a down payment and the rest when you arrive? How does that work?

Ekrem: Some smugglers want the whole sum upfront, but there are quite a few who don't pay the full amount in one go, as you have no idea if everything will go well given the unsafe roads. Together with the smugglers, you travel to some place in Iran where you are given temporary lodgings, and while you're there, you can call someone and ask them to send money to the smugglers before they let us go. I was forced to stay there longer because there was some kind of problem when the money was being transferred to their account. You must have someone to send the money. For my part, I had an acquaintance who sent the money. He had been in touch with my parents for a year.

Goran: Does it ever happen that someone (refugees) doesn't pay the smugglers?

Ekrem: It happens fairly often but, if you don't pay, you get a good hiding from the smuggler. There are many people who are forced to stay and work for them instead.

Enis: This journey has been one of the most difficult experiences yet. I saw someone drown and someone else get shot, and met people who had no money left. They had no hope of continuing the journey and could neither go on nor go back the way they came./ ... /I can tell you; we had many sleepless nights.

Goran: Did you pass through Turkey? Through which countries did you pass?

Enis: I don't remember all the countries I passed through, just Turkey, Greece, and then Germany and Sweden. Between those countries there were some countries I don't know the name of.

Goran: But you saw someone drown or get shot; had this happened in Germany?

Enis: Someone was murdered on the border between Iran and Turkey and the other drowned at sea in Greece.

Goran: Was he shot by border guards or someone else?

Enis: It was a border guard; two Pakistanis and an Afghan were shot dead. One was only 2 m from us. He was shot in the leg and blood spurted up from his leg. Then the smugglers told us we were going up a mountain there. There was me and a woman that I carried on my back. The next incident happened at the port, as we were boarding the boat, we heard that a boat had sunk.

Goran: Was this between Turkey and Greece?

Enis: Yes, that's right.

Goran: And then you boarded the boat?

Enis: Yes, we did. I had spent the night somewhere in the port; it was insanely cold, and I was hungry and couldn't sleep.

The young people's narratives of escaping the war construct and reconstruct a network of verbally expressed moral codes, orienting the individual to take the correct actions during

their flight in their new ritualized context (“send money to the smugglers before they let us go”; “you get a good hiding from the smuggler”; “There are many people who are forced to stay and work for them instead”; “Then the smugglers told us we were going up a mountain there”). The living conditions experienced by the youths during their escape in relation to interactions involving wartime exercises of power, peaceful interactions, and disruptive peaceful interactions are disrupted by changes, and the youths subsequently recount these situations: they symbolically dramatize their experiences. Meanwhile, their narratives of escape from the war are somber, and the youths distance themselves from the actions of other actors, as in the above example regarding the actions of the border guards who killed the refugees or the actions of the smugglers who beat them or force them into slave labor. This verbal distancing actualizes both the image of a mortified and stigmatized self and the image of an active, competent young person, someone who is still fighting against the injustice he has suffered.

The youths’ narratives of escape paint a picture of individual and social figures representing a series of moral codes that contribute to creating and recreating the social order in both a wartime and postwar context. This recounting of the youths’ actions in the described situation depends on interactive rituals between people before, during, and after the war, as well as on a series of moral codes that contribute to creating and recreating a common collective way of thinking and acting [28]. In this interactive dynamic, for example, an image of a compassionate hero is created and recreated (“There was me and a woman that I carried on my back”). This image is interactively grounded both in comparison with a competing group in the form of border guards and smugglers, and in the interplay between interactions involving wartime exercises of power, peaceful interactions, and disruptive peaceful interactions.

In their escape narratives, the youths describe limited opportunities to influence developments in the various contexts in which they find themselves. They demonstrate dependent relationships that are difficult to change, given that these relationships appear to (i) be regulated, modified, and re-regulated by other actors (“I was forced to stay there longer because there was some kind of problem when the money was being transferred to their account”) and (ii) affect the youths’ and other actors’ positions in both interactions involving wartime exercises of power and peaceful interactions.

The youths’ accounts produce images of liberation from various groups’ direct surveillance and control that, in interactive rituals, show a tendency to lead to frustration and continued conflict. When old networks dissolve, it becomes impossible to preserve earlier moral codes, values, and living conditions. The young people interviewed in this study arrived unaccompanied in Sweden, having fled a war. During interviews, an image is produced and reproduced of the individual no longer limited by moral rules and authorities engaged in the wartime exercise of power. Instead, an image emerges of a constant overstepping of all borders established during the war, seemingly because of the collapse of wartime social control coincident with the development of a peacetime system that presupposes a constant growth of the individual’s needs in the branching stream of peaceful interactions. Such a web of interactions appears to create and recreate a specific state of peacetime society in which, at least at first, there is uncertainty regarding terms and conditions, responsibilities, aims, and morals.

The social order founded on peaceful interactions, rather than on interactions involving wartime exercises of power, is a vital element of creating and recreating the conditions for peaceful coexistence among actors. In their narratives, the young people taking part in this study reflect on the significance of interactive rituals that contribute to the creation and re-creation of a social climate that allows more people to live and interact in the same context without exercising martial power over one another. What we see played out in the interactions among actors in the various wartime and escape situations the youths described is the strengthening of social cohesion because of the development of interdependent relationships among the actors. Increasing dependency also creates the conditions for increased individualism (liberation). One important dimension of these

interactive processes is that, to a certain extent, the youths are liberated from the group's direct surveillance and control. This process is not without its problems, however, because it gives rise to new conflicts and the rejection of both the social order based on interactions involving wartime exercises of power and the social order based on peaceful interactions.

4.3. Anonymous—Bureaucratized Exercise of Power

Young people describe their existence in Sweden as one of uncertainty. They do not know if they will be permitted to remain in Sweden and stay in school, or if they will see their parents again. Despite the uncertainty, the young people appreciate Sweden and especially the staff at their HVB homes and school. They describe engaged staff who, besides helping to plan daily life and assisting with school, also facilitate their contact with other public authorities. The discontent, conflict ("fight"), and fear highlighted in their narratives seem to result from the explicit and implicit exercise of power by professional actors and are occasionally directed verbally against appointed guardians, as well as the Swedish Migration Agency and social services staff. The material also provides an image of a stigmatizing social climate in Sweden and the exercise of power in the form of long and frustrating periods of waiting, seemingly reproducing adverse emotions, social comparisons, degradation, stigmatization, and inequality. Four empirical sequences from fieldwork conducted for the study illuminate this reasoning. The first comes from the study's field notes, the second and third from interviews with the youths Melko and Arif, and the fourth from media reporting on young people who have experienced war, sought asylum in Sweden, and been placed in institutions related to the study's field notes.

The head of the HVB home shows me around the building, among other things showing me the kitchen and common areas. In the kitchen, we meet four unaccompanied refugee boys who are sitting at the table eating. One of the boys, speaking Swedish with an accent, offers the head and me food. We decline. The head leaves, heading for the administrative block, and I sit down at the table for a while with the youths (waiting for the head, who is going to drive me back to the train station). The youths explain in English that their existence in Sweden is one of uncertainty; they are both keen to stay permanently in Sweden and to meet their parents again. The parents are apparently still in their homelands. All four say that they attend school in Sweden and would like to go on to further education and work once they have completed school. All four speak positively about their teachers at school, one describing his teacher as being "like my second mother". The staff they come into contact with at the HVB home are also described in positive terms, as staff who help to cook food, plan day-to-day activities, help with school and even with contacts with civil servants when the youths so desire (making telephone calls, sending emails, demanding meetings, making demands). One youth says of the head of the HVB home: "he is like a friend who fights for us". I ask about the nature of this fight: who are the youths fighting against and why? Appointed guardians are described as the most common antagonists, with fights over money that the youths consider they are legally entitled to but that the guardian refuses to hand over. The fight with the social services is over the lack of opportunities and obstacles to contacting their case workers, either by telephone or email. The Swedish Migration Agency decides whether or not the youths are granted leave to remain in Sweden, and their descriptions of the fight against them is laced with well-founded respect and fear. The youths say that once they submit their claims to the Swedish Migration Agency, they would prefer not to have any more contact until a decision is made regarding a permanent residence permit. According to the youths' accounts, each subsequent contact may mean complications. One of the youths offers two examples to back up his reasoning: in the first, a boy was contacted by Swedish Migration Agency staff to arrange a supplementary interview regarding the boy's fingerprints, which had been found in a database in Hungary; in the second, a boy was contacted by Swedish

Migration Agency staff to arrange an interview with the Swedish Security Police. The youths are in agreement that both of these cases reduce the chance of being granted permanent residency in Sweden. (Field notes)

The field notes presented above provide a picture of both much-appreciated staff at HVB homes and schools and of verbally expressed discontent, conflict, and fear in relation to appointed guardians, social workers, and migration agency personnel. This image of discontent, conflict, and fear appears to be the result of the explicit and implicit exercise of power by professional actors [41–43]. The explicit exercise of power refers to interactive action in relation to a written or oral decision that is expected to be, or has already been made. Two sequences from the field notes above that highlight this reasoning relate to appointed guardians and migration agency personnel, the right to access money, and decisions regarding the right to permanent residency (“fights over money that the youths consider they are legally entitled to but that the guardian refuses to hand over”; “The Swedish Migration Agency decides whether or not the youths are granted leave to remain in Sweden”). The implicit exercise of power refers to interactive action in relation to an actor who has the power to make decisions that affect the youths, even though this power cannot be explicitly related to a specific decision. One sequence from the field notes that highlights this reasoning is the description of social workers who have the power to make decisions regarding the young people but who appear without any clear interactive connection to any decision. Social workers are referred as difficult to reach even when the youths need to speak to them (“lack of opportunities and obstacles to contacting their case workers”).

The explicit exercise of power in the relationship between a young person who has experienced war and Swedish Migration Agency staff is described during an interview with Melko regarding his arrival in Sweden:

Melko: It wasn’t particularly easy, we were afraid of being discovered by the police, we were wearing dirty clothes, and I noticed that people were looking at us.

Goran: How many Afghans do you think were on the train?

Melko: There were three of us spread out on the train, but there were other Afghans and Arabs on the train, as well.

Goran: Which town did you go to?

Melko: We didn’t know where to get off the train, but we ended up in Lutstad, where a lot of Afghans live. It was an Afghan who bought us bus tickets and explained which stop to get off at for the migration office.

Goran: What happened when you applied for asylum at the Swedish Migration Agency?

Melko: At the Swedish Migration Agency, they took my fingerprints, so I was registered as an asylum seeker, and then they placed me in transit accommodation. After a week, once I had been back to the Swedish Migration Agency, my case worker mentioned that I had given my fingerprints in Hungary, and I replied that the Hungarians had done that without my consent.

In the above interview sequence, Melko displays both a mortified and stigmatized self and a loss of identity [39,40]. Among other things, he says: “we were wearing dirty clothes, and I noticed that people were looking at us”; “At the Swedish Migration Agency, they took my fingerprints, so I was registered/ . . . /, and then they placed me in transit accommodation”. Melko expresses fear; he hides and doesn’t want to be discovered by the police. His arrival to peace, to Sweden, also implies a switch in his moral career. Melko describes himself as an objectified subject of the exercise of power; he leaves his fingerprints, even though he is not suspected of any crime, all as part of an admission procedure before he can access the bed, food, and temporary accommodation on which he is dependent after his long, difficult escape from the war in Afghanistan. Melko’s description provides an

image of the inequality and degradation of the individual to which the strict regulation, limitations, behavioral restrictions, and mistrust of the modern social apparatus contribute. He demonstrates that he has been stigmatized on arrival in Sweden and has been refused full recognition as an equal in his aspirational social and pedagogical identities [24].

In all likelihood, the initial period in Sweden will consist of a series of interactive rituals [30] that contribute to the repair and recovery of the mortified and stigmatized self-created and recreated during the war, escape, and arrival in peace. An interview with the youth Arif appears to provide an empirical example. Despite his wartime and flight experiences, he appears to be in good spirits throughout the interview and indeed satisfied with his relationships with all of the young people and professional actors he meets in Sweden.

The quotes below paint a picture of a contented young person placed in a special youth home who plans to learn Swedish at school, continue to university studies, and become a good soccer player. We discuss the everyday interactive dynamics of the special youth home where Arif has been placed. The interviewer asked him, "What significance do the other young persons placed in this institution have in your everyday life?"

Arif: To be honest, I'm happy living in this youth home. I'm happy with the staff, I'm happy with the kids. They are all kind, and we have contact with everyone and with many other homes. And from what I've heard from the others, they are not happy. It is not the same for them as here at our home. Our staff members are really kind, we have a kind director who cares, and they work for us and want to make sure we are doing well, and I am happy. Things couldn't be better. That's what I think.

Goran: Are you saying that your colleagues or your acquaintances who live in another youth home have complained about the staff?

Arif: Many of the ones I have spoken to, acquaintances, I have a friend who, who are staying at other youth homes, as I said. And they are not happy with the staff, they are not happy with the food they make. But here, things are good, they make good food and they look after us a lot.

Goran: Does he have anything to say about other officials that you see, I don't know, guardian, caseworker, Migration Agency staff. / ... /

Arif: I am happy with my guardian, I can say that the guardian I have, the others have not had very good guardians. And they complain, too. He is kind, I have a good relationship with him. And I'm happy with the social services. But I do have some ... I need to complain a bit about the Migration Agency because it has taken so long and I'm still waiting for a reply and I have just complained about that. And they say that there were many who came during this period and that it takes a long time to get back to everyone. And that the investigation has taken longer than usual. But he is hopeful that they will reply soon. That I get to stay.

Arif describes that he is happy with personnel he sees on a daily basis at the residential youth home. The interview continues, and the interviewer asks two follow-up questions: "What are your thoughts about your future in Sweden?" and "What are your plans for the future?"

Arif: I have a lot of plans. I have a lot of plans but I will take one step at a time, first I think I have to study the language, that I need to get that done and then I want to start university, continue my studies and get an education, and then we will see what happens. / ... / Right now I'm mainly trying to learn the language, read the language. And my hobby is playing soccer, becoming a good player. Famous. And right now I can't play because I had surgery on my knee 2 weeks ago, and I am hoping to be able to focus on that, too. Being a soccer player.

The youths' narratives of the explicit and implicit exercise of power create and recreate an image of HVB and school staff construed as dedicated and expressed in positive terms. This image is dichotomous to the image presented of those wielding power, such as

appointed guardians, social workers, and migration agency staff. The pictures painted in interviews depict charismatic HVB and school staff who bring other professional actors into play by telephoning them, demanding meetings, and making demands based on the young people's wishes and rights. These actors are allotted a protective role in relation to the young people, who are depicted as in need of protection from other professional actors. In Basic (2018) [2], and Basic and Matsuda (2020) [23], empirical sequences are analyzed in which staff at HVB homes are critical of the actions of colleagues in relation to young people who have experienced war, sought asylum in Sweden, and been placed in institutions. Interviews with personnel at HVB homes are sometimes emotionally charged. There may be emotional stories, for example, about personnel at HVB homes who are empathic, who understand and try to help young people. There also may be stories about others who belittle and abuse young people and even contribute to the risk of worse mental health in young people. Two interviewees in that part of the study were intensely critical of the adolescents they had met in their work. The adolescents were portrayed as greedy, and the goal of their arrival in Sweden was described as a planned effort to use ("rob") the Swedish community [2,23].

Media reporting of this category of young people that contributes to the stigmatization of this group as a whole is also criticized in Basic (2018) [2] and Basic and Matsuda (2020) [23]. The media headlines available online include: "Åkesson: Neighbors should report those who help the undocumented", "Why malign refugee children? The spread of rumors on the Internet is extensive and appears to be organized", "Here is police officer Peter Springare's controversial post—thousands are now showing their support", "SVT investigates: gang rapes among unaccompanied refugee boys", "Wants to report unaccompanied refugee children to the police—for benefit fraud", "Legal scandal when rapists lie with impunity about their age", "Charged after rape at a home for unaccompanied refugee children", and "Åkesson's counterattack after Löf's criticism" [53–58,61,62]. In the analyzed media reporting, young people who have experienced war, sought asylum in Sweden, and been placed in institutions are represented through a series of interactive finger-points: as a generalized type of rapist and benefit fraudster. These media representations create and recreate an image of both the generalized and commonly stigmatizing youth type and of a creature to be kept at a distance, unwelcome, such as a form of generally stigmatizing Other [39,40].

Basic (2018a) [2] and Basic and Matsuda (2020) [23] note that negative media reports about the adolescents, the populist appearances of politicians that aim at the adolescents, and negatively charged opinions from public officials (e.g., the police) about the adolescents constitute a contributing dimension to the stigmatization and debasement of the entire group. These factors in turn make the inclusion and integration job assigned to personnel at HVB homes more difficult. The attention spent by informants at HVB homes regarding the contribution from the media, politicians, and the police when it comes to stigmatizing and debasing the entire group is in line with information dissemination on the Internet [2,23]. These negative representations in the media do not go unnoticed among the young people themselves. During a conversation in the TV room of an HVB home, one boy tells me: "Many people in Sweden don't like us; the staff here are great, but many people outside the home don't like us, just read what they write about us on the Internet".

It appears that both the explicit and implicit exercise of power by professional actors in relation to young people with war experiences in institutional care in Sweden and the stigmatizing climate of Swedish society contribute not only to creating and recreating but also to maintaining a particular kind of self, characterized by a lack of equality and the degradation of the individual [39,40]. Being unable to obtain money that one has a legal right to from an appointed guardian, having your telephone calls go unanswered by a social worker, being offered food that is not "good", being constantly dependent on other professional actors, being pointed out as a generalized rapist and benefit fraudster in media reporting—all of these are expressions of power that contribute to the mortification and stigmatization of the self. In analyzing this phenomenon, we cannot disregard previous

interactive rituals from the context of previous wars and escape from war. These rituals of interaction can also be analyzed as a series of interactive stigmatizing expressions of power during wartime, the flight from war, and after the war in Sweden.

In the youths' narratives, they compare themselves with other young people, thereby evaluating themselves in contrast to others ("I have a friends who, who are staying at other youth homes, as I said. And they are not happy with the staff, they are not happy with the food they make"). It appears that these interactive stigmatizing expressions of power, comparisons, and definitions of inequality play a major role while young people are working on their social and pedagogical identities. If we compare postwar narratives on Sweden with narratives dealing with the war and escape, there is a visible tendency for young refugees from war-torn areas to create and recreate a number of categories that were constituted during the war, escape, and institutional care in Sweden. Another tendency is for the youths to compare themselves with other young people, both those in institutional care and those outside the system, and with power-wielding actors. The common denominator for both of these tendencies is that the youths create and recreate an image of stigma in their representations, probably because they do not receive full social and pedagogical recognition from those around them as equal individuals in their aspirational identities.

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Rather than take the image of traumatization [5–12] as a sole point of departure, this study strives to achieve an actor-oriented picture, where the interviewees' narratives are analyzed as arenas in which the narrator in various ways formulates their experiences. The youths' narratives are viewed as multilayered elaborations on their own biographies.

The identified and analyzed power dynamics in the youths' narratives seem to be marked by their experiences of war in their homelands, of their flight from the war, and of their present-day experiences of living in a peacetime society. These narratives display the mortified and stigmatized self and a victim identity through the construction and reconstruction of distance from the actions of other actors. The youths display their mortified and stigmatized selves as a product of experience—of war, subsequent flight, and the social climate in the new peacetime society. The mortified and stigmatized self is created and recreated in contrast to the other actors in the context. Distancing oneself from those actors, from the context of war, escape, and peace, seems to be a point of departure for constructing both the young person's identity as a victim and interactive success in relationships with certain professional and non-professional actors. Distance from one opens the possibility and lays the foundations for a relationship with the other.

Young people's narratives are a retrospective example of postwar symbol production, in which power-dynamic interactions are defined as an expression of a social and pedagogical identity, inasmuch as they are based on a contrast to the Other. As an example, in their wartime and escape narratives, the youths recount and dramatize: (1) the exercise of power in practice, where the construction of wartime interactions (involving the exercise of power) is compared and related to the construction of peaceful interactions (not involving the exercise of power); (2) the significance of the specific social conditions of wartime interactions between actors who consider themselves distanced from actors from other groupings but with whom they have a bare minimum of routine interaction; (3) the contrasting relationships and comparisons between actors that create and recreate the categories: victim, perpetrator, and hero; and (4) an image of the mortified and stigmatized self that offers limited room for maneuvering and makes it more difficult for young people to realize their aspirational identities.

The realization of aspirational social and pedagogical identities in peacetime is interactively dependent on achieving a balance between representations of interactions involving wartime exercises of power and peaceful interactions. The new situation in conjunction with fleeing war constructs and reconstructs disruptive peaceful interactions (disruptive interactions not associated with the exercise of power), which emerge in relation to interactive islands of peaceful interactions in the youths' narratives. This social and pedagogical

phenomenon arises in a series of recounted interpersonal interactions and rituals that contribute to moral production and the creation and re-creation of the social order in the new situation.

The interactive dynamic that characterizes the youths' wartime and escape narratives appears to act as a fuel that allows them to tell their stories. Interactions involving wartime exercises of power, peaceful interactions, and disruptive peaceful interactions can be understood as the narrative core of war and peace. It can be seen as some kind of recounted moral code that is beyond any real control but that can also conjure social and pedagogical order from the narrator's life in the described situation. It seems that war and escape from war produce, reproduce, and dispel narratives but can also establish new narratives, which in turn can be quickly dispelled.

In their narratives, the youths construe and reconstrue their existence in Sweden as uncertain. They express uncertainty about whether they will be permitted to remain in Sweden and stay in school, or if they will see their parents again. Despite the uncertainty, the young people appreciate Sweden and especially the staff at their HVB homes and schools. The discontent, conflict ("fight"), and fear recounted in their narratives seem to be the result of the explicit and implicit exercise of power by professional actors and are occasionally directed verbally against appointed guardians, as well as the Swedish Migration Agency and social services staff. The study's empirical material also provides an image of a stigmatizing social climate in Sweden and the frustration of long periods of waiting, rendered as the exercise of power, seemingly reproducing adverse emotions, social comparisons, degradation, stigmatization, and inequality.

An analysis of the power dynamics in the youths' narratives shows four interactive dimensions: (1) an identity-creating, verbal struggle for affirmation; (2) dramatization as a subjective focus and approach; (3) the inflation of some kind of sense of belonging to a group; and (4) representations of a specific moral order in wartime and postwar society. The narratives show young people who are both integrated into and regulated by wartime and postwar society and thus also influenced by the dynamic moral order created and recreated in the situations described. The youths' bearing is marked and influenced by earlier prewar, wartime, and postwar social dynamics, as well as by the interview situation itself. If we follow Goffman's [29] line of reasoning, the youths also define the interview situation in order to know how they should act when they meet other actors within that situation. This definition tells the youths what they should and should not reveal, given that every definition of the situation has a moral character. The behavior of the youths depends on and is influenced by the behavior of other actors in the situation—in this case, the specific actions of the interpreter and researcher.

The situations that the young people recount in their narratives consist of a series of interactive moral codes, represented in their accounts as being acted upon by specific individuals—both the narrators themselves and other actors in the situation. In these situations, moral codes are described as unstable, fickle, liable to be broken, redefined, re-construed, and built anew. The participation of the youths in such rituals creates and recreates moral codes, as well as the sense of belonging that may contribute to the acceptance of various identities that can be used successfully in subsequent rituals.

The interactive acceptance or distancing displayed by the youths in their accounts occurs both during a brief interaction (in the interview situation) and during a long chain of interactions (through the war and postwar period). As the youths move between different postwar situations, they cannot ignore their wartime experiences. The point here is that the youths' earlier wartime experiences merge with their new experiences and are significant to future situations. In accordance with the above, one can conclude that wartime and postwar morals are not created in parallel with the individual, group, or society; rather, wartime and postwar morals are integral to social life during and after the war. Wartime and postwar morals are created in interpersonal interactions, especially when encountering groups that deviate from one's own normative code—a perpetrator, for example.

The power dynamics identified and analyzed in this study demonstrate that narratives about war, escaping war, and postwar life in Sweden, construct and reconstruct an image of a series of interactive rituals that are both influenced by and influence the power dynamic among the actors. The result is the creation and re-creation of an interplay among the stigmatizing experiences of the youths, their social comparisons, and definitions of inequality.

Previous studies of young people with wartime experiences have demonstrated recurrent themes in the war and refugee experience, as well as implying strong expectations about how these experiences might be assumed to manifest themselves [15]. Among explanations offered in these previous studies, post-traumatic stress and medical or psychiatric needs dominate [5–12] and competing explanations for the youths' difficulties appear to be relatively downplayed. Such competing explanations include established inequalities in the country where they seek asylum, material and institutional problems, or bureaucratic obstacles, along with any analysis of interactions in which young people demonstrate their strength by learning new skills such as the language. The current analysis points in this direction, tying into research on so-called *emergent resilience* and the ability of those impacted by war to improve their life chances after a period of struggle against negative circumstances [14] (p.114). This explanation is also in line with analyses of how the past experiences of refugees interact with the day-to-day stressors in the host country [13]. Wartime memories may be exacerbated by everyday stress, making the qualitative documentation and analysis of what these stress factors are in practice a matter of interest for future studies.

From a Western European perspective, it is easy to imagine that the consequences of war are confined to “over there”, to another country, continent, or point in time. It is also easy to distill the wartime experiences of refugees, to simplify or reduce them. It is therefore a matter of urgency to offer those who have experienced war first-hand and are now living in various Western European societies, the opportunity to explain the significance of those experiences; for example, in narratives on postwar victimization and on reconciliation and irreconcilability. Previous studies of postwar communities in Bosnia, for example, have demonstrated how those with wartime memories attempt to deal with the fact that certain actions can never be forgiven or, at the very least, offer scant possibilities for reconciliation [4]. Such narratives cannot be reduced to stress, illness, or trauma and instead are proof of identity-forming moral analyses. If nothing else, they avoid some of the typification that seems so prevalent today in both integration efforts at an overall social level and in treatment and everyday institutional life.

5. Conclusions

This study concerns young people who have experienced war, taken shelter in Sweden, and been placed in institutions. The purpose of the study is to identify and analyze power relations that contribute to the shaping of young people's identities and repertoires of action via stigmatizations and social comparisons with different reference groups. This article deals with an important and contemporary subject and offers some new insights into the field of refugee studies, specifically elaborating on the experiences of unaccompanied refugee minors and documenting and analyzing the power relations that contribute to the shaping of young people's identities and repertoires of action via stigmatizations and social comparisons with different reference groups. These results could also serve as a starting point and a point of reference for some other research, especially within the context of the new Ukrainian refugee crisis, and to check the possible differences and double standards in refugee reception procedures. From the methodological point of view, at first sight, conducting only six interviews leaves an impression of underrepresentation of various characteristics of the selected target group; nevertheless, the level of correspondence in presented experiences brings forward important common perceptions of power relations, even though they are in different social and pedagogical environments. These analyzed

personal narratives have also been contextualized by other research materials such as media coverage analyses and observational notes.

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