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Narrative Templates of Post-Soviet Identity in Belarus

Abstract: Based on the analysis of 30 biographical narrative interviews with male and female residents of post-Soviet Belarus, the following four schematic narrative templates of Belarusian collective identity have been identified: the pro-Russian narrative, victimized negative identity, Belarusian nationalist scheme and pro-democratic narrative template. The focus of the article is on the interpretive frame of 'collectivization of innocence' as a foundation for the victimized negative ethnic identity and the pro-democratic narrative template underpinning a civil polity project. Excerpts of the interviews exhibiting the conflicting templates have been analyzed as illustrative examples.

Keywords: Collective identity; biographical narrative interviews; Belarus; negative identity; pro-democratic narrative.

Introductory Remarks

The focus of the article is on four schematic narrative templates of collective identity in post-Soviet Belarus reproduced by interviewees in their extempore accounts. The analysis is based on 30 biographical narrative interviews collected by the author between 1999 and 2008 in Belarus. Both male and female interviewees (with a higher representation of men), aged 22–76 at the moment of recording, were pooled by snowball sampling. The article is a part of a broader and more extensive analysis incorporated into a PhD thesis under construction. The material under analysis has been collected and studied in accordance with the biographical narrative method (cf. Kaźmierska 1997, Schütze 1990). The method requires dense description of interviews, which in practice excludes detailed work on a large body of data. Thus the corpus of 30 interviews analysed in line with the narrative technique constitutes considerable material.

The interpretive frame of "collectivization of innocence" as a foundation for the victimized negative ethnic identity and the pro-democratic or pro-Western narrative template underpinning a civil polity project have been selected for a more detailed inquiry. The choice of illustrative examples has been governed by the fact that they reproduce the above interpretive frames and challenge the conflicting templates thus covering the entire range of four outlined schemata. For the purpose of the analysis firsthand accounts of personal experiences are believed to be articulated in narrator's

intrinsic or emic[1] categories (cf. Goodenough 2003). After James V. Wertsch (2008) and Vladimir Propp (1968), emic representations of the collective past recounted in the interviews will be referred to as specific narratives 'organized around particular dates, settings, and actions' (Wertsch 2008: 140) whereas etic explanations and generalizations will be referred to as schematic narrative templates representing a higher level of abstraction i.e. 'more generalized structures used to generate multiple specific narratives with the same basic plot' (ibid: 140). Moreover, schematic narrative templates underlie collective memory and embody a 'shared cultural tool kit' disseminated via formal education, family discussions, the media, public holidays and the like and are less prone to change as opposed to specific narratives (ibid.).

The Soviet Grand Narrative and Post-Soviet Schematic Templates

The Soviet grand (or dominant) narrative, that used to function for many decades 'as a constitutive story that underlies national identity, constructs collective identity and memory, and guides the nation's morality' (Rapoport/Lomsky-Feder 2004: 3), was invalidated by the elimination of its denominator: 'Soviet ideology no longer plays a role in mobilizing society for any specific efforts. (…) it collapsed with the collapse of the Soviet state' (Radzik 2001: 17). Neither the interviews nor literature on the subject allow for meaningful identification of the formative grand narrative in post-Soviet Belarus. This corresponds with concerns voiced by scholars and laymen alike that Belarusians have failed to develop distinctive collective or national identity. As a matter of explanation, researchers emphasize the enduring legacy of Sovietization and Russification in Belarus (cf. Vashkievich 2007), its unfortunate geopolitical location (cf. Radzik 2001), conflicting emancipation inclinations vested in either Western (Polish and the EU) or Eastern (Russian) center (cf. Turonek 2001), the long-standing religious divide between the Orthodox and Catholic population (cf. Łatyszonek 2001), deep-rooted multilingualism or even diglossia (cf. Mamul 1998), the almost non-existent earlier history of Belarusian statehood (cf. Lenzi 2002), no tradition of civil involvement (cf. Szalai 2002) and other justifications. These arguments are also recounted in the personal accounts of collective identity and past.

[1] The author refers to the terminology coined by Kenneth Pike (1954) by analogy to linguistics that distinguishes between two complementary descriptions of sounds, that of (1) phonetic description—the extrinsic representation comprising physical and anatomic parameters related to sound articulation, and (2) phonemic description, typical of phonology i.e. the study of language sounds as a system, whose pivotal concept is a phoneme, i.e. the minimal sound entity meaningful to speakers of a language (or, by inference, members of a given society). Phonetic variations of language sounds are inexhaustible and meaningful to extrinsic observers. On the contrary, the number of phonemes in a spoken language is limited. Speakers of a given language classify inexhaustible sound variations against identified phonemes and, deduce, accordingly, which words or sentences comprising given phonemes turn out to be useful in a given situation (cf. Headland et. al.1990). Thus, the focus of an emic description of a language is not on the formation of explanations and generalizations yet on the intrinsic conceptual schemes and categories meaningful to the 'insiders' of a given society (cf. Goodenough 2004). The etic and emic depiction roughly corresponds to the distinction between thick and thin description developed by Clifford Geertz (1973) who borrowed the notion from Gilbert Ryle.

In view of the above multitude of geopolitical, religious, linguistic and emancipation options, several potentially formative schematic narrative frames of Belarusian collective identity have sprang against the backdrop of the former Soviet grand narrative. Based on the interpretive analysis of the interviews and available literature on the subject, the author has assembled them into four key post-Soviet schematic narrative templates (each accompanied by a number of subaltern varieties): the pro-Russian (imperialist) narrative, the victimized negative ethnic template, the Belarusian nationalist narrative and the pro-Western or pro-democratic scheme.

The Pro-Russian Narrative Template and Victimized Ethnic Identity

The contemporary pro-Russian interpretive template in Belarus closely corresponds to the Soviet narrative, as both myths (myth understood here after Duncan Bell (2003: 75) as 'a story that simplifies, dramatizes and selectively narrates the story of a nation's past and its place in the world') legitimize Russian supremacy over the subaltern Belarusian group as inherent in its civilization advancement. Given overwhelming Russification of Belarus, its economic dependence on Russia, Russian military dominance, prevalence of Russian mass media and popular culture, to mention just a few factors, pro-Russian sentiments seem only 'natural consequences of the dominant Russian presence in Belarus for over 200 years, and, in particular, they are the results of the Russian-controlled formative process of modern Belarusian society that took place after the Bolshevik revolution in the Russian empire' (Radzik 2001: 24). A lately staggering endeavor to practically utilize nostalgia for the Soviet past has been the Union of Belarus and Russia established by president Boris Yeltsin and president Alexander Lukashenka in 1996, a façade construction created mainly for the sake of mutual economic benefits. The future of the Union is undermined by president Lukashenka's incessant attempts to reformulate Russian-Belarusian power relations within the alliance: 'What makes the situation exotic is just the fact that the messianic function of Ivan Kalita has been assumed by the president of Belarus rather than the president of Russia. It is specifically Minsk in Lukashenka's opinion that should be the center of the unification of the Slavs' (Karbalevich 2002: 36). On a more abstract level, the recent pro-Russian narrative is epitomized in the notion of 'the old Slavic Orthodox Ruthenian Unity' (Radzik 2001: 37) and messianic 'Muscovite Third Romism' (cf. Sidorov 2006). In addition to the allegedly common Orthodox roots, the 'divine' unity of the Eastern Slavic brotherly peoples of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine is reinforced by their feeling of superiority over the morally deprived West.

An oppositely charged spin-off from the Soviet grand narrative is the negative victimized ethnic or ethno-national identity. Similarly to other post-Soviet states, the budding realization of the Soviet/Russian hegemony in Belarus lead to narrative utilization of the collective self-victimization frame fostering the 'performative' victim(ized) identity' (cf. Jalusic 2003). As the post-imperialist subaltern subject carries out (re)construction of the self through the dominant other, it tends to form 'negative identity myths' largely based on the interpretive potential of the 'organized innocence'

frame for self-perception as well as individual and collective potential for action (cf. Jalusic 2003). In reference to Hannah Arendt's notion of 'collective guilt', Vlasta Jalusic (2003) argues that 'collectivization of innocence' serves as an ideological shield against responsibility and allows the victimized subject to renounce both its capacity for judgment and ability to act. In other words, this brings us close to the conspiracy theory evocative of 'the anti-liberal and anti-modernist culture of determinism (…) characteristic of marginalized and victimized groups' (Donskis 1998: 349). While recounting the imperialist past in the present, the narrative based on the interpretive frame of 'organized innocence' explores and exploits the potential of master-slave and oppressor-victim binary opposition, accompanied by demonization of the other and self-vindication (cf. Donskis 1998). As the Balkan events warn us, 'collectivization of innocence' may entail mobilization for collective violence under the banner of tribal nationalisms.

The excerpt below illustrates the process of deconstructing the Soviet grand narrative into which the narrator was socialized as well as post-imperialist process of remembering, which is 'never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (Bhabha 1994: 63). The passage is excerpted from a two-hour interview with a female narrator named Alesya for the purpose of the analysis. The interview was recorded in 1999 in Grodno, a town in Western Belarus. The language of the interview was Russian although the narrator identifies herself as Belarusian. Born in 1949, Alesya was 50 at the moment of interviewing.

ALESYA-1 [03:07–03:35] [2]

1	N:	you see/ it wasn't even openly imposed\ it was done surreptitiously/ stealthily
2		encroached as some foreign matter through all pores/ it was not put
3		straightforward that Russians were better not at all\ the winners in the war were
4		Russians as simple as that/ casualties were mostly among Russians\ and on the
5		whole Russia that is Russia and Russians won the war\ but (.) even if one takes
6		Jews\ those kikes hated by them so much as many as a hundred and fifty are
7		heroes of the Soviet Union\ taking into account the proportion of the Jewish
8		population at the time it is a lot\ and in the perestroika days\ all these talks started
9		to sneak in (.) in shops let's say when Lithuanians had already broken off and
10		Latvians too and Belarus started mentioning its independence\ and all of a sudden
11		old Russian acquaintances of yours the ones you've known for more than twenty
12		years\ (2) well it all started with war veterans I can remember myself queuing and
13		a veteran saying we've liberated you\ and I suddenly recalled\ (.) that my dad (.)
14		aged nineteen when the Soviet troops arrived here\ he was called to arms\ and
15		literally four months later/ on the territory of Poland/ (.) he lost his right leg\ he
16		ended up as a second group invalid with an artificial limb but initially he was
17		walking on crutches/ (.) he spent the liberation day in Lvov in hospital\ a chunk of
18		flesh snatched off his right arm\ huge pieces off his back in short he barely
19		survived\ he was lying in a cast for months\ and worms germinated under the

[2] The numbers in square brackets refer to the number of pages and lines in the original transcript, e.g. [03:07–03:35] reads as follows: 'from page 3 line 7 to page 3 line 35'. Transcription conventions are explained in Annex 1 at the end of the main text.

20		plaster\ a nu:rse nursed him back to health/ anyway he recovered\ and I suddenly
21		told this veteran I'd remembered it all surprisingly/ and about the Russian
22		weapons and Russian victory and I'm telling him you know what/ I was
23		personally liberated by my own father\ a Belarusian by nationality (2) and he
24		personally left there/ his very own right leg\ (.) and as regards the fact that you
25		liberated us I'm sorry but liberators liberate and leave\ that's it\ well yes this was
26		like an insult\ it was disgusting\

The issue of World War II is seminal to both the pro-Russian interpretive frame and Belarusian negative template because of contradictory interpretations of the issue of Soviet/Russian liberation or, alternatively, aggression. The above account depicts complex emotions that come to the fore at an early post-imperialist stage when the subaltern scavenges the past, discovers 'unpalatable memories, seeks to uncover the overwhelming and lasting violence of colonization' (Gandhi 2003: 356). The moment of narrator's symbolic awakening is vividly depicted as an instance of "sudden recollection" triggered by the words of the Russian war veteran—'we've liberated you\' (line 13). The clash of interpretations of the past voiced by conflicting—ethnic Russian and ethnic Belarusian—mnemonic communities is typical of the countries of the post-Soviet bloc (cf. Jalusic 2003; Wertsch 2008). As James V. Wertsch (2008) puts it, drawing on Vladimir Propp's (1968) terminology, the 'Expulsion of Foreign Enemies story line' (Wertsch 2008: 151) deeply underlies the former Soviet and contemporary Russian collective memory: 'In addition to replacing the Communist Party with the Russian people as the hero in official accounts of World War II, several other forms of evidence point to the staying power of the Expulsion of Foreign Enemies narrative template in deep collective memory in Russia' (ibid.: 151). As Wertsch argues, although specific narratives exist in a multitude of varieties, 'at the deeper level of schematic narrative templates a striking conservatism and resistance to change seems to prevail' (ibid.: 151). Thus, even conflicting specific narratives may draw on the 'shared cultural tool kit'. As a result, oppositely charged topoi of the 'Expulsion of Foreign Enemies' can be employed by both ethnic Belarusian and ethnic Russian mnemonic communities.

Alesya vehemently attacks the Russian liberation myth and makes recourse to vivid, bodily images when speaking of her father: '(.) he lost his right leg\ he ended up as a second group invalid with an artificial limb but initially he was walking on crutches/ (.) he spent the liberation day in Lvov in hospital\ a chunk of flesh snatched off his right arm\ huge pieces off his back in short he barely survived\ he was lying in a cast for months\ and worms germinated under the plaster\ a nu:rse nursed him back to health/ anyway he recovered\' (lines 15–20). By debasing the Russian liberation myth, Alesya undermines the fundamentals of the Russian schematic narrative template and, subsequently, Russian collective memory it underpins—'and hence Russian national identity—at a much broader and deeper level' (Wertsch 2008: 152). The dehumanized, collective Russian perpetrator (e.g. 'the Russian weapons and Russian victory' (lines 21–22)) is confronted with a singular example of individual human courage and suffering: 'you know what/ I was personally liberated by my own father\ a Belarusian

by nationality (2) and he personally left there/ his very own right leg\ (.)' (lines 22–24). Thus the Belarusian subaltern repossesses the right of contributing to the victory in World War II which has formally been taken over by the Russian dominant group (cf. Wertsch): 'the winners in the war were Russians as simple as that/ casualties were mostly among Russians\ and on the whole Russia that is Russia and Russians won the war\' (lines 3–4). The Jewish community is mentioned as yet another ethnic group whose role in achieving victory was marginalized by Soviet and Russian propaganda, education and historiography: 'even if one takes Jews\ […] as many as a hundred and fifty are heroes of the Soviet Union\ taking into account the proportion of the Jewish population at the time it is a lot\' (lines 5–8). In addition Russia is depicted as an anti-Semitic country: 'those kikes hated by them so much' (line 6). Alesya reveals her ethnic Belarusian habitus by disclosing the omnipresence of symbolic violence that 'wasn't even openly imposed\ it was done surreptitiously/ stealthily encroached as some foreign matter through all pores/' (lines 1–2), which changed dispositions of Belarusians for many decades to come.

The ability to draw a line between the oppressor and the victim becomes an important building block for her negative, victimized ethnic identity: '(.) and as regards the fact that you liberated us I'm sorry but liberators liberate and leave\ that's it\ well yes this was like an insult\ it was disgusting\' (lines 24–26). In accordance with the organized innocence frame of interpretation, the Belarusian subject is not held responsible for the situation. Further in the narrative, apart from the Russian-ethnic/ Soviet-ideological oppressor, yet another tyrant is outlined, namely the Polish dominant group:

back in nineteen thirty-nine the Bolshevist troops arrived here\ (2) not for a promenade mind you\ (.) they were firing at the locals\ but Belarusians those tramps/ greeted them with open arms\ they recognized them as people of their own breed\ might've been because Poles (.) brought us to such a poor state and we were deprived of everything\ now Poles have already recognized it\ (2) (Alesya, [6: 44–6:48]).

Let me introduce another comment, coming from a different interview, on the arrival of the "liberating" Red Army which was initially welcomed by the subaltern group suppressed by the Polish gentry:

people were happy\ (.) extremely happy at first\ how happy they were/ (.) rushed to snatch the landlord's property\ (3) hurried (.) to snatch the landlord's property\ but then they themselves were deported/ (.) and this was it\ (.) the end\ (.) as deportations were (.) oh/ (.) dreadful (Interview No. 5, [25: 29–32]).

As some specific narratives depict it, Belarusian peasantry, suppressed by the Polish gentry, welcomed the Bolshevik "liberation," which turned out to be another yoke in disguise. According to the Belarusian schematic narrative of self-exoneration, Belarusians have not managed to develop distinctive national identity because of several centuries of the Polish rule, two centuries of the Russian rule and almost a century of the Soviet rule. The latter brought about mass executions (such as the one in the Kuropaty[3] woodlands), collectivization, Sovietization and Russification.

[3] Kuropaty (Bel. Курапаты)—a woodland area near Minsk where mass graves were discovered by Zianon Pazniak, an archeologist and one of the leaders of the Belarusian Popular Front, in June 1988.

Soviet policies of Russification, industrialization and collectivization aimed 'to eliminate the pre-revolutionary past from the collective Belarusian memory because this past did not provide a unifying ground for Russians and Belarusians' (Radzik 2001: 17). Thus, the Soviet modernization project promoted the subjugated ethnic identity formation in Belarus within the framework of egalitarian socialist values divorced from pre-1918 cultural or historical heritage.

ALESYA-2 [07:43–08:14]

1	N:	(.) frankly speaking you could already see it at school you know Russians have
2		achieved everything\ (.) they've been first at space flights/ they've invented
3		printing\ holy Russia\ great history while we are so minute\ (.) we have nothing to
4		boast about\ (.) I spoke to my neighbor the other day you know alright
5		Dostoyevsky\ Tolstoy\ Pushkin\ this was very long ago in the first place\ and
6		secondly I believe that great culture shall go hand in hand with great civilization\
7		I assume that (.) (*quote* +) cold frost and sunshine day of wonder[4]/ (+) in a dugout
8		on the earth-floor/ doesn't (5) sound true\ and what is more\ okay Russian is a
9		great language indeed/ but in Prague/ in sixty-eight/ when the Russian tanks fired
10		at people/ (.) there was an inscription on the wall written not in Belarusian (2) a
11		soldier (.) tell your mom that there are the dead among us\ this was put in Russian
12		oh alright let you be so great\ and let us be so small\ I am comforted by the
13		thought that we have never done anyone any harm\ and these were not us who
14		have snatched away (3) the Chechens\ Dagestanians\ Kalmucks\ this brought
15		about bloodshed\ (.) tears\ (2) somebody else's grief\ and at this point// frankly
16		speaking I have this image of Russia as a voracious shark that has swallowed it all
17		up and is throwing up blood\ (.) and our Lukashenka-supporters anti-Belarusians
18		who are unable to speak proper Russian as a rule but would deny their Belarusian
19		identity they would say (*mocks until* +) see how nice and peaceful our homeland is
20		(.) and look what is going on in Russia/ (+) and I'm asking them why then do you
21		want to get reunited with this Russia/ (.) do you want to see your sons grandsons
22		sent to another forthcoming Dagestan or Chechnya/ (3) and this might end up like
23		this\ it takes bloodshed/ to awaken them\

Alesya continues the process of "deconstructing" long-lived center-periphery relations, and long-standing misrecognition about her ethno-national self-perception. The above example reveals the narrator's feelings of disillusionment that accompany the process of post-imperialist remembering (cf. Gandhi 2003) and the realization that the 'taken-for-granted' knowledge at hand turned out to be the internalized Soviet narrative imposed by the dominant group. The recollection of the collective past unveils the (Heglian) master-servant relationship between the Belarusian subaltern and the Soviet oppressor. Similarly to other narrators, Alesya habitually substitutes the ideological notion of the Soviet by the Russian ethnic denominator. Thus, ethnic

Excavation works (interrupted after Lukashenka's coming to power in 1994) indicate that between 30 and 250 thousand representatives of country's intellectual and religious elite were executed there between 1937 and 1941. The discovery and exhumation of human remains became a powerful impetus for the national revival movement in Belarus.

[4] A line quoted from Alexander Pushkin's famous poem 'Winter Morning', translated by Mikhail Kneller (2000). Available at http://www.kulichki.com/moshkow/LITRA/PUSHKIN/ENGLISH/kneller01.txt [September 2008].

boundaries are introduced to draw a dichotomous divide between the native and the invader. The narrator explores the omnipresent nature of oppressor's power pointing, among others, to the Russian military dominance and aggressive behavior (a means of coercion) as well as educational and linguistic imperialism (a means of seduction):

> We could say that power traverses the imponderable chasm between coercion and seduction through a variety of baffling self-representations. While it may manifest itself in a show and application of force, it is equally likely to appear as the disinterested purveyor of cultural enlightenment and reform. Through this double representation, power offers itself both as a political limit and as a cultural possibility' (Gandhi 2003: 359).

The metaphor of oblivion and awakening has been employed several times with reference to the narrator's own belated recognition of being subject to Soviet all-pervading indoctrination. As Alesya puts it, during perestroika (i.e. in the late eighties), when some freedom of thought and speech was allowed, earlier repressed memories about the collective past reemerged. The narrator turned 35 when the scales fell from her eyes and the nature of pervasive Soviet indoctrination came into sight when challenged by personal (and generational) remembering. The uncovered logic of supremacy leads to the post-imperialist conceptualization of the Belarusian ethnic in-group as the victim of violence inflicted by the Russian oppressor. The interpretive frame of 'organized innocence' employed by the narrator is indicative of the 'double dehumanization' mechanism leading to demonization of the other who is ascribed collective responsibility (cf. Arendt 2003) as well as mystification of the exonerated 'inhumanly innocent victim' (Jalusic 2003). The 'organized innocence' template has a double function: 'on the one hand it enables thoughtlessness while helping people to renounce their capacity for judgment, and on the other it is helping them to renounce their capacity for action, and thus destroying both personal and collective (political) responsibility' (Jalusic 2003: 1185).

Narrator's retrospection and biographical work helps her discover Soviet/Russian cultural hegemony (understood in Antonio Gramsci's terms) and linguistic imperialism, with their effective mechanisms of propaganda and educational system: 'you could already see it at school you know Russians have achieved everything\ (.) they've been first at space flights/ they've invented printing\ holy Russia\ great history' (lines 1–3). The narrator mocks the myth about 'Russia's uniqueness in Eurasia (Eurasianism)' (Sidorov 2006: 317) and the metaphor of Russia as the 'Third Rome' or 'successor to the Roman and Byzantine empires [...] that allegedly persisted into the Bolshevik era' (ibid.: 317). Soviet propaganda of the superiority of Russian culture, language, glorious past and achievements managed to suppress and, in some cases, supersede ethno-national cultures and languages of former Soviet and currently sovereign republics. Some researchers go so far as to state that 'Soviet ideology and identity did not develop in Belarus aside from national ideology and identity but in their place. Almost unique in Europe, modern Belarusian society was formed around a core of Soviet values instead of a core formed by national identity and solidarity. (...) Another related fact is that the Belarusians' own language and culture are commonly perceived by society in regional-ethnographic rather than national categories' (Radzik 2001: 12). The Belarusian self-perception as a periphery vis-à-vis Moscow as the 'Third

Rome' (cf. Sidorov 2006) is so well-entrenched, that even half-way-through deconstructing the subaltern myth Alesya does not follow the principle of stylistic symmetry when challenging the legitimacy of Russian cultural hegemony: 'alright Dostoyevsky\ Tolstoy\ Pushkin\' (lines 4–5). The narrator does not juxtapose the Russian classical literary heritage to equally precious Belarusian cultural tradition yet, instead, admits the superior nature of the Russian language and poetry (thus acting in accordance with the Soviet imperialist narrative). She differentiates between the notions of culture and civilization instead: 'I believe that great culture shall go hand in hand with great civilization\ (…) cold frost and sunshine day of wonder/ (+) in a dugout on the earth-floor/ doesn't (5) sound true\' (lines 6–8). The former is ascribed the meaning of elitist high culture while the latter refers to the quality of life prevailing in a given society. In this way Alesya undermines the modernization mission of the Soviet emancipation project. This line of argumentation permeates the entire interview e.g. 'I've heard old-timers saying that when Russians came here/ (.) they looted the locals\ and their wives/ (.) used to attend a local theatre (.) wearing night-gowns\ because they thought these were dresses' [04: 06–09]. Another way to disavow the legitimacy of Soviet/Russian cultural hegemony is by drawing a line between bygone and contemporary Russian culture: 'this was very long ago in the first place\' (line 5). According to the narrator, what Russia stands for today is not high culture, 'space flights', great history or holiness but unleashed aggression against smaller nations.

As has been suggested above, the narrator's demonization and dehumanization of the dominant other, through whom the negative victim identity is essentially constructed, acts as 'a certain system of moralization/ moral culture which claims that average people or small countries can never assume responsibility for their fate, since the world is dominated by the big and powerful' (Donskis 1998: 351). At the same time, this interpretive framework of organized innocence gives grounds for the feeling of moral superiority over the animalistic perpetrator: 'oh alright let you be so great\ and let us be so small\ I am comforted by the thought that we have never done anyone any harm\[5]' (lines 12–13). As opposed to brutal and expansionist Russia perceived as 'a voracious shark that has swallowed it all up and is throwing up blood\ (.)' (lines 16–17), Belarus is exonerated from any blame or attempt at violence: '[…] one of the crucial features of the organized innocence syndrome is the organized lying and the denial of any wrong-doing by the national collective, which does not cease to exist after the war and crimes' (Jalusic 2003: 1181–2). Dehumanized and demonized 20th-century Russia crashes down on other 'small' countries, too: 'in Prague/ in sixty-eight/ when the Russian tanks fired at people/ (.)' (lines 9–10). This is another instance of substituting the ideological Soviet notion with the ethnic (Russian) one which reinstates ethnic boundaries between the Belarusian and the Russian collective subject.

[5] It is noteworthy that similar instances of self-victimization are relatively widespread and are frequently employed in political speech and public discourse in general. Milosevic's speech is one of the examples: 'The concessions that many Serb leaders made at the expense of their people could not be accepted historically and ethnically by any nation in the world, especially because the Serbs have never in the whole of their history conquered and exploited others' (Extract from Milosevic's speech in Kosovo, 1989, after Jalusic 2003: 1180–1181).

The dividing line follows the linguistic distinction between the oppressor's and victim's vernacular: 'there was an inscription on the wall written not in Belarusian (2) a soldier (.) tell your mom that there are the dead among us\ this was put in Russian' (lines 10–12). Although in 1968, that is during the Soviet invasion in the Czech Republic, Belarus was formally a part of the USSR, Russia alone is ascribed collective guilt and responsibility for the Soviet past, violence and all the related atrocities. In line with this argument, Belarusians together with the Czechs and other 'satellite' states can be included in a larger family of victims as opposed to the mythicized perpetrator-figure. Victimization of the in-group solidifies the boundaries between the in-group and the out-group, while the stigmatized (mythicized) image of the offender strengthens the 'negative' collective self-identity of the in-group.

According to Alesya, post-Soviet Russia has not renounced its imperialist claims and geopolitical expansionism: 'and these were not us who have snatched away (3) the Chechens\ Dagestanians\ Kalmucks\ this brought about bloodshed\ (.) tears\ (2) somebody else's grief\' (lines 13–15) or else '(.) do you want to see your sons grandsons sent to another forthcoming Dagestan or Chechnya/ (3)' (lines 21–22). Having deconstructed the Soviet imperialist grand narrative, Alesya defies the pro-Russian myth internalized by some of her fellow countrymen. The narrator feels resentment towards prototypical Belarusian émigrés from the countryside who have achieved social advancement by successfully undergoing Sovietization and Russification accompanied by renouncing their Belarusian national identity and native tongue as indicative of backward, rural culture, and who constitute President Lukashenka's most loyal electorate (cf. Furman 1999): 'our Lukashenka-supporters anti-Belarusians who are unable to speak proper Russian as a rule but would deny their Belarusian identity' (lines 17–19). Alesya resorts to a staged conversation with the prototypical 'russified' Belarusian driven by nostalgia for the Soviet past in order to challenge re-emerging Russian strive at cultural hegemony and geopolitical encroachment: 'they would say (*mocks until* +) see how nice and peaceful our homeland is (.) and look what is going on in Russia/ (+) and I'm asking them why then do you want to get reunited with this Russia/ (.) do you want to see your sons grandsons sent to another forthcoming Dagestan or Chechnya/ (3) and this might end up like this\ it takes bloodshed/ to awaken them\' (lines 19–23).

The Nationalist and Pro-democratic Narrative Templates

Profound differences between the above two schematic narrative templates (i.e. the pro-Russian option and victimized negative identity) and the frames discussed below (i.e. the Belarusian nationalist narrative and the pro-Western or pro-democratic scheme) lie in a different outlook on agency and responsibility for actions. Both the nationalist and the pro-democratic schematic narratives place agency and responsibility with Belarusian collective and individual subjects. Another peculiar characteristic of the adherents to the nationalist and pro-democratic narratives is their preoccupation with historical narratives and theoretical work whereas both the pro-Russian

and the victimized identity are largely emotional constructs that either challenge or reproduce the existing myths.

Belarusian nationalist mythology that developed in opposition to the Russian imperialist story offers an ethnocentric interpretation of the past, history and nation, and comes to the fore under favorable circumstances. The Belarusian national idea enjoyed some popularity during the mid-nineteenth century Springtime of the Peoples (exemplified by the movement of the Narodniks[6]) and early-twentieth century national revival (represented by the Belarusian Socialist Hramada) and retreated to its habitual dissident status after the crash-down on Belarusian cultural and political elites. This national(ist) narrative continued to germinate covertly under the Soviet rule and could float up again following the collapse of the USSR (embodied by the Belarusian Popular Front). In reference to this narrative template the term 'nationalist' will be applied as referring to the projected form of collective identity or group membership based on the notion of nations 'envisioned as intrinsically political communities, as sources of sovereignty, while this is not central to the definition of ethnicities' (Calhoun 1993: 229). As Craig Calhoun (1993: 225) points out, 'nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalisms have been particularly obsessed with history, as with ethnicity, perhaps because most involve claims to nationhood which are in important ways problematic or challenged by existing states'. As for the Belarusian interpretation of history and modernization trends, the national idea mainly draws from the ethnocentric interpretation of the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) as a key reference point. One of the most renowned founders of the Belarusian ethnocentric historical narrative is Vaclav Lastousky who provided continuity to the history of Belarusian statehood by tracing its origins back to the Polatsk Principality, 'the most ancient and powerful of all Belarusian lands' (quoted after Smalianchuk 2007: 58). Similar undertones of Belarusians' seminal role within the Polish-Lithuanian-Samogitian commonwealth pertaining to Belarusians' civilization advancement, special merits of their national character and the superior role played by Old Belarusian as the official language of the GDL between the 13th and 16th century (cf. Mamul 1998; Smalianchuk 2007) can be found in late twentieth-century historical writings by Mikola Yermalovich.

Before inquiring into the pro-democratic narrative template, let me briefly tackle the issue of Belarusian statehood and conflicting historiographies. Before the most recently gained independence of 1991, the only short-lived episode of sovereignty under the name of 'Belarus' was enjoyed by the country between 1918 and 1919.[7] In

[6] The Narodniks (etymology: 'narod' meaning the people or peasantry), representatives of the so-called Narodnichestvo, modelled after the Russian late 19th-century revolutionary Narodnik movement formed as the aftermath to the 'emancipation of the serfs' in 1861. The Narodniks rebelled against the socio-economic disparity between the peasantry and so-called kulaks (middle-class farmers). Their primary aim was to overthrow the Russian monarchy, the kulaks and distribute land and property among the peasantry. Since in Belarus the most deprived stratum of peasantry was synonymous with the ethnic Belarusian group, the local version of Narodnichestvo acquired clear nationalist characteristics. It is also perceived as the underpinning for later socialist developments.

[7] 'Belarus has existed as a country and a society since the early Middle Ages, yet its history as a state and a nation has been complicated and even discontinuous. During the twentieth century it appeared just

1918, during World War I, the so-called Belarusian Popular Republic was established under the German occupation pursuant to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Although the Belarusian Popular Republic was not internationally recognized and acted as a German 'buffer state', only to be subsequently taken over by the Bolsheviks who replaced it with the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic[8] in 1919, this period constitutes an important landmark within the Belarusian nationalist narrative frame. The history of Belarusian state affiliations prior to Russian supremacy can roughly be divided into the Polatsk period (9th–13th centuries), the dominion of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (13th–16th centuries) and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, that is the union of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland (16th—18th centuries). After the third partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, the territory generally corresponding to the area now known as Belarus was slowly but surely subsumed by the Russian Empire (18th century–1918). On January 1, 1919 the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was established. Subsequent reshuffles of the borders took place in 1939 when, under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the USSR invaded Poland and annexed its eastern parts. In 1945 the border between Poland and the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was redrawn to approximate the so-called Curzon line. Ultimately, the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic ceased to exist in 1991.[9]

These statehood reference points vary in potency in terms of providing historical continuity (cf. Calhoun 1993; Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983) to the sovereign Republic of Belarus established in 1991. They constitute different axes along which conflicting national and historical narratives are constructed. The difference lies not only in perception of a time span covering the Belarusian statehood tradition (19th century versus 13th century) but also in terms of center–periphery relations. When the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (1919) is considered the only earlier Belarusian statehood reference point, the Soviet/Russian agency is emphasized, with Bolshevik Russia as the driving force behind social change and modernization in Belarus. This stance is represented by President Lukashenka's 'court historians' also known as Russophile Abetsedarsky school (cf. Lindner 1999) who cultivate pro-Russian sentiments and are in charge of the official historiography still binding within the educational system at all levels. When the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is emphasized as the seminal statehood

twice on the map of Europe as an independent state—the Republic of Belarus—first in 1918, for just a few months, and second in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed' (Engelking 2001: 3).

[8] The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was established on January 1, 1919, only to be disbanded a month later. The Bolsheviks reshuffled a few provinces and annexed some of them to the so-called Russian Soviet Federative Republic while other areas were put together with Lithuanian provinces to form the so-called Litbel or Lithuanian-Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. Ultimately, in July 1920 the Soviet authorities decided to re-establish the initial Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic which was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1922 following the Treaty of Riga (cf. Radzik 2001; 2002).

[9] Formally, Belarus declared its sovereignty on July 27, 1990, pursuant to the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. On August 25, 1991, the country was renamed into the Republic of Belarus (an official name to the date). In practice full independence was gained by Belarus and other FSU states following the so-called Belovezha Accord signed by Stanislav Shushkevich, Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kravchuck (the heads of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, respectively). The Belovezha Accord declared the dissolution of the USSR and establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (cf. Miranowicz 2003).

nexus, the Belarusian contribution to the multiethnic polity is underlined. The latter emphasis can be found in works by historians representing the so-called 'Dounar-Zapolsky school' (ibid) and is typical of non-official, dissenting circles of historians.

As has been noted above, both the nationalist and pro-Western narratives are highly historicized and are both formed and shared by Belarusian intellectual dissidents[10] (cf. Kristeva 1986) or intelligentsia[11] (cf. Berlin 2003; Gella 1976; Mannheim 1992) i.e. 'a social stratum, alienated from its own society and having feelings of responsibility for at least the moral leadership of its nation' (Gella 1976: 24). As some researchers put it sarcastically, 'the concept of "nation" was described by the Belarusian intellectuals as only those who have national consciousness and speak the native language, so that the "nation" primarily meant those intellectuals themselves' (Titarenko 2007: 81). Contrary to the nationalist option, contemporary Belarusian pro-Western narrative is oriented towards European democratic values and promotes the idea of the Belarusian state as a civil multiethnic polity (cf. Radzik 2001). Historically, the idea of the Belarusian state as a polity (as opposed to the nation-state) can be traced back to the early-twentieth century movement of Krayovtsy,[12] represented by its democratic wing headed by Mikhal Romer and the conservative-liberal option associated with Roman Skirmunt. This pro-Western narrative template envisages Belarus as a legitimate member and contributor to the Western (as opposed to Byzantine) symbolic universe of meanings and values, which can apparently be both verified historically and demonstrated by the traits of the Belarusian national character showing no resemblance to prototypical Russian imperialist characteristics. The pro-Western construct has the potential to embrace the entire society regardless of ethnic affiliations of its constituent groups. Still, under the current authoritarian regime in Belarus, this pro-democratic schematic template is mainly acknowledged and shared by those close to intelligentsia circles.

To exemplify the process of pro-democratic narrative template construction, an expert-type interview with Victor, a professional historian has been selected for a more detailed inquiry. (An extensive excerpt from his interview is provided in Annex 2).

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[10] For Julia Kristeva, 'there are three groups of intellectual dissidents (the word is chosen with direct reference to the dissident movements in the Soviet bloc): the intellectual who attacks political power directly (thus inevitably remaining within the very discourse of power that he is to undo); the psychoanalyst whose major counterpart is religion; and the experimental writer who is out to undermine the law of symbolic language' (Kristeva 1986: 292).

[11] Roughly speaking, the contemporary Belarusian intelligentsia resembles the 'historical "classical" intelligentsia of Russia and Poland which developed during the nineteenth century (…)' and 'the small groups of dissidents in the Soviet Union, and only certain morally and intellectually independent groups in Poland and Czechoslovakia whose social role and place in the social structure resemble very closely the old 'classical' intelligentsia of the nineteenth century' (Gella 1976: 23).

[12] The Krayovtsy (Pol. Krajowiec), the name deriving from the Polish word 'kraj' meaning land or homeland. The movement of Krayovtsy, i.e. 'Local Patriots' or 'Locals,' developed in the early 20th century and comprised mainly Polish-speaking intellectuals (primarily from the Vilnius Region) and noble gentry or 'szlachta'. The Krayovtsy resisted ethnic nationalist sentiments and instead proposed a civil project of a society formation. The idea was to promote a commonwealth of various ethnic groups (including Poles, Lithuanians, Jews, Belarusians, Ukrainians and others) within the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, based not on national or ethnic identity but the feeling of loyalty to the homeland, that is citizenship was to be the binding factor (cf. Smalanczuk 2004; Smalianchuk 2007).

Victor was born in 1959 and was aged 40 at the moment of interviewing. His life story is structured around the transformation process starting with the Soviet self-identity to the fully-fledged Belarusian identity as a destination point. Victor's Belarusian self-identity could fully develop due to his biographical, theoretical and analytical work, as well as affiliations with reference groups that can be classified as intelligentsia circles (which gives this narrator a feeling of belonging as opposed to Alesya's feeling of alienation e.g. 'and this is how my national identity formed/ which frankly speaking ((laughter)) can find no means of expression\' (interview with Alesya, [6: 36—6:37])). The narrator belongs to the milieu of the Belarusian-speaking intelligentsia.[13]

If we apply narrator's emic categories to the description of his transformation, the following life history can be reproduced: Victor was born in a town in Western Belarus in an 'ordinary' family of the 'first-generation Soviet intelligentsia' [2: 20–21]. As Victor 'has later on discovered working in the archives' [2: 21–22], his earlier ancestors were peasants. As the majority of urban residents in Belarus, Victor's parents acquired Russian as a language of social advancement and used it both at work and at home. As a child, the narrator could hear Belarusian only at his grandparents' who raised him in the countryside until the age of two and afterwards during summer vacations. He couldn't discriminate between the two languages at the time: '(3) well\ only later on I could tell Russian and Belarusian apart\' [2: 27–29]. In 1966 Victor started attending primary, 'ordinary' Soviet school where Belarusian was totally non-existent. He remembers having two-hour classes of Belarusian language and literature a week at secondary school, a redundant, 'second-rate' and 'unattractive subject' [2: 32–37]. Victor's realization of his Belarusian identity started with the tribal distinction into his in-group and 'strangers' within the local rural community of his grandparents'. 'Ethnic others' included local Poles, Gypsies and Jews (the latter elicit an expert comment from the narrator's current perspective: 'there has <u>always</u> been this <u>commonplace</u> anti-Semitism present here\ maybe not very visible but whenever people are involved in small-talk\ <u>Jews</u> will always come up\ as a separate nation\' [2: 44–46]). Victor delineates his shared 'tribal' community as follows: 'I couldn't see any difference between Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians' [2: 46–47] as opposed to ethnic out-groups he could define at about the age of sixteen: 'the only thing I knew was that I wasn't a Gypsy, a Jew or a Pole' [2: 48–49].

Higher education at the faculty of history did not help the narrator form his national identity, either. Russian has remained the language of academic instruction even during classes such as the history of Belarus which has been taught as a part of

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[13] The current linguistic situation in Belarus can be characterized as bilingualism or diglossia whereby Russian is omnipresent as both the official and commonly used language of a higher prestige whereas Belarusian stands for the less prestigious vernacular (with the exception of intelligentsia circles where Belarusian is an important marker of the in-group membership and democratic or nationalist views). For the lack of space let me only briefly comment on the situation quoting Yuri Vashkievich (2007: 20): 'The Belarusian language may resound from the stage in the form of songs and folk couplets, but in real everyday life it is perceived as something abnormal, almost as breaching upon generally accepted norms of co-existence. Its speaker is immediately counted among the group of suspect eccentrics or "nationalists," depending on a given situation and circumstances, it is stigmatized in a specific way, eliminated from the primary group of the population and may exist without trouble only in the circle of co-followers'.

history of Russia: 'so there was no impression that this history was in any way distinct from Russian history' [03: 09]. At university Victor could come across Belarusian in the form of a 'rural dialect (.) spoken by uneducated people' [3: 15] during his field trips to the countryside. The inferior status of Belarusian language and culture was sustained by the lack of Belarusian pop culture: 'whenever a program in Belarusian started/ one would rush to switch off the TV\ as usually these were elderly ladies singing some boring songs ((a sigh)) which didn't make Belarusian culture in any way appealing' [3: 15–18]. Throughout his university education Victor did not encounter an academic who would put across the 'Belarusian idea'. The narrator is puzzled by the fact that even those who turned out to be 'devoted Belarusian activists' [3: 23–24] in the late nineties (like professor of history Mikhail Tkaczou) had not revealed their views before the student audience in 1976–1981.

Selective service turned to be decisive in terms of national awakening: '(2) actually I started to feel Belarusian for the first time when I left university\ and became a conscript\' [3:28–29]. Victor was drafted for a year and a half to the Moscow detachment where 'conscripts would get into packs or groups of compatriots\ (.) Ukrainians called Khakhly[14]\ Belarusians commonly referred to as Bul'bashy[15] (.) a pack of Kazakhs\ and Chechens too\' [3:36–39]. It turned out to be the primordial experience of ethnicity as 'a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order" (Barth 1969: 11). This primary appreciation of the ethnic bond was reinforced in a situation of risk to one's personal integrity: 'well it dawned on me this primary realization of being Belarusian (3) why:/ you came across different situations in the army and on the whole Belarusians would lend you a hand and nobody else would\ (3) right\ (.)' [3: 40–42].

Having completed his army service, the narrator was appointed a secondary school history teacher in 1983. The thawing political climate in the USSR—'in eighty-three it was not exactly the period of transformation yet in the Soviet Union but you could feel the wind of change so to speak\' [4: 05–07]—acted as a catalyst for personal metamorphosis, too. During his alumni reunion around 1984 Victor 'quite unexpectedly took a stance of a fully-fledged Belarusian nationalist for the first time ever\ (.)' [4: 12–13]. The narrator's unanticipated public declaration of his Belarusian national self-identity prompted his quest for reference groups and referential places combined with biographical and theoretical work. Thus, since 1986 Victor regularly attended the 'Pakhodnya' club in Grodno run by the local intelligentsia, which served as a meeting place and discussion forum for anti-Soviet, dissenting cultural and intellectual elites. The meetings also functioned as an arena to voice conflicting Belarusian national and historical narratives. Victor distanced himself from the ethnocentric story of the glorious Belarusian past put forward by historian Mikola Yermalovich 'who coined this idea that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was established in the aftermath of the

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[14] Khakhly (Bel. Хахлы)—pejorative for Ukrainians; probably stemming from the typical men's hairstyle with only the fringe being left (khakhol) and the rest of the scull being shaved.

[15] Bul'bashy (Bel. Бульбашы)—pejorative for Belarusians; literal translation—'potato-face' meaning something of a bumpkin.

Belarusian conquest of Lithuanian lands and other strange ideas that seemed bizarre at the time and seem equally bizarre now' [4: 19–4:28].

At around the same time Victor took up a part-time job at the Museum of History and Religion in Grodno, a local hub of independent Belarusian thought and Belarusian-speaking intelligentsia: 'this was my first personal encounter with representatives of the new Belarusian intelligentsia' [4: 33–34]. The growing scope of the Belarusian reference group and increased awareness of his own national identity prompted Victor to continue his professional inquiry into Belarusian history. Thus, in 1990 the narrator commenced extramural PhD studies at the Academy of Sciences in Minsk and got engrossed into another academic environment of 'historians in Minsk that is historians who were researchers and not pedagogues\ which is a totally different category\' [5: 13]. Contacts with the dissenting Belarusian academic elite as well as the break-up of the Soviet Union served as yet another catalyst for changes in Victor's national awareness. Thus, he took initiative and created a school museum of history of education and culture in Belarus, which was 'an innovative idea at the time as in those days museums were usually built around war and patriotic themes\ whereas in this case the idea was to show the history of education and culture in Belarus as linked to the history of the school itself\ and history of schooling in Grodno […] and this was undoubtedly to illustrate Belarusian history with its national implications' [5: 18–5:24]. In 1993 Victor changed both the job—moving to the Institute of Teacher Vocational Training—and the language of instruction—since then he has consistently taught in Belarusian. The year 1995 marked the adoption of Belarusian as the language of both professional and everyday life, partly as a reaction against the 1995 referendum which resulted in the reinstatement of Soviet state symbols and Russian as an official language in Belarus. As the narrator himself comments: 'the fact that I started speaking Belarusian in everyday life marked a certain (.) a certain stage let's say accomplishment of my Belarusian national identity formation' [5: 33–5: 36].

Alongside the described personal choices, the narrator theorizes about the existing and prospective forms of Belarusian collective identity and polity on a higher level of abstraction (see the respective excerpt in Annex 2). Victor specifically focuses on the origins of nationalist and pro-democratic schematic narrative templates. He refutes the idea of the Belarusian nation-state as not feasible and supports the idea of civil statehood: 'no efforts should be spared to promote the Belarusian people as a polity\ (.) that is not ethnically/ not as an ethnic nation not an ethno-cultural organization but a political unit where the key affiliation criteria for the Belarusian statehood would simply be the conviction that Belarus is your home country that you're going to live here and your children too that your life is tied to this land\ [5: 40—5: 47]. The narrator draws an analogy between the current civil society project and the 19th-century Krayova movement as opposed to that of Narodnichestvo. He explains that in the 19th century (under the rule of the Russian Empire) the polyethnic system in Belarus looked as follows: Russians held administrative power, educated elites and noble gentry were Polish while illiterate peasantry was Belarusian. In the second half of the twentieth century, 'when democratization processes took root after the abolition of serfdom/' [7: 47–48], liberals among the Polish ethnic elites, 'the educated circles

of the society (.)' [7: 46–47], 'tried to communicate their ideology to the masses/' [8: 04]. The use of the Belarusian language became more widespread, as it was applied as a means of propaganda by both movements to promote a civil society project combined with anti-Russian sentiments (i.e. the Krayovtsy) as well as ideas of anti-serfdom and the national revolution (i.e. the Narodniks). One of the most prominent examples was the first periodical in Belarusian, a clandestine newspaper 'Muzhytskaya Prauda' ('The Peasant Truth') published by Konstanty Kalinousky, one of the leaders of the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian insurrection of 1863 against the Russian rule. This radical liberal 'cannot be considered Belarusian in the contemporary meaning of the word as we understand being a Belarusian today\' [8: 09–10]. As opposed to Polish or Belarusian nationalists, Kalinousky is categorized as a local patriot, 'rather' a Krayovets: 'he felt affinity to Belarus and Lithuania regarding them his homeland (.)' [8: 13–14]. The revolutionary-nationalist movement of Narodnichestvo chronologically developed alongside the Krayova movement and played an equally important role in promoting Belarusian collective identity. The narrator stresses the 'mythological' role (cf. Hobsbawm/ Ranger 1983) of the Narodniks whose concepts have persisted to this day: 'they conceptualized the Belarusian nation as a purely plebeian rural people (3) and it might as well be that hence comes the typical Soviet view of Belarusians which was in fact introduced by the very Belarusian Narodniks who perceived Belarusians as <u>peasantry</u> as <u>hoi polloi</u> and the Belarusian language as a <u>rustic</u> vernacular (.)' [8: 27–28]. Whereas Kalinousky and the Krayovtsy emphasized the importance of the common multiethnic resistance against the Russian oppressor, 'the Narodniks saw Poles as representatives of the <u>upper</u> stratum of society/' [8: 29–30]. Kalinousky (hanged in Vilnius in 1864) in his famous '<u>farewell</u> letter off the gallows' [8: 35] appealed to Belarusians: 'the minute you hear that your Warsaw brothers are fighting against the enemy join them without hesitation (.)' [8: 36–37]. On the contrary, 'the Narodniks stated it very clearly that this is the Belarusian <u>nation</u> and there are the enemies of the nation namely the Russian Tsarism/ and the Polish gentry\ (.)' [8: 39–41].

Concluding Remarks

The interviews with Alesya and Victor exemplify diverse ways of constructing national identity. Alesya forms her national identity based on the feeling of common fate with a nation that has undergone sovietization and marginalization (cultural annihilation). In other words, Alesya's narrative unrolls starting with particularistic ideas towards universal features i.e. one's right to construe national identity. Victor's case is different. Victor is an intellectual who forms his national identity based on universal prerequisites of human rights and hence moves from universal rights towards particularistic characteristics.

The expert-type interview with Victor abounds in specific narrative representations of schematic templates as well as conceptualisations of formative narratives per se. The narrator focuses on nationalist and pro-democratic collective identity frames as

entrenched in historical and cultural knowledge. Victor disregards the pro-Russian and victimized ethnic identity templates as 'naïve'. This gap is filled with Alesya's vivid accounts of her way of interpreting Belarusian national identity. As the analysis of the excerpts from her interview has shown, one may share the same 'cultural tool kit' with Sovietized compatriots and yet demonize the Russian oppressor instead of aspiring to it. The identified schematic narrative templates of post-Soviet Belarusian collective identity have been discussed in order to point out prospective directions for identity conceptualizations.

There are grounds to believe that both the nationalist and pro-democratic frames of interpretation have not taken hold (yet?) among Belarusian society by and large and are confined to the circles of dissident intellectuals, as these schemata are rooted in non-official and thus not easily accessible historical and cultural sources disseminated within the dissenting milieu. The pro-Russian (imperialist) schematic narrative template is believed (cf. Titarenko 2007, Vashkievich 2007) to be most eagerly internalized by citizens of contemporary Belarus inflicted with nostalgia for the Soviet past. However, the empirical body of research as well as observations of conflicts tormenting many countries of the former communist bloc indicate that victimized tribal identities offer immense mobilization potential for violence which may come to the fore without prior notice.

Annex 1

Key transcription symbols

The interviews have been transcribed in a simplified version of Gail Jefferson's set of symbols denoting paralinguistic information such as intonation, word-stress, pauses and other characteristic features of utterances. For a comprehensive overview of symbols, including the 'Jefferson System' and other transcription standards, see e.g. Atkinson/ Heritage (1984), Hutchby/ Wooffitt (1998), Sacks (1992), Sacks et. al. (1974). The symbols applied in the excerpts under discussion are explained below:

Symbol	Explanation
more	underlined words or syllables have been accentuated in a louder voice
nu:rsethe	colons indicate that the preceding sound has been stretched
tongue/	rising intonation, as at the end of a question
at all\	falling intonation, as at the end of an affirmative sentence
didn't//	unexpected interruption of a flow of speech by the narrator
(.)	the smallest noticeable pause of approximately 0.2 seconds
(2)	an approximately 2-second pause
((sigh))	nonverbal communication
(*quote* +)	transcriber's comment on a specific character of an utterance between the brackets and (+); as in the example below: '(*quote* +) cold frost and sunshine day of wonder/ (+)' reads as follows: the utterance 'cold frost and sunshine day of wonder' is a quotation.

Annex 2

VICTOR [07: 44–08: 42]

7:44	N:	(.) naturally not only this but to a certain extent also a socio-cultural divide of the
7:45		population in Belarus had a role to play\ for as early as the beginning of the
7:46		nineteenth century Polish became the language of the educated circles of the
7:47		society (.) well and later on when democratization processes took root after the
7:48		abolition of serfdom/ (.) in the second half of the nineteenth century/ that is when
7:49		the so-called hoi polloi started to participate more or less actively well actively in
7:50		civil social even political life/ (.) and this is when the role of the Belarusian
8:01		language became more significant/ and a trend// the radical liberal movement
8:02		evolved both around Kalinousky and the Narodniks possessed by the idea of the
8:03		national revolution in other words political ideology came to the fore// and they
8:04		tried to communicate their ideology to the masses/ and how could they convey
8:05		these ideas of the national revolution to the Belarusian rural masses/ or anti-
8:06		serfdom ideas/ only speaking their own tongue/ (.) and propaganda was launched
8:07		and first leaflets were disseminated back in the forties of the nineteenth century
8:08		then an enormous role was played by Kalinousky naturally and his Muzhytskaya
8:09		Prauda\ although obviously Kalinousky cannot be considered Belarusian in the
8:10		contemporary meaning of the word as we understand being a Belarusian today\
8:11	I:	mhm\
8:12	N:	he wasn't Belarusian/ he was rather a person well (.) in terms of beliefs he was
8:13		rather a Krayovets he felt affinity to Belarus and Lithuania regarding them his
8:14		homeland (.) and Bel// I believe that Muzhytskaya Prauda for him was simply a
8:15		very important means of propagating\ (.)
8:16	I:	mhm\
8:17	N:	his ideas communicated to Belarusian countrymen\ regardless of who he
8:18		considered himself he is a part of Belarusian history without doubt for his role was
8:20		colossal\ (.) and afterwards (.) and then (.) later on (.) later on in order to promote
8:21		Belarusianness a huge role was played by the Belarusian Narodniks/ (.) which was
8:22		in the early eighties/ (.) and what they did they formed first theoretical
8:23		underpinnings for the legitimacy of the Belarusian nation\ (.) and it was extremely
8:24		important that they conceptualized the Belarusian nation as the purely plebeian
8:25		rural people (3) and it might as well be that a typical Soviet view of Belarusians
8:26		was in fact introduced by the very Belarusian Narodniks who perceived
8:27		Belarusians as peasantry as hoi polloi and the Belarusian language as a rustic
8:28		vernacular (.) actually in contrast to Kalinousky a certain anti-Polish sentiment is
8:29		spelled out here\ since the Narodniks saw Poles as representatives of the upper
8:30		stratum of the society/
8:31	I:	mhm\
8:32	N:	certain social motives would come to the fore here more and more\ Kalinousky
8:33		didn't// (.) almost didn't voice them at all\ (.) he would rather focus on the national
8:34		liberation struggle a common fight for your freedom and our freedom (.) in fact in
8:35		his letter the farewell letter off the gallows Kalinousky wrote as a closing remark
8:36		addressing Belarusians the minute you hear that your Warsaw brothers
8:37		are fighting against the enemy join them without hesitation (.)
8:38	I:	mhm/
8:39	N:	and you wouldn't find it in the Narodniks no the Narodniks stated it very clearly
8:40		that this is the Belarusian nation and there are the enemies of the nation namely
8:41		the Russian tsarism/ and the Polish gentry\ (.) and this probably intensified the
8:42		development of Belarusian cultural tradition\ as Belarusian\

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