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Discourse Analysis on Belarusian Nationalism, Identity and Nationhood

Ethnic or Civic Nationalism; what processes have defined Belarusian national identity?

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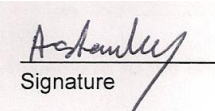
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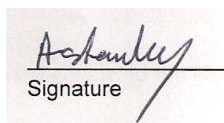


MA Programme Euroculture

Declaration

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Date: 1st June 2015

In memory of my loving mother Rita Ann Stanley (27th January 1948- 21st November 2014)
who sadly passed away during the course of writing this MA Thesis

Discourse Analysis on Belarusian Nationalism, Identity and Nationhood

Ethnic or Civic Nationalism; what processes have defined Belarusian national identity?



Soviet times
BSSR symbolism



Independent
Republic of Belarus



Alternative
Belarusian symbolism

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to carry out a comparative discourse analysis on Belarusian nationalism, nationhood and identity formation. Discourse analysis can be understood as a struggle between different knowledge claims which represent different constructions of the world and different identities.¹ This entails: “a critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge and historical and cultural specificity.”² Discourse is in constant transformation through contact with other discourses. As different discourses each represent individual ways of perceiving the social world, they are therefore occupied in constant struggles with one other to achieve supremacy for the right of meaning.³ Experts and actors each interpret these struggles for supremacy of meaning to justify their own point of view, thereby denouncing the opposing discourse.

Political, historical and Sociology methodologies have been incorporated in aid of carrying out this investigation. Qualitative methods have been included, along with secondary sources from academic journals, scholarly books, conference papers, websites and many articles from the independent *Belarusian Review*, for which I am English language editor. Many of these sources have been written by Anglophone experts of historical, political, linguistic, social and economic issues relating to Belarus. Given the limitations of not speaking Belarusian or Russian, the purpose of this study is to incorporate various opinions of Belarusian identity to produce a well rounded investigation of how identity formation has been shaped. Therefore it was more relevant to use the qualitative approach to conceptualise the Belarusian situation and use a comparative-historical analysis with includes key substantive areas of comparative politics, including: State formation and state restructuring, economic development and ethnic and national identity formation.⁴

Experimental measures have included articles that include linguistic and conscientious findings of the population and their concerns regarding national identity.⁵ These findings relate to a given section of Belarusian society, their reasons for embracing or rejecting the Russian or Belarusian languages and the cultural and political implications of this. In helping

¹ Marianne Jorgensen and Louise Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, (London, Thousand Oaks

² *Ibid*, 5

³ *Ibid* 6 -9

⁴ James Monhoney & P. Larkin Terrie, “Comparative- Historical Analysis in Contemporary Political Science” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2008) 737-739

⁵ Jant Buttolph Jonson & H. T. Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods* (London: CQ Press, 2012), 56-57

to investigate this problem a normative (social norms) approach has been looked at from the perspective of Russian influence in Belarus and a perceived weak Belarusian national identity, these norms will therefore highlight behavioural patterns that govern Belarusian society and discover which actors and groups have benefited the most from political struggle and why.⁶

Comparative politics is also addressed as scholars compare nations with data measured at the level of the nation-state.⁷ As comparative data on nationalism is not always relevant to each country, the thesis will highlight how universal theories on nationalism sometimes get it wrong. One example of this is taken from the western model that states how historically ethnic nationalism should be prone to be more authoritarian and anti-liberal whilst civic nationalism/ patriotism should have a tendency to be more liberal and democratic. The case of Belarus will prove this theory to be wrong. In addressing the puzzles of historical analysis, research will concern casual analysis and the examination of processes over time, and use of systematic and contextualized comparison.⁸ Comparative historical research will highlight how there are historical continuities in the Belarusian nationalist tradition which have always been in constant struggle against the state apparatus and their official versions of “Belarusianess.” The roots causes of such holds on power over time and the effect on the Belarusian nationalist oppositional tradition have several explanations, mainly being the issues of faith as a identity marker, the language questions which have always existed, allegiance to certain actors, the role of economics in society, the role of academics, the influence of politics on people’s daily lives, repressions and purges and the fact that many people just wanted to live a normal life without the burden of political choices.

Many western NGO’s, institutions and academics claim the need for development of a stronger national identity and stronger nation-state formation which will then help Belarus “normalise” and transform Belarus into a stable European democratic nation. This logic is based on the assumption that the nation-states of Europe have at some point in history completed nation building projects on the road to becoming independent modern nation-states. This was evident after the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new nation states in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. The assumption of many western intellectuals is that Belarus has remained an outpost of Soviet style state formations and is therefore

⁶ Ibid, 5.

⁷ Gary King, “On Political Methodology”, *Political Analysis*, Vol. 2 (1991):13

⁸ James Monhoney & P. Larkin Terrie, “Comparative- Historical Analysis in Contemporary Political Science” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2008), 739.

merely a satellite for Russian interests. As this assumption is based on the western European model of ethnic state formations, this notion needs to be challenged. As many western analysts of Belarus often cite Belarus' as having a "weak national identity", the objective of this MA thesis will be to challenge that notion and actually highlight that Belarus has had a rich and diverse evolution on the path to nationalism. The thesis will highlight the roller-coaster ride that has been Belarusian nationalism and its ability to constantly adapt in new guises.

Chapter one describes the ideology of nationalism, the over-lapping nature of Nationalism/Patriotism, the differences between ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism and debates that have emerged in historiography whether nationalism has its roots in primordial thinking or whether the Frankfurt school and modernist thinkers have monopolised ideas on how we perceive the phenomenon of nationalism. Have these models and classical definitions of nationalism and nationhood been relevant in understanding Belarusian nationalism? This chapter aims to investigate, what the differences and variations in nationalism as an ideology are. Eastern and western traditions will also serve as a template when analyzing the Belarusian experience as a basis to their validity.

Chapter two looks at the origins of pre-nations, ethno-confessional and modern state formations as a root of Belarusian nationalism. This chapter includes sections on competing Belarusian nationalist traditions and their subsequent influence on the nationalist movement. Cultural, economic and linguistic legacies are also important factors that are addressed along with foreign occupations that have affected allegiances of Belarusians. The chapter will assess how Belarus has been shaped by historiography and history, in terms of language, culture and collective identity.

The third and final chapter highlights how historical processes has affected modern discourse and how some tenets of the nationalist tradition have become synthesized together while other traditions have remained in opposition. To highlight this point, the oppositional nationalist party Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) will be discussed at length along with issues such as the economic disintegration of the Soviet, the cultural policies of Belarusianization, Russification and the rise of President Lukashenka who has incorporated and rejected several traditions of Belarusian nationalism. His policies of national identity, Russian-Unionism and geo-politics will be discussed in detail along with his flexibility in changing identity

allegiances. This chapter will highlight how actors have generated/ constructed modern discourses of Belarusian nationhood and nationalism.

The experience of Belarusian nationalism is quite an isolated phenomenon with regards to European historical models in the field of nationalism studies. It therefore sets a precedent as its importance is crucial for any understanding of European Union-Russian relations in the post-Soviet space. Given the limited scope of this paper, certain topics such as Belarusian human rights, electoral violations and extensive research into Belarusian economic policies have had to be omitted.

Thus far, much has been written on Belarusian national identity, but this study differs in one respect that it chronicles Belarusian identity over a thousand year period. Some of the most important and differing authors of Belarus are included in this study.

Ioffe has written much on Belarusian history, language, culture and economics but has been criticized of Russophilia but some. Wilson on the other hand, has been commended on writing one of the few Anglophone books on Belarus but he has also been accused of inaccuracies regarding Belarusian history. Marples is a regular writer on Belarusian topics but has links to the opposition, so could be called into doubt at times over objectivity. Leshchenko and Bekus have made great contributions in the fields of cultural and linguistic markers of Belarusian identity and Rudling has supplied important texts on the evolution of the Belarusian national movement. Savchenko is also a reliable political analyst who accurately describes the reasons for Lukashenka's rise to power. Snyder highlights many important comparative examples of nation building between Belarus, Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine and points to the failures of western models of nation building in Belarus whereas Fritz has highlighted the processes of state formation of Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, and Russia and the practicalities in the post-Soviet World. *Belarusian Review* too has been referenced extensively as many of its contributing others have very different perspectives from one another, with some being nationalists authors, some former ministers, some academics and others having a more objective point of view.

Woolhiser looks to the sociological dimensions of culture regarding the role of language in identity formation, Woolhiser therefore highlights that Belarusian nationality to a large extent is defined as a language marker by some Belarusians and this could be said to be true to a great extent in western discourse. However, language as a marker of nationality and identification ignores those nations/ states where successful and strong nationalities are

related to external language use such as the cases of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Switzerland, Belgium, Austria and many others where external languages are by no means a detriment to people's own national identity and the processes of nation-state formations. On the other hand in many European countries, centralisation with regards to language became ever more important from the mid-nineteenth century onwards and a centralised language as a "social progression" climaxed in the 1960s in many countries, with dialects such as Platt Deutsch and North Frisian and languages such as Bretons and Basque becoming less and less spoken due to centralised educational and business needs of the "higher" standard language. As a rule Ethnic nations are more positively inclined towards national minorities and languages whereas Civic states treat every citizen as equal before the law, and as such languages of national minorities are forced to speak the lingua franca or ignored to a large degree. The language issue is a central one in understanding Belarus. As the situation is complex, all these differing approaches to nationalism and nation state formations will be taken into consideration.

Therefore this thesis attempts to incorporate all the most important Anglophone academics of Belarusian nationality and correlate their competing views into a concise overview of the evolution of Belarusian nationalism to its current climate.

Keywords: Nationalism, Historiography, Identity, Discourse, Civic, Language, Patriotism,

Chapter 1:

Theoretical and methodological concepts, testing discourses

What are the differences and variations in nationalism as an ideology?

To understand nationalism, we have to understand the practical uses of the category "nation," the ways it can come to structure perception, to inform thought and experience, to organize discourse and political action.⁹ Debates centred on nationhood are usually debates about nations. Nations are identified as genuine entities, being communities, considerable and lasting collectivities. "That they exist is taken for granted, although *how* they exist - and how they came to exist - is much disputed." Nations don't bring nationalism into existence. The activities of nationalism have been constructed and encouraged by political fields, not by collectivities.¹⁰ "Nationality as a form of collective identity is neither more nor less 'natural' than others, and is constantly made and remade in the course of political experience."¹¹ Throughout history, history itself has been used and re-interpreted to achieve 'valid' political arguments. In this way, even from the beginning, Europeans used origin myths to explain their nations and give meaning to them. Modern historiography is allegedly more scientific, founded on evidence and research, although it has hardly been less ideological.¹²

Traditions of Ethnicity, Nation and State

A nation signifies oneness and cultural unity and this is established in cultural markers such as; history, language, literature, religion, art, and science which all represent the people as an individual, as a single entity with its own spiritual soul, gifts, and strengths. "Each nationality is one people having its own national culture as well as its language."¹³ The highly influential primordial historian Anthony Smith, in contradiction to many modernist writers, states that: "It is *ethnie* rather than nations, ethnicity rather than nationality, and ethnicism rather than nationalism that pervades the social and cultural life of antiquity."¹⁴ Smith points out why more ethnic groups didn't emerge as nation-states until the modern era, was because

⁹ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism reframed Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, (Oxford & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.

¹⁰ Ibid, 14-18.

¹¹ Michael Keating, *Plurinational Democracy Stateless Nations in a Post-Sovereignty Era*, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press; 2001), 2.

¹² Ibid, 31-32.

¹³ Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country an Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 118.

¹⁴ Georgiy I. Mirsky, *On Ruins of Empire; Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Former Soviet Union*, (Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1997). 13.

of the weakness of the group, which couldn't constitute effective political power in opposition to city-states and Empires.¹⁵ From the very beginning national traditions have been used for propaganda, manipulation, with truth being invented by the state and nation to drum up a unified cause. The difference being that this process only increased within the modern era with regards to modernisation and nationalism.¹⁶

In Eastern Europe the pre-national perception of shared identity was *jus sanguinis*, ('issues of blood' or 'right of blood'.) The western perception *jus solis* ('right of the soil') of nationality was determined not *where* an individual inhabited or was born, but was assessed by *who* they are, their cultural, religious and historic identity and from whom they are descended i.e. their ethnicity.¹⁷ As a consequence ethnic and linguistic groups are denoted and used virtually interchangeably. However ethnicity hardly ever contains inhabitants from different linguistic zones.¹⁸ "The politicisation of ethnicity is the result of the overlapping and fusion of three notions of people hood, on which the project of political modernity is based: (1) the people as a sovereign entity; (2) the people as citizens of a state holding equal rights before the law; and (3) the people as an ethnic community, held together by common political destiny and shared cultural features."¹⁹

The state has classically been defined by comprising three interwoven elements: the emotional image of the state (traditions, history, culture, and ideology) the physical foundation of the state (territory, population, and resources) and its institutional representation (government, laws, and institutions).²⁰ For the French revolutionaries, the notion of "nation" was not related with ethnicity but with the territorial unification of France, it had to go together with civil egalitarianism.²¹ Patriotism has been employed throughout the centuries to reinforce and bring into play love of political institutions and ways of life that maintain the shared liberty of the populace. Ethnic nationalism supported and strengthened claims about cultural, linguistic, and ethnic unity, thereby reinforcing the

¹⁵ Azar Gat & Alexander Yakobson, *Nations- The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) .5

¹⁶ Ibid 140.

¹⁷ Karl Cordell, *the Politics of Ethnicity in Central Europe*. (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000) . 8

¹⁸ Azar Gat & Alexander Yakobson, *Nations- The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 21.

¹⁹ Andreas Wimmer, "Dominant ethnicity and dominant nationhood" in, *Rethinking Ethnicity Majority groups and dominant minorities*, ed. Eric P.Kaufmann (London &New York: Routledge, 2004), 37.

²⁰ Dominik Zaum, *The Sovereignty Paradox- the Norms and Politics of International Statebuilding*. (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 29.

²¹ Georgiy I. Mirsky, *On Ruins of Empire; Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Former Soviet Union*, 23

idea of a homogeneous people.²² Nations are not as old as states as nations refer to peoples and states refer to political institutions.²³ Many nationalists historically fought against the patriotism of multi-ethnic empires, such examples include liberal German nationalists, Hungarian nationalists and Polish nationalists of 1848 who wished for recognition of nationhood against the patriotic ideas of the Prussian empire, the empire of the Habsburgs and Tsarist empires which all encompassed several nationalities and sought the allegiance of all nationalities within their borders regardless of the fact that an ethnic core remained at the centre of power within these empire-states. The same principle was also true for Irish nationalists fighting the patriotic British union of nations- state. Therefore there are several competing ideas of the national or patriotic idea. As patriotism, civic and ethnic nationalism each encompass one another, it is sometimes difficult to separate them.

Different approaches to nationalism: Modernists and Primordialists

There are two important schools of thought within the literature of nationalism and nations, mainly being; *primordialism*, and *modernism*.²⁴“Modernist historians argue that Nations and nationalism, can be dated with some accuracy to the latter half of the eighteenth century, anything which appears to resemble it, either in antiquity or the Middle Ages, must be understood as purely accidental or exceptional.”²⁵ Primordialists assert the importance of bonds based on language, religion, race, ethnicity and territory. Advocates of this school of thought maintain that nations and ethnic communities are inborn components of history and are fundamental parts of all human society right through history. With this in mind, primordialists argue that there is nothing exceptionally contemporary about nationalism and nations as features of both of these existed in all historical eras.²⁶ Primordialists are inclined to stress the deep-rooted assumption of ethnic ties, correlating them to bonds of ‘blood’ and kinship.²⁷

²² Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country an essay on Patriotism and Nationalism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 1.

²³ Georgiy I. Mirsky, *On Ruins of Empire; Ethnicity and Nationalism in the former Soviet Union*. 30.

²⁴ Daniele Conversi, “Mapping the Field: Theories of Nationalism and the Ethnosymbolic Approach,” in *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism- History, Culture and Ethnicity in the Formation of Nations*, ed. Athena S. Leoussi and Steven Grosby, (Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 15.

²⁵ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, (Malden, USA, Oxford, UK & Victoria, Australia: Blackwell publishing, 1986), 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 12.

²⁷ Camille C. O’Reilly, *Language, Ethnicity and the State; Volume 2: Minority Languages in Eastern Europe post-1989*, (New York :Palgrave Publishers Ltd, 2001), 3.

Modernists like Eric Hobsbawm consider the primordialist standpoint as a determined attempt at ‘*social engineering*’ intentionally inspiring throwback sentiments on the masses. However, no opinions are ever without complete bias, and Hobsbawm himself belongs to the Marxist school of thought. In response to such claims, Smith’s discourse emphasises that ethnicity can scarcely be shaped in modern times, it must have existed previously.²⁸ The majority of intellectuals writing about nationalism are modernists and correlate the nation exclusively with nationalism and modernity. Again, Smith contradicts this by making the case that it is possible to date the growth of modern nations to ancestral eras.²⁹ Adhering to this view, nationalism and ethnicity are taken to be loosely interconnected. Historical states are frequently defined as being petty-states, states, and empires. Within all these political units, ethnicity was always a key feature. “Ethnicity made the state and the state made ethnicity.” States always attempted to homogenize the populace within their territory as a feeling of shared identity encouraged the community’s allegiance.³⁰ “Many nations originated from former ethnic communities exhibiting mutual characteristics such as language, traditions, memories, and a belief in common descent, and a sense of collective identity.”³¹

As several modernist theorists were from Jewish backgrounds, their experiences have also been flavoured by subjective points of view, which was common for the Frankfurt school of thought and within the discourse of cultural relativism. They all also experienced a time of the most extreme and violent nationalisms. Therefore it was only natural that they reacted against all this and interpreted discourse in such a manner, thereby rejecting notions of primordialism which they perceived as a reactionary point of view.³² One scholar, very much adhering to the above principles is Jürgen Habermas; he takes for granted that nations are fundamentally aggressive, regardless of the fact that violent nationalisms have been the historical exception, not the standard. This is also a widespread belief within broad sections of academia. When comparing all historical nationalisms, this argument could be said to be unfounded.³³ This, the opinion of Ross Poole in “Patriotism and Nationalism” can be backed up by examples such as the relatively peaceful national movements that emerged during

²⁸ Conversi, “Mapping the Field: Theories of Nationalism and the Ethnosymbolic Approach,” 17.

²⁹ Ibid, 18.

³⁰ Gat & Yakobson, *Nations- The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism*. 3.

³¹ Ibid, 9.

³² Ibid, 17.

³³ Ross Poole, “Patriotism and Nationalism” in *Patriotism- Philosophical and Political Perspectives*, ed. Igor Primoratz & Aleksandar Pavković (Aldershot, UK & Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 143.

1848, national self-determination movements after the First World War in new nation states and the national movements that emerged during the breakup of the Soviet Union such as in Lithuania and Poland. The argument goes that these movements established democracy which went hand in hand with nationalism after the collapse and revolt against the authoritarian patriotic empires of the nineteenth and twentieth century. They were also mostly ethnic variations of nationalism which emphasized language as a prerequisite to independence and nationhood. In spite of this there still remain those extreme examples that emerged after the collapse of patriotic multi-national empires such as the case of the National Socialists and the excesses of Serbian nationalism in Yugoslavia. This therefore implies that is no standard one size fits all definition of nationalism as the ideology itself can incorporate both primordial and modernist interpretations of nationalism and nation building processes and can be moderate, extreme, liberal, anti-liberal, democratic and authoritarian.

Patriotism, Ethnic Nationalism and Civic Nationalism

Patriotism and nationalism are frequently confused with one another.³⁴ George Orwell once gave a simplified but accurate definition to this issue; he stated that nationalism as rooted in the people and patriotism as rooted in the land.

Patriotism attempts to encourage the welfare of all individuals born or living with a similar *patria* or country. Nationalism aspires to encourage the welfare of all individuals with a uniform *natio* (a group with shared ancestry and background or similar linguistic features). “Patriotism appeals to all residents of an ethnic group, regardless of their ethnic background. Nationalism appeals to all members of an ethnic group, regardless of their country of residence.”³⁵ Patriotism engages the affiliation between the citizen, the state, and fellow citizens.³⁶ The nationalist envisages political life based in a pre-political type of belonging, the patriot on the other hand envisages it as shaped and learned through the political actions of the citizen.³⁷ For the nationalist, the stress is on the role of identity and culture as it is because of “culture – language, stories about land and history, art forms, modes of dress, communication, common rituals, customs, and so on that individuals form a sense of themselves as belonging to a *nation*, and it is this identity which provides the link between

³⁴ Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country an Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism*. 6.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 3-4.

³⁶ Ross Poole, “Patriotism and Nationalism” in *Patriotism- Philosophical and Political Perspectives*. 136.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 142.

the individual and the state.”³⁸ It is therefore normal to differentiate patriotism from nationalism by considering patriotism as an allegiance to a group as envisaged in legal and political terminology. Whereas nationalism is classically defined as having allegiance to a group envisaged mainly in ethnic and cultural terms.³⁹

In this way definitions of patriotism and civic nationalisms, seem to imply that they are one and the same and this is reinforced by historian Georgiy I. Mirsky in *Ethnicity and Nationalism in the former Soviet Union*; “the formation of a *civic nation*, or a *state nation*, is a concept opposed to that of an *ethnic nation*, just as state nationalism, or patriotism, can be called civic nationalism and is as different from ethno nationalism.”⁴⁰ “Civic nationalism also identifies nationality with citizenship.”⁴¹ Ethnic nationalism regards nationality as inherited or as a cultural marker. Every citizen of the civic nation-state is considered to have identical national identity. ‘Ethnic’ national identity is harder to classify, as ethnicity itself is a far more obscure and is a more problematic notion than citizenship.⁴² However, there are overlaps, as many ‘civic’ nations need an ethnic nucleus as states were usually shaped by this governing *ethnie*, who may still represent the dominant state elites, controlling its political establishments.⁴³

Civic nationhood’s leading doctrine includes common laws, “equality before the law, and universal reciprocity of rights and duties.” For ethnic nations, the leading doctrine is based on its genuineness or ‘authenticity’. But in both cases these overlaps and ethnic factors are intermingled with civic dimensions.⁴⁴ Gat and Yakobson state in *the Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism*, that ethnic nationalism stresses ancestry and common culture, and civic nationalism stresses state territory and culture.⁴⁵ “Civic nationalism is supposedly organized around political ideals rather than around a culture; it “envisages the nation as a community of equal rights-bearing citizens” united only in their

³⁸ Ibid,145-146.

³⁹ John Kleinig, “Patriotic Loyalty” in *Patriotism- Philosophical and Political Perspectives*, ed. Igor Primoratz & Aleksandar Pavković (Aldershot, UK & Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 43.

⁴⁰ Georgiy I. Mirsky, *On Ruins of Empire; Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Former Soviet Union*. 38.

⁴¹ Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country an Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism*. 7.

⁴² Gat & Yakobson, *Nations- The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism*. 330.

⁴³ Anthony D. Smith, “The Power of Ethnic Traditions in the Modern World” in *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism- History, Culture And Ethnicity In The Formation Of Nations*, ed. Athena S. Leoussi and Steven Grosby, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 332.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 325- 327.

⁴⁵ Gat & Yakobson, *Nations- The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism*. 7.

common allegiance to shared political ideals and practices. Civic nationalism is allegedly neutral about culture, and hence is, in principle, inclusive and universalistic.”⁴⁶

Eastern European models and legacies; Tsarist and Soviet definitions of nationhood

In order to understand, competing historiographies, narratives and discourses in Belarus, we must firstly understand the Russian experience. The literary figure Aleksandr Pushkin (1799– 1837), presents two contradictory insights into Russian national identity; the imperial and the ethno-cultural.⁴⁷ Conflicting national identities started to emerge at several stages, the Decembrists of 1825 could be said to be one of the earliest alternative Russian patriots as their patriotism consisted of free citizens, the rule of law and were not related to official notions of patriotism. The official state slogans of Tsarist Russia; ‘Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality’ later turned out to be the main ideological agenda for Russian statehood. Later still, Slavophiles when looking back to Muscovite origins and turning against western influences, deduced the idea that most of Russia’s problems began with Peter the Great, “when a westernised elite lost contact with the age-old Russian traditions and fell prey to western notions of rationalism, Roman law, and private property.”⁴⁸

The idea of empire in effect created the divide among Russian imperial (*rossiiskii*) and Russian ethnic (*russkii*) identities. The split was seen between the abundant local *russkii* folk cultures of the peasantry (including Byelorussians) and the culture that centred on the elites, which was European looking and mainly urbanized in character.⁴⁹ “Ethnic Russians possessed first, a definite ethnic identity, and second, an imperial identity but no genuine national identity and no national self-consciousness”⁵⁰ The argument goes, that as Russians had no exclusively Russian political institutions (as they were also shared with other ethnicities) being Russian has always been classified more by language, culture and religion, than in legal, ethnic, constitutional and political dimensions of nationhood.

⁴⁶ Kok-Chor Tan, *Justice without Borders- Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Patriotism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 89.

⁴⁷ Hubertus F. Jahn, “‘Us’: Russians on Russianness” in *National Identity In Russian Culture- An Introduction*, by Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 55.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 59-62.

⁴⁹ Geoffrey Hosking, “Russians as a dominant ethnic”, in *Rethinking Ethnicity Majority groups and dominant minorities*, ed. Eric P.Kaufmann, (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 120-121.

⁵⁰ Georgiy I. Mirsky, *On Ruins of Empire; Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Former Soviet Union*. 38.

“Russia is often left out of western European stories of ‘nationalism’ and ‘nationhood’.

Franklin and Widdis argue in *all the Russia’s* that, Russia is not and has never been a ‘nation state’, where the geo-political boundaries and the ethno-cultural boundaries coincide. They go on to say, “more or less from the start it has been a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual polity – an empire – but with a strongly dominant Slav (Rus, Russian) population and culture. Rus, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union – all were expanding powers, continually enlarging their territorial boundaries and their spheres of influence through conquest and annexation.”⁵¹

Therefore formation of a characteristic ‘Great Russian’ culture turned into a political necessity. This was a difficult task as Russianness itself is positioned either among imperial or among national identities, or in other words, among geo-political and ethno-cultural principles of self-characterization.⁵² Before 1917 and after the revolution, the legality of the state sprung not from citizen’s approval, (i.e., the nation) and no single ethnic/linguistic unit or nation made up the bulk of the country. The Tsar thought of himself as the rightful ruler as God had ‘chosen’ him, therefore identification with the Russian nation played a secondary role. Similarly, the communist elite viewed historical discourse and the right to rule, as interpretations of Karl Marx’s teachings.⁵³ Tsarist Slavophiles too didn’t highlight the notion of an ethnic nation but the role the Russian Orthodox Church with its distinctive holiness.⁵⁴

By early 1930s the Soviet Union required every citizen to have one nationality, thereby creating a new single Soviet people and new Soviet nation: the New Soviet Man (*sovetsky chelovek*) was meant to unify all citizens of the Soviet Union, regardless of their nation’s cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences. The USSR used ethnicity as a systematized standard for education, party structure, and for managerial restrictions. Soviet elites saw no contradictions between being Russian (or Belarusian, Estonian, etc) and being Soviet.⁵⁵ For Lenin, the revolution was the primary concern over all social aspects, which also included culture and language. These classifications were viewed in light of whether they halted or made the revolution move forward. When national groups were in disagreement with communist policies, these groups were then condemned as ‘bourgeois nationalists’ that should be suppressed. The communists didn’t resist the application of local languages and

⁵¹ Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, “All the Russia’s.” in *National Identity in Russian Culture- an Introduction*, ed. Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 4

⁵² Ibid, 5.

⁵³ Theodore R. Weeks, *Across the Revolutionary Divide Russia and the USSR, 1861–1945*, (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2011), 87.

⁵⁴ Georgiy I. Mirsky, *On Ruins of Empire*. 26.

⁵⁵ Theodore R. Weeks, *Across the Revolutionary Divide Russia and the USSR, 1861–1945*. 89.

used these native languages and groups to expand the Soviet ideal into every respective republic of the Soviet Union.⁵⁶

By the late 1930s policy towards nationalities transformed from pluralist ideals and moved towards centralized dictatorial methods.⁵⁷ On the other hand with national boundaries, the USSR reinforced ethnic identities, as the Soviets actively reinforced these national groups, be it in name only, with a continuous remembrance of one's own ethnicity via a symbol of banal nationalism; that of the Soviet passport system.⁵⁸ When Stalin called for collective nationalist Soviet feelings for the war effort, Marxist archaeology turned away from interpreting evidence on the basis of class conflict and now concentrated on ethnic history to galvanize support.⁵⁹ From the 1950s, traditional Soviet ethnography and terminology were reconsidered, which thereafter appealed to notions of 'nation' and 'nationality'.⁶⁰ "Attempts were made to promote native culture, art, language, and to rewrite history, thereby educating the people in the spirit of national identity and pride."⁶¹ Of course Russians were presented as the "super-ethnos" and leading component of the USSR.⁶² On the other hand, there has never been such a thing called the Soviet nation. When asking an inhabitant of the Soviet Union about their identity, a likely response one would likely hear would include; 'I am a Soviet citizen,' or 'I am Russian (or Belarusian, Tatar etc).' Both these discourses correspond to civic and ethnic dimensions of nationhood. The "sovetskie ludi" (Soviet people) was a concept created, that was related in the first instance to state citizenship but not to ethnicity.⁶³

The attack of the USSR in the summer of 1941 by the Nazis fundamentally transformed the nature of Soviet Patriotism. "The Russian people were now portrayed as the older brothers of the other Soviet nationalities and military heroes, saints from Kievan Rus, the Muscovite state and the Tsarist Empire was called upon to fight the enemy, just as they had been in the First World War."⁶⁴ This Great Patriotic War was cultivated as a Soviet national victory and

⁵⁶ Ibid, 100.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 104.

⁵⁸ Jane Dawson, "Egalitarian Responses in Postcommunist Russia", in *Egalitarian Politics in the Age of Globalization*, ed. Craig N. Murphy (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 104.

⁵⁹ Andrew Gillett, *On Barbarian Identity- Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2002), 12.

⁶⁰ Mark Bassin, "Lev Gumilev And Russian National Identity During And After The Soviet Era" in *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism- History, Culture And Ethnicity In The Formation Of Nations*, ed. Athena S. Leoussi and Steven Grosby, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 144.

⁶¹ Georgiy I. Mirsky, *On Ruins of Empire. 2.*

⁶² Ibid 6.

⁶³ Ibid, 162.

⁶⁴ Hubertus F. Jahn, "'Us': Russians on Russianness," in *National Identity in Russian Culture.* 64

not merely for Russians, but all Soviet citizens.⁶⁵ “From this legacy, the USSR would create a ‘single Soviet people’ (*edinyi sovetskii narod*) comprised of all their diverse ethnic groups, the USSR republics would be ‘national in form, but socialist in content’.⁶⁶ As there were an abundant amount of Russians within the USSR, the Russian language along with every USSR nation and state identity would be centralised from Moscow⁶⁷ Contradictions were always prevalent within the USSR, and from the 1950s to the 1970s, republican academies and universities were encouraged to research national history, culture, folklore and traditions. These subjects became more fashionable but when conflicting with official state policies, publications were condemned for ‘bourgeois nationalism’ when not incorporating communist egalitarian principles of historical discourse. In some instances, local nationalists and their publications could be ostracized as Fascist or Nazi teachings.⁶⁸ Interestingly, the Soviets encouraged nationhood, inclusively institutionalizing it but repressed nationalism.⁶⁹ For the Soviets, “the repression of nationalism went hand in hand with the establishment and consolidation of nationhood and nationality as a fundamental insight into social formations of mankind.”⁷⁰

In the west, historiography of Russia has been developed largely from the imperialist and statist historiographical structure formed within the Tsarist Empire. This imperial construction was slowly established as ‘objective’ or a model that could be used by Western historiography as being impartial, but this was anything but. Soviet historiography after 1934 also adopted the popular beliefs established in Tsarist historiography.⁷¹ Historically, the eastern Slavs were alleged to be three local branches of Russians who could, if history and conditions had allowed, be incorporated into a single nation.⁷² With this mind Soviet Belarusians were accounted to unite with the ‘Great Russians’ into a modern Russian-speaking *homo sovieticus*, thereby returning to the so-called east Slavic unity of Kyiv Rus⁷³

⁶⁵ Stephen Lovell, *The Shadow of War Russia and the USSR, 1941 to the Present*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 212.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey Hosking, “Russians as a dominant ethnic” in *Rethinking Ethnicity Majority groups and dominant minorities*. 123.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 126.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 129.

⁶⁹ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism reframed Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, 17.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

⁷¹ Taras Kuzio, “Historiography and National Identity among the Eastern Slavs: Towards a New Framework,” *National Identities*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2001):109.

⁷² *Ibid*, 118.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 113.

Chapter 2

Historical milestones of Belarusian nationhood and Cultural Heritage

How has Belarus been shaped by historiography and history, in terms of language, culture and collective Identity?

Belarus is often said to have a weak national identity. The purpose of this chapter is to challenge that notion and to highlight several national movements and nation formations over the last thousand years. Belarus doesn't strictly adhere to scholarly debates over Patriotic/Civic nationalists and Ethnic nationalist's classifications or definitions. It is therefore an interesting case to challenge any rigid definitions of either classifications regarding nationalism. The discourse over Belarusian history has also been shaped dramatically by historiography and different spheres of influence, i.e. just like the Russian model: westerners versus eastern looking perceptives has also played a major role in shaping Belarusian identity.

The appearance of twentieth century Belarusian national historiographies produced a separation of the universal all-Russian historical explanation into national Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian accounts⁷⁴ In this respect Belarusian national awareness could be understood independently, an identity that combines both aspects of civic and primordial identity and began with the nation's pre-modern history. The building blocks of identity formation have long established roots and have all been formed in the territories of larger political units of which Belarus was once a part, i.e.: Kyivan Rus' (900s–1200s), the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1300s–1569), the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–late 1700s), and the Russian empire (1790s–1917). “As major languages and religions differed over time, and empires altered, they all left their mark on Belarusian history and society.”⁷⁵

Pre-Nation states

Within much of the territory of Belarus, Baltic speakers were first known to inhabit the area before Slavic speakers migrated there after 500AD. Scholars disagree on the time and place that a distinct Belarusian language and people was created and to what extent they embody a

⁷⁴ Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations- Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16.

⁷⁵ Renee L. Buhr, Victor Shadurski & Steven Hoffman “Belarus: An Emerging Civic Nation?,” *Nationalities Papers*, 39:3, (2011): 430.

Baltic and eastern Slavic fusion⁷⁶ The linguistic Peter Mayo argues in “Belorussian,” that the Belarusians are ethnically descendants of the primordial East Slavonic tribes; the Dregoviči, Radimiči and Krivichi/ Crivians with their centres being located in Gnezdovo, Izborsk, and Polotsk.⁷⁷ Andrei Kazakevich describes in “A Brief Genealogy of the Crivitian Idea,” how the Crivitia idea in the 1920s had been used as a synonym of Belarus with several Belarusian scholars naturally using the Crivitian tradition as a tool to overthrow Slavic (Russian) centrism.⁷⁸ A few national movements saw the nation’s revitalization as a pursuit for its Baltic roots, along with a new national name as Krivichi was seen to be more justified than “Belarus.”⁷⁹ The theory was based on the belief that the ‘three tribes’ blended with neighbouring Balts to form the beginnings of Belarusian ‘ethno genesis’.”⁸⁰

Another very old and competing idea was supported by the early-twelfth-century cleric who wrote the *Primary Chronicle* in the Caves monastery of Kiev. The chronicler created the basis for eastern European history when depicting the epic Slavic migration from the Danube to the attainment of their new homeland in Eastern Europe. Hitherto, the Kievian/ Rus state was seen as the accepted period for the continuation of ethnically distinct communities of eastern Slavs.⁸¹ The chronicler set a precedent; he now allied the Slavonic Rus to the eastern Christian world.⁸² Tsarist Russian historians declared the history of Kyivan Rus to be one inseparable Russian nation, with Ukrainians and Belarusians regarded as simply sub-factions, undistinguished as separate cultures and languages. Instead they were envisioned to be branches of Russian culture and dialects of the Russian language.⁸³

A reaction against this has come from some Belarusian historians who look to the history of the Polatsk principality and the Crivitian people who inhabited it during the era of Kyivan times.⁸⁴ The Polatsk principality was a considerably minor successor to Kyivan glory, which

⁷⁶ James R. Millar, *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Thomson Gale, 2004), 134.

⁷⁷ Peter Mayo, “Belorussian” in *the Slavonic Languages*, ed. Bernard Comrie & Greville G. Corbett (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 887.

⁷⁸ Andrei Kazakevich, “A Brief Genealogy of the Crivitian Idea,” *Political Sphere*, No 11 (2008):118- 119.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 121.

⁸⁰ Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, (Cambridge, 2006), 54.

⁸¹ Oleksiy P. Tolochko, “The Primary Chronicle’s ‘Ethnography’ Revisited: Slavs and Varangians in the middle Dnieper region and the Origin of the Rus State” in *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Ildar H. Garipzanov, Patrick J. Geary & Przemysław Urbańczyk, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2008), 169-170.

⁸² *Ibid*, 178.

⁸³ Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, (Cambridge, 2006), 541.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

came to symbolise a Belarusian pursuit of medieval roots to national sovereignty.⁸⁵ Belarusian historians assert that it was not reliant on either Kiev or Novgorod, the two most powerful centres for the Rus.⁸⁶ However, authors such as Serhii Plokhy argue that no “all-Belarusian” identity existed at the time, even in prototype.”⁸⁷ With such statements, we must sometimes assess why such a claim would be made, was Plokhy reasoning based on modernists or a primordialist perception? Using other European models of ethno-genesis, there seems to be valid claims of prototype identity formations as many nation-states in their pre-histories were founded on two or three ethnic bases. Were the modern Germans solely comprised on the Alemani tribes, or were they not also comprised of Franks, Saxons, Frisians, Angles, Celts and Slavs east of the river Elbe. Was not the first English nation-state of the 10th century and the first English peoples a combination of Danish and Norwegian Vikings as well as Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Celts and Britons. No nation was ever “pure”, even at the beginning and these combinations of either similar tribes or more distant cousins were the foundation of all European nation peoples. Thereby, Plokhy statement to simply brush off-hand early Belarusian proto-history seems to either fall in line with modernist interpretations or could be adhering to the “objective” Imperial historiography previously mentioned.

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL)

The next legacy of Belarusian identity formation has been cited as the GDL. The full title of GDL was; “the Grand Duchy of Litva, Ruthenia and Samogitia.” Belarusian historian, Zachar Šybieka argues that to refer to the GDL under its full name has not gained recognition in world-wide historiography as the Lithuanian state has monopolized this tradition.⁸⁸ The Belarusian argument is based on several factors including; ‘Litvin’, a word which is Slavic, and denotes the residents of the GDL and more recently has been used to describe ethnic Belarusians. There are also more radical versions of Belarusian history, which imply that medieval Litva and medieval Belarus was one and the same. The argument goes that “modern ‘Lietuvians’ are really only the ‘Baltic Lithuanians’, the tribes who lived near the coast, who have stolen the ancient name of the true Slavic locals.”⁸⁹ Kirył Kaścian & Alaksiej Dajlidaŭ state the language of Litva and contemporary Belarusian vernacular are the

⁸⁵ Ibid, 54.

⁸⁶ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus-The Last Dictatorship in Europe*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press 2011), 4.

⁸⁷ Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, (Cambridge, 2006), 44.

⁸⁸ Zachar Šybieka, “Understanding Kalinoŭski,” *Belarusian Review*, Volume 25, No. 1, Spring 2013, 5.

⁸⁹ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 27.

same Slavic language.⁹⁰ The language during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was Church Slavonic.⁹¹ However, “the GDL and the Commonwealth was a multilingual, multi-confessional, and multiethnic empire. The dominance of the Belarusian and Polish languages varied according to the time period one examines.”⁹² After the 1569 Lublin Union the administrative utilization of Church Slavonic changed and Polish along with Latin slowly became the lingua franca employed by the elites. The principal religion also varied according to the epoch; elites could be Orthodox or Catholic. Efforts to overcome the disparity between Catholics in the Polish Kingdom and Orthodox’s in the GDL produced the creation of the Uniate or “Greek Catholic” church.⁹³

Ruthenian or “old” Belarusian

“The Slavonic tongue of Belarus; Ruthenian or “old” Belarusian was the dominant literary language of the political entity of the GDL.”⁹⁴ “With the advance of confessionalization, loyalty to rulers and lands was marginalized by loyalty to a given religion. Religious debates thus helped shape the main characteristics of Ruthenian identity.”⁹⁵ From 1620 onwards, the name “Belarusians” was employed to signify the Orthodox Ruthenian population of the Commonwealth.⁹⁶ Andrew Wilson argues in *Belarus-The Last Dictatorship in Europe* that, “Uniate identity represented a religious community, but didn’t define itself in national terms.”⁹⁷ Ruthenian identity did however have clear ethno confessional characteristics. In court documents of the period, Orthodox priests were routinely called Ruthenian, while Roman Catholic priests were identified as Polish.⁹⁸ To put things in perspective, both Ruthenian and Muscovite identities were inspired by the political, cultural and scholarly heritage of Kiv and both were strongly related to the Orthodox religious customs and church structure.⁹⁹ Plokhy goes on to say that, the Ruthenian nation and identity cannot be thought

⁹⁰ Kyril Kaścian & Alaksiej Dajlidaŭ, “Belarusians in The Battle of Grunwald,” *Belarusian Review*, Volume 22, No. 2, Summer 2010, 18.

⁹¹ Peter Mayo, “Belorussian” in *the Slavonic Languages*, 887.

⁹² Renee L. Buhr, Victor Shadurski & Steven Hoffman “Belarus: An Emerging Civic Nation? (2011): 430.

⁹³ Ibid, 431.

⁹⁴ Jerzy J. Smolicz & Margaret J. Secombe, “Sociology as a Science of Culture: Linguistic Pluralism in Australia and Belarus,” in *Sociology and Ideology*, ed. Eliezer Ben-Rafael (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2003), 65

⁹⁵ Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, (Cambridge, 2006), 199.

⁹⁶ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 235.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 48.

⁹⁸ Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, (Cambridge, 2006), 183.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 201.

of as an exact precursor of modern Belarus and identity to the same extent that “early modern Muscovite identity can be so regarded vis-à-vis the Russian nation.”¹⁰⁰

Polish and Lithuanian civic empire

“Belarus and Poland’s mutual historical destiny after Union of Lublin (1569) coexisted in a single federal state – *Rzeczpospolita* also known as the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.”

¹⁰¹ Andrew Savchenko argues in *Belarus- a Perpetual Borderland* that a single Belarusian (or proto-Belarusian, Ruthenian) state within the GDL have no basis for justification as the Lithuanian and Polish influences in politics and society were too powerful.¹⁰² He also argues “that the medieval landed nobility was neither Belarusian nor Russian. The gentry, whether ethnically Lithuanian or Slavic, owed its allegiance to the Grand Duke of Lithuania and conducted business of the state in the language they called Russian.” Savchenko then goes on to say that the supposedly Belarusian aristocrats would not identify with the name Belarus related to today’s Belarusian territories. They didn’t classify themselves or their peasants as Belarusians and the language they utilized for state affairs was identified as “*yezyk ruski*” (Russian/ Ruthenian.)¹⁰³ Savchenko does acknowledge however, that Ruthenian or Old Belarusian was a proto-Belarusian language, but argues that its influence among the elites was losing ground, due to the Polonization of the aristocracy. “The “Russian” (Ruthenian) language thereafter was rapidly becoming the language of the townsfolk and peasantry. The proto- Belarusian national consciousness was pushed steadily downwards until it came to rest at the level of village community.”¹⁰⁴ The outcome of this decline, concluded in 1697 with the prohibition of Belorussian from all state articles and court procedures.¹⁰⁵

“The Ruthenian identity that developed in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania prepared the ground for the nineteenth-century Belarusian national project.”¹⁰⁶ Plokyh accredits this period as the beginning of Belarusian proto-identity. Savchenko also acknowledges that the Belarusian national project was built on Ruthenian identity developed during the GDL but states that it

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 356- 357.

¹⁰¹ Uładzimir Łobač, “Images of Neighboring Peoples in the Traditional World Outlook of Belarusians” in *Belarus and its Neighbors: Historical Perceptions and Political Constructs*, ed. Aleś Lahviniec & Taciana Čulickaja, (Warsaw: ELIPSA, 2013), 50.

¹⁰² Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland* (Leiden & Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2009), 32-33.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 28.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 31-33.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Mayo, “Belorussian” in *the Slavonic Languages*, 889.

¹⁰⁶ Serhii Plokyh, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, (Cambridge, 2006), 8.

failed “to produce a distinct identity in early modern times, given the lack of a proto-Belarusian polity.”¹⁰⁷ Barbara Epstein argues that although there was a shared language and a religion, there was no awareness of universal Belarusian identity.¹⁰⁸

After 1795, the GDL was partitioned between the Empires of Austria, Prussia and Russia in 1795 with the majority of lands going to the Russian Empire, including all of Belarus.

“Zachar Šybieka argues Tsarist policies destroyed the Litva tradition and deprived Belarusians of knowledge about their past, thereby making Belarusians easier to turn into Russians by the Tsarist authorities.¹⁰⁹ Šybieka could have a strong case here as at this time the majority of Belarusians were illiterate and historical memory along with ethno-confessional dimensions of identity were the only ways this tradition could be passed down. The policy of Rusification would thereby aspire to transform the two branches of the eastern Slavs into one entity.

Russian nationalism/patriotism

Russian elites never expressed a plain design for the Russian nation or detailed an identity separate from a religious (orthodox), imperial, state, or ethnic identity. More or less from the beginning it was a multinational "Russian" state with loosely imagined commonalities; religion or loyalty to the tsar.¹¹⁰ The crucial spirit of Slavic character for Slavophiles was Orthodox Christianity. The Slavophiles were unsuccessful in establishing an ethnic tradition instead of a statist identity for Russia. The state was not ethnically homogeneous so only Russification could support their endeavours. The brainchild of this idea came in the form of pan-Slavic unity, but resistance from Catholic Slavs such as the Poles, convinced imperial authorities to concentrate on the Belarusians of the North-Western territories.¹¹¹ According to Hienadź Sahanovič’s “Attitude of Belarus’ Population to the Russian Army in the 17th Century,” most Orthodox Belarusians opposed the Catholic aristocracy and authority of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 360- 361.

¹⁰⁸ Barbara Epstein, *The Minsk Ghetto, 1941–1943 Jewish Resistance and Soviet Internationalism*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 2008), 66.

¹⁰⁹ Zachar Šybieka, “Understanding Kalinoŭski,” *Belarusian Review*, Volume 25, No. 1, Spring 2013. 6

¹¹⁰ Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out- Imperial Russia, National Identity, and Theories of Empire” in *A State Of Nations- Empire And Nation-Making In The Age Of Lenin And Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny & Terry Martin, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 44.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 49- 51

Rzeczpospolita/ Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth so were more likely to support some Russian actions in the region.¹¹²

These decisions also coincided with a change of identity based not on religion but on language.¹¹³ These changes in Belarusian society were shaped by circumstances when in 1839 Belarusians lost their only national institution; the Uniate Church which was abolished.¹¹⁴ As ethno-confessionalism in many European countries was a means of preserving national identity, Belarusian/ Ruthenian ethnic identity as supported by the Uniate Church would no longer be represented by a religious institutional apparatus and thereby would lose influence at the state level or within the Empire. However on the other hand, another alternative religious element still had a powerful influence in Belarus, as for many Orthodoxy meant belonging to all-Russian culture.¹¹⁵ Wilson counters this viewpoint by stating, “that local peasants in the nineteenth century would have called themselves *chelovek ruskoi very* (‘a person of Russian/Rus faith’), but without any implications of Russian ethnicity. Most would-be Belarusians identified with locality, a phenomenon known as *tuteishyia* (in Belarusian, coming from ‘here’)”¹¹⁶ Within Russian nationalist discourse throughout the mid-nineteenth century, Belarus was increasingly thought of in ethnic terms rather than in the historical sense.¹¹⁷ At the same time however, “the name, 'White Russia' (Belarus) was simultaneously banned from official administrative language due to the nationalist or separatist nuances which it was believed to carry.”¹¹⁸

Localness/ Tuteishać

As ethnic awareness was supposedly thought of in Tsarist circles, nineteenth century Belarusian peasants were likely to evade the matter of nationality altogether and identified themselves simply as (Tuteishyia) “locals”.¹¹⁹ “Tuteishyia, literally means “people (coming) from here, Tuteishasc’ is a unique method by which Belarusian people assert their national

¹¹² Hienadz Sahanovič, “Attitude of Belarus’ Population to the Russian Army in the 17th Century” in *Belarus and its Neighbors: Historical Perceptions and Political Constructs*, ed. Aleś Lahviniec & Taciana Čulickaja, (Warsaw: ELIPSA, 2013), 29.

¹¹³ Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out,” 55.

¹¹⁴ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 56.

¹¹⁵ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 63.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 65.

¹¹⁷ Darius Staliūnas, *Making Russians- Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863*, (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi B, 2007), 29.

¹¹⁸ Michael E. Urban, *An Algebra of Soviet Power- Elite Circulation in the Belorussian Republic 1966-86*,; (Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne & Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 10

¹¹⁹ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 61.

identity more in terms of localness, from-here-ness, than in terms of any clear-cut, monolithic ethnic identity.”¹²⁰ Alexander Pershai describes in *Localness and Mobility in Belarusian Nationalism* how, “the Belarusian peasantry did not feel a sense of belonging to any particular nation and self-identified with their land, not with culture and language, for many, tuteishasc was the way to “hide” from legal regulations. Tuteishasc was not on the list of officially recognized identities. It was ambiguous and inclusive: all mentioned groups regardless of their class, ethnicity, religion, domicile (urban/rural) and language could identify as tuteishyia.”¹²¹

Polish rebellion 1863

“The Polish rebellion and uprising of 1863 contributed to the maintenance of Polish national institutions but did nothing to construct institutions of a Belarusian state.”¹²² Against this backdrop Polish-speaking aristocrats first made political appeals to Belarusians as an ethnic group, promising ideas of social justice, after the Polish separation from the Russian empire, Belarus in theory would unite with Poland under a federation.¹²³ The reaction to these Polish appeals aimed at Belarusians made the Tsarist establishment implement policies making Russian culture and language more dominant in the region.¹²⁴ Thereafter mass conversions of Catholic Belarusians to Orthodoxy occurred in the 1860s. Russian official discourse portrayed this as a restoration of historic justice.¹²⁵ This was another step in a systematic attempt at divide and occurring. From then on the Tsarist regime looked to “White Russians” (Belarusians) as their younger brothers. “Not only the Slavophiles, referred to Belarus as West Russia, but liberal Westernized economists, insisted that economic progress demands that inhabitants of the western provinces speak Russian and not the local dialect.”¹²⁶

Darius Staliūnas in *Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863* suggests that “the imperial authorities, hindered the formation of the Belarusian nation, while on the other, it was those very authorities who “constructed” Belarusianness and created an “imaginable”

¹²⁰ Alexander Pershai, “Localness and Mobility in Belarusian Nationalism: The Tactic of Tuteishaść” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, Vol 36, No1 (2008): 86- 88.

¹²¹ Ibid, 92- 94

¹²² Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 51.

¹²³ Aliaksandr Bystryk, “Evolution of the Belarusian National Movement in the pages of periodicals (1914-1917),” (MA thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 2013),18.

¹²⁴ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus-A Perpetual Borderland*, 54.

¹²⁵ Darius Staliūnas, *Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863*, 134.

¹²⁶ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 55.

Belarus.”¹²⁷ In the 1860s local officials, viewed the “Belarusian dialect” as an important instrument for nationalising the peasantry, and for combating Belarusian books printed in “Polish characters,” which were being spread among the peasants by local landowners.”¹²⁸ The Tsarist authorities wanted Belarusians to learn Russian in Cyrillic thereby making Belarussianness a regional variation of Russianness.¹²⁹ These actions would further sever Belarusians collective ties with the GDL and Belarusian written in Latin. As Belarus was occupied solely by the Tsarist empire Belarusian traditions would vary to Lithuania and Ukraine traditions, as after 1795, both nationalities had literacy outposts free of censorship, as was the case of Prussian Lithuania and Ukrainian Galicia in the Austrian empire. As a result both nationalities developed a written grammar outside of Tsarist influence which was never the case for Belarus.

The West-Russian cultural tradition

It was only in the latter half of the nineteenth century, that Belarusians at last started to identify themselves in other ways, thereby moving away from Ruthenianism; most of this effort was achieved by west-Russian intellectuals’ rather than Polish intellectuals.¹³⁰ The West-Russism ideology was a counter-movement to hinder Polish nation-building on Belarusian lands by above all by destabilizing the old nobles. Ironically, this powerful Orthodox faction was the major heir to the Uniates.¹³¹ Typical characteristics of this tradition incorporated the awareness of Belarus’s distinctiveness as “Western Russia”, an acceptance of historical legacies such as the Polotsk principedom, admiration of the Orthodox Church and its influence in “West-Russian lands”, anti-Polishness and anti-Catholicism. The movement also supported scholarship written both in Russian and in Belarusian.¹³² The movement looked to Frantsisk Skoryna/ Skaryna (1490–1552) for inspiration as he first introduced West Russian provincialism’s into religious manuscript, thereby being the father of West Russian literature. Grigory Ioffe in “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity” accredits Skoryna with creating the basis of the Belarusian language.¹³³

¹²⁷ Darius Staliūnas, *Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863*, 10.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 286.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 296.

¹³⁰ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 67.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 70.

¹³² Ales’ Smolenchuk, “Litvinism, West-Russism and the Belarusian Idea. The XIXth – the Beginning of the XXth Century” *Crossroads Digest N2, The journal for the studies of Eastern European borderland*, (2007):100.

¹³³ Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 8, (2003): 1261.

In the 1860s – 1870s, the movement even had support from Tsarist officials as the “theory of West-Russism” was being cultivated. Its main belief was that since Belarus was a cultural and state part of Russia, the Belarusians were therefore a subdivision of the Russian ethnos. To help foster this idea, competing influences had to be liquidated from Belarusian lands, mainly Polish influences.” The beliefs of West-Russianism had popular support, mainly from locals who worked for civil and military officials in the Tsarist government. Thereby, a Russian administration would support and shape one form of Belarusian national identity if not for the first time. The prime purpose of West-Russianism ideology was aimed to eradicate all qualities that differentiated Belarusians from (Great) Russians.¹³⁴ This was truly a movement of Russification.

As such, segments of the West-Russianists gravitated in the direction of the Russian nationalist ideology and several of them even joined the emerging Belarusian national movement.¹³⁵ Wilson highlights that it was west-Russian historians who revitalized interest in Polatsk, as they wanted to establish that the Poles didn’t have claim to the region but he also describes how “west-Russians” sought to repress any idea of a country named Litva. “The west-Russians, rather than the Belarusian nationalists who came later, were therefore responsible for popularising the terms (White Russia) ‘Belarus’ and ‘Belarusian’ as a safer alternative.”¹³⁶ Strangely but not surprising given their ideology, west-Russians saw little requirement for the Belarusian language at all. “They argued that Belarusians should use the ‘one and the same Russian literary language’ as the Russians.”¹³⁷ So within line with their “elder brother”, West-Rusism looked to their Orthodox legacies and the traditions of Kievan Rus’, but also Ruthenia, with one important difference, they severed Belarus’s connections with Catholic Poland.¹³⁸ Catholics historically were inclined to identify with Poles, whereas the Orthodox identified Russians, this in effect left no room for Belarusians.¹³⁹ This was the first time, ethno-confessionalism would divide the national movement and it wouldn’t be the

¹³⁴ Aliaksandr Bystryk, “Evolution of the Belarusian National Movement in the pages of periodicals (1914-1917),” 9.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 10.

¹³⁶ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 71.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 75.

¹³⁸ Dorota Michaluk and Per Anders Rudling, “From the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Belarusian Democratic Republic: the Idea of Belarusian Statehood during the German Occupation of Belarusian lands, 1915 – 1919,” *The Journal Of Belarusian Studies*, Vol. 7 Issue 2, (2014): 5.

¹³⁹ Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity” (2003): 1248.

last. On the hand, as Savchenko points out, Belarusians had now taken their first action en route to a nationally-informed civil society with the support of the Tsarist administration.¹⁴⁰

Litvin idea

Another competing movement was the Litvin movement. Literature in the Belarusian native vernacular was first made available by representatives of this Lithuanian tradition.¹⁴¹ Their ideology of *krajovaść* was put together in Belarus and Lithuania in the early twentieth century. Followers of this movement professed that all natives of historic Lithuania (GDL), “irrespective of their ethnic and cultural affiliation, were ‘citizens of the region/*kraj*’ and thus belonged to a single nation. A sense of patriotism and self-identification as ‘local’ or a ‘*kraj* citizen’ was the main criterion of such national identity.”¹⁴² *Krajovaść*’s followers desired that the *krajovaść* identity might be united with a vision of modern national identity.

Alaksandr Smalančuk suggests that the expansion of the *krajovaść* idea was made possible by the so-called ‘*tutejšaść*’ of local people. This therefore implies it was based on a civic national identity.¹⁴³

“The *Krajowy* ideology was established upon the idea of territorial nationalism, and took into consideration the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the lands of the GDL, Poles, Lithuanians, and Belarusians, and proposed a joint identity based upon their joint 700-year heritage of the union with Lithuania.”¹⁴⁴ “The *krajovtśi* believed in the idea that the interests of the region as a whole (the *krai*) should come before those of any one ethnic group, and adhered to a political idea of Grand Duchy patriotism and a common Polish high culture, distinct from, and even superior to, ethnic Poland, representing a unique synthesis of cultures, albeit on the basis of Catholicism and the Polish language.”¹⁴⁵ “Preserving multiethnicity was therefore key.”¹⁴⁶ Advocators in the Belarusian national project also worked very

¹⁴⁰ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 64.

¹⁴¹ Aliaksandr Bystryk, “Evolution of the Belarusian National Movement in the pages of periodicals (1914-1917)” 8.

¹⁴² Alaksandr Smalančuk, “*Krajovaść* vis-à-vis Belarusian and Lithuanian National Movements in the Early 20th Century” in *Belarus and its Neighbors: Historical Perceptions and Political Constructs*, ed. Aleś Lahvinič & Taciana Čulickaja, (Warsaw: ELIPSA, 2013), 70

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 71

¹⁴⁴ Dorota Michaluk and Per Anders Rudling, “From the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Belarusian Democratic Republic,” (2014): 5.

¹⁴⁵ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 77.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 79.

vigorously with supporters of *krajovaść*.¹⁴⁷ The *krajovaść* theory of a political nation consisted national identity's main criterion to be as a 'citizen of the *Kraj*', thereby collaborating in an ethnic union of nations.¹⁴⁸ "One of the main goals of *krajovaść* was the reconciliation of particular local or national interests to common interests and cooperation between nations based on civil equality". Followers of the *Krajovaść* movement desired that *krajovaść* identity may well be united with a modern national identity.¹⁴⁹ As *krajovaść* endorsed more assertive forms of Belarusian identity than west-Russism, many aspects of the movement coincided with the tenets of the 'national' movement.¹⁵⁰ The Grand Duchy myth was also encouraged by the *krajovtsi* project and has left a long lasting legacy on the Belarusian national movement.¹⁵¹

Belarusian cultural tradition

"The process of the Belarusian cultural accumulation that was happening within the limits of the Litvin and West-Russian cultural traditions laid the foundation for the Belarusian cultural tradition which in a certain sense was a combination of Litvinism and the West-Russian tradition."¹⁵² The Belarusian cultural tradition incorporated both traditions to varying degrees.

Added to these traditions, Belarusian national consciousness can also be accredited to the efforts of ethnographers, folklorists, linguists, amateur poets and playwrights.¹⁵³ In Belarus, ethnic consciousness began to develop amongst Catholic scholars in the mid-nineteenth century. These ideas of a unique Belarusian identity developed from research in folklore, mainly outside the territory of Belarus.¹⁵⁴ Two different 'myths of descent' were formulated, one being, the 'pure Slavic stock' and other being the 'Baltic substratum' theory.¹⁵⁵ The Belarusian tradition differed also to previous movements, as it portrayed religious indifference; thereby hoping to galvanize support from all would be Belarusians. This then

¹⁴⁷ Alaksandr Smalančuk, "Krajovaść vis-à-vis Belarusian and Lithuanian National Movements in the early 20th Century," 79.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 80.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 71.

¹⁵⁰ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 80.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 87.

¹⁵² Ales' Smolenchuk, "Litvinism, West-Russism and the Belarusian Idea" (2007): 101.

¹⁵³ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland* (Leiden & Boston, 2009), 61.

¹⁵⁴ Grigory Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity" (2003): 1246.

¹⁵⁵ David A. Riach, 'Themes in Belarusian National Thought: The Origins, Emergence and Development of the Belarusian 'National Idea',' (Thesis., Carleton University Ottawa, Canada, 2000), 10.

would bypass the issue of confessional divide of ethnic Belarusians and would refer to all Belarusians irrespective of their religious beliefs.¹⁵⁶

At this period in history there were no universities in Belarus; Belarusians students therefore had to study elsewhere within the Russian empire.¹⁵⁷ Within this context Belarusian students in St. Petersburg founded the Belarusian Revolutionary Hramada (Union) in 1902. Hramada became the centre of Belarusian nationalism and included a small circle of ethnic Belarusian students and intellectuals, which later became one of the first Belarusian political parties.¹⁵⁸ What differentiated the Belarusian national project from west-Russian and the Litvin traditions was that the movement believed language to be the single most significant identifying issue of the national movement, trumping “race,” religion and ethnicity.¹⁵⁹ The movement thereby differed from previous movements with either the emphasis on ethno-confessionalism or civic multi-nationalism, Hradma therefore was embracing Ethnic Nationalism.

“The new Belarusian national activists needed a national ideology, with its own myths, stories, and ideas, which could justify political action towards national self-determination. The active creation of a Belarusian national identity by intellectuals and literary figures continued into the first decade of the 20th century.” From 1906 to 1915, the newly named Belarusian Socialist Hramada leadership created the literary periodical *Nasha Niva* (Our Field).¹⁶⁰ The *Nasha Niva* in affect created the first Belarusian literary standard; it was written solely in Belarusian and welcomed thousands of amateurs as contributors. It also aimed to create a national awakening and foster ideas of social liberation. However, *Nasha Niva*'s circulation never exceeded forty five hundred. The founders of *Nasha Niva* did however succeed in forming a uniform national ideology and spreading it amongst ethnic Belarusians, it should be noted however as Savchenko makes clear that illiteracy among Belarusian peasants was widespread at the time, and circulation would have made most of an impact amongst the intelligentsia.

¹⁵⁶ Ales' Smolenchuk, “Litvinism, West-Russism and the Belarusian Idea” (2007): 102.

¹⁵⁷ Barbara Epstein, *The Minsk Ghetto, 1941–1943 Jewish Resistance and Soviet Internationalism*, (2008), 68.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 70.

¹⁵⁹ Per Anders Rudling, “The Battle Over Belarus: The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement, 1906-1931,” (Doctor diss, University of Alberta, 2010), 10.

¹⁶⁰ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 63.

Belarusian national ideology encompassed both socialism and romanticism.¹⁶¹ Nasha Niva motif was language ‘revival’ as following the Hramada tradition motif; they hoped a new definition of nation would unite Orthodox and Catholics Christians together.¹⁶² “The newspaper also aspired to enhance the social prestige of the Belarusian language, reminding readers that in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania this language possessed the status of the state language and was used to write laws”¹⁶³ They were thereby creating a new historical narrative. Nasha Niva actively spread an ethnic-language variant of national ideology with calls made for the language to be used in all walks of life, including education, religion and political life. Nava Niva’s early rise was also linked to Lithuanian and Belarusian Poles in fomenting the so-called “krajowa ideologija” (“local area ideology” or “Regionalism”) This was the premise of a state or civil nation formed the basis of “Regionalism”.¹⁶⁴ Thereby Nava Niva incorporated the Litvin tradition within their ranks, which also incorporated some ideas of Civic nationalism.

“At the beginning of the twentieth century Belorussian still had no codified alphabetical, orthographical or grammatical norms.” To combat this, Nasa Niva successfully created standard alphabets, both in Cyrillic and Latin. This work was then later continued by “Branislań Taraškevič, who’s *Belorussian Grammar for Schools* (Taraskevic 1918) quickly, became the standard against which other proposals for orthographical and grammatical norms were measured.”¹⁶⁵ “In 1911 literacy was not widespread, overall, only 13.5 per cent of Belarusians were literate in 1911 ”¹⁶⁶ This in no way helped Nasa Niva export their message to the populace.

Others still in the Belarusian national movement wished to transform the pre-existing sense of local or regional identity into a clearly articulated national consciousness.¹⁶⁷ “In 1913 the development of one more variant of the Belarusian national idea began. It was named “clerical-patriotic” by Anton Lutskevich. A newspaper popularized the development of national consciousness among Belarusians-Catholics, encouraged Catholic clergy to use the

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 64-66.

¹⁶² Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 83.

¹⁶³ Ales’ Smolenchuk, “Litvinism, West-Russism and the Belarusian Idea” (2007): 103.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 104.

¹⁶⁵ Peter Mayo, “Belorussian” in *the Slavonic Languages*, ed. (London and New York, 1993), 888.

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 86.

¹⁶⁷ David A. Riach, ‘Themes in Belarusian National Thought: The Origins, Emergence and Development of the Belarusian ‘National Idea’,’ (Thesis., Carleton University Ottawa, Canada, 2000), 14.

Belarusian language in religious services, and was aimed at social harmony and an evolutionary way of society development.¹⁶⁸ Their weekly Belarusian paper ‘defended Christian and Belarusian values’ and (instead of the Socialist Hramada who put class before nation) put religion first, and Catholicism at that, thereby limiting their appeal to only a fifth of the population.¹⁶⁹ “The divide of the Belarusian population according to religion as well as state and cultural loyalty was a significant impediment to the attempts of introducing a unified Belarusian national idea.”¹⁷⁰

The Belarusian national cause however had no influence in politics and received no representation in the first Duma of March 1906.¹⁷¹ Belarusian parties like Hramada were mere sideshows compared to all-Russian parties like the Communists.¹⁷² “In 1914 the two most significant national movements in Belarus were the Roman Catholic *krayovtzi* and the Orthodox west-Russians.”¹⁷³ The Belarusian national movement was being outdone by rival factions. The west-Russians held more influence over eastern Belarus as Belarusian national activists were more successful in the West.¹⁷⁴

Belarus during World War One

Throughout World War One, Belarusians served in the Russian imperial army in the hundreds of thousands.¹⁷⁵ Belarusian nationalists hoped by expressing loyalty and support to the war effort they would gain some concessions from the Tsarist government after the war.¹⁷⁶ The Tsarist authorities were less inclined to tolerate an independent national movement to flourish.¹⁷⁷ Instead, within Tsarist Belarusian lands still held by the Russians, the population

¹⁶⁸ Alaksandr Smalančuk, “Krajovaść vis-à-vis Belarusian and Lithuanian National Movements in the early 20th Century,” 70.

¹⁶⁹ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 83.

¹⁷⁰ Aliaksandr Bystryk, “Evolution of the Belarusian National Movement in the pages of periodicals (1914-1917)” 23.

¹⁷¹ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 68.

¹⁷² Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 85.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 87.

¹⁷⁴ Aliaksandr Bystryk, “Evolution of the Belarusian National Movement in the pages of periodicals (1914-1917)” 16.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 25-26.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 28.

¹⁷⁷ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 69.

was exposed to intense propaganda, stressing that Belarusians were a branch of the Russian nation.¹⁷⁸

During the first years of World War One, the armies of Imperial Germany occupied most of the ethnically Belarusian lands, including Minsk and Vilnius, these were now under German military rule, known as Ober-Ost. The Germans supported Belarusian ethnicity with the acknowledgement of the Belarusian language as one of the official languages within Ober-Ost lands. This action increased the status of the language as previously the population thought of it only as a primordial or primitive language of peasants. Laws were now being published in Belarusian and a newspaper *Homan* (The Clamour) was published in German-occupied Vilnius in 1916-1918 by Belarusian campaigners. “*Homan* is especially important for the history of Belarusian nationalism, as it was the first Belarusian periodical published outside Russia ”¹⁷⁹ Belarusian national discourse was now able to be openly antagonistic towards the Tsarist Empire with German patronage with Russian rule being condemned on many number of issues and given the roles of enemy. The Russian Empire was portrayed as the historic persecutor of the Belarusian people; a new historical narrative was shaped by the writers of *Homan*. The history of the GDL was again given a significant role in the Golden age of the Belarusian national myth. The conditions for a Belarusian historical narrative to be sustained were only possible under the patronage of the Ober-Ost regime.¹⁸⁰ Preceding German occupation, the vision of a Belarus totally detached from Russia was non-existent on Belarusian lands. “Under the Ober-Ost regime was the first time in the history of Belarusian nationalism when large parts of Belarusian ethnic territory was not under Russian rule.”¹⁸¹

General Ludendorff’s administration was now told to encourage Belarusian cultural activities and to employ Belarusian activism as a counterbalance to Polish nationalism in the region. The nationalists were dependent on sponsors and allies as they still had by this time no popular following. Under German patronage, they found themselves in a situation more encouraging than any other time in modern history.¹⁸² Marshal Hindenburg then supported

¹⁷⁸ Dorota Michaluk and Per Anders Rudling, “From the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Belarusian Democratic Republic,” (2014): 27.

¹⁷⁹ Aliaksandr Bystryk, “Evolution of the Belarusian National Movement in the pages of periodicals (1914-1917)” 30-37.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 53- 55.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 57-60.

¹⁸² Per Anders Rudling, “The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement: Historical Preconditions and Prospects for the Future” in *Revolt in the Name of Freedom: Forgotten Belarusian Gene?*, ed. Piotr Rudkoński & Kaciaryna Kolb, (Warsaw:Uczelnia Łazarskiego,2013), 113.

educational reform, with the first ever Belarusian elementary schools being opened.¹⁸³ Paul Von Hindenburg then went further on 22 December 1916 and prohibited teaching in the Russian language with religion and science to be taught in Belarusian and other subjects taught in German.¹⁸⁴ “ By October 1916 there were eight Belarusian language schools, in April, 1918 there were 89 Belarusian schools ”¹⁸⁵ The German occupation thereby assisted a national revival in German occupied Belarus, but this uneven development in a divided Belarus restricted a nationalist shakeup solely to the western part of Belarus until the Germans occupied the eastern half of the country.¹⁸⁶

Savchenko however suggests that Belarusian national leaders were still hesitant to carry on alone, even with German backing and instead planned to revive the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a political construct, which would include Belarusians, Lithuanians, Poles and Jews.¹⁸⁷ There were splits in the Belarusian camp, with those seeking for full independence whilst others looked to the Litvin tradition for inspiration. With this in mind, a rival idea in 1917 to the purely nationalist vision saw plans to reconstitute the GDL, the so-called ‘national conception’ scheme was thought up to incorporate ethnic Belarusian lands on both sides of the German-Russian front into one political unit.¹⁸⁸ Per Anders Rudling argues in the Rise and fall of the Belarusian National Movement that “much like the *krajovaść* ideology, Belarusian nationalism could be defined by its search for allies and associates.”¹⁸⁹ Wilson states that it was ‘only at the start of 1918 that the Belarusians finally gave up on the *krai* conception of statehood’.¹⁹⁰

After the Treaty of *Brest-Litovsk*, German forces entered Minsk on March 8, 1918, but there was a bewildering obstacle, in Vilnius, there was already a national Belarusian government, nominated by a Belarusian National Assembly, it was also acknowledged by the Germans and had a different vision for a Belarusian state, which would be a multinational confederacy made up of Belarusian and Lithuanian territories. This project therefore clashed with the

¹⁸³ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 92.

¹⁸⁴ Dorota Michaluk and Per Anders Rudling, “From The Grand Duchy Of Lithuania to the Belarusian Democratic Republic,”(2014): 10.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 11.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 26.

¹⁸⁷ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 70.

¹⁸⁸ Dorota Michaluk and Per Anders Rudling, “From the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Belarusian Democratic Republic,” (2014): 12.

¹⁸⁹ Per Anders Rudling, “The Rise and fall of the Belarusian National Movement: Historical Preconditions and Prospects for the Future,” 112.

¹⁹⁰ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 92.

Belarusian national state ideology school of thought. The opposing groups were quickly reconciled, after which both Vilno and Minsk nationalist factions convened in Minsk on March 25, 1918 and declared the first Belarusian state: the Belarusian People's Republic (*Bielaruskaja Narodnaja Respublika*- BNR). However these intellectual politicians who proclaimed the BNR and elected themselves members of the government were not accountable.¹⁹¹ As such, Imperial Germany chose not to back BNR's declaration of independence and dissociated with the Council of the Republic, considering them only as representatives of the Belarusian national population.¹⁹² Wilson argues that BNR "may have transcended *krai*-politics, but it still thought in terms of some kind of confederation with Poland, an alliance with Ukraine or the Baltic States, or German protection."¹⁹³ Wilson therefore implies that Belarusians were not able to achieve self-determination on their own.

Outside influences however did play a role in a state formation and this is highlighted by Raman Skirmunt's BNR government (from May 14 to July 21 1918), his geo-political considerations saw Poland, not Russia, as a political partner which in turn which was unenthusiastically translated by the Belarusian Social-Revolutionaries and Social-Federalists. Their influence at this time was also much greater than the nationalists. The next prime minister, Ivan Sierada (July 22- October 12, 1918) was a social-federalist.¹⁹⁴ It seems even in government, cooperation between nationalists and other parties seemed impossible.

Another factor that damaged the cause was paradoxically, the nationalists' "collaboration" with Imperial Germany, which alienated them from the masses. Rudling argues that the declaration an independent BNR is a contemporary Belarusian foundation myth, or counter-myth, which was cultivated in opposition to the Soviet narrative. However this statement shouldn't detract from the fact that Lukashenka's regime imagines itself to be the heir of the BSSR, while for most of the opposition and Belarusian Diasporas BNR has come to symbolise a fundamental position in their historical memory.¹⁹⁵ The BNR was short lived; by December 1918 most of their leaders had been forced to leave the country. Wilson however

¹⁹¹ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 72.

¹⁹² Dorota Michaluk and Per Anders Rudling, "From The Grand Duchy Of Lithuania to the Belarusian Democratic Republic,"(2014): 22.

¹⁹³ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 94.

¹⁹⁴ Dorota Michaluk, "The Four Governments of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in the International Arena in 1918–1920," in *Belarus and its Neighbors: Historical Perceptions and Political Constructs*, ed. Aleś Lahviniec & Taciana Čulickaja, (Warsaw: ELIPSA, 2013), 86

¹⁹⁵ Per Anders Rudling, "The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement: Historical Preconditions and Prospects for the Future," 114-115.

has rightly asserted that the BNR laid the foundation for more successful efforts of Belarusian statehood and state building; he argues that even Soviet Belarus was indebted to some degree to the BNR.¹⁹⁶ In spite of this valid reasoning, Soviet historiographies for obvious reasons never referred to the BNR, apart from in a negative context, which was described as a failed effort by “bourgeois nationalists” to separate the “three Slavic brothers” from one another.¹⁹⁷

BSSR (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic)

The BNR lacked many of the characteristics connected with statehood; - “borders, army, parliament, police, currency, constitution, and codified laws,” all central apparatus of any functional state, these were all absent. In spite of this, “after 1918 it became much harder to deny the existence of Belarus and the Belarusian language, even among leading communists, a foundation for nation building had been laid.”¹⁹⁸ Michaluk and Rudling in “From the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Belarusian Democratic Republic,” also support the claim, that the creation of the BSSR seems to have been absolutely dependent on BNR’s proclamation of March 1918 and the nationalist intelligentsia demonstration of strength as a nucleus of nationalist activists were now sufficiently powerful to make a persuasive arguments for Belarusian statehood.¹⁹⁹

On January 14, 1919 after the Bolshevik invasion of Minsk, a Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic was declared. Again, a notion of a union with Lithuania came to the fore when the two states unified into a short-lived multinational state known as Litbel. This state however only lasted two months after Polish armies invaded Vilnius and Minsk in the spring of 1919.²⁰⁰ This was the height of Soviet –Polish confrontations, but eventually Bolshevik armies reclaimed Minsk in the summer of 1920. One outcome of these events was “the partition of ethnic Belarusian territories at the Treaty of Riga signed on March 18, 1921.”²⁰¹ After the treaty many Belarusian politicians, including former BNR activists, were willing to

¹⁹⁶ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 95- 96.

¹⁹⁷ Per Anders Rudling, “The Battle Over Belarus: The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement, 1906-1931,” (Doctor diss, University of Alberta, 2010), 142.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 140

¹⁹⁹ Dorota Michaluk and Per Anders Rudling, “From the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Belarusian Democratic Republic,” (2014): 28.

²⁰⁰ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 73.

²⁰¹ Grigory Ioffe , “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 8, December 2003, p 1255

work within Soviet state formations. Michaluk states that; “they considered the BSSR their state, their Belarus, but in fact, it was just Moscow’s political decision.”²⁰²

Polish Belarus

After the Riga Treaty, the Belarusian nation was effectively partitioned between Poland and the Soviet Union. “Both powers were openly hostile to ideas of Belarusian nationalism. In Poland, the Western Belarusians suffered harsh repressions from 1924.”²⁰³ By 1927, the Polish government also embarked upon a concentrated drive of Polonization that deliberately sought the annihilation of all Belorussian cultural, religious and educational organizations.²⁰⁴

Paradoxically, as Michael E. Urban points out in *an Algebra of Soviet Power*, “the most active expression of indigenous Belorussian nationalism in the western territories (Poland) during the thirties came from the underground Communist Party of Belorussia (KPB).²⁰⁵ This also brought about a change again, as before World War One, the Belarusian national movement had been anti- Russia and against Russification. The Polish state at first wanted to benefit from this anti-Russian direction of Belarusian nationalism. It therefore not only allowed but vigorously encouraged Belarusian school and cultural institutions, wishing to awaken Belarusian distinctiveness from Russia and thereby obtaining the allegiance of the Belarusian population.²⁰⁶ However, just as with the BSSR, support was later withdrawn and assimilationist strategies were adopted. In this context Polish schools replaced Belarusian ones and by the 1930s, conversions of Orthodox Belarusians to Roman or Uniate Catholicism were attempted and many Belarusian Orthodox churches were closed down. “Far from being immersed into the Polish nation, Belarusian speakers in the Polish borderlands developed much stronger Belarusian and national identities during the interwar period.”²⁰⁷

²⁰² Dorota Michaluk, “The Four Governments of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in the International Arena in 1918–1920,” 94.

²⁰³ Benjamin Hiscox, “The legacy of sovereignty: how the interwar years have shaped democratic transition in Lithuania and Belarus,” *Groundings*, Volume 2, September 2008, 57.

²⁰⁴ Michael E. Urban, *An Algebra of Soviet Power- Elite Circulation in the Belorussian Republic 1966-86*, (Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne & Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

²⁰⁶ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism reframed Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, (Oxford & New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 101.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 102.

The most important Belarusian nationalist movement in Western Belarus was the Belarusian Peasants and Workers *Hramada*, (BSRH) ²⁰⁸ The BSRH was supportive of the BSSR's policies of Belarusization and *korenizatsiia*, which they professed as an example also for Western Belarus. ²⁰⁹ Hramada received their orders from the BSSR and tried to generate a large revolutionary movement that could possibly destabilize ethnic Belarusian localities in their favour. Direct confrontation therefore came from the Polish authorities who viewed their aims as essentially dangerous. BSRH objectives also facilitated further isolation of Belarusian national groups from the political establishment. Therefore within this context, Soviet Belarus became to be seen as the lesser of two evils and the only realistic way of achieving an eventual unification of all ethnically pure Belarusian lands into one Belarusian national state.”

There were others in the Belarusian nationalist Polish camp that didn't align themselves with the Bolsheviks.” The Belarusian Christian Democratic Party (BKhd) regarded the struggle for Belarusian national interests within the Polish state as only a necessarily temporary measure. ” Their wish was to create a self-governing Belarusian nation-state, which looked from neither to Russia nor Poland for support. ²¹⁰ Rudling argues, that “despite its relatively small size, the BKhd had considerable intellectual influence on the development of Belarusian nationalism.” ²¹¹ The BKhd moved away from the Hramada tradition and discarded the ideology that the Belarusian nation was divided by class. An older theme re-appeared and the BKhd oriented themselves towards Lithuania. The BKhd believed Belarusians to be culturally divided from the Great Russians. They therefore rehashed the older nationalist traditions of GDL and the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, that they were both “Belarusian states”. In this respect, they were out of tune with other Belarusian nationalist groups of the early 1920s, as they continued to oppose the idea of Soviet Belarusian statehood, and contended BSSR historiography in creating a “national” history. ²¹²

²⁰⁸ Per Anders Rudling, “The Battle over Belarus: The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement, 1906-1931,” (Doctor diss), 208.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 209.

²¹⁰ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 107-113.

²¹¹ Per Anders Rudling, “The Battle over Belarus: The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement, 1906-1931,” (Doctor diss), 199.

²¹² Ibid, 200- 202.

Ilya Kunitsk, points out that western Belarus is an important case to look at as the intensity of nationalist feelings was always more advanced than in Eastern Belarus.²¹³ The logical explanation of this could lie in ethno-confessional dimensions as western Belarus was always a stronger catholic heartland, less affected by Rusification with more Belarusian speakers and with it at this time belonging to Poland, would have no conflict of interests if inspired by the GDL and the Polish Commonwealth. Thereby nationalists would in theory at least have an easier task in converting ethnic western Belarusians to the nationalist cause than in the east of the country where orthodoxy, Russian language dominance and the policies of Rusification had taken a stronger hold.

Soviet Belarus (BSSR) – 1920 & 30s

Most historians accredit the BSSR in 1920s as being a golden era of Belarusian culture, politics and scholarship. Savchenko states that the 1930s was the polar opposite, with all accomplishments in Belarusian art, culture and scholarship being thoroughly sovietised, along with the process of Russification which destroyed Belarus' national make up beyond recognition and almost beyond the point of restoration. Savchenko also argues that the second "Golden Age" was not really an indigenous experience, but that of an imperial power, i.e., the USSR which was imposed from above and was a useful way for the authorities to promote national feelings amongst the populace.²¹⁴

One early action taken in this area was accomplished by the brochure: "The Belarusian National Question and the Communist Party" (December 1921) which stated that Belarusian culture was not divided by class and therefore national interests in Belarus in fact corresponded with the interests of the working classes. "Thus, Belarusian culture was the culture of the working masses of Belarusians". This message had been repeated several times within the nationalist camp and had its roots deep within *Nasha Niva's* circles.²¹⁵ Another important development for Belarusians in this period was the actions the Communists took regarding "industrialization, urbanization and in the fields of education and culture."²¹⁶ These processes were supported in Moscow in the 1920s as the Bolsheviks increasingly stressed the Party's proletarian character, and encouraged 'working-class upward mobility.' "The Soviets

²¹³ Ilya Kunitsk, "Influences on Belarusian Nationhood: Soviet Institutionalization Or Direct Russification?," *Belarusian Review*, Volume 21, No. 1. Spring 2009, 7.

²¹⁴ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 77- 78.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 82.

²¹⁶ Michael E. Urban, *An Algebra of Soviet Power- Elite Circulation in the Belorussian Republic 1966-86*, 13.

also made use of folklorists, linguists, and ethnographers to help identify and promote ethnicities and nationalities.”²¹⁷

With these factors in mind, the nationalist movement found it possible to work with the communists as Pro-Communist political considerations were not unimportant to Belarusian nationalists.²¹⁸ “Of course, a Belarusian nationalist did not have to be a Communist to have pro-Russian attitudes. Not infrequently, the acceptance of Russia as a potential ally was merely a way of rejecting Poland.”²¹⁹ The nationalists therefore complied with the BSSR and from it, emerged a hybrid Creole Soviet-Nationalist identity with the Bolsheviks investing in national consciousness amongst the citizenry.²²⁰ However, as Laura J. Olson argues in *Folk Revival and Russian Identity*, “Soviet national consciousness” should not be confused with the nationalist goal, the Soviets goal was ‘internationalism’, but this could be achieved in a relationship between all the various peoples in the Soviet Union in the attainment of the uniqueness of one’s own ethnic group.²²¹

Belarusian during the 1920s became an official language and the Soviets introduced personal IDs “which not only described the holder’s place of residence but also the person’s *natsional’nost’* or ethnicity.”²²² Advocates of the Belarusian national movement also established major Belarusian national institutions, which were to survive the Soviet’s change in nationality policies, including an enlarged nationally-informed civil society. Soviet patronage supported for the first time in history Belarusian national state structures.²²³ Belarus’s National Communists were instrumental in recognizing illiteracy and combating it by intensifying Belarusian education at all levels. The National Communists also promoted Belarusian culture via publication of books and periodicals in the Belarusian language. These efforts culminated in a reduction of adult illiteracy by 300,000 in three years.

The BSSR also undertook the task of nation building to heart by encouraging ideas and myths that would validate the existence of the Belarusian nation .This endeavour was given to the intellectual organization, the Institute of Belarusian Culture (Inbelkult.) “The study of

²¹⁷ Laura J. Olson, *Performing Russia- Folk Revival and Russian Identity*,(London: Routledge, 2004), 35

²¹⁸ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 74.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 75.

²²⁰ Laura J. Olson, *Performing Russia- Folk Revival and Russian Identity*, 37.

²²¹ Ibid, 38

²²² Grigory Ioffe , “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity,” 1244.

²²³ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 78.

Belarusian history by Inbelkult lay somewhere in between scholarly pursuit and national indoctrination.” The state was the tool nationalists could use for the time being to promote Belarusian national development in the Soviet Union, as the choice was clear, through the state or not at all. Savchenko argues that it was never clear what Belarusian national communism utilized the most, was it the “national” or the “communist” component. It was unusual for an empire in general and especially an empire like the USSR, to promote and support literacy and education in the local language. What was even stranger was the fact that the USSR gave finances in support of a nation’s history and promoted its glorification. It therefore can be argued that the modern foundations of state sponsored scholarship of Belarusian nationalism were developed under the supervision of Soviet officials.²²⁴ Soviet patronage then went one step further in 1927 by briefly tolerating an effort to found an independent Belarusian Orthodox Church.²²⁵ Belarusian nationalists also used state funds to impose Belorussification upon all segments of life, public and private.²²⁶

It therefore is surprising, to discover that the primary resistance to the Belarusification came from local peasants. This is also understandable given their historic ‘local’ identity as Belarusization had allocated them Belarusian ethnicity by the Soviet administration; they opposed their forced “nationalization”. One can presumably assume they wished not to be classified. Belarusization was also opposed by the left wing of the Bolshevik party and after 1927 Stalin himself followed suit, “he became concerned that the nationalities policies of the 1920s had strengthened local nationalism.”²²⁷ “By 1930 Stalin delegitimized the Belarusian national communists by accusing them of working for Pilsudski and being agents of the Polish state, robbing the national communists of their credentials as Belarusian patriots.”²²⁸ Given Belarus’s borderland locality, the national intelligentsia had empathy either with Russian or Polish culture. The change of policy should therefore be seen as a struggle between two nationalisms.

The Great Terror began in BBSR already in 1930 and was conducted on the basis of a “national democratic” conspiracy.²²⁹ More than ninety prominent Belarusian scholars, writers and administrators were condemned to various prison terms and “internal exile” during 1929-

²²⁴ Ibid, 86-89.

²²⁵ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 105.

²²⁶ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 90.

²²⁷ Per Anders Rudling, “The Battle Over Belarus,” 307.

²²⁸ Ibid, 311.

²²⁹ Ibid, 307- 308.

30.²³⁰ “By 1933, all politically active members of the old Belarusian intelligentsia were eliminated from the scene” and a list of banned books appeared shortly after their disappearance. “The list included collections of Belarusian folklore, dictionaries of local dialects, Belarusian journals, Belarusian archaeology, dictionaries of Belarusian scientific terms, Belarusian folk tales and proverbs.”²³¹ Belarusian was now censored and it was no longer feasible to advertise books by Belarusian writers in bookshops.²³² These developments set the scene for a re-introduction of a possible Sovietised Russification process as Belarusian history was now portrayed as a joint class struggle of Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian peasants against their “Polish landlords.”²³³

On the other hand, it could be said, that the Belarusian national idea was not dropped completely, but rather formulated now solely by Communist ideology in Moscow and no longer by Belarusian national scholars in Minsk. Savchenko argues that Belarusian didn't disappear overnight and was still prevalent in all school levels, as the Russian language was not a mandatory subject until 1938.²³⁴ Disappointingly for the nationalists, the peasantry reacted indifferent to the end of the Belarusization. The consequences of the end of Belarusization and *korenizatsiia* (nativization" or "indigenization") meant the re-appearance and remedy of Russian nationalism was set to make a return.²³⁵

This was evident straight away as “Soviet historiography after 1934 largely returned to the Tsarist Russian imperial scheme of history.” This historiography portrayed new myths about the Soviet Union and allocated non-Russians around the Russian “elder brother.” Taras Kuzio argues in “History, Memory and Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Colonial Space” that historiography “channelled the collective historical memory and national awareness generated by modernization into an ethnographic regionalism compatible with Soviet Russian loyalty.”²³⁶ Propaganda therefore strove to depict the national movement in Belarus as counter-revolutionary intending to divide the BSSR from the Soviet Union and “establishing

²³⁰ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 91.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 92.

²³² Ihar Kuźniacoŭ, “The Bolshevik Repressions against the Belarusian National-Democratic Movement in 1920–1930ies,” in *Belarus and its Neighbors: Historical Perceptions and Political Constructs*, ed. Aleś Lahvinič & Taciana Čulickaja, (Warsaw: ELIPSA, 2013), 103

²³³ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 92.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 93

²³⁵ Per Anders Rudling, “The Battle Over Belarus,” 306.

²³⁶ Taras Kuzio, “History, Memory and Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Colonial Space”, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (2002): 241-264, p 246

a bourgeois national-democratic republic.”²³⁷ With this in mind ethno genesis turned out to be one of the fundamental undertakings of Soviet archaeology, especially relating to ethno genetic history of the early Slavs.²³⁸ This in turn could justify a “Soviet- Slavic union.”

The Belarusian language was officially transformed in 1933 in accordance with the policy of Russification and distinctive characteristics of the Belarusian language were eradicated, thereby making it closer to Russian (Creole Belarusian - “narkamauka”)²³⁹ This initially didn’t change newspaper circulation as the number of newspapers published in Belarusian remained virtually the same, 149 in 1938, compared to 148 in 1931.²⁴⁰ The purges of 1930s did however lead to the downfall of 90 per cent of the Belarusian intelligentsia. Between 1937-1941 between 100,000 and 250,000 were murdered and buried in the woods outside Minsk at Kurapaty.²⁴¹ Ilya Kunitski has argued in “Belarusian Nationhood: Soviet Institutionalization or direct Russification” that “Stalin’s purges of late 1930s undermined the sense of “Belarusization” by wiping out the national intelligentsia and the national political elite.”²⁴²

Nazi Invasion

Present national identity discourse for many contemporary Belarusians revolved around heroic images of World War Two, this struggle pitted Belarusians against the Nazis and remains central to national identity. This heroic past is however told selectively and was shaped by the USSR.

Belarus’s involvement in WW2 actually began on September 17, 1939, when the Soviet Union collaborated with Nazi Germany against Poland. Belarus gained from this aggression by receiving the ethnically Belarusian regions of interwar Poland.²⁴³ The two parts of Belarus were therefore re-united.²⁴⁴ “For the first time in modern history, Belarusian ethnic

²³⁷ Ihar Kuźniacou, “The Bolshevik Repressions against the Belarusian National-Democratic Movement in 1920–1930ies,” 101.

²³⁸ Philip L. Kohl, “Nationalism and Archaeology: On the Constructions of Nations and the Reconstructions of the Remote past,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 27 (1998): 231.

²³⁹ Ilya Kunitski, “Influences on Belarusian Nationhood: Soviet Institutionalization Or Direct Russification?,” *Belarusian Review*, Volume 21, No. 1. Spring 2009, 7.

²⁴⁰ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 93.

²⁴¹ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 105.

²⁴² Ilya Kunitski, “Influences on Belarusian Nationhood: Soviet Institutionalization Or Direct Russification?,” 7.

²⁴³ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 118.

²⁴⁴ Grigory Ioffe, “The Phenomenon of Belarus, A Book Review Essay,” review of Yuriy Shevtsov, by Grigory Ioffe. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 47, No. 5, (2006): 627.

territories coincided with an identifiable political entity. The unification made Belarus more ethnically representative.”²⁴⁵

The German Army advanced into Belarus in June 1941. The official Belarusian narrative has dismissed collaborators as traitors.²⁴⁶ In fact, “Belarusians fought both for Soviet partisan groups and pro-German police and military units.”²⁴⁷ This narrative is rarely highlighted in contemporary Belarus. The Nazis during WW2 attempted to utilize Belarusian nationalism and find common arguments with local inhabitants which then could be directed against the Soviet Union.²⁴⁸ Already in 1939–40 the Belarusian nationalist Diaspora in Germany developed many Belarusian voluntary organizations. One such organization was the Belarusian Self-help Committee. After the German invasion, the Belarusian Self-help Committee did not establish a new government, but instead, became the closest thing Belarusian nationalists had to a national government, with the support of the German administration.²⁴⁹

The familiar pattern of outside help to the Belarusian national movement was becoming a common theme as the Germans made some political concessions to the nationalists. These concessions included “limited local involvement in dealing with administrative and social questions, in the creation of a ‘national government’ and ‘advisory committee’, and in the creation of the indigenous armed forces, volunteer battalions and police units, which were planned to be initially under German control but in due course to pass over to national control.”²⁵⁰ The SS also helped set up a ‘Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church’, independent of Moscow. Wilson argues that “the most important collaborationist structure was the Belarusian Central Council set up in December 1943.”²⁵¹ “Its ‘national’ symbols, the Pahonia and the red-and-white flag, were the symbols of local administration.”²⁵² The Nazis then allowed the formation of Belarusian Land Defence Forces, with estimates that tens of thousands of people joined that army. “These battle units, later repeatedly reorganised, led to

²⁴⁵ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 120.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 124.

²⁴⁷ Siarhei Bohdan, “The Belarusian Regime as a Repercussion of the Second World War,” *Belarus Digest, Belarus, Headlines*, Issue IX, July 2012, 6.

²⁴⁸ Cormac Ryan, “Patriotism, Propaganda and Public Opinion in Nazi Occupied Belorussia, 1941-1944,” (BA diss., University College Dublin, 2010), 42.

²⁴⁹ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 131.

²⁵⁰ Olga Baranova, “Nationalism, anti-Bolshevism or the will to survive? Collaboration in Belarus under the Nazi occupation of 1941–1944”, *European Review of History*, 15:2, (2008): 121.

²⁵¹ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 109.

²⁵² *Ibid*, 110.

the eventual formation of a Belarusian SS Division which did not participate in any massacres.”²⁵³

The German administration made appeals to Belorussian national and cultural independence.²⁵⁴ In this endeavour, Belarusian nationalists portrayed the Germans as liberators and protectors of Belorussia’s interests. Therefore the nationalists were entwining their destiny with that of Nazi Germany. Belarusian nationalists were also grateful to the Nazi authorities and portrayed this message in nationalist newspapers: ‘*German authorities have allowed us to create our own national schools*’.²⁵⁵ “As the occupation was presented as a source of advancement, development, and stability for Belorussia, those who opposed it were demonised. The targets of this demonization were the partisans and the Soviet powers in Moscow.”²⁵⁶

Not only Belarusian nationalists supported the Nazis, others collaborated because they were against Soviet economic and cultural policies, while most people just wanted to survive the war.²⁵⁷ Barbara Epstein rightly asserts in *the Minsk Ghetto, 1941–1943* that nationalist movements of the time in other parts of Europe, drew on anti-Semitic elements but this factor was virtually nonexistent in Belarus. To highlight her point, she states “that the term “Byelorussian” was used in various ways; it could be used to mean either ethnic Byelorussians or Byelorussian citizens.”²⁵⁸ However despite this, anti-Semitism during the war became more widespread.²⁵⁹ This factor may have contributed to the local police’s (recruited 25,000 men) systematic involvement in murdering Jews.²⁶⁰ Olga Baranova, however explains in “Collaboration in Belarus under the Nazi occupation of 1941–1944” that Belarusians joined police units for a variety of reasons such as “social and personal

²⁵³ Siarhei Bohdan, “The Belarusian Regime as a Repercussion of the Second World War,” 6.

²⁵⁴ Cormac Ryan, “Patriotism, Propaganda and Public Opinion in Nazi Occupied Belorussia, 1941-1944,” (BA diss.,) 34.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 35-37.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 38.

²⁵⁷ Olga Baranova, “Nationalism, anti-Bolshevism or the will to survive? Collaboration in Belarus under the Nazi occupation of 1941–1944” (2008): 113.

²⁵⁸ Barbara Epstein, *The Minsk Ghetto, 1941–1943 Jewish Resistance and Soviet Internationalism*, (2008), 43

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 57

²⁶⁰ Martin Dean, “Schutzmannschaften in Ukraine and Belarus: Profiles of Local Police Collaborators”, in *Lessons and Legacies VII-The Holocaust in International Perspective*, ed, Dagmar Herzog, (Evanston, Illinois: North Western, 2006), 228.

advancement, and this choice was in no way an expression of patriotism and the national Belarusian idea.”²⁶¹

During the German occupation the Diaspora Belarusian nationalist politicians, returned from exile and were allowed to take over key posts in local government, economy, and the media. Baranova states, that the Nationalists put their faith in the Germans as they knew from experience not to trust the Soviets and the Poles, she suggests the Belarusian nationalist leadership had no other alternative in the hopes of an autonomous Belarus. These arguments were based on the perception that the Germans had allowed some basic forms of national civil government and cultural movements, the freedom to operate.²⁶²

Another historically legacy that has been forgotten in Soviet historiography is that of the rural population from the western part of Belarus, who “did not accept Bolshevik economic and cultural policies such as mass and forced collectivisation, nationalisation of industry and provided their services in the interest of the occupiers.”²⁶³ It is also not surprising that these Belarusian collaborationists never made it into Soviet history books. According to official narrative, there were few in the Belarusian collaborationist movement, the collaborationists were insignificant compared to the Soviet-led Partisan movement.²⁶⁴ There have been some contemporary alternative nationalist histories produced which consider socio-political changes made during the German occupation as a positive development. These histories look to the “creation of public and youth organisations, the opening of national schools, the establishment of autocephaly of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, and the organisation of indigenous police forces and military battalions”, which are seen in a positive light in the development of state building and the Belarusian national project.²⁶⁵

Partisans and the Great Patriotic War

The official narrative of World War Two comes from the Soviets. Their story recalls the special role played by the partisan. “The Partisan movement was not motivated by Belarusian nationalism. Its Guerrilla warfare was controlled directly from Moscow.”²⁶⁶ Partisans and Belarusian Communists if anything adhered to Soviet patriotism, which meant

²⁶¹ Olga Baranova, “Collaboration in Belarus under the Nazi occupation of 1941–1944,” (2008): 122.

²⁶² Ibid, 117.

²⁶³ Ibid, 120.

²⁶⁴ Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity,” 1256.

²⁶⁵ Olga Baranova, “Collaboration in Belarus under the Nazi occupation of 1941–1944,” (2008): 125.

²⁶⁶ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 128.

“defending Byelorussian territory and all the peoples who lived in it from foreign occupation.”²⁶⁷ As the Partisans were successful on the battle field in later years against the Nazis, this thereby gave Soviet high command the opportunity to create the new nation’s central myth.²⁶⁸ “The partisans and Red Army were portrayed as the embodiment of Soviet virtue and heroism.” This promoted identity of the Soviet soldier gave confidence to the population to formulate an affinity with the Red Army.²⁶⁹ Many locals also joined the Partisans. The partisans were also seen as familiar, “the fact that they were Russian: ‘our’ people who were speaking a familiar language and sharing a similar background, while Germans were perceived by local populations as foreign invaders.”²⁷⁰ Therefore old sentiments were hard to shift.

The Soviet leadership portrayed the war as a war of heroes: “soldiers, partisans and members of the underground resistance.”²⁷¹ Soviet war propaganda was also looking for a way to galvanize Soviet society against the Nazi invader and Slavic ethno genesis gave one possible answer to Soviet archaeology and historiography, which slowly transformed into a symbol of national identity. Ethno genesis was used for the Slavs of prehistory to justify the present, and to provide brotherly relations between the White and Great Russians.²⁷² The emphasizing role of Russians and other Slavs in the resistance against the Nazis was linked to Stalin’s leadership which became increasing reliant on Russian and East Slavic nationalism.²⁷³

After the war according to Wilson, “local Belarusian Communists monopolised the myth of resistance to cement their power as the partisan generation. They ‘constructed a specific national myth which positioned the ideals of a heroic *national* resistance movement within the larger framework of the heroic sacrifices of the *Soviet* people’. To them, history started in 1941, ‘The new ruling class formed its ideology on the basis of its own Victory, not thinking too deeply about historical events which came “before them.”²⁷⁴ “In 1945, Stalin proclaimed

²⁶⁷ Barbara Epstein, *The Minsk Ghetto, 1941–1943 Jewish Resistance and Soviet Internationalism*, 75.

²⁶⁸ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 134.

²⁶⁹ Cormac Ryan, “Patriotism, Propaganda and Public Opinion in Nazi Occupied Belorussia, 1941-1944,” (BA diss.), 22- 23.

²⁷⁰ Olga Baranova, “Collaboration in Belarus under the Nazi occupation of 1941–1944” (2008): 124.

²⁷¹ Andrej Kotljarchuk, “World War II Memory Politics: Jewish, Polish and Roma Minorities of Belarus,” *The Journal of Belarusian Studies*, 1 (2013): 13.

²⁷² Andrew Gillett, *On Barbarian Identity- Critical Approaches To Ethnicity In The Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout, Belgium,:Brepols Publishers, 2002), 209.

²⁷³ Per Rudling, “For a Heroic Belarus!: The Great Patriotic War as Identity Marker in the Lukashenka and Soviet Belarusian Discourses,” *Nationalities Affairs*, issue 32 (2008): 49.

²⁷⁴ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 114.

the Russian people to be “the ruling force of the Soviet Union” and “the most outstanding nation of all nations within the Soviet Union.”²⁷⁵ This in effect left very little room for Belarusians. The whole USSR had been shaped by WW2 and the Belarusian Nationalists had discredited themselves. The forces of industrialisation, economics and centralisation would now be the undoing of the Belarusian national movement.

Belarus in the USSR

Post-war Belarus was a contradictory republic, after the war it became ethnically homogenous, but at the same time it became increasingly culturally de-nationalized. Rudling argues the BSSR was reduced to a Soviet region where the Russian language prevailed at the expense of the Belarusian language, which remained marginal. The BSSR lacked key “national” institutions of its own, such an army and an independent administration in the Belarusian language.” All these consequences implanted Soviet ideas of patriotism into Belarus; the “Friendship of the Peoples and the new Soviet imagined community” into one country.²⁷⁶ As post war Belarus was geared towards large-scale industrialization, it soon became the way to the prosperity.²⁷⁷ Nationalism and national identity therefore also became increasingly marginalised idea that had little to do with people’s everyday-life.²⁷⁸

“Post-war generations of Belarusians grew up with the narrative of the Great Patriotic War as the centrepiece of their national identity”. Belarus’s involvement in the “Great Patriotic War” put it in a unique position and made it stand out from other Soviet republics, added to this was the symbolism of the name “partisan” which became irreversible interlinked with Belarus.²⁷⁹ This constructed identity implemented by the Communist Party produced a full-blown cult of the “Great Patriotic War.”²⁸⁰ War-time suffering and heroism was also intentionally ethicized. Official commemorations portrayed patriotic Soviet Belarusian partisans in Belarusian folk traditional dress while the activities of Jewish, Polish and anti-Soviet Ukrainian partisan deeds were downplayed or missing from official narratives that

²⁷⁵ Per Rudling, “The Great Patriotic War and National Identity in Belarus”, presented at the Third Annual Research Seminar on Contemporary Ukraine 12-13 October 2007, 12.

²⁷⁶ Per Rudling, “For a Heroic Belarus!: The Great Patriotic War as Identity Marker in the Lukashenka and Soviet Belarusian Discourses,” (2008): 50.

²⁷⁷ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 140.

²⁷⁸ Per Anders Rudling, “The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement:” 118.

²⁷⁹ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 117.

²⁸⁰ Per Rudling, “The Great Patriotic War and National Identity in Belarus,” 13.

overtly stressed Soviet and Belarusian pride.²⁸¹ Until the late 1970s all high-ranking officials of Soviet Belarus were recruited from the ranks of Soviet-Partisans who were instrumental in defeating the Nazis.²⁸² During their period in office, this generation fostered and encouraged Soviet partisan myths, this therefore became vital for the Soviet Belarusian narrative.²⁸³ Rudling argues that for Belarusians “the Great Patriotic War was a given basis for a new identity.” Belarusian and Russian partisans were commemorated and this helped to cultivate a new post-war Belarusian identity, based upon the distressing and brave events every Belarusian could associate with personally.²⁸⁴ At the same time, “the Belarusian Communist Party was russified, and wartime suffering became the basis of standard Soviet Belorussian history.”²⁸⁵ Belorussian Partisans thus were successful in creating a specific national myth which could appeal to patriots, nationalists and the common people alike and placed the morals of a heroic Belorussian *national* resistance movement inside the larger structure of the heroic sacrifices of the *Soviet* people.²⁸⁶ This identity was now transformed into an ever increasing civic identity. It seemed that Belarusians were turning their backs on Ethnic nationalism and the Belarusian language.

Added to this paradox, was the fact, that post-war Belarus society became more of a homogeneous society. The Holocaust had transformed the demographics of Belarus, which had cleared the towns of Jews and Poles, and meant Belarusians controlled urban life for the first time in history. Minsk was the most Sovietised city and Belarus was seen as one of the most loyal Soviet republics.²⁸⁷ Given that Belarus was a homogeneous society, strange developments occurred. “By 1970 national history had all but disappeared from Belarusian curricula” and by 1980, no schools in Minsk taught Belarusian in the capital.²⁸⁸ Nationalists who advanced an understanding of identity related to the GDL could be branded as anti-Russian. Therefore identity had to be established on Russian language and culture.²⁸⁹ Rudling states that, “While the USSR presumed its ability to “construct” “primordial” nations, the end goal was to provide the people of the SSRs with an ethno linguistic national

²⁸¹ Ibid, 14

²⁸² Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity,” 1259.

²⁸³ Per Rudling, “For a Heroic Belarus!: The Great Patriotic War as Identity Marker in the Lukashenka and Soviet Belarusian Discourses,” (2008): 51.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 49.

²⁸⁵ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 283.

²⁸⁶ Michael E. Urban, *An Algebra of Soviet Power- Elite Circulation in the Belorussian Republic 1966-86*, 30.

²⁸⁷ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 117.

²⁸⁸ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*, 283.

²⁸⁹ Renee L. Buhr, Victor Shadurski & Steven Hoffman “Belarus: An Emerging Civic Nation?,” *Nationalities Papers*, 39:3, (2011): 432.

identity that would then wither away in favour of a civic, Soviet identity.”²⁹⁰ In theory, this meant the reconciliation and union of all socialist nations into a new nation, which would be then be regarded as a common, socialist culture, speaking in the language of “international communication,” or lingua franca, i.e. Russian.²⁹¹ This might have been the case in the 1920s, but post-war Belarus was clearly being russified and therefore was in the later stages of this development if the theory went according.

Alexandra Goujon, states in *Nationalism in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Space* that, “Soviet nationalism was characterised by the aim of the Soviet leaders to create a new form of affiliation, the “Soviet people”, based on one ideology, the conception of nation combined two distinct elements, a territorial one and an ethnic one.”²⁹² Soviet ideology was often ambiguous on the nationality question as it exhibited both international- communist and imperial-messianic elements. Vladimir Buldakov argues in “attempts at the “Nationalization” of Russian and Soviet History in the newly Independent Slavic States” that, “the “consciousness” of *homo-sovieticus* was usually divided, being both “internationalist” and “patriotic” at the same time.”²⁹³ Renee L. Buhr also explains that “the Bolsheviks promoted an ethnic version of identity in the hopes of breaking with those exclusive ties and evolving toward a civic identity – one based on shared ideologies, class ties, and loyalty to the state, not language or kinship. Soviet indoctrination required “double assimilation,” namely, the simultaneous assimilation of individuals into both the “national” and Soviet identity.”²⁹⁴

Post war BSSR was organized as a nation state with an ethnic core community, but paradoxically the cultural and ethnic homogenization, brought a new hybrid identity: Belarusian identity became *both* Soviet and Belarusian.²⁹⁵ “At the societal level Belarusian national identity was becoming associated with quaint backwardness, it still however retained

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 437.

²⁹¹ Per Anders Rudling, “The Battle Over Belarus: The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement, 1906-1931,” (Doctor diss.), 321.

²⁹² Alexandra Goujon, “Nationalism in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Space: the cases of Belarus and Ukraine,” *Arbeitspapiere des Osteuropa- Instituts der Freien Universität Berlin, Heft 22* (1999) : 20.

²⁹³ Vladimir Buldakov, “Attempts at the “Nationalization” of Russian and Soviet History in the newly Independent Slavic States” in *The Construction and Deconstruction of National Histories in Slavic Eurasia*, ed. Hayashi Tadayuki, (Sapporo: Slavic Research Centre, 2003), 4.

²⁹⁴ Renee L. Buhr, Victor Shadurski & Steven Hoffman “Belarus: An Emerging Civic Nation?,” *Nationalities Papers*, 39:3, (2011): 431.

²⁹⁵ Per Anders Rudling, “The Battle Over Belarus: The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement, 1906-1931,” (Doctor diss.), 320.

its traditional sanctuary at the communal level in rural areas.”²⁹⁶ Michael Urban offers an explanation for this; he states that “the Belarusian language was declining significantly between 1959 and 1970. Upwardly mobile, second-generation, urban residents experienced the central pull of the Russian language and culture as they entered into higher education and professional careers.”²⁹⁷ Russians accounted for 8 percent of Belarus’s population in 1959, 10 percent in 1970 and 13 percent in 1989. Russians usually settled in Belarus’s urban centres and found employment in newly established industrial enterprises. “In 1959, only 21 percent of ethnic Belarusians lived in cities and towns, more than 48 percent in 1989, while the share of ethnic Belarusians living in rural areas of Belarus dropped from 61 percent in 1959 to 30 percent in 1989.” Added to this was the fact that in 1959, more than 77 percent of ethnic Belarusian urban dwellers claimed Belarusian as their native language, while in rural areas this figure was almost 99 percent. Ethnic Belarusians who moved into cities from their native villages would use Russian as this everyday communication; therefore the economic transformation of the country was changing linguistic patterns.²⁹⁸ What didn’t help matters was the fact, that in the Soviet Union it was usual for to Belarusian *Trasianka* to be ridiculed.²⁹⁹ “*Trasianka* or *trasyanka* can refer to a mixed form of speech in which Belarusian and Russian elements and structures alternate in rapid succession.”³⁰⁰

In education, Belarusian language schools were closed and ‘Russification’ became engrained within academia.³⁰¹ The use of Belarusian declined so significantly during the years 1959 and 1970 that Belarusians in 1970 “were registered as the lowest percentage still regarding their own language as the one of primary use.”³⁰² As modernization had enhanced living standards for most Belarusians, language matters seem to have come as a secondary concern.³⁰³ Nelly Bekus even argues that this “economic progress of the 1960s and 1970s in BSSR can be considered as a specific part of the Belarusian nation-formation process, during which certain aspects of Soviet ideology as well pro-Russian cultural and political stance were engraved into the concept of the Belarusian idea.”³⁰⁴ Paradoxically, “Soviet Byelorussia” as a nation

²⁹⁶ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 143.

²⁹⁷ Michael E. Urban, *An Algebra of Soviet Power- Elite Circulation in the Belorussian Republic 1966-86*, 16-17.

²⁹⁸ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 135-137.

²⁹⁹ Aleh Trusau, “Again on the Belarusian ”*Trasianka*,” *Belarusian Review*, Volume 25, No. 1, Spring 2013, 13

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 12.

³⁰¹ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 116.

³⁰² Michael E. Urban, *An Algebra of Soviet Power*, 16.

³⁰³ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 141.

³⁰⁴ Nelly Bekus, “Belarusian Language Policy in the Context of Linguistic Human Rights,” (paper presented for conference Post Communist Politics and Economic workshop at Harvard University, February 11th 2013), 10.

was 'made', at a time when books and teaching in the native tongue were prohibited.³⁰⁵ Peter Mayo further explains how “against this must be set the spread of Russian as the primary means of public communication and an increasing, if imperfect, bilingualism, particularly among the educated urban population.”³⁰⁶ “By 1980, there was not a single Belarusian language school in the capital, and all higher education was conducted in Russian.” In all levels of education, the primary language of instruction was Russian. It was mandatory, while education in native languages of non-Russian republics was reduced to an option. Since education in most universities was only in Russian, most parents concluded education in Belarusian would halt the success of their children and therefore opted for them to be taught in Russian.³⁰⁷ By 1989 Minsk’s population only had 62 percent of ethnic Belarusians claiming Belarusian as their native language.³⁰⁸ Economic, educational and social-mobility elements seem to have been major factors in Belarusians acceptance of Russification of the Belarusian language.

Within this context, Belarusian national culture and language were frequently perceived as being “backward” and anti-progressive.³⁰⁹ As the Belarusian national movement was seen to be weak historically, the subject of Belarusian nationalism was also ignored by intellectuals. “For Soviet historiography, the national question had been “resolved,” and Soviet Belarus was an example of a peaceful and harmonious flourishing of national cultures.”³¹⁰ Belarusian nationalism found its last sanctuary in academia and among artistic and literary communities during the 1960s to the early 1980s.³¹¹

³⁰⁵ Erich Goldhagen, “Ethnic Minorities in the Soviet Union”, *The Journal of Byelorussian Studies*, New York, (1968): 95.

³⁰⁶ Peter Mayo, “Belorussian” in *The Slavonic Languages*, ed. (London and New York, 1993), 889.

³⁰⁷ Editorial, “Belarus’ Colonial Legacy,” *Belarusian Review*, Volume 25, No. 1, Spring 2013, 2.

³⁰⁸ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 138.

³⁰⁹ Nelly Bekus, “Belarusian Language Policy in the Context of Linguistic Human Rights,” 10.

³¹⁰ Per Anders Rudling, “The Battle Over Belarus: The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement, 1906-1931,” (Doctor diss,) 12.

³¹¹ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus- A Perpetual Borderland*, 142.

Chapter 3

Battlegrounds of Belarusian national identity; the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), Russia, the media, academics and Lukashenka

How have the Actors generated/ constructed modern discourses of Belarusian nationhood?

Soviet Legacies and the BPF

Within the Soviet Union, Belarus was one of the richer republics, mainly due to an extensive and relatively modern industrial base.³¹² Soviet memory would remain a time of comfort and stability for the majority of Belarusian citizens.³¹³ Combined with this factor, was the fact that Soviet mentality of the people was deeply engrained within in Belarus. National pride in Belarus was overwhelmingly a pride in Soviet Belarus and its recent achievements.

Therefore, it is argued that a socialist consciousness is a true representation of Belarusian culture and identity.³¹⁴ Communist ideology fostered collective movements such as the peasant commune and ideology became the surrogate of religion.³¹⁵ In the BSSR, economic aspects of politics were highlighted rather than cultural topics.³¹⁶ In spite of this, most of the Soviet hierarchy had local roots and identified with Belarusian culture and literature, however this hierarchy was heavily sovietized. Because of these factors, “ideas of independence and national rebirth were not popular with the leadership of the BSSR.”³¹⁷ The economic system of the BSSR was well-functioning which was reflected in rates of investment and high economic growth, the BSSR also had a low-level of corruption and the political leadership was moderately popular.³¹⁸

³¹² Stewart Parker, *The Last Soviet Republic- Alexander Lukashenko's Belarus* (Milton Keynes, UK: Trafford Publishing, 2007), 44.

³¹³ David R. Maples, “Europe's Last Dictatorship: The Roots and Perspectives of Authoritarianism in White Russia” *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, No. 6 (2005): 904.

³¹⁴ Stewart Parker, *The Last Soviet Republic*, 42-43.

³¹⁵ Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (2004):107.

³¹⁶ Andrey Kazakevich, “Four corporations of Belarusian elite,” in *Belarus: Neither Europe, Nor Russia: Opinions of Belarusian Elites*, 223.

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, 221.

³¹⁸ Verena Fritz, *State-Building: A Comparative Study of Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, and Russia*, (Budapest & New York: Central European University Press, 2007), 212.

In spite of the above mentioned, some cultural issues started to undermine the system. In 1985 twenty eight intellectuals made a collective grievance to Mikhail Gorbachev about the prejudice against Belarusian culture which had given rise to a ‘noticeable growth of national awareness’, which in turn ‘provoked a hostile reaction from the bureaucracy.’ “To prevent a rise in tension, the authors suggested that the Belarusian language must be protected by legislation.” The first event to seriously undermine the system in the BSSR was the 1986 Chernobyl disaster and the subsequent cover-up. The elite were blamed of being subservient to Moscow at the cost of national interests.³¹⁹

This led to a generalised protest with some youth, intellectual and cultural organisations, emerging in 1988 such as the history society and the club of young writers.³²⁰ Zianon Pazniak, archaeologist and the future nationalist leader of the Belarus Popular Front (BPF) discovered a mass grave in 1988, in Kurapaty, near Minsk. The grave originated from Stalin’s purges of the 1930s and not to Nazi crimes as the authorities had claimed.³²¹ Kurapaty soon came to symbolize the crimes of the Stalinist regime and more recently, of Soviet rule.³²²

The late 1980s created a national revival as Pazniak had undermined Soviet harmony by discussing Stalinist genocide which had previously been hidden from the public. Pazniak again began a new public discourse into identity.³²³ The Kurapaty findings (June 1988) estimated that about 200,000 Belarusians were put to death in the period from 1937 to 1941 by Stalin’s agents. Soon after, “several hundred people took part in demonstrations commemorating victims of Stalin’s terror and demanding punishment of the guilty.”³²⁴ BPF activists were arrested for mistreatment of national symbols and the authorities confiscated literature and leaflets. “This was a severe blow to the local Communist myth that there were no ‘blank pages’ in the BSSR’s past.”³²⁵ Thereafter the first BPF meetings had to be held in

³¹⁹ Jan Zaprudnik, “Belarus-In search of national identity between 1986 and 2000” in *Contemporary Belarus-Between democracy and dictatorship*, ed. Elena A. Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson and Rosalind J. Marsh, (New York & London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 114.

³²⁰ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 144.

³²¹ Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity,” 1256.

³²² Alexandra Goujon, “Memorial Narratives of WWII Partisans and Genocide in Belarus”, *East European Politics and Societies*, 24: 6 (2010): 7.

³²³ *Ibid*, 20.

³²⁴ Krzysztof Brzechczyn, “In the Trap of Post-Socialist Stagnation: on Political Development of the Belarusian Society in the Years 1986-2006”, in *Democracy in Western and Post-Communist Countries. Twenty Years after the Fall of Communism*, ed. Tadeusz Buksiński (Poznań: Peter Lang publishers, 2009), 39.

³²⁵ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 144.

Vilnius, because the congress was forbidden in Minsk.³²⁶ Presumably this action was taken to restrict their audience in Belarus. The BPF was then established in October in 1988.³²⁷ “Shortly after, the Belarusian Council of Ministers adopted a resolution requesting that measures be taken to establish a memorial in Kurapaty.”³²⁸ “Pazniak spread the idea of a biological link to the nation which appears in his use of the word "genocide" to characterise crimes committed during the Stalin period as well as the Chernobyl disaster.” The goal was to highlight that Soviet authorities wished to destroy the genetic and ethnic makeup of the Belarusian nation.³²⁹ In February 1989, a rally of 40,000 young people in Minsk displayed such slogans as ‘sovereignty for Belarus’ and ‘Official Status for the Belarusian Language’³³⁰

The BPF advanced national revival and democratisation and insisted on an independent Belarus, free from Soviet rule. “The Belarusian nomenklatura (communist party and administrative bureaucracy), who occupied all major decision making positions, remained strongly sovietised and reluctant to pursue radical reforms.”³³¹ The only legal party in March 1989 was the Communists. The BPF was relatively small; it had 50,000 members by the end of the 1989. It was hard for the BPF to attain power; this therefore made them focus more on street protests. The Soviet elites were mostly comprised of factory management, collective farm bosses, technical intelligentsia and military men. The BPF and the Communist Party had virtually nothing in common, either in ideological or a social context as the BPF was comprised of mostly intellectuals and were mainly Belarusian-speakers who they aimed their policies at.³³² In 1989 ethnic Belarusians were the most homogeneous group in Belarus; 77.9 per cent of the population. However, In spite of Belarusians being the majority, Russian was the language one would normally hear in on the streets.³³³

³²⁶ Krzysztof Brzechczyn, “Political Development of the Belarusian Society in the Years 1986-2006”, 40.

³²⁷ Ibid, 39.

³²⁸ Alexandra Goujon, “Memorial Narratives of WWII Partisans and Genocide in Belarus,” 18.

³²⁹ Alexandra Goujon, “Nationalism in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Space : the cases of Belarus and Ukraine” *Arbeitsbereich Politik und Gesellschaft*, Heft 22, (1999): 20.

³³⁰ Jan Zaprudnik, “ Belarus- In search of national identity between 1986 and 2000” in *Contemporary Belarus- Between democracy and dictatorship*, ed. Elena A. Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson & Rosalind J. Marsh, (New York & London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 114.

³³¹ Vadzim Smok, “Is There Nationalism In Belarus?” *Belarus Digest*, 03 March 2013, <http://belarusdigest.com/story/there-nationalism-belarus-13214> (accessed 14th April 2015)

³³² Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 145-146.

³³³ Ibid, 121- 123.

The BPF, 1990 elections & Belarusian Independence

In 1990 Vyacheslav Kebich of the Belarusian Communist Party (BCP) became the Prime Minister.³³⁴ During the 1990 elections the BPF won between 25 and 37 seats out of 360 seats on the Belarusian Supreme Soviet.³³⁵ Given their size, “the BPF played a remarkable role in securing for the Belarusian language the status of sole official language (January 1990) and proclaiming Belarus’s sovereignty (27 July 1990) and independence (25 August 1991).”³³⁶

However, among Belarusophone intellectuals, there were divisions between supporters of two opposing variants of the Belarusian standard language. The most common version in use since 1933 was known as narkomauka, it was perceived as being heavily mixed with Russian. BPF supporters wished to implement the ‘purer’ but more complicated pre-1933 standard of Belarusian; Tarashkevitsa. “This version had been used by Belarusians in Poland until 1939 and again during the Nazi occupation, and kept alive by post-war Belarusian émigrés in the West.”³³⁷ Tarashkevitsa however only represented fewer than 10 per cent of the population.³³⁸ Belarusian was also only spoken by less than 25 per cent of the population at a sufficient level.³³⁹ Therefore the new Belarusian law was mainly a symbolic measure, and Russian continued to be the lingua franca of education, the media, government and economic life.³⁴⁰ However, in spite of this, many Belarusian language schools were opened.³⁴¹

Independence didn’t change public discourse in many respects as the Belarusian media remained in the hands of government controlled organizations. From this point of view, it is likely that most Belarusians believed what they were told about the nationalist opposition. From the beginning, Belarusian political nationalism was subjected to relentless insults by official media. “The BPF often were described as nationalist radicals, political extremists,

³³⁴ Krzysztof Brzechczyn, “Political Development of the Belarusian Society in the Years 1986-2006”, 40.

³³⁵ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 147.

³³⁶ Jan Zaprudnik, “Belarus- In search of national identity between 1986 and 2000,” 114.

³³⁷ Curt Woolhiser, “Language Ideology and Language Conflict in Post-Soviet Belarus”, in *Language, Ethnicity and the State; Volume 2: Minority Languages in Eastern Europe post-1989*, ed. Camille C. O’Reilly (New York: Palgrave Publishers Ltd, 2001), 106.

³³⁸ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 154.

³³⁹ Jan Zaprudnik, “Belarus- In search of national identity between 1986 and 2000,” 116.

³⁴⁰ Curt Woolhiser, “Language Ideology and Language Conflict in Post-Soviet Belarus,” 94.

³⁴¹ Grigory Ioffe “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity”, (2003): 1031

ideological heirs of Nazi collaborators, and at least until the collapse of the Soviet Union; bourgeois nationalists.”³⁴²

The BPF were distinctive in the fact that it called for the full independence of Belarus from the USSR, the introduction of ‘Western style democracy’ and to embrace a market economy. On 17 September 1991 full independence of Belarus was proclaimed.³⁴³ The BPF goals encompassed independence through national rebirth. The main idea of the BPF was the revival of the national idea, including the rebirth of the Belarusian language. They were also pro-Western and sceptical towards Russia. It was BPF parliamentarians who made Parliament restore the historical Belarusian symbols: white-red-white flag and the Pahonia coat of arms, symbols and flags that were synonymous with the GDL and previous Belarusian independence movements.³⁴⁴

“While BPF’s goals of national independence, linguistic revival, and cultural development were presented in great detail, political and economic arrangements were treated with vagueness which revealed a lack of familiarity with economic and political theories.”³⁴⁵ As the Soviet economy had been constructed around the entire USSR, independence presented many difficult challenges to Belarus, therefore in an attempt to protect each new nation from total economic collapse, a new union was created; the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).³⁴⁶

Belarusianization 1990-1994

Under the new prime minister Kebich, Stanislau Shushkevich (chairman of the Supreme Soviet) and with the aid of the BPF, the process of Belarusian nation-building occurred. Although the BPF did not hold a majority of seats, it was successful in implementing a considerable amount of its cultural programme at state level. The official names ‘Soviet’ and ‘socialist’ were removed from Belarus’ official title and was spelt according to Belarusian grammar.³⁴⁷“In 1992 the official insignia of independent Belarus became the Red and White flag and the state symbols of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Belarusian language was also

³⁴² Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 175.

³⁴³ Stewart Parker, *The Last Soviet Republic- Alexander Lukashenko’s Belarus*, 50.

³⁴⁴ About the BPF Party, http://narodny.org/english/?page_id=2 (accessed 13 March 2015)

³⁴⁵ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 156..

³⁴⁶ Stewart Parker, *The Last Soviet Republic- Alexander Lukashenko’s Belarus*. 50-51.

³⁴⁷ Natalia Leshchenko, “A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus”, *Nations and Nationalism* 10, 3, (2004): 334.

proclaimed as the only official language of Belarus.”³⁴⁸ The BPF then set out promoting “national identity based on respect for the Belarusian language and culture, a new interpretation of history and a new approach to foreign policies. Europe became the representation of a real political tradition dating back to the Duchy of Polatsk and the GDL.”

The national elite announced that the ‘Belarus’ return to Europe’ was its major political, economic and cultural priority.³⁴⁹ The terms “western Rus” or “west Russian lands,” were substituted with Belarus and Belarusian in official historiography. This viewpoint broke with the tradition of Belarusians as a subdivision of the ‘ancient Rus,’ and now promoted Belarusians as a Slavicized Baltic tribe.³⁵⁰ Historiography portrayed Belarusians as victims of Russian imperialism, which was deemed to be the cause all the nation’s sufferings, however this viewpoint seemed immoral to many Belarusians.³⁵¹ The Belarusian establishment also cooperated with the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC), and described the Orthodox faith as authentic Belarusian institution. In nation-building terms, the Catholic Church however struggled to separate the notions Catholicism from Polishness³⁵² “The Belarusian language and local traditions gained acceptance in some areas of religious activity of the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC)” Religious revival affected the rise of national consciousness.³⁵³ Nationalists also began to communicate closely with the Belarusian Diaspora in the West.³⁵⁴

As not all of the population spoke Belarusian, Belarusian-language schools within cities were amplified in 1991, necessitating Belarusian language examinations for university admission; this went hand in hand with the requirement of the Belarusian language in the employment and the state sectors. ‘Belarusianization’ soon came in difficulties however as there was a shortage of Belarusian-language textbooks and technical dictionaries and qualified Belarusian-speaking teachers and administrators. Obstructionist attitudes of much of the political and economic hierarchy, along with negative stereotyping of Belarusian amongst

³⁴⁸ Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Questions of Language” *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, No. 7 (2003), 1259.

³⁴⁹ Andrey Kazakevich, “Four corporations of Belarusian elite” in *Belarus: Neither Europe, Nor Russia: Opinions of Belarusian Elites*, 223.

³⁵⁰ Nelly Bekus, *Struggle Over Identity-The Official and the Alternative "Belarusianness,"* (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 197-210.

³⁵¹ Natalia Leshchenko, “A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus”, 336.

³⁵² Nelly Bekus, *Struggle Over Identity-The Official and the Alternative "Belarusianness,"* 157-159.

³⁵³ Jan Zaprudnik, “Belarus- In search of national identity between 1986 and 2000” in *Contemporary Belarus-Between democracy and dictatorship*, 118-119.

³⁵⁴ Hienadz Buraŭkin, “A People can Realize itself to its Fullest only as a Nation State,” *Belarusian Review*, Volume 25, No. 2, (Summer 2013): 11.

a sector of the population didn't help the advancement of the language.³⁵⁵ There was in spite of these setbacks, progress made in primary school education but Russian remained the dominant language of higher education, where resistance came from Russophone administrators and teaching staff.³⁵⁶

Linguistic problems caused incorrect usage of Belarusian grammar and vocabulary on a mass scale and endorsed the view of Belarusian as an 'inferior rural vernacular'. Affirmative action regarding Belarusian in the work place made disadvantaged (urban) Russian-speaking specialists looked down upon (rural) Belarusian speakers as opportunists.³⁵⁷ The BPF cultural programme failed to take 'business Russian' into consideration. Natalia Leshchenko argues in "two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus," that BPF's economic programme did appeal to the urban population, whereas the rural population favoured the cultural programme. "As a result, the urban Russian-speaking supporters of economic reform loathed the domination of Belarusianness, whereas the country people who embodied it were alarmed by the prospect of privatisation of land and dissemination of collective farms."³⁵⁸ As a result the BPF did not favour the complete backing of any sector of society.

The BPF had promoted 'rural' ways of life and language, but also referred to some ancient golden age of Belarusian culture which most people couldn't feel any connection with. Wilson states the BPF's dismissive view of the Soviet period was a tragic mistake and implied that Belarusians should learn to forget large parts of their own lives.³⁵⁹ "Paznyak misjudged how such attempts might alienate those who are ignorant of their past heritage."³⁶⁰

The BPF also proved not to be flexible; rejecting any idea of working alongside the nomenklatura. "Instead, it concentrated its efforts on capturing power without building a broader political alliance."³⁶¹ This was due to that they were in disagreements with much of the other democratic opposition to the nomenklatura. These issues usually revolved around

³⁵⁵ Curt Woolhiser, "Language Ideology and Language Conflict in Post-Soviet Belarus," in *Language, Ethnicity and the State; Volume 2: Minority Languages in Eastern Europe post-1989*, 94.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, 96.

³⁵⁷ Natalia Leshchenko, "A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus", 335.

³⁵⁸ Ibid, 350.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 337.

³⁶⁰ David R. Marples, "Elections and Nation-Building in Belarus: A Comment on Ioffe" *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 48, No. 1, (2007): 64.

³⁶¹ Vital Silitski, "Explaining post-communist authoritarianism in Belarus" in *Contemporary Belarus- Between democracy and dictatorship*, ed. Elena A. Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson & Rosalind J. Marsh, (New York & London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 39.

what the BPF described as the “subservience” of other parties to Russian interests. “In March 1992 the BPF began campaigning to collect signatures for a referendum on early elections in the autumn. The plan was to hold new elections using a mixed, half-proportional/half-majoritarian system, which would have led to stronger parties. But the nomenklatura were afraid of any proportional element. Kebich considered the BPF was creating an artificial campaign.” The BPF found itself without alliances within the political trappings of power and Parliament rejected the referendum campaign. The BPF couldn’t work with the status quo while the nomenklatura monopolised almost every position of power. Pazniak was felt to be too radical for Belarusian society as a whole.³⁶²

“The BPF represented for a large majority of people, a marginal and homogeneous social group which was not concerned with problems of daily life.” Intellectuals had a poor image and this can explain why the BPF found it very difficult to export their message to other social groups, such as workers or farmers.³⁶³ Leshchenko states that, “while BPF’s cultural programme was almost fully supported and implemented at the state level, the economic development of the country remained within the discretion of the communist elite, which valued social stability more than reform. As living standards kept falling throughout the early 1990s, the new Belarusian identity came to be associated with an insecure and unstable life.”

³⁶⁴

Election 1994

During the period of Belarusianization the economy rapidly declined as it was not capable of confronting the challenges of disintegration of Soviet economic structures.

Alyaksandr Lukashenka highlighted corruption within the government and accused Prime Minister Kebich, along with Shushkevich of fraud and exploitation of office.³⁶⁵ This brought Lukashenka to the fore during the 1994 Belarusian elections. When the Belarusian economy began to disintegrate following the retraction of the Russian rouble in July 1993, Lukashenka’s allegations offered a straightforward justification for the country’s decline.³⁶⁶

³⁶² Andrew Wilson , *Belarus*, 154- 156

³⁶³ Alexandra Goujon, “Nationalism in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Space : the cases of Belarus and Ukraine” *Arbeitsbereich Politik und Gesellschaft*, Heft 22, (1999): 13-14

³⁶⁴ Natalia Leshchenko, “A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus”, 336.

³⁶⁵ Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*. 159.

³⁶⁶ Vital Silitski, “Explaining post-communist authoritarianism in Belarus” in *Contemporary Belarus- Between democracy and dictatorship*, ed. Elena A. Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson & Rosalind J. Marsh, (New York and London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 41.

“The BPF program emphasized that Belarus should demand the full withdrawal of Russian troops, Russia would lose its privileged position in Belarus’s foreign policy and become just another neighbour. The BPF made its vision of Belarus’s destiny very clear: historic, economic, and geopolitical reasons place Belarus in Europe. Only as a European country could Belarus be not only politically independent but also culturally viable.”³⁶⁷

However, the nationalists were not helped in their endeavours as official media waged an unrelenting anti-BPF campaign which formed public perceptions of the nationalists. Silitski states that, “official propaganda portrayed Pazniak as a Nazi who would wage a conflict with Russia and would persecute his opponents once he came to power.”³⁶⁸ Savchenko argues that, “contrary to the view fostered by official media, the Belarusian nationalist opposition was neither radical nor xenophobic. The program of the BPF emphasized that it did not discriminate on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, or religion. The BPF never called for a complete break with Russia, just for a well-balanced foreign policy in which Russia, while losing its privileged position, it would still remain an important partner for Belarus.”³⁶⁹

The official media seized every chance to instil the idea that excessive sovereignty from Russia meant heightened energy costs, while orientation to Europe meant monetarist economic policies which implied deprivation. In this climate, BPF’s program had no chance of success as they “called for a free market as the main goal of the party’s economic policies.”³⁷⁰

Radical ethnic nationalism intensified divisions in Belarusian society into ethnically aware Belarusians and the Russian-speaking mainstream. The emphasis of this divide by the BPF only assisted Lukashenka to use Pazniak as a counter-image and to unite the pro-Russian vote.³⁷¹

Savchenko argues that, “Lukashenka’s popularity lay in the fact that he was “man of the people”, spoke their language (a sloppy mixture of Russian and a rural dialect of the Belarusian language), and was easily distinguishable from the intellectual elite or the administrative cadre of the Soviet era. For the general public, the newly discovered corruption of the ruling class was a convenient explanation of inflation, shortages, factory

³⁶⁷ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*. Brill, 173.

³⁶⁸ Vital Silitski, “Explaining post-communist authoritarianism in Belarus,” in *Contemporary Belarus- Between democracy and dictatorship*, 42.

³⁶⁹ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 176.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 178.

³⁷¹ Vital Silitski, “Explaining post-communist authoritarianism in Belarus,” 43.

closures, declining standards of living, and other economic ills.”³⁷² Lukashenka guaranteed to return to Belarus’s Soviet affluence by staying within Russia’s sphere of influence. Lukashenka portrayed himself as loyal to the ideals of social justice, a familiar form of national identity and to be a strong leader. His main appeal was to the rural uneducated, the industrial working class and young professionals.

“Respondents did not share Pazniak’s vision of Belarus as a nationally-aware country, deliberately re-creating its cultural landscape and seeking inclusion into the European community of nations. They were also afraid that a vigorous enforcement of language laws would force those people for whom the preferred language was Russian to leave the country. As many members of the Russian-speaking minority were skilled workers and educated professionals, their departure would damage the national economy of Belarus.” For that reason Belarus had to maintain its special connection with Russia. In these circumstances they relied on Lukashenka to be a better guardian of Belarus’s national interests. Lukashenka was perceived as an authentic reformer and patriotic politician, all components that the opposing candidates were lacking.³⁷³

Lukashenka’s pledges of eliminating corruption, reducing inflation, criticism of market reforms with pledges to continue privatisation and advancing closer bonds with Russia and other CIS states appealed to the majority of voters as their major concerns.³⁷⁴ In the first round of voting Pazniak received only 13 percent, thus coming a distant third.³⁷⁵ In the second round, Lukashenka won with 80.4 per cent of the vote.³⁷⁶ The overwhelming majority of the electorate rejected the nationalist vision of the country’s future.³⁷⁷ “Belarusians received what they voted for: a strong presidential regime headed by a man driven by nostalgia for the Soviet era.” This would set Belarus on an alternative path to nation building.

In 1994 Lukashenka became the first president of independent Belarus. People would start to refer to him as “batska”, the Belarusian for father.³⁷⁸ Wilson describes how some Belarusians

³⁷² Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 179.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 181-183.

³⁷⁴ Vital Silitski, “Explaining post-communist authoritarianism in Belarus” in *Contemporary Belarus- Between democracy and dictatorship*, 43.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 174.

³⁷⁶ Jan Zaprudnik, “Belarus- In search of national identity between 1986 and 2000” in *Contemporary Belarus- Between democracy and dictatorship*, 114.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 178

³⁷⁸ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 171-172.

could associate with their president; “Lukashenka had grown up an archetypal Soviet man. He had stints as a border guard, as an ideology lecturer and was head of the Horodets collective pig farm from 1987–90.”³⁷⁹ The rural population in collective farms were known for being loyal followers of their local superiors and this viewpoint can be accredited to the success of Lukashenka amongst rustic Belarusian populations. Lukashenka has used this image as a “kolkhoz boss and the characteristics of rural identity in his speeches on state-building and democracy by trying to establish a direct link to the people.”³⁸⁰ Lukashenka didn’t depend on the support of the Communist Party; instead he adopted a personalistic approach supported by popular appeal.³⁸¹

Several forms of Russian nationalism and Pan-Russianism, were accepted by the Belarusian hierarchy after Lukashenka succession to power.³⁸² Kazakevich argues that “Lukashenka shaped his rule on Soviet tenets (such as reverence for authorities, avoidance of responsibility and reliance on the state rather than on the self). These beliefs resonated better within a society formed on Soviet principles than individualism and self-esteem advocated by the nationalists.”³⁸³ Not long after the election, Lukashenka set out to revert the nation-building accomplishments of the Nationalists and democrats. This was accomplished by reviving Soviet identity.³⁸⁴

Referendum

“Lukashenka started his first term in office with notorious anti-national steps: he replaced national symbols with slightly modified Soviet ones, initiated the introduction of the Russian language as second official language, and stopped and reversed support of the Belarusian language in education, media, government and virtually everywhere. This policy led to the continuation of the denationalisation policy started by communists”.³⁸⁵

³⁷⁹ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus The Last Dictatorship In Europe*, 148.

³⁸⁰ Alexandra Goujon, “Nationalism in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Space : the cases of Belarus and Ukraine” (1999):16

³⁸¹ Verena Fritz, *State-Building: A Comparative Study Of Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, And Russia*, (Budapest & New York: Central European University Press, 2007), 223.

³⁸² Andrey Kazakevich, “Four corporations of Belarusian elite” in *Belarus: Neither Europe, Nor Russia: Opinions of Belarusian Elites*, 223.

³⁸³ Natalia Leshchenko, “A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus,” 334.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 338.

³⁸⁵ Vadzim Smok, “Is There Nationalism In Belarus?” *Belarus Digest*, 03 March 2013, <http://belarusdigest.com/story/there-nationalism-belarus-13214> (accessed 14th April 2015)

This was achieved firstly by a referendum. Siarhiej Navumyk of the BPF describes how on April 11, 1995 as a sign of disapproval against the upcoming referendum nineteen members of the BPF declared a hunger strike in Parliament. They were beaten up, hurled into military trucks and dumped in the centre of Minsk. Only after the attack, did the Supreme Council approve of the four referendum questions. For several weeks leading up to the referendum, state-run TV and radio led a non-stop promotion of Lukashenka's position.³⁸⁶ "In the debates on official bilingualism leading up to the 1995 referendum, Russian nationalist ideologies of the Tsarist era, re-emerged within pro-Russophone discourse in a number of government-sponsored publications, it was asserted, that the Belarusian language was merely a dialect of Russian with dubious claims to linguistic autonomy and historical authenticity, or that it is an artificial language of writers."³⁸⁷ The BPF again were not perceived in a good light. Just before the referendum, a documentary was aired on state TV drawing comparisons between nationalists and Nazis.³⁸⁸

"The referendum included four questions. The voters were asked if they want to give the Russian language the same status as Belarusian, to replace the country's coat of arms and flag with the new ones (derived from old Soviet symbols), and to express their support for Lukashenka's policy of economic integration with Russia."³⁸⁹ The fourth question had the most far reaching consequences; "Do you agree with the necessity to introduce changes in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, that provide the possibility of early terminating mandates of the Supreme Council by the president of the Republic of Belarus, in the case of systematic or gross violations of the Constitution?"³⁹⁰ Official results asserted that all four were accepted by no less than three-quarters of voters, with 64.8% going to the polling booths. "On June 12, 1995 Lukashenka signed a decree introducing new state symbols in accordance with the constitution"³⁹¹ The nationalists declared that "the vote on referendum, especially in rural localities was falsified."³⁹² However, the opposition were efficiently

³⁸⁶ Siarhiej Navumyk, (BPF), "The 1995 Referendum on National Symbols and Official Languages was not Legitimate," *Belarusian Review*, Volume 25, No. 2, (Summer 2013): 9.

³⁸⁷ Curt Woolhiser, "Language Ideology and Language Conflict in Post-Soviet Belarus," in *Language, Ethnicity and the State*, 100.

³⁸⁸ Natalia Leshchenko, "A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus," 338.

³⁸⁹ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 183.

³⁹⁰ Siarhiej Navumyk, (BPF), "The 1995 Referendum on National Symbols and Official Languages was not Legitimate," *Belarusian Review*, 7- 9.

³⁹¹ Krzysztof Brzechczyn, "In the Trap of Post-Socialist Stagnation: on Political Development of the Belarusian Society in the Years 1986-2006," 44.

³⁹² Siarhiej Navumyk, (BPF), "The 1995 Referendum on National Symbols and Official Languages was not Legitimate," *Belarusian Review*, 10.

deprived of a public forum to object.³⁹³ The approval of Russian as an official language with equal status to Belarusian was condemned by the BPF as an effort to cut short the expansion of national culture in Belarus.³⁹⁴

Russian was again reintroduced as a second official language of Belarus. The referendum introduced a U-turn in language policies and the achievements introduced by the nationalists from 1991 to 1995. The effects were imminent as Belarusian as a language course in primary schools suddenly decreased from 75% in 1993-94 to 28% in 1997-98, and from 58% to 4.7% in the city of Minsk.³⁹⁵ From 1995 to 1998, the amount of Belarusian books printed dropped from 20.5 percent to 13.2 percent, while Belarusian-language newspapers decreased from 42 percent to 34 percent. Schools with Russian as the language of instruction grew from 594 to 1076 in 1999. Schools and university courses from 1992 and 1994 were affirmed to be ‘politicised’ and ceased to be distributed. A ‘new’ course book was introduced in 1996 differed very little from Soviet textbooks. “It organised phases of history into feudalism, capitalism and socialism.” These books recognized the trinity of the Slav family (Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians) as the beginnings of Belarusians history.³⁹⁶

Lukashenka promoted the view of Belarusian language supporters as radical nationalist extremists with connections to Western powers. Lukashenka claimed the nationalists sought to weaken Belarusian– Russian integration and stop the return of a formidable Eurasian state including most of the former Soviet republics. The ideologization of the Belarusian language led to circumstances in which public use of the language in urban areas was automatically interpreted as anti-regime statements. For normal citizens, there was a specific danger connected with the use of Belarusian when addressing agents of state authority, especially the police, security services, judges and government officials.³⁹⁷

“A seven-question referendum was held on 24 November 1996. Four questions were put forward on changing the date of the country's Independence Day, amending the constitution,

³⁹³ Curt Woolhiser, “Language Ideology and Language Conflict in Post-Soviet Belarus,” in *Language, Ethnicity and the State*, 95.

³⁹⁴ Alexandra Goujon, “Nationalism in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Space : the cases of Belarus and Ukraine” (1999):18

³⁹⁵ Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 8 (2003): 1031.

³⁹⁶ Natalia Leshchenko, “A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus,” 338.

³⁹⁷ Curt Woolhiser, “Language Ideology and Language Conflict in Post-Soviet Belarus”, 96.

changing laws on the sale of land and the abolition of the death penalty. All of Lukashenka's proposals were approved. Voter turnout was claimed to be 84.1%.”³⁹⁸ The consequences of this referendum meant that the constitution was now handed over to President with operative “control over all the institutions of authority, including the judiciary, local governments, and even the legislature.”³⁹⁹ Lukashenka now had authoritarian powers.⁴⁰⁰ In the meanwhile BPF leader Paznyak had emigrated to USA in 1996 and then moved on to Warsaw, still professing to be the spiritual head of the nationalist opposition.⁴⁰¹ “In 1996, Independence Day was changed from date of declaring sovereignty (27 July) to the date of liberation of Minsk from Nazi occupants (3 July).”⁴⁰²

Silencing the BPF

Lukashenka has used identity politics to retain power and silence domestic opponents. Initially as the BPF were the strongest oppositional party and nationalist by ideology, the BPF became Lukashenka’s greatest enemy. “Lukashenka liked to remind Belarusians about the 1990s, the time when ‘wild nationalists’ raged. His favourite tale goes, “back in the 1990s Russians were sitting on their suitcases in Belarus” - meaning that nationalists were about to evict them from the country. In reality this is a complete myth, created to increase his importance in the eyes of the Russians.”⁴⁰³

In September 1999 the BPF divided into two parties. Pazniak was in charge of the renamed ‘Christian Conservative Party of the BPF’. The leader of other, significantly bigger party, the BPF ‘Revival’ was Vintsuk Viachorka.⁴⁰⁴ The appearance of Viachorka as leader ended the party’s official policy of non compromise with other political parties.⁴⁰⁵ To counter the threat of Viachorka, Lukashenka’s government had him imprisoned and sentenced to a fortnight in prison, supposedly for involvement in an illegal electoral campaign meeting.⁴⁰⁶ Therefore the BPF have been systemically targeted. “In 2005 a decree was introduced on the restriction of

³⁹⁸ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 186.

³⁹⁹ Vital Silitski, “Explaining post-communist authoritarianism in Belarus,” 36.

⁴⁰⁰ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 186.

⁴⁰¹ Grigory Ioffe “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity”, 1262.

⁴⁰² Jan Zaprudnik, “ Belarus- In search of national identity between 1986 and 2000,” 116.

⁴⁰³ Vadzim Smok, “Is There Nationalism In Belarus?” *Belarus Digest*, 03 March 2013, <http://belarusdigest.com/story/there-nationalism-belarus-13214> (accessed 14th April 2015)

⁴⁰⁴ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 214.

⁴⁰⁵ David R. Marples “History and politics in post-Soviet Belarus-The foundations” in *Contemporary Belarus-Between democracy and dictatorship*, ed. Elena A. Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson and Rosalind J. Marsh, (New York and London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 29.

⁴⁰⁶ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 217.

the usage of the words ('Belarusian' and 'National', 'Popular', 'People's') in the names of political parties and movements.⁴⁰⁷

BPF strength lay in gathering supporters at demonstrations and rallies, this has also been curbed. One such event happened in March 2009. The BPF applied to hold a rally for the 91st anniversary of the BNR. During the rally youth members of the BPF had their red and white banners taken away, were detained by government authorities and were beaten in the streets.⁴⁰⁸ As the BPF youth wing had previously been supported by 10% of youths, efforts were made to deconstruct this movement. Military conscription was therefore used as a tool to detract many youth members away from the BPF and the Young Front. Health-related military draft postponements reportedly vanished overnight. One such case involved "Franak Viachorka, a BPF activist and son of Vintsuk Viachorka." His unfitness for military conscription was called into doubt and the training commission found Viachorka to be able bodied and fit for service. The government therefore have used military conscription to reduce the influence of the BPF.⁴⁰⁹

By the mid-1990s opposition became impossible as the government has consolidated their control and no one within Belarus could fight back effectively. The regime was helped in this endeavour with propaganda. They again portrayed and compared nationalism with fascism which could revive traumatic memories amongst the populace. "This rhetoric was strongest in the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, when nationalist organisations and ideas remained more widespread and stronger. With Lukashenka's consolidation and the decline of the organised opposition this anti-nationalist pressure somewhat calmed down".⁴¹⁰

The alternative Belarusian idea does have its own outlets in the independent press such as alternative cinema, independent rock-music, theatres and within national literature. However Lukashenka holds all the access to institutional resources of the state, therefore an "alternative" Belarusianess was always likely to have fewer followers than from state sponsors. The opposition have also used the internet to popularise the "alternative" Belarusian nation and have published magazines and books to support this concept.

⁴⁰⁷ About the BPF Party, http://narodny.org/english/?page_id=2 (accessed 13th March 2015)

⁴⁰⁸ *Belarusian Review*, Volume 20, No. 4, (Winter 2008): 11.

⁴⁰⁹ Volha Lisichonak, "From Political Front Line To Army Drudgery" *Belarusian Review*, Volume 20, No. 4., (Winter 2008): 26.

⁴¹⁰ Vadzim Smok, "Is There Nationalism In Belarus?" *Belarus Digest*.

Children's competitions and organised trips along with depictions of an "alternative" Belarus in feature films and documentaries have all tried to promote this competing nationalism. However as Bekus remarked, these actions continue to be "locked in the parallel sphere of public life." Nationalists' activities were not talked about in the official media and their alternative history of Belarus along with significant historical dates were not referred to or depicted in the press, nor was this discourse studied in schools and they were not represented in official public spaces.⁴¹¹

"The struggle over Belarusian's identity has thus become closely interrelated with the struggle against the authoritarian regime. Belarusian opposition leaders consider "national awakening" to be the main condition under which the country's democratisation can take place." However, Belarusian nationalists were not in possession of the establishment's resources which could implement the idea of a 'Belarusian nation' into social practice.⁴¹² Savchenko argues that, "in conditions of total media blackout, unable to use radio and television (both government-controlled), and having only limited ability to express themselves through the print media, thus effectively isolated from the electorate, the opposition had little hope of victory."⁴¹³ Lukashenka has counter-balanced any opposition by appealing to the necessities of national security in order to hush up the democratic opposition, to suppress the growth of civil society and independent media as traitors of the nation. Lukashenka has marginalised the opposition and accused their understanding of social discontentment within Belarus as nationally alien concept.⁴¹⁴ Nationalists and oppositional forces that defected to the west are also viewed by some in Belarus as opportunists and only interested in financial support from western institutions.

Another factor holding back Nationalists was the language situation and Lukashenka's infiltration into education and the media. From 1994 to 1999 Belarusian as a language of instruction was cancelled in most schools with the last high school in Minsk being closed down in 2003 because they taught politically incorrect 'alternative Belarusian history'. The government also applied the same methods to the European Humanities University in 2004 which hitherto has operated from Vilnius. "In January 1995 the Belarusian State Publishing

⁴¹¹ Nelly Bekus, "Belarus: the national vice," Published on *Open Democracy*, 21st October 2010, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/nelly-bekus/belarus-national-vice> (accessed 15 February 2015), 3.

⁴¹² *Ibid*, 4.

⁴¹³ Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus—A Perpetual Borderland*, 215.

⁴¹⁴ Natalia Leshchenko, "The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 8, (2008): 1421.

House refused to print oppositional newspapers. The authorities replaced independently thinking editors-in-chief of state mass-media with loyal ones and closed other oppositional newspapers”⁴¹⁵

Therefore Belarusian ‘primordial’ culture was systematically deconstructed by 1999. This was reflected in the fact, that “the Belarusian language was only spoken at home by 36.7 per cent of the population and Russian by 62.8 per cent. Meanwhile, the Belarusian-speaking villages turned themselves into fortresses of conservatism and nostalgia for Soviet times and reintegration with Russia.”⁴¹⁶ Belarusian speakers are viewed as educated and belonging to the intellectual elite and therefore being a marker of the opposition which no doubt would deter the majority of the population from speaking the language.⁴¹⁷ By 2009, a poll showed “that the number of regular Belarusian-speakers was less than 8 per cent.”⁴¹⁸ According to these polls, there is no doubt, that a systematic assault on the Belarusian language had been completed by the authorities and with such a movement as the BPF which based most of its support on Belarusian speakers, it clearly would have damaged their support base over a period of time. One can only guess if one of the reasons this policy was carried out by Lukashenka was to damage the BPF. However a contrary argument has been made by Bekus, she highlights the paradox of this situation; “the evidence of opinion-polls is that those who use the Russian language are not necessarily pro-Russian in their political preferences; on the contrary, it is the Belarusian-speaking population (the major parts of which are villagers) that manifests greater readiness to integrate with Russia.”⁴¹⁹ A number of ethnic Russians in Belarus have even turned out to be supporters of Belarusian language rights, whereas many ethnic Belarusians have taken an emphatically anti-Belarusian stance.⁴²⁰ *Smok*, states that “today nationalist organisations are few and they do not impact upon Belarusian politics.” He asserts that most Belarusians do not support nationalist ideas.⁴²¹ Lukashenka up until this point was successful in sustaining a single vision for Belarus.

⁴¹⁵ Krzysztof Brzechczyn, “In the Trap of Post-Socialist Stagnation: on Political Development of the Belarusian Society in the Years 1986-2006,” 47.

⁴¹⁶ Jan Zaprudnik, “Belarus- In search of national identity between 1986 and 2000,” 117.

⁴¹⁷ Grigory Ioffe “Understanding Belarus: Belarusian Identity”, 1032.

⁴¹⁸ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 124.

⁴¹⁹ Nelly Bekus, “Belarus: the national vice,” 2.

⁴²⁰ Curt Woolhiser, “Language Ideology and Language Conflict in Post-Soviet Belarus,” 100.

⁴²¹ Vadzim Smok, “Is There Nationalism In Belarus?” *Belarus Digest*.

Lukashenka's first term and Belarusian-Russian Union

Not long after his inauguration in 1994 Lukashenka instigated a union with the Russian Federation.⁴²² State ideology was formulated in the 1990s, three fundamental principles of this ideology included; “strong presidential power, a socially oriented economy, and Christian (Orthodox) values.” Bekus remarks that “ideas of the Belarusian statehood were closely connected with the ideas of Slav unity, brotherhood and cooperation of the peoples. In this circumstance, when Belarusianness is to be found on the territory of Slav civilization, notions of the union with other states “inside” this civilization do not contradict, but develop an idea of Belarusian independence”⁴²³ Therefore Łukashenka has virtually realized the main prerequisites fundamental for Russocentrism: bestowing the Russian language with a position of the state one, establishing a union with Russia and promoting a symbolic stable fascination with Russian culture and the Russian people.⁴²⁴

In “Russocentrism among the Projects of Belarusian Identity,” Alaksiej Łastoŭski argues, “for Russocentrism the salvation is in alliance with Russia, the West brings spiritual and physical death for Belarus.”⁴²⁵ Lukashenka's reasons can be seen as pragmatic as “a distinct orientation towards Russia and the CIS promised restoration of old economic links and cheap Russian energy resources.” It therefore can be argued, that integration was a plausible extension of the Soviet identity policies. Lukashenka also had other reasons for pursuing this policy, mainly his dream of becoming Russian president, which therefore would necessitate the elimination of Belarusian sovereignty.⁴²⁶ From this point of view, it becomes obvious with hindsight of Lukashenka ambition, why else would he “emphasize that Russians and Belarusians constituted one people.”⁴²⁷

“During the period 1995–1997, Belarus and Russia concluded a number of agreements: a customs union on 6 January 1995, a treaty of friendship, good neighbourhood and cooperation on 21 February 1995, and two major integration treaties, a treaty on the creation

⁴²² Natalia Leshchenko, “A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus,” 341.

⁴²³ Nelly Bekus, *Struggle Over Identity-The Official and the Alternative "Belarusianness"*, 223-225.

⁴²⁴ Alaksiej Łastoŭski, “Russocentrism among the Projects of Belarusian Identity: the Role and Prospects in the Modern Belarusian State” in *Belarus and its Neighbors: Historical Perceptions and Political Constructs*, ed. Aleś Lahviniec & Taciana Čulickaja, international conference papers, (Warsaw: Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA, 2013), 133.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid*, 134.

⁴²⁶ Natalia Leshchenko, “A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus”, 339- 341.

⁴²⁷ Piera-Belarus Project, “Łukashenko : with or without you?” 19th December 2011, <http://belarusproject.eu/2011/12/lukashenko-with-or-without-you/> (accessed 12th January 2015)

of a 'community' on 2 April 1996 and a 'union' treaty on 2 April 1997." Integration policies brought substantial financial gains until 1998 and well into the 2000s.

However Leshchenko has argued that Lukashenka supported integration with Russia in entirely ideological terms, completing his electoral promise to 'rectify the historic mistake of the dissolution of the USSR'.⁴²⁸ Lukashenka's dealings with Russia deteriorated after the more assertive Vladimir Putin took over from the weaker Yeltsin as Russian president. Putin made it clear that he had no need of Lukashenka as 'Russia's saviour'.⁴²⁹ Relations became worse in August 2002, when Putin proclaimed that only practicable way integration could work was if Belarus was incorporated into Russia.⁴³⁰ Putin proposed that the six oblasts of Belarus should integrate into the Russian Federation along with Belarus's citizens. This idea would thereby destroy the very notion of Belarus as a nation-state.⁴³¹ Lukashenka dismissed this idea as insulting to Belarus. Thereafter, Belarusian state-owned media enterprises were flooded with enraged letters over Putin's remarks and in support for Lukashenka.⁴³²

Since 2005 the affiliation linking the two countries worsened significantly. Russia increased the cost of gas, upsetting economic prosperity mostly founded on the chain and export of such resources.⁴³³ This state of affairs continued until the end of 2006, when a number of long-sought compromises were at last given to Russia concerning the control of gas transport group Beltransgaz.⁴³⁴ "When Russia doubled prices for gas and cut off oil supplies to Belarus in January 2007, President Lukashenka turned the situation to his advantage by presenting it as undue pressure on Belarusian sovereignty."⁴³⁵ As the integration process threatened to undermine Lukashenka's unlimited authority in Belarus, he quickly changed direction and began to stress the themes of Belarusian sovereignty and independence.⁴³⁶

⁴²⁸ Natalia Leshchenko, "The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus," 1427.

⁴²⁹ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 206.

⁴³⁰ Natalia Leshchenko, "A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus," 341.

⁴³¹ Grigory Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape," 102.

⁴³² *Ibid*, 103

⁴³³ Piera- Belarus Project, "Lukashenko : with or without you?"

⁴³⁴ Natalia Leshchenko, "The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus," 1427.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, 1428.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*, 1421.

Geo-Politics and Belarusian Sovereignty

Suddenly Lukashenka changed stance, from Slavic integrator to the chief guardian of the Belarusian national sovereignty.⁴³⁷ Leshchenko highlights that Lukashenka was confronted with the task of merging Soviet identity with Belarusian self-determination and the politics of sovereignty as a counterbalance to incorporation within the Russian Federation.⁴³⁸ This presented Lukashenka with a problem as Russia continued to be the main financial supporter of the Lukashenka government. Here lies the paradox; reinforcement of sovereignty necessitates economic improvement and is reliant on Belarus surrendering sovereignty to the Russian Federation.⁴³⁹

Thereafter, official Belarusian national ideology put emphasis on its particular traditions and history; it portrayed its Soviet heritage as a positive experience but identified the need to replicate Soviet tenets within the Belarusian framework of independence.⁴⁴⁰ To help support this endeavour, history textbooks were re-written yet again, this time in honour of Belarusian independence and the accomplishments of Lukashenka's regime, rhetoric of Slavic union was also firmly restricted.⁴⁴¹ The origins of Belarusian statehood now incorporated west-Russian and Belarusian nationalists' traditions and narratives. Polotsk was designated as the main rival of the Kievan state and the GDL was contended to be an independent entity inside the shared state with Poland. Russia then, lost to some degree its special relationship within Belarusian official historiography.⁴⁴²

The media had also supported the idea of sovereignty and statehood. Bel TV News programme can include up to 32 references to statehood. Lukashenka changed his mind with regards to Belarusian language policies. "The presidential address on Independence Day in 2002 was delivered in Belarusian and the ministry of education adopted a programme of Belarusisation, which foresaw teaching several school subjects in Belarusian, publishing Belarusian textbooks on other subjects as an alternative to Russian-language ones, encouragement of running school administrations in Belarusian, and further development of

⁴³⁷ Alaksiej Lastoŭski – "Russocentrism among the Projects of Belarusian Identity: the Role and Prospects in the Modern Belarusian State," 135.

⁴³⁸ Natalia Leshchenko, "A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus," 340.

⁴³⁹ Ibid, 346.

⁴⁴⁰ Nelly Bekus, *Struggle Over Identity-The Official and the Alternative "Belarusianness,"* 223-225.

⁴⁴¹ Natalia Leshchenko, "The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus" 1421.

⁴⁴² Natalia Leshchenko, "A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus," 344.

Belarusian grammar.”⁴⁴³ The ‘ideology of the Belarusian state’ introduced in 2003 also asserted Belarus’s sphere of influence in Europe. However Belarusian Europe was described similar to Soviet narratives as being a geographic and historical notion. The regime described how European values of human rights and democracy along with contemporary European culture and politics as being alien to ‘the Belarusian people’.⁴⁴⁴ Lukashenka views these European elements as separate entities as he has constantly used Belarusian sovereignty as a self-defence mechanism and counter weight against EU pressure to introduce democratic reforms and this fact could be also highlighted during the war in Iraq when Lukashenka sympathised with the autocratic Hussain as a victim of the West. “Such a position endorses the Soviet attitude, in which the West was accepted as an enemy and the Third World as being exploited and friendly.”⁴⁴⁵

Lukashenkism, Egalitarianism and Creole Nationalism

As the BPF had a youth movement, Lukashenka countered such moves by the establishment of The Belarusian Republican Youth Union (The BRSM) in 2002 which would instil Belarusian patriotism on ‘loyal’ adolescence. It would become the largest youth organization thereby thwarting critical attitudes and stop youths turning against the regime.⁴⁴⁶ Taciana Šukan reinforces this point of view; “BRSM’s activity is directed to make young people less interested in political life and prevent them from the transition to protest activity.”⁴⁴⁷ Wilson argues that the government does not want Belarusians to be loyal to the nation, it wants them to be loyal to the president and Lukashenka has tried to create a sort of cult of personality. This can be highlighted in such manifestations as sport which has been incredibly valuable for national prestige.⁴⁴⁸ As Lukashenka himself plays ice hockey, he never misses an opportunity to highlight his athletic abilities; thereby Lukashenka is capable of presenting himself in many different ways. Lukashenka's popularity can also be accredited to 'his

⁴⁴³ Ibid,343.

⁴⁴⁴ Andrey Kazakevich, “Four corporations of Belarusian elite” in *Belarus: Neither Europe, Nor Russia: Opinions of Belarusian Elites*, 225.

⁴⁴⁵ Natalia Leshchenko, “A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus,” 344.

⁴⁴⁶ Taciana Šukan, “Youth Policy and the Attitude of the Authorities Towards Youth Organizations in Contemporary Belarus”, in *Belarus and its Neighbors: Historical Perceptions and Political Constructs*, ed. Aleś Lahviniec & Taciana Čulickaja, international conference papers, Warsaw: Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA, 2013), 206

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, 208

⁴⁴⁸ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus*, 205.

rhetoric, behaviour and politics which as Ioffe states “match a Belarusian peasant archetype, a communal peasant ethos; a "father"(bats'ka).”⁴⁴⁹

This communal identity has manifested itself in the form of egalitarian nationalism. Egalitarian nationalism can be described as an ethnically inclusive ideology that praises the qualities of collectivism and anti-liberalism.⁴⁵⁰ Egalitarian nationalism is a great source of inspiration for Lukashenka’s statehood as this amalgamation of Soviet collectivist principles also includes anti-liberalism and clarifies the need social unity, a state-owned economy and national sovereignty which operates to defend the regime from foreign pressure. This ideology also upholds the ‘Great Patriotic War’ Partisans as noble defenders of Belarusian sovereignty against foreign aggressors, but at the same time doesn’t place emphasis on their actual ethnic affiliation. “Egalitarian nationalism like civic nationalism advocates membership in the nation on the basis of shared values, rather than shared blood. It is associated with all the territory of Belarus’ and the ‘national economic model’ that is reflected in the ‘national’ traits of collectivism, egalitarianism and a national disinterest in materialism and western individualism.

Lukashenka’s ideology can therefore be understood as based upon three essential pillars: national uniqueness, unity and the sovereignty of Belarusians. Belarusian egalitarian ideology also portrays Belarusians as the ‘purest’ of the Slavic nations.⁴⁵¹ This ideology is based on an egalitarian view; in acquiring social order, the state must subordinate individual concerns to the collective will and interest. Leshchenko helps explain how this ideology has been reinforced; “the use of massive billboards displaying social groups of a variety of ages and occupations loom over cities and towns and send a strong message of the population’s unity behind the idea of the Belarusian state, ‘For Belarus’ (Za Belarus).”⁴⁵²

However, Belarusian egalitarian nationalism is not simply a carbon copy of Communism. Lukashenka’s regime lacks a number of major characteristics of socialism: there is no ruling party; there is no power sharing elite, but one sole leader; the economy is not fully planned and is currency-based; and the state ideology is clearly non-communist. “Lukashenka’s accomplishment has been to refocus those collectivist values from the communist ideology

⁴⁴⁹ Grigory Ioffe, “ Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape”,104.

⁴⁵⁰ Pjera- Belarus Project, “Lukashenko : with or without you?”

⁴⁵¹ Natalia Leshchenko, “The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus,”1422

⁴⁵² Ibid, 1424.

onto the post- Soviet Belarusian state and present them in national terms.”⁴⁵³ Ioffe helps to explain how such a flexible ideology accounts for Lukashenka's popularity which has roots both in rural rudimentary conservatism just as much as in the Russophile attitudes of the general populace. ⁴⁵⁴ This has led to many analysts of Belarus to describe and incorporate the theory of “Creole nationalism,” which David Marples rather describes as Lukashenkism. ⁴⁵⁵ This Creole nationalism can be derived from those Russian speakers and mixed speakers who are patriotic. Some academics argue that Creole nationalism can be associated with Tuteishasc or that of Belarusian loyalism and is a kind of hybrid identity.

In foreign policy too, Soviet discourse still lingers as Lukashenka has combined Soviet ideological antagonism to the West with new the vocabulary of Belarusian national independence. ⁴⁵⁶ Following the events in the Crimea, Lukashenka has solidified his position as a go-between and peacekeeper with the Russians on the Ukrainian issue and has begun gradually shifting towards sponsoring a Belarusian national revival. Lukashenka justified his new stance by stating, “I support the Belarusian language, because it distinguishes us from the Russians. This is a feature of our nation”. In April 2014 Lukashenka declared, "We are not Russians, we are Belarusians", one month after the referendum in the Crimea and incorporation or annexation depending on your point of view into the Russian Federation. Previously, Lukashenka had declared slogans such as "Belarus and Russia are one nation.”

The Great Patriotic War was for a number of years seen as the beginnings of Belarusian independence. Now the regime's outlook modified and they embraced earlier historical periods in Belarus's history such as the GDL, which was constantly at war with Muscovite Russia. This therefore acts as a counterbalance in Belarusian history to Russian threats. This new policy of ‘Soft Belarusisation’ has also seen the gradual extension of cultural policy and the use of the Belarusian language, culture and cultural heritage via such examples as the Festival of Belarusian Culture ‘Sniezhan’ (31 January 2015) and the ‘Mother Language Festival’, (22 February 2015) . *Mojeiko* explains that, “Lukashenka needs to guide Belarus away from Russia, be it through a policy of 'soft Belarusisation' or improving ties with the

⁴⁵³ Ibid, 1430.

⁴⁵⁴ Grigory Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape,”110.

⁴⁵⁵ David R. Marples, “Elections and Nation-Building in Belarus: A Comment on Ioffe” *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 2007, 48, No. 1, (2007): 66.

⁴⁵⁶ Natalia Leshchenko, “The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus,”1427.

West in order to minimise potential threats to Belarusian sovereignty and to his own power.”⁴⁵⁷

The need for Lukashenka’s nationalization of Belarusian political life is linked to the restoration of popular national awareness as a kind of obstruction hostile to incorporation into the Russian state, which would unquestionably diminish Lukashenka’s importance. This factor plays a role in the formation of the ‘besieged fortress consciousnesses’. Bekus has argued that the real reason Belarusian national feelings have been promoted by official government is to make the position of the current regime feel more secure.⁴⁵⁸ Therefore Lukashenka could rightly be called the king of the Creoles as this Creole nature more implies the flexibility of the President and his ability to change policy as circumstances arise and to adapt and adopt approaches, histories, languages and political views he previously rejected.

⁴⁵⁷ Vadim Mojeiko, “Soft Belarusization: A New Shift in Lukashenka's Domestic Policy?” *Belarus Digest*, 21st April 2015, <http://belarusdigest.com/story/soft-belarusization-new-shift-lukashenkas-domestic-policy-22434> (Accessed 4th May 2015)

⁴⁵⁸ Nelly Bekus, *Struggle Over Identity- The Official and the Alternative "Belarusianness"*, 223-225.

Conclusion

As Belarusian nationalism varies in ideology from one regime to another, one can argue that successful nationalisms and Civic nationalisms/ patriotisms are those that are adaptable to changing to environments in which they find themselves in.

The processes of Belarusian national identity formation are complex and wide ranging. For one they adhere to Eastern European models of nationhood. Secondly they both encompass ethnic and civic variants of nationalism. To varying degrees, the BSSR and Lukashenka's current Creole approach to nationalism can be said to encompass a variant of civic nationalism which places emphasis on territory, sovereignty and egalitarian collective communities and is much more concerned with social progression via economic and industrial progress.

Lukashenka and the Communists have perceived Belarusian history, ideology, territory, population, resources, myths, government, laws, and institutions as something quintessentially Soviet and this mindset along with the trinity of the three Slavic civilizations is difficult for any opposing nationalists to remove. The "alternative" position gravitating from historical nationalists during the republic of BNR and the BPF have always emphasised cultural policies such as language and education whilst in government and in opposition. On this basis the alternative nationalists can be considered ethnic nationalists. Soviet, Tsarist and Lukashenka's regime emphasises values, beliefs, and state institutions such as the economy, communist ideology, the Orthodox Church, modernization, industrialisation so therefore can be considered patriots. However, they all considered Belarus's cultural affinity to the Great Russians, so do comprise an ethnic element in their logic but ethnicity can overlap with civic nationalism. The Communists used civic ethnic principles to highlight people's "sovereign" entity which then portrayed Belarusians as a Soviet people in the unity of Soviet nations. Here is another example; an Englishman or Scotsman is an ethnic entity in a Civic union of Britain. On the other hand, Belarusian ethnic nationalists viewed the people as an ethnic community, held together by common political destiny and shared cultural features.

Belarusian identity to a large degree has been shaped by history, historiography, language, culture and collective identity but there are many other variables such as the influence of economic progression and a feeling of stability or simply getting by in which either regime the Belarusian people found themselves in.

The West Russian tradition of Kiev and Polastk and the Belarusian tradition of the Critvians, the Baltic-Slavic tribes or Slavic Litvins of the GDL all originated in primordial ways of thinking about the origins of the Belarusian peoples. Historiography firstly seems to have implanted certain preconceived ideas in people's mind. Many experts claim that Belarusians could simply not have existed in proto-history or the middle-ages based on the fact that they were not political entities, but many nations, meaning peoples were not established states at this time and still have a claim to trace their origins in primordial eras. If one thinks of the Frisians they are still not kin-nation state but still can trace their origins deep into the dark ages. Another example is the Scots, with a nuclear of Picts that merged with the Scots and lost their language and traditions. For many argue the origins of modern Belarusian identity originate in the ethno-confessional dimensions of Ruthenian identity. As church institutions were established in most countries on ethnic bases, they can be argued to be primordial institutions as religious institutions were the first to cultivate ethnic collectives.

Ploky argues that Ruthenian identity could not have existed during the middle-ages as the Ruthenian language was not adopted by court officials and thereby cannot be justified as a proto-Belarusian national entity. This argument is not entirely logical as there are several cases where external powers transplanted the indigenous language and reduced it to the level of the peasantry. This was the case for English speakers, when after 1066 a French Monarchy spoke their native tongue for two hundred years. Nobody would argue however that English culture didn't exist at this time. It simply went underground with the "higher" French language eventually merging itself with the English language. The same can be true of church language, it wasn't until the English reformation that English over Latin was adopted so many of the arguments about Belarusian proto-history fall on hollow ground as Lithuanians, Finns and Czechs had for many centuries their language reduced to that of the peasants.

The phenomenon of Tuteishyia (localism) can be attributed to a lack of national awareness and also to reinforce it. This is evident in several cases; the Litvin idea, traditions and ideology of *krajovaść (region)* both made appeals to locals in a Civic territorial empire that would revive the GDL. The Tsarist authorities also saw "locals" as possible supporters and wanted Belarusians to learn Russian in Cyrillic thereby making Belarusianness a regional variation of Russianness. Locals and rural dwellers were also seen to be also upholders of the Belarusian language and therefore targeted by Belarusian Nationalists in the early 20th century, in the 1920s and by the BPF in 1990s. As local peasants wished not to be categorized as a group they rejected the "alternative" nationalist movement. Localism and the

peasantry could also account for solidarity with regards to collective farms and the support they have given to Lukashenka and outwardly rejecting Nationalist economic policies. Therefore localism and rural communities have historical continuities through many eras and far from being supporters of ethnic Belarusian nationalism with its emphasis on language, have been some of Lukashenka's strongest supporters.

The west-Russian movement, has its origins in "othering", othering the Poles, and making Belarusians more Russian through language and culture, thereby making the inhabitants more loyal to the authorities. This was not the first movement which would be established in opposition to external forces. It was however, the first time, which necessitated that Russian should be spoken as an economic imperative and advancement for society. As the West-Russian movement had institutional Tsarist support, its long standing legacy would be important as local Tsarist officials would view the Belarusian language as a "dialect," but an important one at that, should be cultivated in opposition to Polish influence. The West Russian movement could also be said to have cultivated ethno-confessional divides such as the promotion of the Orthodox Church and anti-Catholicism. The main purpose of West-Russianism ideology was aimed to eradicate of all qualities that differentiated Belarusians from (Great) Russians. Some members even moved towards Russian nationalist ideology. This tradition has comparables with Lukashenka's Russo-Centrism especially during his first term. West-Russianism was the first official state sponsored nationalist movement in Belarus, and can be seen as successfully implemented as all state sponsored projects were.

The Litvin tradition *and Krajowy* ideology first cultivated a Belarusian native vernacular and professed a sense of patriotism and self-identification as 'local' or a '*kraj* citizen' as a decisive factor of national identity which was based on a civic national identity and territorial nationalism or Civic Constitutional patriotism with the interests of the region coming before any one ethnic group representing a unique combination of cultures, based on Catholicism, the Polish language and the legacy of the GDL. The USSR in one way was also based on a similar but opposing idea that would incorporate Belarusians in union with Russia.

The Belarusian movement of the early 20th century was an ethnic nationalist movement based on language as a cultural marker of national awakening and an attitude of religious indifference; that hoped would gather support from both Catholics and Orthodox believers. In spite of this, its nucleus comprised of many Catholics with emphasis on social democratic

principles. These socialist principles would then be remembered by nationalist working together with National communists during the BSSR's Belarusization policy of the 1920s.

However as nationalist newspapers and other outlets such as *Nasha Niva* never had a mass following and no institutional support in the early years, the spread of such ideas was always limited outside nationalist academic circles and academia in general. The nationalist ideas of the early 20th century are however said to have inspired national communists and Belarusian nationalists of the 1920s in implementing their policies. As the *Nasha Niva* was also inspired by the Litvin tradition, it can also be said that in the nationalist camp, there were those who were inspired by the tenets of civic nationalism on the basis of a GDL union.

Another historical continuity is that of the Christian Belarusian nationalist movement. This legacy can be categorized by its inflexibility, its anti-Russian direction, and its pro-Polish stance, its advancement of the GDL tradition, its anti-socialism and its defence and support of Catholicism at the costs of recruiting from a broader section of society. Such examples include the newspaper "clerical-patriotic" published by Anton Lutskevich before World War One, the Belarusian Christian Democratic Party (BKhD) in Polish Belarus of the 1920s and Pazniak's smaller renamed Christian Conservative Party of the BPF of the late 1990s.

Belarusian nationalists have been stigmatized heavily because of their collaboration with the Germans during World War One and Two. It can be argued however in the case of German help during World War One, that Belarus was able for a limited time to implement theory into practice and introduce a sovereign nation state, cultural policies that reflected Belarusians in education and proclaim Belarusian as the national language outside the sphere of Russian influence in the guise of the BNR. The BPF and Belarusian Diaspora therefore are inspired by this alternative historical memory of the BNR. The red and white flag however has negative connotations for many Belarusians and as Belarusian nationalists also worked for the Nazis during World War Two which would be forever repeated by the Communists, Lukashenka's regime and the media. Because of this, BPF have suffered from an image problem. However, the BNR by default made the BSSR and nation state formation possible. Like any state formations, it was built upon layers from one movement to another and every government continues some institutional functioning of the previous governments.

This is also true of Lukashenka's regime which imagines itself, to be the heir of the BSSR and egalitarian patriotism. The BSSR was also established by an external power; the USSR and its policy of Belarusization of the 1920s, was made possible by following orders from Moscow. The BSSR's "Golden age" was the only time, that Soviet or Russian patronage would support a mass ethnic nationalist movement. BSSR of the 1920s would also incorporate both socialist and nationalist ideologies into one ideology and this inspiration could also draw parallels to Luakshenka's egalitarian nationalism of today. The purges of 1930s BSSR also have comparables with Luakshenka's referendum of the 1990s and the silencing of the opposition on issues of national identity. The Russification and roll back of language policies can also be seen in both periods.

The Second World War impacted Belarusian civic nationalism as Polish and Soviet Belarus were re-unified, the Partisan myth conveyed the defence of this territory and consolidated the sovereignty of BSSR. Therefore many notions of Belarusian identity were formulated during the Soviet era. Historical eras depicted by alternative nationalists are too rooted in the distant past for many Belarusians to associate with. The partisan myth implied a sense of civic values and ideals that were pushed onto the populace given the partisans role in government for over forty years. Partisans became irreversible interlinked with Belarus.

The instruction of the Russian language during the later part of BSSR's life span would involve the forces of industrialisation, economics and centralisation which would mean that Russification would reduce the number of potential Belarusian speakers nationalists could appeal to and Belarus soon started to become culturally de-nationalized.

The Bolsheviks promoted a civic identity based on Soviet Patriotism, shared ideologies, class ties, and loyalty to the state, not language or kinship. Belarusian identity became *both* Soviet and Belarusian. Economic progress can be considered as a part of the Belarusian nation-formation process, modernization had enhanced living standards for most Belarusians and preservation of the Belarusian language seems to have been a secondary concern. Certain aspects of Soviet ideology as well pro-Russian cultural and political stances were engraved into the concept of the Belarusian idea." Economic, educational and social-mobility elements were major factors in Belarusians acceptance of Russification of the Belarusian language.

Soviet memory would remain a time of comfort and stability for the majority of Belarusian citizens and Soviet mentality of the people was deeply engrained within in Belarus. National pride in Belarus was overwhelmingly a pride in Soviet Belarus and its recent achievements.

Modern discourse has been constructed by actors in several ways, many of which have been generated by re-interpretations of the past. The media, BPF, Lukashenka, Russia and academics have all been guilty of this.

BPF's lack of success can be accredited to its failure in working with the nomenklatura and pursuing radical reforms which were not popular with the overwhelming majority. As the BPF was comprised mainly of academics and Soviet elites were mostly comprised by heads of industry, business, the military and the public sector, the BPF were at a disadvantage with few influential supporters. The nomenklatura represented social stability. BPF's pro-Westernism and market reforms, scepticism towards Russia, linguistic revival, and cultural programmes highlight their lack of knowledge relating to economic problems, and as such was ultimately the reasoning for their rejection. All Belarusian nationalist movements including the BPF, obsessed about the introduction of the Belarusian language at the expense of Russian and in most instances, this halted their popular appeal. As Russian speakers were seen as invaluable parts of Belarusian society, the majority of Belarusians could not accept their vision of Ethnic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism also intensified divisions in Belarusian society.

The media was also openly hostile to nationalist aspirations for change and often described them as nationalist radicals and political extremists. The BPF were also affectively silenced by the government, with imprisonments, restricting public rallies and restrictive usage of nationalistic words in public discourse. The military conscription issue of the BPF wing also enabled Lukashenka to establish his own youth wing (BRSM) to counterbalance alternative visions of national identity. The Belarusian language itself was targeted as an ally of the BPF. With no access to the trappings of state, silenced and attacked by the authorities and media, ethnic nationalism as a movement was destined to failure.

The Belarusian national movement can also be said to have had historically many external sponsors, either from Poland, Russia, the Soviet Union, Germany or the European Union. All of them would shape the discourse of their opponents with claims such as traitors been thrown around.

Portraying any rift of relations with Russia as damaging to the economy, Lukashenka guaranteed to return Belarus's Soviet affluence by staying within Russia's sphere of influence. As many Belarusians could associate with Lukashenka given his Soviet background in the military, as a teacher and head of a collective farm, he was portrayed as a man of the people. His rule can be categorized as personalistic supported by popular appeal based on Soviet tenets and symbolisms and this is reflected in the Referendum of 1995.

Lukashenka's patriotism or national idea has transformed several times during the course of his rule. His first incarnation adhered very much towards Soviet legacies and called for greater union with Russia for economic and cultural reasons. His ambition to become Russian president could have also had a bearing on abandoning Belarusian sovereignty in favour of further integration with Russia. Putin's stance on Belarus as a region of Russia seems to have made Lukashenka look for other allies in Western Europe and re-write Belarusian national identity based on the premise of Belarusian sovereignty. As Lukashenka is reliant on Russia financial support to rule, he has had to compromise and the trinity of the three Slavic civilizations still plays a part on Belarusian identity as well as Russo-centrism. However, following events in the Crimea, Belarusization by a twist of fate has bounced back on the agenda of Belarusian politics with the Belarusian language and earlier periods of history pushed to the fore. This therefore implies that Lukashenka adopted some tenets of the BPF.

Domestically, Lukashenka very much adheres to Soviet legacies of civic nationalism with a huge emphasis placed on Partisan myth and values, which can be seen as a way to reinforce the message of Belarusian sovereignty and re-assert egalitarian nationalist values about society working together for the better good of the collective. This is also supported by his national economic model and this image could also be aimed against western individualism. Therefore Belarus has a sort of Creole nationalism that is able to incorporate several nationalist's traditions and incorporate new policies based on old ideas when circumstance permits. Official nationalism of Lukashenka's regime is Civic, however the opposition's nationalism is overwhelming ethnic as it's based on the Belarusian language and Belarusian primordial culture. The reasons for success of each variation of the ideology mainly boil down to factors such as ideology which has had institutional support to promoting a cause but also other factors including; demographic, geo-political, linguistic and economics factors which historically have played a part influencing society along with the effect of authoritarianism in determining which variation of nationalism would be embraced.

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