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## Concentration Camp Rituals: Narratives of Former Bosnian Detainees

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**Title:** Concentration Camp Rituals: Narratives of Former Bosnian Detainees

**Abstract**

In the German camps during the Second World War, the aim was to kill from a distance, and the camps were highly efficient in their operations. Previous studies have thus analyzed the industrialized killing and the victims' survival strategies. Researchers have emphasized the importance of narratives but they have not focused on narratives about camp rituals, or analyzed post-war interviews as a continued resistance and defense of one's self. This article tries to fill this gap by analyzing stories told by former detainees in concentration camps in the Bosnian war during the 1990s. The article aims to describe a set of recounted interaction rituals as well as to identify how these rituals are dramatized in interviews. The retold stories of humiliation and power in the camps indicate that there was little space for individuality and preservation of self. Nevertheless, the detainees seem to have been able to generate some room for resistance, and this seems to have granted them a sense of honor and self-esteem, not least after the war. Their narratives today represent a form of continued resistance.

**Keywords:** humiliated self, status ritual, stigma, resistance, de-ritualization, power ritual

## **Introduction**

In the German camps during the Second World War, the aim was to kill from a distance, and the camps were highly efficient and industrialized in their operations (Bauman 1991; Langer 1991; Megargee 2013a,b). Previous studies have thus analyzed the efficient and industrialized killing of other people and survival strategies in concentration camps (Bauman 1991; Langer 1991, 1996; Luchterhand 1953; Megargee 2013a,b; Round 2006; Ryn 1990; Sunderland 2010; Stein 2009; van Ree 2013). Researchers have emphasized the importance of narratives but have not focused on narratives about rituals as a starting point. Neither have they analyzed post-war interviews as a continued resistance and defending of one's self. This article shows how interactions rituals in concentration camp are described by Bosnian interviewees and how post-war narratives are a form of continued resistance and defense of one's self. In this way the article contributes to a sociological, and criminological understanding of the phenomenon interaction rituals in the concentration camp.

My analysis is based on interpersonal interpretations of violence during the 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In their quest for 'ethnic cleansing' of Bosniacs<sup>1</sup> and Croats from northwestern Bosnia, Serbian soldiers and policemen, among others, used concentration camps. The aim of the ethnic cleansing was to take control of the geographic area by expelling the Bosniac and Croat populations. In addition to concentration camps, the ethnic cleansing of northwestern Bosnia consisted of a range of other techniques, including mass murder, systematic rape, forced flight, and economic and legal discrimination. For example, in just the municipality of Prijedor in northwestern Bosnia, the number of Bosniacs and Croats killed during summer 1992 was more than 3000 (including more than 200 women and 100 children), and more than

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<sup>1</sup> Bosnian Muslims began to identify themselves as Bosniacs during the war. The term 'Bosniac' is actually an old word meaning 'Bosnian', which is now used both in an official context and everyday language.

40,000 Bosniacs and Croats, almost half of the prewar population in Prijedor, were driven into exile (Basic 2016, Tokaca 2013; Zwierzchowski and Tabeau 2010; Tabeau 2009; Cekic 2009; Wesselingh and Vaulering 2005; IPC Patria 2000). The common denominator was that warfare was directed against civilian populations, namely groups of people with other ethnic identities; the aim was to make life impossible for Bosniacs and Croats. It was not enough only to expel these individuals; the aim was to create an atmosphere in which they would never dare return (Bassiouni and Manikas 1994; Blum et al. 2007; Case No.: IT-99-36-T; Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Greve and Bergsmo 1994; Wesselingh and Vaulering 2005).

The war directly affected northwestern Bosnia at the end of spring 1992 when Serb soldiers and police took over the local administration without meeting any armed resistance. Serbian artillery shelled several villages in the region (for example, Kozarac, Hambarine, Briševo, and Biščani) while the media spread propaganda about “Muslim and Croat war crimes against Serbs” to create panic (Case No.: IT-99-36-T; Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-98-30/1-A; Case No.: IT-95-8-S; Greve and Bergsmo 1994; Wesselingh and Vaulering 2005). The residents of these villages were unarmed and sought shelter in the mountains and valleys in northwestern Bosnia. Serbian soldiers and police caught a large number of refugees; some were instantly executed in the woods, and some were transported to concentration camps in Omarska, Keraterm, and Manjača.

Omarska is a village that belongs to the municipality of Prijedor in northwestern Bosnia. The population of Omarska is predominantly of Serbian origin, and the camp was located in the management buildings of the Ljubija Ironmine. Before the war, Keraterm was a brick-burning factory in Prijedor. Manjača is a mountain massif in the northwestern part of Bosnia, and prior to the war, the Yugoslav People’s Army had several training facilities in different locations within the massif. When the war in Croatia began, some of the army compounds became concentration

camps for captured Croatian soldiers and civilians. This continued when the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina began; Manjača was used as a concentration camp for civilian Bosnians and Croats (Case No.: IT-99-36-T; Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-98-30/1-A; Case No.: IT-95-8-S; Greve and Bergsmo 1994).

The camps in northwestern Bosnia stood out for individualized crimes in which the perpetrator often knew his victims (Basic 2016, 2015c, 2015d). The tools used for killing were not only firearms but also knives, steel rods, electric cables, and batons. An interviewee, called Nesim<sup>2</sup> in the study, describes the fear, physical abuse, and death in the camps:

Behind your back, Goran (Nesim addressing the interviewer by name), just one meter behind you, they slaughtered and flayed people. There was screaming and commotion. It happened beneath the feet of those lying in the last row, I think I was lying in the fourth. I don't know if you've ever heard a man's shriek of agony, torment, and pain while being tortured. It is totally different from the cries you hear when someone is in emotional distress. I feel chills to this day when I hear someone crying. People were crying because of the torment, they begged to be killed to escape the pain. This makes your blood freeze. You don't eat, you don't drink because they're not giving you any water, you're not allowed to go to the toilet, we were like chickens. When they called on someone, you couldn't walk over since you were near fainting.

Through analyzed sequences taken from qualitative interviews with exiled Bosnians who were detained as civilians and placed in the concentration camps, Omarska, Keraterm, and Manjača at

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<sup>2</sup> All names and identifying information have been changed.

the start of the war, this article conveys how those former camp detainees perceived the crimes committed against them.

Scientific reports and legal judgments from the Hague Tribunal that address the living conditions in the concentration camps describe an existence characterized by humiliation, physical abuse, fear, and death. Detainees died on a daily basis from physical abuse, planned executions, food shortage, and illnesses. According to witnesses at the International Criminal Tribunal, Bosniac and Croat prisoners lost anywhere from 20–40 kg (around 45–90 lbs). The general atmosphere made the detainees lose any will of their own; they became apathetic, and the texts convey the image of detainees just sitting around waiting to die to end the pain. For example, in summer 1992 in Omarska camp alone, about 5000–7000 Bosniacs and Croats (including 37 women) were held in appalling conditions. Hundreds died of starvation, punishment beatings, and ill-treatment. Hundreds more were transported to different localities and executed (Basic 2016; Case No.: IT-99-36-T; Case No.: IT-97-24-T; Case No.: IT-98-30/1-A; Case No.: IT-95-8-S; Greve and Bergsmo 1994; Wesselingh and Vaulering 2005).

David Knottnerus (2005) asks for more research on de-ritualization, i.e., interrupting participation in a ritualized practice, in which the ritualized individual experience of the concentration camp is highlighted as a striking example. Inspired by Goffman and Collins' analysis of interaction rituals, Knottnerus (1997) developed a theory on “structural ritualization” that can be seen as a theory on ritual practice. In his analysis, Knottnerus focuses on chains of interaction rituals where the ritual is perceived to have an important role in social life. At the heart of the theory is the role rituals play for groups of people and the individual in everyday interactions. Knottnerus argues that rituals are an important part of everyday social life and that individuals use these in structuring various social activities. In this study: arrival at the camp is analyzed as an individual transfer from one social context to another; life in the camp is analyzed

as a structure in which the ritualized interactions of the individual create mobility within the framework of the camp's system but not outside the system; and detainee's life in the camp is delineated by several interruptions from participating in the ritualized practices of ordinary social life. In the words of Knottnerus (2005), interviewees living conditions are de-ritualized in relation to their past and future living conditions.

The purpose of my article is to discover, understand, and describe de-ritualization as well as interaction rituals depicted after time spent in the concentration camp and to identify how these interactions are symbolically dramatized through stories and gestures. In the following, I would like to point out that social interaction rituals and symbolic dramatizations emerge when interviewees speak about their everyday lives in the camps, and more specifically, when they speak about (a) the arrival, (b) going to the toilet, (c) the overnight conditions, and (d) food and cigarettes. My analytical findings are presented in the following themes: (1) De-ritualization in contrast to earlier experiences, (2) Portrayals of humiliation rituals, (3) Portrayals of power rituals, (4) Portrayals of resistance rituals, and (5) Portrayals of status rituals.

### **Rituals and morals**

This article joins the narrative traditions within sociology that consider oral descriptions as both discursive and experience based (Potter 2007[1996]). In addition to this general point, I found rituals to be particularly relevant components of the specific stories I examined.

Collins (2004) says that social life is formed by a series of rituals. In that analysis, Collins (2004, 34) further develops Durkheim's view on social life using Goffman's theory on the importance of the definition of the situation (Turner and Stets 2006). Individuals are both regulated and integrated by society according to Durkheim (1987[1897]). 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. Interpersonal interaction, according to Goffman (1990[1959]), 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 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 (Goffman 1982[1967]).

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 (Collins 2004, 58-9, 109).

According to Collins (2004, 109), people are filled with a certain emotional effervescence from previously experienced situations. Moving between different situations results in individuals’ bringing along this emotional charge from previous relationships. Emotions are present in all social situations and thus are an essential part of social interplay (Hochschild 2003[1983]; Turner and Stets 2006; Pugliesi 1987). As I have noted, Hochschild (2003[1983]) states that individuals perform emotional labor in relation to the normatively “correct” emotional codes in a certain situation (“emotional control”). Emotions suggest either a moral acceptance or rejection from the described reality. Collins (2004, 12) writes the following about rituals, morals, and emotions:

Again the thrust of the argument, and the logic of the evidence, is comparative: moralities vary with the organization of the group; change in group structure changes moralities.



/.../ In fact, a whole range of moralities has emerged as different kinds of ritual practices have been discerned for different groups and historical periods. /.../ New social connections can be established by extending rituals to new participants; and those excluded by rituals from group structures can fight their way into membership ...

From Collins' perspective, morality arises in the interaction between humans, especially when meeting groups of people with a different sense of morality compared to that which, for example, the narrator sees as the "right" morality. The important point in this is that the presented morality, whether it is seen as right or wrong, must be performed by actual persons and can be redefined, produced anew, and reconstructed. To paraphrase Collins, a participation in such rituals creates and recreates moralities and the feeling of community as well as the rise of other sacred objects which, in turn, can be used in future rituals (Collins 2004, 79-101, 150-51, 183-222). The interaction rituals in a concentration camp thus produce a special kind of self, a belittled self characterized by moral exhaustion and resolution. Goffman's analysis (1990[1961], 12-74) on total institutions draws attention to the humiliated self, namely the shift in an inmate's moral career caused by imprisonment and its interaction rituals, such as admission rituals, prison guards' distrust, and physical and mental humiliation.

Max Weber (1968 [1922]) understands power as a direct action from actor X forcing actor Y to act according to X's wish, even when the action is contrary to Y's interest or will. If we were to simplify, we could say that Weber gives attention to two dimensions of power relations in situations that contain violence. The first dimension is maintained through violence or threats of violence. The other dimension is maintained because the exposed individual gives up or goes along with the power of the aggressors. The power an aggressor has is mainly contained by an order with special contents and followed by specific individuals (Collins 1986; Collins 2008;

Weber 1968 [1922]). Collins (2004, 115-18, 284-88) is inspired by Weber's view when he writes about power, conflicts, solidarity, resistance, and status. Collins argues that the exercise of power, in all social arenas, always faces resistance from other people, thus generating new conflicts. Collins (1992/2008, 40) means that "conflict and solidarity are two sides of the same coin." Mobilization against an enemy often leads to solidarity in certain groups and vice versa (Collins 1992/2008, 34-41).

The following sections primarily analyze prison guards' rituals when exercising power and the prisoners' response to these rituals, which either manifests through resistance or adjustment and resignation. The analysis formulates a number of different sub-rituals such as power rituals, humiliation rituals, resistance rituals, and status rituals. These concentration camp rituals cannot be distinguished from other social interactions. The concentration camp regime and routines, how the detainees restrain themselves from an open display of resistance, the way they explain and notice power, humiliation, status, and resistance – such phenomena are created and re-created in a myriad of everyday interactions.

## **Method**

The material for this study was collected through qualitative interviews held with nine former camp detainees. All of the interviewed now live in Sweden, Denmark, or Norway. They are all men between ages 30 and 65 years, all of whom had survived the ethnic cleansing in northwestern Bosnia, carried out by Serbian soldiers and policemen. Seven of them came from the Prijedor municipality and the remaining two from other municipalities in northwestern Bosnia. Among the interviewees, eight were Bosniacs and one Croats. Seven lived in Sweden, one in Norway, and one in Denmark. The interviews were conducted from April through June of

2006. Four close relatives of those nine former camp detainees also were interviewed. Parts of the material collected in 2006 have been analyzed in other reports and articles. These analyses are based on the above-described material and with partly different research questions (Basic 2016, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, 2015e, 2007).

The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed into Bosnian, usually the day of or in the days just following the interview to ensure good documentation and to comment with details<sup>3</sup>. By commenting on the transcript, I produced a “categorization of data” (Ryen 2004, 110–112, 123–127). When encoding the statements, markers for rituals were identified in the material (Goffman 1990[1959]; Collins 2004; Knottnerus 1997). Empirical sequences presented in this study were categorized into the material as: ”from freedom to captivity”, ”humiliation”, ”power”, ”resistance” and ”status”. To make a choice of empirical examples, as guidance I used the study’s aim and how clearly those empirical examples illustrated the analytical point I wanted to emphasize. For this reason, some of the more articulate informants are heard more often than others.

The interviews were carried out in a conversation-oriented fashion in which I took on the role of interlocutor rather than interrogator. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) call this way of interviewing, where the interviewer takes on the role of an improvising and flexible conversational partner, an “active interview.” In practical terms, this means that I assumed the role of an interested listener wanting to learn more about everyday lives in the camps. This fashion of interviewing promotes both the conversation and the moral production of the interviewees.

The interviews analyzed in this study have a strong emotional charge. They concern painful stories about neighbors who changed their behavior when the war began: One day, a neighbor is a

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<sup>3</sup> Selected parts were translated into the Swedish and English language by an interpreter.

civilian greeting you just as friendly as ever, and a week later, the same neighbor is in uniform; he still greets, but he also participates in massacres, rapes, robberies, and abduction of neighbors to place them in concentration camps (Basic 2016, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, 2015e, 2007).

The stories created during those interviews were interpreted within an analytical context of interaction rituals (Collins 2004, 34; Goffman 1982[1967]; Knottnerus 1997). This analytical aim also applies to the emotions that emerged during the interviews, such as fear, shame, hate, and joy (Hochschild 2003[1983]; Turner and Stets 2006; Pugliesi 1987). I taped all interviews and wrote notes during the conversations so that the expressed emotions could be displayed in the descriptions and observed through direct interaction.

About the emotion and fear, Nesim recalls, “My fear made me sweat, and I looked as if I had just had a shower. It’s like now, while telling you, it feels as if my fever is high.” Continuing the interview, Nesim showed me—although I could already see it on his short-sleeved shirt—that he had perspired extensively on his back and his armpits. During the interview, Nesim talked about his feelings while showing the physical effect of his emotions (i.e., his extensive perspiration). His emotions could have passed relatively unnoticed during the intensity of the conversation, but Nesim chose to highlight and demonstrate his feelings. Emotions were often vivid, and this source of information is something that I in part chose to use in my article. In the analysis, these emotional expressions are seen as enhancements that participate in creating the narrator’s victim identity and his rejection of the guards’ actions as well as categorization as a “concentration camp detainee.”

Several of the interviewed participants began crying during their interviews. I was also emotionally affected during these interactions and while conducting the analysis (Kleinman and Copp 1993). According to the conventional view of a scientist, I was expected to put my emotions aside while gathering material and conducting the analysis. Sometimes, this distancing

is difficult to achieve, as it was in my case because I had personal experience of the beginning of the war in northwestern Bosnia as a member of the ethnic groups being cleansed from the area. I personally know many of the individuals the interviewees mentioned and am also familiar with some of the described violent situations that took place during the war in northwestern Bosnia. The presence of emotions during the work naturally affected the execution of the study. During my work, I was, on one hand, aware of the potential impact my feelings could have on the scientific nature of the text, and for this reason, I worked intensively and continuously to emerge as objective in the analysis (Kleinman and Copp 1993). On the other hand, my own experiences from the war in Bosnia helped me to better recognize, understand, and analyze general social phenomena such as interaction rituals emerging during the stay in the concentration camp. During my analysis, I strove to act in a value-free way as possible. I worked intensively and continuously against homogenizing and collectively blaming any of the sides in the war.

### **De-ritualization in contrast to earlier experiences**

All of the former concentration camp detainees in this analysis disclosed that they were placed in the concentration camps as civilians, unarmed and harmless to the guards. In describing his transport to and arrival at the concentration camp, Nesim says in a low voice:

The truck was jam-packed. It drove towards Gomjenica<sup>4</sup> now and then took the road to Omarska /.../ We were thirsty, a drop of water was more valuable than all of Prijedor, Sweden, even all of Europe. Just one drop of water. We were scared, sweating, we saw

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<sup>4</sup> A village in northwestern Bosnia.

people at the pista<sup>5</sup>, guns, armored personnel carriers, tanks, etc. Guards were standing there guarding people who were sitting on the piste, they were packed like sardines /.../ They drove us back to the police station and then to Keraterm; we arrived there around nine o'clock. We were the first detainees to arrive to Keraterm. They just opened the gates and placed us inside the hangar next to some pallets. The room was approximately 15 to 20 meters deep, and they stowed in 400 to 500 people. We found pallets, and someone had brought a blanket. I found some cardboard and put it on the pallet. We started preparing for outdoor life. /.../ Then six more buses arrived from Donja Puharska<sup>6</sup>. They had not been let into Omarska, that's why they were taken to the slaughterhouse before being brought to Keraterm. We spent the night there and everyone asked the same question: Why me, why did they take me? People had been captured in the streets, and many wore only shorts and t-shirts with sandals on their feet. People who were completely innocent, without any reason ...

Nesim's first encounter with the living conditions in the camp seemed to be imbued with a lack of explanations for why this happened ("Why me, why did they take me? People had been captured in the streets, and many wore only shorts and t-shirts with sandals on their feet. People who were completely innocent, without any reason"). His reproduction can be seen, using Goffman's terminology (1990[1961], 67), as a sad tale, a kind of lament in which he explains that he does not belong to those legitimately placed. Although Goffman wrote about how individual inmates in camps could contrast themselves to those whom they presumed to be appropriately

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<sup>5</sup> "Pista" is the name of a paved surface in front of a management building at the Omarska camp.

<sup>6</sup> A village in northwestern Bosnia.

placed there, the sad tale described here concerns “everyone”: No one seems to understand why they are placed in the camp.

Nesim’s arrival at the camp can be seen as an individual transfer from one social context to another, from freedom to captivity. Life in the camp can be seen as a structure in which the ritualized interactions of the individual create mobility within the framework of the camp’s system but not outside the system. No matter what perspective we choose as an explanatory model, Nesim’s life in the camp is delineated by several interruptions from participating in the ritualized practices of ordinary social life. In the words of Knottnerus (2005), Nesim’s living conditions are de-ritualized in relation to his past and future living conditions.

Thornburg et al. (2007) examine how the ritual practice is disturbed in the context of disasters and how individuals handle these events. De-ritualization is most clearly manifested through the individual’s passive performance (withdrawal from the incurred situation) and identity loss associated with disasters (Sell et al. 2000; Thornburg et al. 2007, 164). The dissociation from the others as well as from a forced status position, are being actualized when Nesim recounts his experiences from the concentration camp. Nesim’s stories become an expression of de-ritualization in relation to his earlier experience according to Knottnerus’ (2005, 1997) conceptual apparatus. The ritualistic practices are disrupted, and individuals recount these disruptions in retrospect, dramatizing their experiences symbolically (sad tale, stories of disasters, abuse and humiliation etc.). Stories about disasters are occasionally sad, and individuals distance themselves from other individuals, from categories and assigned status. This verbal rejection projects the picture of an active and competent actor, an actor who continues to fight. This projection is partly in contrast with Thornburg, Knottnerus, and Webb (2007, 164) and Sell et al. (2000), who argue that de-ritualization is most clearly manifested through the individual’s passive appearance.

## **Portrayals of humiliation rituals**

In a concentration camp, the act of going to the toilet can be seen as a specific interaction ritual. It is a repetitive action, on a daily basis, that is carried out in relation to other inmates and guards. The common denominator in the interviewees' stories about camp conditions was that they all were beaten when visiting the toilet. These depictions are symbolically charged and reinforced with emotions. Continuing with Nesim's description of the circumstances surrounding the toilets reveals two distinct constructs. On the one hand, Nesim describes himself as a victim in the situation. On the other hand, Nesim rejects the camp guards' behavior. Several times during the interview, he gets agitated and sweats profusely. Nesim explains:

There was an outbreak of dysentery, Goran (Nesim addressing the interviewer by name), hepatitis, and dysentery. There was no water in the toilets, the water we were drinking was for industrial use, and it was not purified so people got kidney stones and gallstones from it. We all suffered from blood in our urine after three or four days because of the water. /.../ I had to go to the toilet because I got dysentery and I saw that it was vacant. Afterwards, when I had finished and was about to go away from there, the guards noticed me and wondered what I was doing there. There were two of them, and they immediately began interrogating me. They asked who I voted for, they harassed me and started beating me. One of them kicked me with his military boot, and it felt as if my intestines had shifted. I am quite skinny. It wasn't fear that made me shit myself, since I have to put it bluntly, it was the dysentery, it was just water. Everything just flushes straight through



you in an instant, you get a stomachache and you faint from the pain. I did that towards the end. /.../ I went to the water house and washed my underwear.

As I have mentioned, Goffman (1990[1961], 12-74) notes the humiliated self caused by the interaction rituals in, for instance, the concentration camp. The above quotation contains a story describing how the humiliated self affected the individual's identity and vice versa. The humiliation of having diarrhea and going to the toilet with fear of being followed and physically abused there, then being forced to go outside to wash the feces from your underwear, humiliates you both physically and mentally ("It wasn't fear that made me shit myself, since I have to put it bluntly, it was the dysentery, it was just water"). Using Collins' conceptual apparatus, the retold humiliation could be designated as a humiliation ritual. These rituals contribute to the individual's moral exhaustion and eventually lead to a shift in an inmate's moral career. We can assume that Nesim's road to the new humiliated self begins upon arriving at the camp and is lined by many interaction rituals, such as special admission rituals, prison guards' distrust, physical and mental violations, and not least, the described violation and abuse during toilet visits.

By recounting humiliation rituals and describing the guards' behavior, Nesim constructs the guards' behavior as morally reprehensible and implies that he experienced loss of identity in connection with a trauma (Thornburg et al. 2007, 164). He has traveled from being a respected citizen, a father, a son, and a worker to being a detainee who not only has to ask permission to go to the toilet but is being abused there too – a stigmatized prisoner. According to Goffman (1990[1963], 11–55), an individual is stigmatized when not receiving full recognition of social identities. Common denominators for all types of stigma are that a stigmatized individual would have been accepted into general social rituals but that the stigma removes him or her from the community (Bauman 1991; Freidson 1983; Goffman 1990[1963], 11-55; Langer 1991, 1996;

Luchterhand 1953; Mccarthy and Hagan 2005; Megargee 2013a,b; Round 2006; Ryn 1990; Stein 2009; Suderland 2010; van Ree 2013).

An analysis of 138 interviews with concentration camp survivors from the Second World War, carried out by Stein (2009), shows that the described stigmatization that appears in the interviews in relation to the interviewees' own recounted experiences of the camps, together with how community members treated and questioned them after the war, creates an interactive chain that seems to affect the creation and re-creation of identity in the interviewed.

Similar ritualized identity dynamics appear in my empirical material when looking at the interviewees' relation to their own experiences. De-ritualization, which is portrayed through loss of former identities, stigmatization, and recounting humiliation rituals and by depicting 'the others' actions as morally despicable, implies the importance of uninterrupted rituals – namely those rituals that characterized life prior to the interviewees' being placed in the camp.

### **Portrayals of power rituals**

In the narratives from concentration camps, detainees' rituals concerning basic needs were prominent. Above, visits to the toilet were discussed. Below, power rituals surrounding sleeping and eating are presented.

Sleeping or the way one spent the night was part of an interaction ritual in a concentration camp. It is repetitive, and it takes place in close proximity to other human beings (detainees and guards). According to all interviewees in this study, overnight conditions in the camps were severe. The quarters were usually old offices or workers' dressing rooms, crowded with inmates who were often unable to lie or even sit on the floor. In addition, the inmates were blackmailed

and beaten when they tried to sleep. When talking about the overnight conditions in the camp, Sanel recounts some particularly important objects. He says, outraged:

It was horrible, 150 people were pushed into a room of nine square meters, you couldn't breathe. A guard came in and he threw a shoebox inside saying that he wanted 500 DM<sup>7</sup> or he would let us suffocate in there. Many didn't have any money, others had a little but since we didn't succeed in collecting the money, they started beating those standing closest to the door. This was a kind of cruelty which cannot be retold nor described.

Sanel's description of the overnight conditions is charged with dramatizations of various objects ("room of nine square meters"; "shoebox"; "500 DM"; "money"). Dramatizations can defend a particular depiction against alternative interpretations (Goffman 1990[1959], 23-5; Potter 2007[1996], 107-8, 121-29). The highly colored image Sanel gives seems to create and re-create elements of power demonstrations, which Collins calls 'power rituals' (Collins 2004, 348-51; also see Collins 1992, 3-29; Collins 2004, 115-18, 284-88; Weber 1968 [1922]). The overnight experience at the camp can be seen as a repeated interaction in which the detainees probably would value space, peace, and quiet, but instead they are forced into overcrowded facilities and are blackmailed and abused. In this described power ritual, Sanel exposes his victim identity which is created, re-created, and maintained in contrast to the others, i.e., the guards. Furthermore, it shows that the image of morally wrong action is created and re-created in Sanel's identity work. There is a clear connection in Sanel's narrative between his portrayal of a victim identity and the guards' morally wrong actions.

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<sup>7</sup> German marks, approximately 250 euros.

The dramatized role that Sanel gives the guard is that of someone issuing orders (“threw in a shoebox and said ...”). At the same time, Sanel is placing himself (and the other detainees) as order-takers. Persons enacting power rituals are, according to Collins (2004, 348), identifying strongly with their official self. In Sanel’s story, this guard is well identified with his official self. In the description, he is quite aware of the symbolism regarding his order-giving (“he wanted 500 DM or he would let us suffocate in there”). Order-taking creates a “backstage personality” (Collins 2004, 348). Sanel is portrayed as someone taking orders, an individual without any options but coping with the incurred situation.

Like spending the night or sleeping and going to the toilet, eating is an interaction ritual. According to the detainees, food was distributed as follows: First the detainees were lined up in groups of approximately 30 people and then had to wait for several hours until it was their turn. When going to the dining area, the detainees had to run a gauntlet through a passage of guards hitting them, usually with steel rods, batons, and electric cables. If someone fell during the gauntlet, the guards sometimes beat him to death. The only meal during the day consisted of a “water slurry soup” and 100 g of bread. The meal lasted barely three minutes, and the detainees were beaten during the meal itself. It was considered difficult to avoid all the blows, and the price for eating was to endure being beaten (Basic 2007, 36). Asim furiously depicts the way in which food was distributed:

Ten guards stood at one side and ten at the other. All had steel rods and at best batons. They beat us while passing so we tried to take cover behind each other but everyone received at least five to six blows. We had to eat fast because ten guards walked around hitting the tables, yelling at us to hurry up. We slurped up the soup and then got beaten on the way back again. People just become like animals, it’s hard to imagine this today, but I

know that it could happen again. They let a man lie among us for 15 days until he finally died from his injuries. Maggots were crawling in his open wounds, but they kicked him out among the other detainees at the piste. They had already killed thousands of people, but they left this man to die there among us in horrific agony and pain, why couldn't they just kill him? After that he lay there dead, among us, for a couple of days. And we walked around there stepping on him and being lined up to go and eat. That was the regime, you lined up and got beaten when you went to eat this stale soup in order to survive.

In Asim's story power rituals are actualized through the humiliated self ("people just become like animals"). The reduction of one's individual value and the environment's disrespect for status positions from before the war become evident when Asim describes himself as an animal. The loss of identity in relation to one's position before the war, which Asim seems to depict, is a result of the humiliation of the self. Power rituals, as Asim renders them, are present in almost every segment of his description of the conditions concerning food distribution. The guards' ritualized interaction with the detainees, in which repetitive and frequent physical abuse occurred, is a clear example of power wielding that resulted in "that was the regime," in Asim's words.

Earlier research on life conditions in concentration camps shows that detainees often respond with resistance or adjustment and resignation to guards' power-wielding rituals (Bauman 1991; Luchterhand 1953; Megargee 2013a,b; Round 2006; Ryn 1990; Stein 2009; Suderland 2010; van Ree 2013). My research material suggests that after a stay in a concentration camp, social interaction rituals are often presented through symbolic dramatizations – usually with the aim of defending the particular narrative against alternative interpretations. Guards' power rituals and the detainees' responses to them are uttered in retrospect, in accordance with earlier research,

through resignation, resistance, or adjustment. The next section addresses the latter two in more detail.

### **Portrayals of resistance rituals**

How and where, in the empirical material, do we find resistance rituals? Goffman (1990[1961], 61-6) writes that the adjustment to a total institution offers some room for different individualistic ways to deal with it. I argue that resistance and status rituals can be distinguished in precisely those empirical examples that highlight the adjustment. According to several interviewees, they sometimes skipped meals to avoid getting physically abused. Rasim explains with irony and laughter:

... sometimes I didn't eat for 24 hours or 48 hours, not because I didn't want to, nor because of a lack of food, but because of the beating, the torture – that's why you skipped the meals.

Asim is angry when telling about food distribution, and Rasim's story is filled with irony and laughter. When actors recount in this way they, according to Potter (2007[1996]), they give extra emphasis to the story's arguments. Talking about food in this way gives this category the status of a charged symbol. Food is necessary for survival, but it also has a symbolic worth. In the above description, Asim does not portray food as nutrition that is bought on the lunch break to cope until you go home. Instead, the food intake is described as something shaped by repetitive humiliation rituals, power rituals but also resistance and status rituals (Collins 1992, 3-29; Collins 2004, 115-18, 284-88, 348-51; Weber 1968 [1922]).

Goffman (1990[1961], 61-6) writes about five methods of adaptation. 1) *Situation withdrawal* is about an inmate who draws attention only to events in his immediate environment. He is quiet, staring into the wall; he is dehumanized. 2) The *intransigent line* is characterized by the inmate's deliberate refusal to cooperate with the staff. 3) *Colonization* is about an inmate who settles into the new environment and is satisfied with the little reward given by the institution. 4) *Conversion* is characterized by an inmate who seems to take over the staffs' view of him, trying to play the part of an ideal prisoner so that the inmate thus imitates the staff regarding their language and behavior. 5) *Playing it cool* is the most common way to adapt, according to Goffman, and here inmates (depending on the current situation) choose one of the four mentioned methods for adaptation to cope with institution stress.

The portrayed power and humiliation rituals show that there was very little room for individuality in the camps. According to the interviewees, many prisoners chose as adaptation methods either situation withdrawal or playing it cool. Stories with an element of resistance rituals become visible if we analyze resistance as an answer to an imposed social control (Collins 1992, 3-29; Collins 2004, 297; Weber 1968 [1922]). The study's empirical material offers few examples of tales in which a hero comes forth and openly opposes the guards. The intransigent line, i.e., resistance, can be glimpsed in Rasim's remark about occasionally skipping meals to avoid being beaten. In other words, he refuses to cooperate with the guards because he does not want to carry out a joint project with them, i.e., the food distribution.

Rasim's description can be interpreted as a dramatization of the importance of remaining invisible to the guards. From the perspective of Collins (2004) and Goffman (1990[1959], 1990[1961], 1990[1963], 1982[1967]), being invisible means that the individual deliberately participated in the creation and the preservation of a humiliated self although in a general and diffuse way, avoiding the attention from the person who is humiliating him (in order to survive),

which in turn can be seen as a resistance ritual (Collins 1992, 3-29; Collins 2004, 297; Weber 1968 [1922]). The intransigent line together with playing it cool in the previous quote shows the resistance rituals becoming visible when prisoners reflect on how they coped with the hardships.

### **Portrayals of status rituals**

Becoming visible in the camp meant, on one hand, possible physical abuse resulting in death and, on the other, gaining a favorable position compared to other detainees, a status position. A happy and excited Rasim told me how he got some food from a guard he got to know in the camp:

The next time he came to guard duty, he called on me and gave me a quarter of a loaf of bread, a quarter of a loaf was a lot, it felt like a whole car. A quarter of a loaf of bread and some boiled beef which the guards had gotten to eat, fucking unbelievable, Goran (Rasim addressing the interviewer by name), then I got one cigarette. I started to gain hope that someone still watched over me or looked at me positively.

The cigarette smoking is an important part of the culture in many societies (Collins 2004: 297-344). The importance of cigarettes in war society and the scarcity of cigarettes during the war always come up in casual war narratives in previous research. Andreas (2008), Nordstrom (2004), Hedlund (2014), and Titeca et al. (2011), all of whom studied war society in Bosnia, Congo, Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda, South Africa, Angola, and Sierra Leone, write how this important piece of culture has the duality of standing for something else. For example, cigarettes and cigarette smuggling are usually interactive with and connected to murder and prostitution.



Rasim is a passionate smoker; during the interview, he explained the ritualized pleasure this gift, in the shape of a cigarette, brought to his life in the camp (Collins 2004, 297-344). Other detainees used cigarettes as trade goods. Nesim told me how his wife had sent him a package through a guard (containing cigarettes, food, and money). The symbolic value of these sacred objects (package, cigarettes, food, and money) participates in different rituals, such as in power rituals (those with power can get cigarettes, food, money, or packages); this in turn creates access to other symbols, which in turn contributes to the creation of, for example, status rituals (Collins 1992, 3-29; Collins 2004, 115-18, 284-88, 348-51; Weber 1968 [1922]). Namely, detainees who received packages, cigarettes, food, or money also gained a special status position in the camp.

On status rituals, Collins (2004, 347) writes: “On the dimension of status rituals, persons differ in how close they are to the center of attention and emotional entrainment: the person who is always at the center, those close by or sometimes in the center, those further out, marginal members, non-members.” The status rituals, described above, are products of an experienced and subsequently portrayed everyday interactions that can be singled out analytically from Rasim’s story (Knottnerus 2005, 1997; Sell et al. 2000; Thornburg et al. 2007). There emerges a recognition of a valuable identity (“someone still watched over me or looked at me positively”), emotional commitment (“fucking unbelievable, Goran”), and different charged symbols (“a quarter of a loaf of bread,” “a whole car,” “one cigarette”).

The interviewees occasionally mentioned cooperation between guards and prisoners. There was the smuggling of cigarettes and biscuits. The arrangement was that some of the detainees sold the merchandise on behalf of the guards, and sometimes they betrayed others who had money, which resulted in guards robbing and sometimes killing them at night (Basic 2007, 41). Thus, not only status degradation but also status elevation in terms of being someone with

connections or someone owning attractive goods may, according to the interviews, be dangerous.

Nesim dramatizes the interaction between guards and detainees:

A pack of biscuits and a pack of cigarettes with the risk of being discovered and then they could come at night to kill you. They wanted money, that's why it was best to lay low.

Nesim's narrative is characterized by his advice on how to survive such a distressing situation.

He says, "that's why it was best to lay low," which can be seen as a marker saying that, depending on the current situation, a detainee could choose if he will withdraw from the situation or come forward and interact (for example, with a guard who receives detainees packages).

Sometimes, the cooperation with the guards resembled the adjustment approach described above, namely conversion. Ivo says:

Lako (a fellow detainee whom Ivo knew before the war) became completely insane. He determined the order in our room and when we should eat ... he behaved worse than a guard.

Luchterhand (1953) analyzed 52 interviews with former concentration camp detainees after the Second World War. In his analysis, he focuses on those interactive patterns created in interpersonal relations during time spent in concentration camps and retold after the war. More specifically, Luchterhand focuses on described interactions between guards and prisoners and the prisoners' descriptions of sharing food with other prisoners and stealing from them. The study shows that camp detainees depicted the others (criticized inmates) as if they changed their personality, adopted the guards' values as their own, and identified with the guards.

Ivo's story reveals a similar conversion noticed by Goffman and Luchterhand; it's about Lako's taking over the guards' view regarding his humiliated personality and trying to play the role of the perfect prisoner. Ivo seems to have seen this as a status marker or pure madness ("he became completely insane").

The detainees' balancing act between different ways of adjustment, in which various charged objects are dramatized in their stories and in that reveals status rituals. According to Collins' perspective (2004, 79-101, 150-51, 183-222), this balancing could be used in future rituals, such as trade rituals (using the cigarettes you get). This example shows that even enemies can cooperate but that doing so requires interaction, role-taking, and defining common sacred objects.

De-ritualization, i.e., the break from participating in ritualized practice related to disasters, is often symbolically dramatized in retrospect. In these retold dramatizations, also a variety of rituals, such as power rituals, humiliation rituals, resistance rituals, and status rituals, are presented. My study shows that in the concentration camp regime and routines, for the detainees who are restraining themselves without openly displaying resistance, their way of explaining and drawing attention to power, humiliation, status, and resistance is created and re-created in everyday interactions.

### **Conclusion: Concentration Camp Rituals**

During the war in northwestern Bosnia, civilians were direct targets – and even participants – in acts of war. In this article, I have analyzed narratives of de-ritualization, humiliation rituals, power rituals, resistance rituals, and status rituals. Previous studies have analyzed the survival strategies in concentration camps (Luchterhand 1953; Round 2006; Ryn 1990; Sunderland 2010;

Stein 2009; van Ree 2013). Researchers have emphasized the importance of detainees' stories but have not used stories about rituals as a starting point or interpreted interview responses as a defense of one's self or a continued resistance.

The analyzed empirical examples revealed how the camp detainees' victim identity is created, re-created, and retained in contrast to 'the others' – the camp guards. The camp detainees' portrayal of their victim identity presents their humiliated self through dissociation from the camp guards. The detainees' new (altered) moral career is presented as a result of the imprisonment at the camp and the repetitive humiliation and power rituals. The importance of the camp guards was emphasized in these rituals, in which the detainees' new selves, characterized by moral dissolution and fatigue, emerged (Collins 1992, 3-29; Collins 2004; Goffman 1990[1959], 1990[1961], 1990[1963], 1982[1967]; Weber 1968 [1922]).

In addition, detainees reproduced the image of morally wrong behavior that was created and re-created within their identity work. The humiliated morality created in these conversations can be seen as a product of interaction rituals. It can be altered, created anew, reconstructed, and redefined. It seems that moral constructions materialize through reinforcements in the descriptions, such as recognizing and/or displaying emotions.

The interviewees' rejections of the guards' actions and their forced "camp detainee" status could be interpreted as an expression of de-ritualization, leading away from their own earlier experiences. The subsequently illustrated myriad everyday interactions, which can be distinguished analytically in the interviewees' stories, expose rituals of humiliation, power, resistance, and status. Through these, we see the interviewees' loss of identity, others' recognition of their identity, emotional involvement, and different charged symbols (Bauman 1991; Knottnerus 2005, 1997; Langer 1991, 1996; Luchterhand 1953; Megargee 2013a,b; Round

2006; Ryn 1990; Sell et al. 2000; Stein 2009; Suderland 2010; Thornburg et al. 2007; van Ree 2013).

The portrayed rituals of humiliation and power show that space for individuality in the camps was heavily restricted; still, the rituals of resistance and status, as well as adjusting to the living conditions in the camps, seem to have generated a certain space for individualization. The ability to resist and possess some minor degree of control appeared to give the detainees a sense of honor and self-esteem, not least after the war.

Previous studies have analyzed the efficient and industrialized killing of other people (Bauman 1991; Langer 1991; Megargee 2013a,b). In my study, the symbolic rituals for killing the individuality of former concentration camp detainees is analyzed. These descriptions must be reviewed to understand these situations. It is important to evaluate the social consequences inherent in violence rituals during war – and for this, researchers need to be close to the empirical material.

This article has analyzed the prisoners' perspective. It is however important to study the stories of both detainees and guards. By telling their stories, detainees can restore their status and achieve a certain level of self-esteem and recognition of their identities. Their narrative today is a form of continued resistance. The guards, by telling their stories, can explain to themselves and to an audience; they can show their emotions. Without this type of process, the detainees risk living an existence without peace and serenity, and the guards risk permanently being bound by their committed atrocities.

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