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# Self-Narratives of Resilience:
# Contingency and the Weakness of Identification

Abstract:

This article, written at the intersection of social philosophy and anthropology, explores a mode of self-identification found in the narratives of the older generation of Lithuania who experienced or only witnessed the coercion of an occupational regime. This mode is named the "weak identification" and prescribed to forms of resilience. It is evident in life stories where the narrator focuses not on herself but on another person – one who is neither famous nor powerful, but a publicly unknown contemporary embodying the vulnerability of the epoch. To explain this mode of identification and self-narration, several conceptions of social philosophy are involved, primarily those addressing the modality of social ties (R.G. Collingwood, E. Laclau, G. Agamben, etc.). The article argues that this form of self-identification as a mode of social and political resilience serves as a rejection of hegemonic aspirations to power and develops unique mode of self-narration with a replaced center.

Keywords:

weak-identification, resilience, contingency, self-narration

Often, when we talk about nostalgia for the Soviet era, we tend to oversimplify the identity mechanisms of the older generation, without noticing the extremely rich variety of identification models. This imposition of nostalgia, which smacks of mockery (though it could probably be applied to a small part of those who remember the occupation times well), is neither accurate nor socially valuable. The oldest generation in Lithuania demonstrates much more diverse and complex attitudes toward themselves and their social environments. These attitudes have even taken on paradoxical, ironic, or conversely, very direct forms, due to many twists and turns of thought and experience that most of them had to undergo in their lives. By seeing this variety of identification modes in the narratives of the older generation and understanding the contingent reasons for that diversity, we can also rethink the contemporary spread of current identity models, their spontaneous flow, and attempts at their change.

In this text, I will discuss one mode of self-identification that can be attributed to the generation which lived the majority of their lives under the Soviet occupation. This model is more complex and harder to notice: it is the weak identification observable in narratives that reflect a posture of social, civic, and political resilience.

These narratives stand out due to their specific perspective of focusing on the other person. This is a frequent feature in auto-narration in general, but these cases are slightly different: this "other" who becomes the center of a story is a person without power, or one who refuses to participate in any public, cultural, or political processes. In such stories, the narrative "I" has withdrawn to the position of an observer (the story is not about them), and the hero who is spoken about is a real person, a contemporary who is not a hero, and who never tried to become one, nor thought about themselves as they would about hero.

This strange form of auto-narration tells us about the relationship between identity and power (presented as inevitable and necessary in many theories). I will explore this question with the help of not only relevant philosophical theories (Robin G. Collingwood, Ernesto Laclau, Judith Butler, Allison Weir), and research on resistance attitudes during the occupation period (Tomas Vaiseta, Nerija Putinaitė, Gintautas Mažeikis, Przemysław Bursztyka, Alexei Yurchak), but also by episodes of reflection from anthropological memory research.

The intersection of social philosophy and anthropology, which in turn includes oral auto-narratives as material, provides the best approach to this question. Since

reflections in this context are not solely from the perspective of philosophical theories, they allow us to notice small discrepancies that adjust any stylization or classification. On the other hand, because this analysis is not performed from the perspective of sociology or Soviet-era history, I can focus on the processes and concepts of self-narration, normativity, and power and their interrelations, rather than on separate historical facts.

## The Concept of Identity and its Social Context

The weak mode of identification, or refusal of any engaged collective identity, is only one, rather peripheral way of collectivity and (or) communality. A weak identity does not refer to a person's weakness; on the contrary, it demonstrates a person's ability to defy the narrative impulse to present oneself according to the prevailing normative models of auto-narration. It is possible that this mode of identity is practiced more often in post-Soviet spaces and possibly in other previously occupied countries. Therefore, it is valuable to detect and rethink it in the Lithuanian contexts. This form of self-identification is important to recognize and keep in mind for reasons that have been pondered by Lithuanian philosophers and historians for several decades. These thinkers, in one way or another (but always critically), have pointed out the dominant approaches to self-identification. The weak mode of self-identification establishes identities of a slightly different type than those typically discussed in philosophy and sociology in the first half of the twentieth century, when the theme of identity was created and widely discussed.

Many of Lithuanian philosophers have noticed the absence of a different type of identity that does not limit or cancels the possibility of innovation. Leonidas Donskis and Zygmunt Bauman referred to the political communities of Eastern Europe as "communities of forgetting": we have "communities of forgetting" guided by "the tragic play of imagination building monuments to itself."[1] Donskis and Bauman describe Eastern Europe, and particularly Lithuania, as a place where identification models are strongest and most rigid, grounded solely in the scheme of what is and what is not acceptable "for us," rejecting anything that does not meet our strict norms.

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1)    Bauman and Donskis, *Moral Blindness*, 127.

The Community of Forgetting creates a purified utopian past, offering an uncritical heroic (or more often, victimized) self, in the background of which "the sword of willful forgetting falls on those who remind us of our weaknesses and vices."[2]

Nerija Putinaitė seems to continue this line of thought: "Such an identity does not admit any weaknesses or mistakes, and has no room for novelty."[3] This skeptical attitude of Lithuanian scholars toward the most visible forms of identification is quite understandable. However, it is worth examining the diversity of these models and noticing the more complex ways of identification. In contemporary Lithuania, models of identification still depend on different understandings of resistance and resilience, their modes, and variations.

A weak identity is one that dissolves itself in observation: it is an identity of a different subject than it was produced in times of modernity; this model we see in the stories of people who never fit within the norms and therefore do not create a narrative subject of power when talking about themselves. In the posthumous book of Donskis, a collection of shorter essays from his last years, there is a brilliant story about nobility. Giving an example of a personal conversation with an animal rights activist, Donskis explains how and why he recognized this person as having a noble nature: the person did not steer the conversation toward himself; he was only interested in the lives of others, especially those who are unknown and invisible.[4] In this way, Donskis succinctly and precisely reveals the power and attractiveness of weak identification, as an identity formed not through the reflection and highlighting of its boundaries, but through a special condensation of what is around. Another Lithuanian sociologist and philosopher, Vytautas Kavolis, understood the process of identification in very similar way. According to him, identity should be understood "not as a kernel of a nut surrounded by a hard protective shell, but as a meeting point of many cultural flows, where the enduring meaning of that individual's or collective's existence condenses… . Today's identity: a point of condensation with a unique mechanism of transformation."[5] In this Kavolis' statement one thing is clear: the only way to think

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2) Ibid.

3) Putinaitė, *Šiaurės Atėnų tremtiniai*, 211.

4) Donskis, *Man skauda*, 76–79.

5) Kavolis "Liberalaus galvojimo erdvėje," 43.

about any kind of individual or collective identity today would be trying to discover some coinciding features of this "mechanism" of condensation and transformation.

Reflections on identity often encounter aporias or even paradoxes. On the one hand, identity is one of those concepts whose thematization creates the phenomenon itself; on the other hand, identity is most often thematized from the perspective of what it is not (from the sense of its lack). Here, I want to highlight another aporia – the social strength of weak narrative identity. I will explain a bit about the distinction between weak and strong identification processes. The maximally strong self is clearly recognizable in auto-narratives that focus on marking one's boundaries, emphasizing one's distinctiveness, and public image. The narrating self in the stories of strong narrative identification is easily repeatedly described (for example, in retelling), defined by established and declared characteristics, shown as having clear principles and views. The weak self, on the contrary, is one that hardly maintains boundaries (usually, this person does not even feel the need to maintain them), surrenders to situational transformation, and constantly shifts attention to another person or another being, or environment in general. This difference, which takes many forms in practice, is similar to the distinction between first-person identity and third-person identity, given by Allison Weir. Weir explores the difference, or rather the transition, between these two distinct concepts of identity, seeing the two poles of the identity scale in the theories of Charles Taylor and Michel Foucault: "While it can be argued that Taylor and Foucault are thematizing two very different aspects of identity – Taylor focuses on first-person, subjective, affirmed identity, and Foucault on third-person, or ascribed, category identity – in practice, these two are very much intertwined."[6] The mode of first-person identification raises the question "Who am I?"[7] On the contrary, identification with the "third person" is governed by the idea that "there is no pregiven objective truth of the self."[8] In narrative practice, this mode can be identified by the conscious or unconscious refusal to explain oneself in terms of reified and naturalized social norms and principles. Such a narrator tells a story without becoming the center of it. This becomes especially evident when a person describes an event that is painfully remembered or marks a turning point

6)    Weir, *Identities and Freedom*, 15.

7)    Ibid., 25

8)    Ibid.

in her life: even in these episodes – and especially in them – the narrative focuses on observations of the whole situation rather than on one's own emotions, thoughts, or decisions. It could be noticed that these two types of identification may have different relationship with the normative social context: the strong (the first-person) identity adopts social norms without questioning, while the third-person identity is based on reflection and careful adaptation to norms, often checking and measuring them not on oneself, but on other people.

Another possible typification of the identity process, which also reveals a certain paradox, is the distinction between vertical and horizontal vectors of identity formation. This is especially emphasized when it comes to communal identity (which is, as believed, established by centered, vertical relations), and collective identity (which is supposedly established by horizontal interpersonal actions). It is worth mentioning the classic distinction observed by Louis Dumont: reviewing the history of anthropology, he identifies the distinction between circulation of values in modern society and pre-modern community as the distinction between network (horizontal circulation) and pyramid (centered vertical circulation).[9] The way in which values are acquired refers to the logic of personal identification, which has more than one variation even in the same social environment.

A centered (vertical) way of circulation of values is usually implemented, or at least proposed, by religious or strongly ideologized political communities. One of the clearest examples of such a model is Martin Buber's attempt to take this vertical identification as a practical model for a non-homogeneous community. This attempt is maybe worth remembering today; but it also helps us understand that this model is simply impossible, similar to giving the shape of a cube to water. In his practical-social writings, Buber describes his vision of a new community as an attempt to subordinate the horizontal dimension to the vertical one. Therefore, the community is built not through horizontal relations among individuals but through the metaphysical center:

> The real essence of community is undoubtedly to be found in the – manifest or hidden – fact that it has a center. The real origin of community is only to be understood by the fact that its members have a common rela-

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9)    Dumont, "On Value."

tionship to the center, superior to all other relations: the circle is drawn from the radii, not from the points of the periphery. And undoubtedly the primal reality of the center cannot be known if it is not known as transparent into the divine. But the more earthly, the more creaturely, the more bound a character the circle takes, so much the truer, the more transparent it is. The social belongs to it. Not as subdivision, but as the world of authentication: in which the truth of the center proves itself.[10]

This theoretical model is interesting precisely because of its abstractness and apparent impossibility of implementation. This clear, schematic (even geometric) image of a perfect community, even if we do not think it can be realized or do not believe in such a possibility, still allows us to ask theoretical questions: What exactly prevents its realization? What processes or elements of social life would always hinder it, and are these elements necessary constituents of society? To be fair, Buber himself called this theory "utopian socialism," emphasizing not the religious, but the social nature of this model – a certain remote communication through a recognized common value. This utopian project, articulated by Buber in the middle of the twentieth century and later explained in more than one of his works, was criticized by Emmanuel Levinas. Essentially, Levinas disagreed with the idea that this relationship of maximum respect and responsibility toward the other does not stem from a newly discovered ethical stance, but from an unattainable sociality which returns society to a pre-democratic order, unregulated by modern political systems.[11]

We can often recognize this model given as an aspiration, sometimes even an imperative, when it comes to communities, not only religious but also ethnic or, especially, professional communities (as in big enterprises or cultural institutions). In such cases, the emphasis is usually placed on trivialities: on a common narrative which supposedly produces common values and establishes a smooth relationship with another who shares those values. Returning to Buber, we can notice that his purified model is based solely on the synchronicity of relationships. In this new kind of community, only recent relationships matter, and not previous or historical iden-

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10)    Buber, "Social Framework of Cultural Creativity," 98.

11)    Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence,* 112–14.

tifications, as if there were no centuries-long conflicts, no future expectations and the corresponding manipulations. But the most important diachronic dimension ignored by this conception is the normative context, which is never created in a particular situation or a series of situations but includes a much longer period of common life.

On the other hand, the subordination of interpersonal relationships to obedience to a higher metaphysical being can be easily transformed into the subordination of interpersonal relationships to political power. Gintautas Mažeikis describes the close tie between religious and ideological interpersonal relationships based on verticality (the social and the axiological): "religious rituals are replaced by ideological rituals, or religious rituals merge with ideological ones, for example, religious celebrations for ideological purposes. In both cases, the verticality of transcendence is highlighted, only in different ways: holiness comes either from God or from an ideologized past."[12] In all cases of establishing the vertical relationship, both religious and political, we find the same concept of human nature, which, in vertical, centered communality, is understood as having a single metaphysical, intemporal origin.

One of the very first and the brightest theory that rejected such a concept of human nature was one of Robin G. Collingwood, who proposed to change the concept of human nature to the epoch – a multifaceted and inextricably dense maze of social relations. The concept of the epoch is one of the most complex in the philosophy of history and is defined differently by various theories. Collingwood offers perhaps the most detailed discussion of this concept, which has influenced subsequent methods and trends (for example, methodology of micro-history). For Collingwood, the epoch means a plane or, rather, a tangle created by various social tensions, conflicting interests, actions, and conflicts. This tangle holds fast every thinking and acting of separate individuals. Every human being, every decision made by someone, and every historical event are connected not merely to a few, but to an unlimited number of other historical events, actors, and cultural and social factors. This complexity forms a unity, which Collingwood calls an epoch.[13] It is precisely such an understanding of an epoch that is necessary for micro-historical and micro-political research, or for a comparison of different epochs or their individual elements.

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12)  Mažeikis, *Kritinė teorija ir kultūros politika,* 212.
13)  Collingwood, "Reality as History," 189.

Now, I would like to draw attention to Collingwood's reflections on modality: his rather strange modal observations are crucial to the further argument of this article. Collingwood discovered in Plato's text (*The Republic*) the strange distinction between two "necessities" – "mathematical" and "erotic" – the first of which he identifies as the necessity as in natural sciences, and the second as the necessity as a necessity encountered in the historical field.[14] By invoking this especially scenic of Plato's distinctions, Collingwood speaks of social (not naturalistic) necessity that limits the freedom of every human decision. This is the medium of modality in which the humanitarians operate: multiple contingent assemblages of daily life in which neither complete freedom nor strict determination of a person's act or an interpersonal situation is possible. In terms of modality, social life exists between necessity (understood in Kantian categories) and accidentality: it is the contingency. Thus, a scholar analyzing this plane (Collingwood is primarily concerned with historians), formulates not apodictic, not problematic, but assertoric statements – statements about reality that are neither laws nor hypotheses.

Collingwood's concept of epoch is primarily applied to historical research: the historian, in researching the past, formulates statements characterized by this peculiar social necessity, which arises from a dense social structure and the multilayer network of human relations. In this text, I am not talking about the modality of scientific retellings of historians, but about the modal predispositions of the self-narration processes. Every narrative, not only the scientific one, is aimed at one or another plane of modality. This plane, when only noticed in a story, reveals the relationship which the storyteller sees and perceives between the things being told and the reality (in the ontological sense), how much the storyteller universalizes what is being described, how much they charge it with (again, universal) moral attitudes, and how much they perceive their story as a description of a singular situation. Collingwood, in arguing that history (like human sciences in general) also focuses on the level of some kind of necessity, discovers human, relatively free necessity as a tangle of overlapped social relations or, in other words, as contingency. Perhaps most later theories of social philosophy, analyzing the concept of identity, are guided by this concept of the social whole. This dense tangle of interactions is exactly what Hannah Arendt calls the "already

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14) Ibid., 198.

existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting ills and intentions."[15] This "already existing" web, due to its density and unpredictability, can either support the particular action or unexpectedly prevent it from being fulfilled. Because of its density, this contingent network imitates necessity, but due to its unpredictability, it is in no way subject to apodictic formulations. This is a plane of contingency, which is nevertheless very far from the modality of an accident.

This model of society prioritizes neither horizontal nor vertical relations; it is a rejection of an orderly, explainable, comprehensible image of interpersonal ties (as verticality or horizontality). However, this small shift in modal categories, placing contingency closer to necessity, makes this model of social interactions complex: it allows exactly as much freedom of choice as the epoch with all its dominant and alternative meanings permits. Any narrativization, whether artistic, documental, autobiographical, or even academic is controlled and shaped by the density of the epoch and the multidirectional circulation of its interactions. This enables us to reconstruct the details (in no way not the whole), of the particular time and place through the stories of those periods. Unlike Collingwood, who discusses the epoch as a field of historical inquiry, Judith Butler makes a similar point when speaking of the narrative subject:

> Yet there is no "I" that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no "I" that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning… . The reason for this is that the "I" has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms.[16]

We cannot think of ourselves in isolation from a normative context: "The subject is subordinated to norms, and the norms are subjectivating, that is, they give an ethical shape to the reflexivity of this emerging subject."[17] It would be a mistake to think that

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15) Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184.

16) Butler, *Account of Oneself*, 7–8.

17) Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, 43.

Butler proclaims the complete determinism of the narrative subject, or its full subordination to the social norms and requirements that specific times and societies lay on social roles. Butler's thinking fits well with what we have called the contingency of social relations – a conception found in the works of Collingwood, Arendt, and many others. Butler themselves seeks ways to mitigate the inevitable subjugation of a person's act of self-reflection to a normative context, which they explore in their writings on vulnerability, resilience, and resistance.

## The Mode of Weak Identification: Powerlessness and Alternative Normativity

During the occupation period, many of strange attitudes, behaviors, and examples of creativity flourished in Lithuania as responses to the ideological coercion of the time, forms of resilience practiced by society and its individual members. Different forms of resilience were deeply embedded in the style of Lithuanian Soviet-era arts, public texts, official communication, and everyday encounters. The research of these modes is important because they reveal a cultural code that, even after long-term demolition, could not be fully eradicated. Here, I am not focusing on irony in its various forms but rather on a little bit related posture: a unique form of self-identification in which an individual no longer believes in the possibility of constructing an adequate public image but instead but instead bears witness to another person's life. This specific form of self-identification produces a non-declarative identity with a displaced narrative focus.

Tomas Vaiseta, analyzing the typical attitudes in late Soviet society, comes very close to this type of self-identification when discussing the phenomenon of rumors, a form of information exchange widely discussed by researchers during the Soviet era.[18] Vaiseta refers to the circulation of anecdotes, tracing their etymology: something unpublished, unrecorded, lacking a specific author, or clear trajectory of dissemination. He notes, "We could say that during the Soviet era, anecdotes were getting closer to their original meaning – by means of humor, discussing, reacting to, and interpreting the side of life that was hidden or forbidden to criticize."[19]

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18)    Vaiseta, *Nuobodulio visuomenė,* 155.

19)    Ibid.

Vaiseta describes public gatherings – such as cultural events or performances – where people who did not know each other suddenly experienced the same emotional wave related to an alternative sense of community. He terms this phenomenon a "public space of feelings," presenting it as a "non-ironic structure" that "did not deny or offer a real alternative to the official public space but only supplemented its performative dimension." Vaiseta qualifies this phenomenon as para-structural:[20] it forms itself near the main structure and does not create its own, alternative structure. Perhaps the most significant feature of this space, according to Vaiseta, is that "the uncertainty and spontaneity of the public space of feelings allowed people to connect when there was no prior trust between them."[21] These spontaneous quasi-gatherings of people, who did not know each other, were not based on declared views or beliefs. Such spaces were not created or consolidated but were retrospectively identified as having emerged in their ephemeral form before vanishing immediately.

The identification and description of this non-ironic para-structural space of emotions helps us better understand certain aspects of auto-narratives. It seems that such narratives could have existed (or rather, existed only in the past tense) without physically gathering or encountering other members. They did not gather at a single center of power, spiritual or political, as in Buber's model. These auto-narratives focus paradoxically neither on their own power nor on the power of a person on whom the narration is focused.

Often, participants of various research projects based on life stories demonstrate unique access to their memory: they find a space for another person's story when talking about their own experiences, because they find it more significant and eloquent. In one of the research projects, where we spoke with the older generation of Vilnius residents, three auto-narratives from mutually unrelated people (who did not know each other) all revolved around the same person. The man on whom the older generation of Vilnius residents began to tell stories, in his life, avoided any representation of power, consciously eluding the prevailing norms. He was a poet who was exiled by the Soviet government, as legends tell it, because of one poem. Relatives of the poet clarify that it was actually an entire notebook of poems that led

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20) Ibid., 180.
21) Ibid., 181.

to his exile; this episode shows us clearly how the narrative that spread about him was inevitably stylized. After ten years, he returned to Lithuania. He studied German, became a translator, and lived in poverty. According to one version of the story, he lived modestly, used to translate classical works, and sell them to other translators (because any work signed by him could not be published). However, these differently told, stylized stories are nothing more than legends about him.

What is especially interesting is that no one was asked to speak about this person. Moreover, the storytellers did not know each other; they simply belonged to the same generation and, relatively, to a similar geographical location. Yet, they all found time to tell his story or even recite his verses. He possessed the power to gather others by radically distancing himself from any conception of political power, from any pursuit of self, creative ambitions, or the desire to become somebody. It is hard to determine how many such unrecognized leaders existed in occupied Lithuania, but certainly not just one or two. The most famous was Justinas Mikutis (also a former exile), respected and valued primarily by visual artists, writers, participants in active resistance, and generally, by everyone who was inimical to the Soviet system. Lithuanian art historian Odeta Žukauskienė presents summarized memories of Mikutis, in which he is remembered as "a wandering sage." "I had never heard such speaking; it was new and deeply shocking," recalls the artist interviewed by Žukauskienė.[22] Mikutis became a symbol of resilience or even silent resistance. It is evident that during the period of occupation, quite many such symbol-persons were created in stories – almost all of them were modest individuals, previous exiles, some of them homeless tramps, often officially unrecognized poets, painters, philosophers, and sometimes, but not necessarily, drunkards. Teenagers and young people carried unpublished poems (or poems later published in some more liberal magazines and torn out) by young, officially unrecognized poets, often with tragic fates and hippie lifestyles (such as Rimas Burokas, Rolandas Mosėnas, etc.). Paradoxically, detachment from social norms may have been exactly what attracted others, creating very strange, invisible communities that were similar to the spontaneously appearing and disappearing para-structural spaces of emotional communality described by Vaiseta.

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22)   Žukauskienė, "An Aberrant Poser. Mikutis."

These self-narratives, in which there is almost no self, are told from the perspective of an eyewitness who was not even a direct observer. These narratives recall and partially explain a few attitudes described in more or less classical philosophical texts. I will mention a few of them here. First, this is an attitude of the "knight of faith" in Søren Kierkegaard's (Johannes de Silentio) *Fear and Trembling*. Another attitude described in philosophy is the "complete witness" (the new ethical subject) in Giorgio Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz*. Possibly more similar attitudes are described in Western ethical tradition, going back much earlier, but these two examples clearly show us a few important things: 1) such a self-denying account emerges as an exceptional attitude when thinking about ethics (in Kierkegaard's case, the attitude of the knight of faith cannot be called ethical, this is a different stage in his conception – yet it remains a consideration of an ethical plane); and 2) this attitude is distinguished from all the normative ethical attitudes by its modality – this attitude refuses universalization and does not propose any kind of new normativity. Here is a quote of Kierkegaard describing the knight of faith:

> The true knight of faith is a witness, never the teacher, and therein lies the profound humanity, which has much more to it than this trifling participation in the woes and welfare of other people that is extolled under the name of sympathy, although, on the contrary, it is nothing more than vanity. He who desires only to be a witness confesses thereby that no man, not even the most unimportant man, needs another's participation or is to be devalued by it in order to raise another's value.[23]

This attitude of "only to be a witness" is neither hierarchical nor anti-hierarchical, it stands beyond any political or social position. The last sentence of this description of the knight of faith reveals an almost impossible posture that can only be practiced through a narrative (a testimony) which is much different from the smooth and captivating narrative of one's life adventures: a narrative that will almost always be deemed a failure because it does not fulfill its most important function – not aiming at power. The knight of faith does not seek power, does not value it, and possesses neither the

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23)    Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling," 80.

power of the humiliated and oppressed (this is also a kind of power that could be narratively attainable), nor the power of the humiliator or oppressor.

Agamben, continuing his argument on desubjectivation as shame and the transition to a new subjectivity (as a process of resubjectivation), states: "Testimony takes place in the non-place of articulation… . And it is precisely because the relation (or, rather, non-relation) between the living being and the speaking being has the form of shame, of being reciprocally consigned to something that cannot be assumed by a subject, that the ethos of this disjunction can only be testimony."[24] The narration-testimony described by Agamben occurs when the narrator, who experience absolute impossibility to tell what he remembers, is forced to tell – to speak in the place of someone who can no longer speak. This is, as Agamben shows, an act of very strange modality: it is impossible to narrate because of the experienced shame (desubjectivation), and it is necessary to narrate precisely because of the same thing: because of the necessity of resubjectivation. Then the story becomes pure testimony, without any claim to personal power. In Agamben's theory, this radical act of narration is not a theoretical assumption but is found in the written testimonies of Auschwitz survivors. These testimonies have different narrative forms and quite different narrative content. This philosophical reflection by Agamben is based on the observation of a specific modality in these texts, or a specific relationship to power, that reveals a new narrative and ethical subject.

Returning to the earlier example of another person's story becoming the story-teller's story, it is impossible not to notice the similarity. First, because this is not a story about a hero; on the contrary, it seems that interest in him was raised by his unheroic attitude, his complete loneliness, and his refusal to join any group of society. This anti-normative stance does not introduce a different normativity, an alternative normativity. This case also resembles Agamben's example in that the witnesses are telling, not retelling (because no primary narrative exists). We can recognize this narrative as fundamentally different not by how one or another specific attitude is negated or replaced by its opposite, but by the absence of the image of power that such an identification creates. The very existence of these philosophers, poets, and artists – who were not recognized by the system and denied its standards – created a community

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24)   Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz,* 130.

of individuals, gathering those who did not join any other official groups or mindsets. This community is somewhat similar to the perfect ethical community sketched by Alphonso Lingis: it is found when "an imperative is recognized in the face of the other," where the other, the stranger, turns to us not only with convictions and decisions, but also with fragility, vulnerability, and mortality: "One enters into community not by affirming oneself and one's forces but by exposing oneself to expenditure at a loss, to sacrifice. Community forms in a movement by which one exposes oneself to the other, to forces and powers outside oneself, to death and to the others who die."[25]

With the rethinking of alternative forms of self-identification, the very concept of identity has also changed. Lingis shows us this kind of community in which power is not what unites (and, accordingly, what unites is not the will to power). In such a community, identity practices change; here we should talk about the kind of identity that Weir calls "transformative identifications." This transformative identification, which occurs when I encounter another person's life mode, fate, and posture, is rarely identified as a way of establishing identity. Weir interprets this type of identification as an alternative to "identifications of sameness and agreement": "When identity politics rest on an assumed sameness and agreement, the effect is a silencing that is, in fact, a form of dis-identification: I keep my disagreements, my questions, my discomfort to myself. The identity of the 'we,' then, is a false identity, based on an agreement and a sameness that do not in fact exist."[26]

The collective identity is not, and should not be, unifying; rather, it is a polyphonic choral work, performed more by listening to others, than by singing in a unique manner. On the other hand, it sounds more beautiful the more overtones are retained. If these different overtones are not allowed to manifest – if they are removed from the life of the community, leaving only the main tone (as a theoretical definition of a group) – then the timbre disappears, and only the quantitative dimension remains. This is likely why the first step of identification is so difficult: everyone is afraid of losing something that does not fully fit into the defining concept. To lose this residual of one's own subjectivity seems most unjust and painful. This non-narrative residual is not some mystified "I," or a mysterious existential depth. It is this potential that

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25)    Lingis, *Who Have Nothing in Common*, 12.

26)    Weir, *Identities and Freedom*, 82.

I see as providing the opportunity to tell very different stories about myself. Always, when telling my "true" story, I am aware of the possibility of different stories – born in different contexts of social normativity. As we have already mentioned, Judith Butler explains that the subject is never fully represented by an auto-narrative or any other form of presentation. Another important aspect in Butler's theory is that this real-izing the situationality of my "I" (or, realizing that this "I" would be different in other circumstances) is precisely what creates my ethical attitude toward others: "I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others."[27]

There is one more reason why the older generation of Lithuania, or at least a small part of it, feels the impossibility of a narrative account of themselves especially strongly: they recognize and try to avoid empty declarations remembered from times of living in a totalitarian state. The shadow of those declarations haunts any possible sense of communality or collectivity. These people avoid speaking collectively, in one voice, to feel themselves collectively as a social body.

However, this non-belonging to the system does not mean active opposition to it, only disconnection. Disengagement means giving up not only the content but also, or perhaps primarily, the form of identification. Adam Michnik mentions this adoption of the totalitarian form as the biggest mistake from a practical perspective, as he expressed in one of his prison letters in the mid-1980s. Michnik believed "that totalitarian dicta-torships are doomed. By now, no one gives credence to their mendacious promises," but "there still remains their ability to infect us with their own hatred and contempt. Such infection must be resisted with our whole strength."[28] Arendt makes a very similar point, saying that violence (as a means of force) can destroy power but cannot replace it.[29] Here, we recognize the same distinction between power, violence, and force: violence may accompany force, but in that case, it is not power anymore (because power can be only persuasive). This is precisely what Michnik expressed in the given quote.

The difference between power and strength is important when trying to under-stand the difference between resistance and resilience. At the end of the Soviet era,

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27)    Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 84.

28)    Schell, "Introduction," xix.

29)    Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 202.

the system did not possess power anymore, it was a pure force. Thus, it is important to notice that the posture we are discussing is not a resistance posture because (for example, it does not have a clearly articulated enemy); there is no expressed hatred for the dominant power or system in it. We could say that this is what distinguishes identification with attitudes of resilience from identification with groups and activities of resistance. The ability to disidentify with strongly suggested models turns into a caution that makes people avoid identifying with opposing contents as well. Any identification with false power (actually, the force) is avoided: identification with the narratives that accumulate it is avoided without a trace. Therefore, one avoids adopting the motives and logic of those narratives when telling a story about oneself.

## Non-Hegemonic Narration as Witnessing

Hannah Arendt depicts the relationship between articulation of thought and human action as a power structure – this connection, culturally refined over time, reveals that every action accompanied by narrative is an action directed toward power. Arendt distinguishes between activities in which speech plays an essential role and those in which speech is merely supplement.[30] Political action exemplifies the former, being a type of action where speech (narration) is equally engaged and directed toward power. Narrating oneself under harsh political conditions, such as during occupation or within a totalitarian system, is necessarily also a political act.

It would seem that no self-narrative can fully escape its dependence on normative frameworks or its orientation toward power accumulation. On the other hand, autobiographical narratives themselves often challenge such dictates of norm and power – particularly those narratives that are directed into contemplations of other people and the surrounding cultural environment. Here, we encounter a paradox: the more consistently a person narrates their life; the more stable they demonstrate their personality, principles, convictions, and positions on various phenomena; the more readily they surrender (often with minimal reflection) to social requirements. This creates a self-image and role molded by prevailing, alternative, or group-specific social norms.

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30)  Ibid., 179.

This outcome arises because mirroring (and thereby reinforcing) these norms confers power. In this case, power is achieved through one's narrative self-presentation. In turn, the norms guiding self-narration are not merely social habits or (as often imagined) averages – the dominant, most common traits or behaviors. This notion of norms is challenged in philosophy, particularly by Michel Foucault, who draws on George Canguilhem. Foucault argues that "The norm consequently lays claim to power. The norm is not simply and not even a principle of intelligibility; it is an element on the basis of which a certain exercise of power is founded and legitimized."[31]

Ernesto Laclau's theory, presented in his last book, *The Narrative Foundation of Society*, explains the relationship between socio-political power and acts of narration in a slightly different way. Laclau explains that most stories perform the shift of modality: contingent elements become elements of necessity and establish a universal model of human action proposed to society at large or even universally. According to Laclau, modalities are vectors for the pursuit of power, for establishing, defining, and redistributing of hegemony, directing rhetorical movements (usually, recognized as tropes), toward practical, mainly – political, aims. Laclau views the rhetorical "figure" (in rhetoric, a movement that changes meaning), as a claim for dominance expressed by an insignificant element of the story. Moreover, any element, he asserts, "can contain within itself a hegemonic function."[32] Assigning a hegemonic function to any element of the system means that a skilled narrator can grant a chosen narrative element with significance of universality or necessity (moral, political, or social necessity).

According to Laclau, narratives about local, temporally bound, and contingently formed situations often aim to derive from these situations a universal and eternal principle, one that is always valid for everyone. This also applies to self-narratives. Through rhetorical means, contingent fragments are condensed and transformed, given with the status of universality, primordiality, law, norm or justice (in all cases, a mark of power). Laclau describes this dynamic of identity: "if I identify myself with a certain content, … it becomes the symbol of my being."[33] Self-identification (in a sense beyond just naming but binding oneself to the name as to the context) involves the

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31) Foucault, *Abnormal*, 50.
32) Laclau, *Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, 86.
33) Ibid., 113.

play of modalities. Identity is based on this movement from contingency to necessity. By clearly and specifically defining one's boundaries and portraying one's form, these definitions applied to oneself seemingly have to be understood universally. Every narration (as a social process), according to Laclau, seeks to participate in social competition for hegemony and, therefore, gradually develops a strong narrative structure.

Modality becomes one of the key factors when discussing the relationship between narrative, or rhetoric in general, and social norms, as well as the power that is institutionalized through them. The modality of what is narrated provides the narrative subject with power. Agamben writes similarly about the relationship between modality and power. For Agamben, modal categories "are not innocuous logical or epistemological categories that concern the structure of propositions… . They are ontological operators, that is, the devastating weapons used in the biopolitical struggle for Being."[34] Agamben writes:

> Modal categories as operators of Being, never stand before the subject as something they can choose or reject; and they do not confront him as a task that he can decide to assume or not to assume in a privileged moment. The subject, rather, is a field of forces always already traversed by the incandescent and historically determined currents of potentiality and impotentiality, of being able not to be and not to being able not to be.[35]

The one who begins to tell about themselves takes their narrative intention from the intersection of certain modalities. Similarly to Laclau, Agamben raises the question of the possibility of a specific contingent narration – of a witnessing.

Active resistance and resilience of non-identification are similar states, if we see them as expressions of the most general political stance, but very different when we focus on modality and the extent to which each of these attitudes seeks power. Summarizing the detailed dictionary meaning, Sarah Bracke states that resilience "revolves around shock absorption."[36] She disagrees with the common

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34) Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 147–48.

35) Ibid.

36) Bracke, "Bouncing Back," 54.

view that resilience is simply the result and sign of vulnerability. She argues that resilience is: "conceptually designed to overcome vulnerability – to contain and evade it, to bounce back from it, to minimize its traces, to domesticate its transformative power."[37] The specific social environment, an epoch filled with aggressively imposed truths, was undeniably understood as a situation of vulnerability. Therefore, the other person – one who survived, perhaps repressed, perhaps impoverished, experienced humiliation but lives in the same environment (in the same social web) – such a person appears in self-narratives as a reference to the scale of a social environment's vulnerability, becoming a symbol of vulnerability – someone worth narrating about, unlike the self. Narrating about this poet, or philosopher, or simply the person who resists social adaptation, tells the story of the harshness of the socio-political environment and the meaninglessness of any roles within that environment.

Putinaitė compares the state of passive ignorance of the socio-political and cultural environment to lethargy, which "in society manifested not as doubt of ideological truths, but as indifference to what is happening and experiencing deep meaninglessness."[38] This comparison accurately identifies non-participation in social processes through non-identification with them, but this non-participation should not be seen only as a life-diminishing illness. The withdrawal from any social role, non-engagement in any collective identity, can also be interpreted as a conscious (not necessarily explicitly expressed) stance. This stance is primarily linked to the perspective of the witness – speaking about a single, insignificant person, marking the harshness and hostility of the environment. This position of the witness is not (or not necessarily) destructive – it turns into the stance of an observer who refrains from generalizing or drawing universal conclusions. On the other hand, cultural philosopher Przemysław Bursztyka calls "the introduction of distrust and suspicion among the people" as one of the main ways of sovietism (he calls them "social operations" and derives from the totalitarian political habits of soviet Russia).[39] Thus, it is quite possible that such indifference and avoidance of identification (which I call here the

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37)   Ibid., 69.

38)   Putinaitė, *Nenutrūkusi styga*, 126.

39)   Bursztyka, "Reconceptualizing Eastern Europe," 88.

model of weak identification) was foreseen or even partially implemented by Soviet ideologues and was extremely comfortable to the regime of late sovietism. However, it was not really foreseen that a certain community of non-identifiers would start to appear in para-spaces of structure. This turn from boredom and indifference to anti-systemic awareness was not expected in any case. However, it would be wrong to say that such a posture of resilience always leads to a position of resistance.

There is no logical or chronological sequence between the many different stances of disobedience and active resistance. The distinction between resilience and resistance, as I define it in this article, cannot be composed into any sequence either. The only framework that seems to link these attitudes is the stages of modality. If we consider resilience (combining Bracke's and Laclau's theories), as a stance having the modality of contingency, and resistance as a stance of necessity always aiming at the dominance of power, then we can clearly see this sequence of modality as a different relationship with power.

Yurchak, analyzing the principles of adaptation to power in Soviet Russia (and, obviously, his conclusions cannot be automatically transferred to the research of countries occupied by Soviet Russia), also emphasizes that narrative schemes practiced by those in power were neither adopted nor believed. Yurchak observes that the model of truth (not so much the content, but rather the form), was never taken from those who held power. According to Yurchak, the vocabulary and the discursive-ethical dimension (which Yurchak identifies as the ethical dimension as an alternative to the declarative dimension), were also different:

> This dimension and vocabulary were neither "inside" nor "outside" authoritative regime, but in a peculiarly deterritorialized relation to it – that is, while the forms, acts and rituals of authoritative discourse were immutable and ubiquitous, the constative meanings of these forms were irrelevant to Inna and her friends. Instead, they injected their lives with new meanings, forms of sociality, and relations, adding a "surplus value of code" and making them something else, deterritorializing them.[40]

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40)   Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 130.

Yurchak identifies deterritorialization as (in the sense of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari), a process similar to this which, in this text, I call the weak identification. However, according to this logic, deterritorialization always points to the soon-to-be reterritorialization, which would mean that after losing trust in prevailing concepts and narrative strategies, they will sooner or later become valid and reliable in another normative context. It means that trust in the social environment and one's own ability to assume a social role and appropriate responsibility comes back when the political system changes.

Recalling the Collingwood's concept of epoch presented above, it is clear that this narrative striving to universalization and metaphorization is not unavoidable necessity; it is rather developed as a cultural pattern (which means that it is active only if practiced in some sense voluntarily). The fact that this habit is culturally formed and contingent means that it should not be chosen in every narrative act. Collingwood's concept of epoch portrays the diversity of social relations as a field where, under contingent conditions, social roles, and accompanying norms are not freely chosen from many options. Rather, they are indicated, imposed, expected, or required through threats, or nurtured through education. The example we discussed above shows that, upon recognizing this tangle, it is possible to remain without a social role (or at least without the one with which one identifies for life). Every such narration, being an act of weak identification, disrupts the system, which would more easily accept direct resistance than non-participation: "Any remnant of a contingent empiricity that is not dialectically mastered by the whole would jeopardize the latter for, in that case, the contingency of the unmastered element would make the whole equally contingent."[41] The act of weak identification is not directed toward a fighting with the ideological environment, but instead it undermines the logic of this environment, creating cracks in its body and thus performing its slow erosion. Thus, a person who minimally identifies with neither a flow of their life events, nor with their profession, nor any other of their personal attributes, is a strange body within any political order (but especially within those which are harshly ideologized) questioning its legitimacy simply by existing.

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41)    Laclau, *Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, 161.

## Conclusion: The Narrative Mode of Weak Identification

In the article, I highlighted a certain contradiction: the social strength of weak narrative identity. Such an attitude is recognizable in those life stories in which, instead of talking about oneself, highlighting one's own form and role, one tends to bear witness to the fate of other people, their choices. Weak identity disappears in observation. The weak self-identification, which in no way refers to the weakness of the one who identifies themselves, marks a state in which (more or less consciously) a person refuses to participate in hegemonic struggles for power and public visibility. In such narratives of resilience, there is no desire to fight, destroy, or deceive the hated system; instead, there is a refusal to identify with any group of people that accumulate power.

This attitude can be recognized in some of the self-narratives told by the older generation in Lithuania (the generation that suffered under the long oppression of the occupying regime). In these exceptional stories, a narrator speaks about another person – someone who is not public or powerful, who is chosen as a figure representing the harshness and vulnerability of the epoch. By telling the story of this other person, the narrative subject remains in a role of a witness, an observer, or someone who tries not to leap from the level of contingency into the clarity of necessity; also, one who avoids the universalization of any contingent details and the imposition of narratively expressed norms or principles on others. This model of self-narration we see primarily in the stories of those people who never had the goal of conforming to prevailing norms, and therefore, when talking about themselves, do not create a narrative subject of power. Weak identification can be qualified as a form of social and political resilience, and especially in those societies where social and cultural norms are strictly enforced and their imitation is required. Soviet and partly post-Soviet Lithuanian society is one of many possible examples. We could also find many more resistance postures practiced in repressed societies, but even this one, described in the article, already shows what simplification would be to attribute only two prevailing posture variants to such societies: one model of resistance and one model of obedience, without noticing the full spectrum of ways in which people maintain their dignity under condition of occupational regimes.

Acknowledgement

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