Symbolic interaction, power, and war: an ethnography-inspired analysis of the narratives of unaccompanied young refugees with war experiences in institutional care in Sweden
Background

- War – Civilian
- Unaccompanied refugee minors
- Power (Max Weber - Randall Collins)
Since 2015, more than 35,000 children and young people have come to Sweden unaccompanied by a guardian.

- HVB homes

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 the post-war life?
Method

- Qualitative study
- Interviews with six young people from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria who have experienced war followed by a placement in institutional care in Sweden
- Field notes taken in conjunction with fieldwork at HVB homes
- Online media reporting on the category of young people who have experienced war, sought asylum in Sweden, and been placed in institutions
Narratives of young persons

- War, violence, and the exercise of power
- Emotionally charged
- Painful memories
- Professional actors in Sweden:
  - empathetic people attempting to assist the youths,
  - wielders of power who mistrust them and contribute to replicating negative emotions, degradation, stigmatization, and inequality.
Power relations and war

- Postwar symbol production
- Dramatize the significance of war interactions
- Expressions of social identity - based on contrasting oneself from the Others.
Power relations and escape from war

- Mortified and stigmatized self that limits and hinders any possibility of attaining their aspirational identities
- The new situation as a refugee is marked by disruptive peaceful interactions (disruptive interactions not associated with the exercise of power)
- Emerge and disappear on interactive islands of peaceful interactions in the youths’ narratives
- Recounted moral code
Engaged staff

Stigmatizing social climate in Sweden

Exercise of power
Conclusion

- Narratives combining wartime experiences and youth and institutional relationships
- Creation and recreation of the young people’s identities
- Alternative approaches to analyzing relatively expected traumatic perspectives
- Social morals function in relation to the young people’s wartime experiences, their escape from war, and their peacetime existence
Thank you for your attention and participation!