

**Belarus and its Neighbors:
Historical Perceptions
and Political Constructs**

Belarus and its Neighbors: Historical Perceptions and Political Constructs

International Conference Papers

EDITED BY

ALEŚ ŁAHVINIEC
TACIANA ČULICKAJA



WARSAW 2013

Editors: Aleś Łahviniec, Taciana Čulickaja

Project manager: Anna Grudzińska

Papers of the conference “Belarus and its Neighbors:
Historical Perceptions and Political Constructs”.

The conference was held on 9–11 of December 2011 in Warsaw, Poland.
The conference was sponsored by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Belarus Office,
National Endowment for Democracy and Open Society Institute.

Translation: Vieranika Mazurkievič

Proof-reading: Nadzieja Šakun (Belarusian), Katie Morris (English),
Adrianna Stansbury (English)

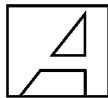
Cover design: Małgorzata Butkiewicz

Publication of this volume was made possible by National Endowment for Democracy.

© Copyright by Uczelnia Łazarskiego, Warsaw 2013

Oficyna Wydawnicza Uczelni Łazarskiego
02-662 Warszawa
ul. Świeradowska 43
tel. 22 54-35-450, 22 54-35-410
wydawnictwo@lazarski.edu.pl
www.lazarski.pl

ISBN: 978-83-60694-49-7



**Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung**



**OPEN SOCIETY
FOUNDATIONS**



**National Endowment
for Democracy**

Supporting freedom around the world



Implementation of publishing:
Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA
ul. Inflancka 15/198, 00-189 Warszawa
tel./fax 22 635 03 01, 22 635 17 85
e-mail: elipsa@elipsa.pl, www.elipsa.pl

Contents

Foreword.....	7
<i>Andrzej Sulima-Kamiński – Quo Vadis, Belarus? Instead of an Introduction</i>	11
<i>Andrzej Januškiewicz – Obstacles on the Way to Mutual Understanding: the Effects of National, Historical and Cultural Stereotypes on the Diplomatic Practice between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Muscovite State in the Mid-16th Century.....</i>	17
<i>Hienadz Sahanovič – Attitude of Belarus' Population to the Russian Army in the 17th Century.....</i>	28
<i>Uładzimir Łobač – Images of Neighboring Peoples in the Traditional World Outlook of Belarusians</i>	42
<i>Aleh Dziarnovič – Gudas as a Historical Name of Belarusians in the Lithuanian Language: 'Goths' or 'Barbarians'?.....</i>	56
<i>Alaksandr Smalančuk – Krajovaść vis-à-vis Belarusian and Lithuanian National Movements in the Early 20th Century.....</i>	69
<i>Dorota Michaluk – The Four Governments of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in the International Arena in 1918–1920.....</i>	81
<i>Ihar Kuźniacou – The Bolshevik Repressions against the Belarusian National-Democratic Movement in 1920–1930ies.....</i>	95
<i>Zachar Šybieka – Treasures of Small Towns of Belarus: Common Heritage of the Rzeczpospolita</i>	106
<i>Siarhiej Čaty – What are the Economic Niches of Belarus in the Region?.....</i>	116
<i>Serge Naŭrodski – Economic Relations between Belarus and Poland Before and After the Crisis.....</i>	121
<i>Alaksiej Łastoŭski – Russocentrism among the Projects of Belarusian Identity: the Role and Prospects in the Modern Belarusian State</i>	131

<i>Anais Marin</i> – Current Challenges of EU-Belarus Relations: Can the Eastern Partnership Support the Europeanization of Belarus?.....	139
<i>Alaksiej Bratačkin</i> – Recent Trends of the Europeanization Discourse in Belarus.....	153
<i>Nastaśsia Klimovič</i> – Regionalization of EU–Belarus Relations: First Step Towards Europeanization or a Possibility to Bypass the Crisis?	162
<i>Ina Ramašeŭskaja</i> – Possible Directions for Public Administration Reform in Belarus	174
<i>Maryna Sakalova</i> – E-Government in Belarus: to Overcome the Inertia of Informatization	181
<i>Lina Klymenko, Sergiu Gherghina</i> – Citizens’ Perceptions of the Political Regime in Post-Soviet Belarus	196
<i>Taciana Šukan</i> – Youth Policy and the Attitude of the Authorities Towards Youth Organizations in Contemporary Belarus	204
<i>Natalla Arciomienka</i> – Education Abroad: Brain Drain or Investment in the Future?	210
<i>Piotr Rudkoŭski</i> – The Freedom of Conscience in Non-Democratic Environment	218
<i>Piotr Kuźniacoŭ</i> – The Role of Social Networks and Other New Media in Shaping Civil Society and Building National Identity in Belarus	225

Images of Neighboring Peoples in the Traditional World Outlook of Belarusians

Images of neighboring countries and the peoples inhabiting them are quite frequent but also specific in the traditional worldview of Belarusians, as reflected in various genres of folklore, ideas and beliefs.

Categorization of space in the mythopoetic worldview distinguishes two main zones, which correspond, respectively, to 'this' and the 'other' world. In the reality of conservative and low mobility rural communities, the first category is virtually identical to the 'living space' – a set of cultural and natural loci included in the economic practice of the group and nominatively recorded at the level of mental space registry. The 'other' world, with all its variability (the world of the dead, divine or infernal sphere, far away and 'foreign' lands') and mythological or real distance, is characterized, above all, by its exclusion from the everyday life experiences of the community.

In the case of a distant country - 'foreign lands' - both geographical characteristics (forest land, steppe, location in the north or south, etc.), and ethnic and cultural images of people that inhabit this region are significant for the formation of its image in the mythopoetic worldview. Moreover, the ethnic characteristics of the country are a priority in the traditional language picture of the world. For example, when it is absolutely impossible to isolate the ethnonym from toponym, to identify what is primary and what is secondary and subordinate (either people called 'Poles' got their name from their home country, Poland, or the country got its name from the ethnonym).

Ethnic images are an important part in the worldview of any people. Those images allow people to not only compile and optimize their self-concept (intra-image), they also clearly define at the level of the collective consciousness the specific features of a different ethnic group (extra-image), which in turn, gives substantive description of the content and space the people lives in. The image of the 'foreign' is formed as a general knowledge about religion and way of life, rites and rituals, language and beliefs of ethnic neighbors. Notions of 'foreign' faith and 'foreign' people are reflected in folk legends and beliefs, in ritual practices and forms of everyday communication.

Factors by which specific countries are mythologized in the traditional worldview of Belarusians can differ. In the cases of Ukraine and Latvia, geographical location had great importance (in the lower reaches of the Dnieper and the Džvina, respectively, and for Ukraine, also in the steppe zone, which in traditional beliefs was associated with hazardous infernal area symbols).

In the case of Belarusian raftmen, who rafted timber on the Džvina to Riga, we have largely mythologized images of Latvians and Latvia, although based on real facts. One of the main factors of mythologizing actually was the river itself, the Džvina-Daugava, the main and most ancient channel of communication in the region. Since the Džvina is very clearly oriented along the East – West line, its upper (source) and downstream (mouth) in the traditional worldview of Belarusians were represented like two opposite poles of a mythological space. The source of the Džvina correlated with the sunrise, the idea of light, life, beginnings. The lower reaches of the river and its estuary embodied the lower tier of the universe, the zone of danger, as well as the lower part of the body. Significantly, in Belarusian folk traditions, child birth can be symbolically described as a pregnant woman's journey to the mouth of the Džvina, to Riga ('to go to Riga' – to give birth).¹

For the raftmen, rapids and rocks in the lower reaches of the Džvina present not only real, but mythological danger, as evidenced by their Belarusian names: *Varažeja* / *Seer* (near Jėkabpils), *Čortava Barada* / *Devil's Beard* (28 miles below Jėkabpils), *Balvancy* / *Blockheads* and stone

¹ Никифоровский Н.Я. Очерки престопадного житья-бытья в Витебской Белоруссии и описание предметов обиходности. Витебск. Тип., 1895. С. LIX.

Blockhead (17 miles above Riga).² Accordingly, the Latvians, who knew the geomorphology of the Dźvina/Daugava in this segment of the river and floated wooden caravans through the rapids, were seen by Belarusian raftmen as extraordinary people. They were believed to possess some special magical knowledge with a secret character (they were using terms in an incomprehensible (Latvian) language). These circumstances of mythologizing the Latvians image in the nineteenth century were very aptly noted by Ramuald Padbiarezki: *‘Belarusian peasants believe that Latvians are wizards... The supernatural power attributed to them roots in the intricacy of the language, their courage and skill to float their boats through the Dźvina’s rapids, and lead loaded ships from Jėkabpils to Riga. Returning home from the water travels, a Belarusian peasant brings amazing stories about them, they even deliberately bring presents, so as not to annoy wizards.’*³

As for Ukraine, in its very title one can see a clear etymological connection with the word *kraj*, border or ‘margin’: ‘The term Ukraine relatively early (late twelfth century) became attributed to the border area in Pereyaslav and Kyiv lands.’⁴ To the archaic mind, the mythologem ‘border’ was of fundamental importance, since it divided the world into ‘our’ mastered, cultured area and ‘alien’, ‘savage’ and dangerous space.

In the Belarusian mythopoetic worldview, the border status of Ukraine was symbolically stressed by its landscape features (by the prevalence of forest steppe, and in particular, the steppe). Belarusian folklore clearly shows that ‘in contrast to the “forest”, treated as something close – part of “our” world, the «steppe»... almost certainly is correlated with the scope of the “foreign”’: It is situated in a “foreign land”.⁵ In Belarusian history and folklore texts, the steppe often appears as ‘field’, although not in the sense of having been cultivated and mastered by people – ‘our’ land; but as ‘open field’, a wide treeless space, which strikes with its lack of order and structure, belonging to the sphere of chaos and destruction. This,

² Сапунов А.П. Река Западная Двина: Историко-географический обзор. Витебск, 1893. С. 177–181.

³ Падбярэскі Р. Лісты пра Беларусь // Шляхам гадоў: Гіст.-літ. зб // Уклад. Я.Янушкевіч. Мінск, 1994. С. 254.

⁴ Агеева Р.А. Страны и народы: происхождение названий. Москва, 1990. С. 166.

⁵ Санько С. Штудыі з кагнітыўнай і кантрастыўнай культуралогіі. Мінск, 1998. С. 113.

strictly speaking, is a 'Wild Field', which 'lays between the lands of Ruś (Ruthenia) and Tatar possessions (the territory of modern Kirovograd, Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, Kherson, partially Odesa, Zaporizhzhya, Vinnytsia, Cherkasy regions)'.⁶ The Belarusian fairy-tale epic represents 'open field' as the border between 'this' and the 'other' world, the point of final battle between the representatives of these areas (e.g. a fabulous hero and a dragon). The same formula is accurately recreated in Belarusian Chronicles which describe(s) actual historical events: 'when the Grand Duke of Lithuania Alhierd (Algirdas) was the owner of the Lithuanian land, he went to the Field with the Lithuanian army, and beat the Tatars on the Sinija Vody River'.⁷

For medieval inhabitants of Belarus, Ukraine was an unpredictable and unstable border. A border that pulsed very intensively. Every split in such a border with the 'other' world threatens to break peace and stability, to destroy the ordinary way of life. It is no coincidence that representatives of the 'open (wild) field', when moving from the periphery ('Ukraine') to the centre ('Lithuania'), are described using references to nature, not culture. In this way both the Crimean Tatars and Zaporizhzhya Cossacks, in accordance with the way they act in Belarus (robbery, rape, murder), are characterized as 'locusts', while Bohdan Khmelnytsky acts as a 'devastating wind' for *Rzeczpospolita* and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.⁸ Ukraine's periphery character, marginality and correlation to the lower tier of the universe on the mythological level, identify it with the world of the dead and the idea of death in general. This other world in Belarusian folk songs acts as 'Ukraine is far away', a 'foreign country', where the actions of the hero going there, get the opposite meaning to the world of men: 'he took a wife from Volhynia – a grave in an open field', 'got married in Ukraine' – was killed.⁹

Frequently used evaluation characteristics applied to Cossacks ('*Chachły*'), representatives of Ukraine, include: *excessive stubbornness* ('there was a person... he was a *chachol*, and like all Ukrainians, he was

⁶ Сагановіч Г. Казакі // Энцыкл. гісторыі Беларусі. Т. 4. Мінск, 1997. С. 7.

⁷ Арлоў У. Беларускія летапісы і хронікі: Пер. са старажытнарус., старабел. і польск // Уклад. У. Арлова; праім. В. Чамярышкага. Мінск, 1997. С. 60.

⁸ Цішчанка І.К. Сацыяльна-бытавыя песні // Уклад., сістэматызацыя, уступ. Арт. І камент. І.К. Цішчанкі; рэд. А.С. Фядосік. Мінск, 1987. С. 287, 290.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 178, 191.

so stubborn that no one could do any business with him.¹⁰); *idleness* ('a Cossack is so round because he eats and lays down on his side'¹¹); *thoughtless sociability* ('a Cossack hanged himself to keep somebody company'¹²); *rape and indecent behavior towards women* ('I will gasp, I will wave, / I will not yield to a *chachoł*. / *Chachoł* has no credit – / he pushes against the grain'¹³); and *drinking* in combination with anti-social behavior ('I am a Cossack, poor chap, / do not know girls; / drink vodka, beat Jews, / The whole day I have fun'.¹⁴ Illustrative of the latter case is the fact that the custom of drinking a lot of vodka at funerals in Brest is perceived as being 'new', 'not local' and 'as Ukrainians do'.¹⁵

A special place is occupied by ideas about Ukrainians' untidiness, which to some extent was due to water scarcity. As noted by Ch. Piatkievič, '*A Ukrainian in relation to tidiness, not only does not differ from a person from Paleśsie (Prypiać Marshes), but sometimes is even below that level [...]* It should be emphasized, however, that the majority of Ukrainians do not wash their necks, and then sweat mixed with dust for some time covers their necks with a two mm thick reddish shell, which cracks from the sun and looks like a crocodile or snake skin. This, apparently, was an occasion to call ... the Ukrainians, through the gentry, adder or viper...'.¹⁶

When describing the perception of Russian lands and people there in attitudes of Belarusians in the nineteenth- early twentieth century, the actual ambiguity of the term 'Ruś' (Ruthenia) and 'Russian' (Ruski, Ruthenian), as reflected in folklore, must be taken into account. In written sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, ethno-confessionism, 'Ruski' meant the Orthodox population of the state, rather than ethnic Russians, who were

¹⁰ Сержпутоўскі. А.К. Казкі і апавяданні беларусаў Слуцкага павету. Мінск, 2000. С. 128.

¹¹ Добровольский В.Н. Смоленский этнографический сборник. Ч. 3 // Записки ИРГО по отделению этнографии. СПб., 1894. Т. XXIII. Вып. 2. С. 57.

¹² Касько У.К. Святло далёкай зоркі. Мінск, 1997. С. 273.

¹³ Шейн П.В. Материалы для изучения быта и языка русского населения Северо-Западного края. СПб., 1893. Т. II. С. 211.

¹⁴ Фальклор у запісах Яна Чачота і братоў Тышкевічаў // Уклад., сістэм. Тэкстаў і камент. В.І. Скідана і А.М. Хрушчовай, уступ. Арт. Т.В. Валодзінай. Мінск, 1997. С. 274.

¹⁵ Седакова О.А. Поэтика обряда: Погребальная обрядность восточных и южных славян. Москва, 2004. С. 119.

¹⁶ Пяткевіч Ч. Рэчыцкае Палессе. Мінск, 2004. С. 354.

called ‘Moscow’, ‘Muscovites’, ‘Maskali»’.¹⁷ A similar situation occurred even in the nineteenth century, as reported by correspondent Šein in the Harodnia province, ‘our peasants call Great Russians Muscovites, Cossacks, rusaki».¹⁸ Accordingly, the term ‘*Ruś*’, is rather frequently used in Belarusian fabulous epic to refer to ‘our’, ‘baptized’ world of people, as opposed to other world inhabited by dragons, monsters, evil spirits; however, it in no way indicates ethnic Russian lands.

‘*Ruś*’ (Ruthenian land) acquires a completely different meaning in the folklore dimension of real history. Thus, Belarusians of the nineteenth century perceived the expansion of the ‘Russian land’ directly linked to the political drama of the partitions of *Rzeczpospolita*, as the cause of violations of the existing world order and changes of a broader, even ontological and cosmological character. ‘The old people say that when “*Kaciarynuška*” (Catherine II) took our land, winters were shorter, and as when she took it, summer became shorter’.¹⁹ The destruction of ‘their own’ and start of adherence to a ‘foreign’ state, Russia was the end of the former ‘good times’: ‘We always’ were rich, we had thirty horses. Finally, the landowners from Moscow appeared, and out of thirty only three are left’.²⁰

The image of *Ruś* as an ‘alien’, distant, potentially dangerous and destructive land is dramatically realized in the mythopoetic worldview of Belarusians in the late eighteenth century, after military recruitment was introduced. A person was called up for 25-year military service. In fact, in his native area he was considered dead. For example, a young recruit complains in a song: ‘I’m going to Russia, to the war. / Everything is foreign there/ there is only sky and damp earth. / I’ll cry following my cart, / Recollecting my father and mother, / and cursing my lot’.²¹

¹⁷ Бандарчык В.К. Этнаграфія беларусаў: гістарыяграфія, этнагенез, этнічная гісторыя // В.К. Бандарчык, І.У. Чаквін і інш. Мінск, 1985. С. 78–79, 131.

¹⁸ Шейн П.В. Матэрыялы для изучения быта и языка русского населения Северо-Западного края. СПб., 1902. Т. 3. С. 98.

¹⁹ Берман И. Календарь по народным преданиям в Воложинском приходе Виленской губернии Ошмянского уезда // Записки императорского Русского географического общества. СПб. 1873. Т. V. С. 41.

²⁰ Романов Е.Р. Белорусский сборник. Витебск, 1891. Вып. IV. С. 89.

²¹ Цішчанка І.К.Сацыяльна-бытавыя песні / Уклад, сістэматызацыя, уступ. Арт. І камент. І.К. Цішчанкі; рэд. А.С. Фядосік. Мінск, 1987. С. 51.

At the same time, in the national world-view, Russia is fraught with another danger: a long-term stay there can lead not only to physical death of the 'local people', but also to the loss of cultural (linguistic) identity, which makes the identification of a person in the traditional community indefinite. A domestic observation in Harodnia province in the end of the nineteenth century provides an eloquent example: *“if a person unfamiliar with the area asks a local in Russian: “what village are you from?” or “what is the name of this village?” The local person will answer, but before he will give the stranger a look of surprise and ask: “perhaps you are from Russia, who does not speak our language and says [in Russian] dziareunia?” And if the stranger says: “No, I’m local, from Vaŭkavysk, from Luniansk parish, I only speak in a slightly different way, as I was in Maskali for 10 years”, than the native often noted: “Now it’s clear! The face and outfit looks local, but the way he speaks is strange. Oh my Lord! Spent among Muscovites ten years and completely broke his tongue”.*²² It is significant that even in the 1970s and 80s, children and young people in villages near Lepiel made rash comments about using Russian words: ‘Do not use Russian, or you’ll be expelled from Belarus’.²³

The historical conditions of the relationship between the two ethnic groups were crucial in forming the image of Russians in Belarusian folk culture. In particular, we have to keep in mind the dramatic events of devastating wars of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries and the behavior of Russian armies on the territory of Belarus. It became the basis for creating an image of the cruel, ruthless character of the Russian people. A Russian was regarded as a more terrible character than the mythological devil: ‘A devil can be scared away by the sign of cross but not a Maskal’; ‘– Father! Father! The devil climbs in the house! – Do not worry; whoever, but a Maskal’.²⁴ It is no accident that one of the meanings of the word Maskal in Belarusian dialects is a ‘naughty boy or

²² Шейн П.В. Материалы для изучения быта и языка русского населения Северо-Западного края. СПб. 1902. Т. 3. С. 98.

²³ Being grateful to T.V. Valodzina for the access to the field materials.

²⁴ Максимов С.В. Белорусская Смоленщина с соседями // Живописная Россия: Отечество наше в его зем., ист., плем., экон. и быт. значении: Литовское и Белорусское Полесье: Репринт. воспроизв. изд. 1882 г. Минск, 1993. С. 438, 457.

an empty ear of rye or wheat'.²⁵ The blind Muscovites' willingness to obey orders of the authorities is reflected in Belarusian fairy-tale prose. Thus, in the fairy tale 'Asilak', by order of landlords, they kill a people's hero: 'The landlords hired Maskals and attacked Asilak. No wonder, Maskal. If he gets an order he will even kill his own father and mother'.²⁶ Maskals are even used to 'intimidate' the disease in a spell: '...Zosia's valve, stand still, do not show. If you show I will call Cossacks, Maskals, they will cut you, they will chop'.²⁷

Drunkeness is another negative trait of the Russian people²⁸ ('it is difficult to trace among local people the typical features of 'alcoholics', which are observed in full glory among the "petty Maskals", dispersed in the South-East of Viciebsk province²⁹); *mendacity* ('it is well known, a Maskal is good at telling lies'³⁰); *lack of responsibility* (the term, 'Russian traveling moon' means absolutely indefinite³¹); *thievery* ('a Maskal is beaten not because of stealing but because of failing to hide it properly'; 'that's the essence of a Maskal: to steal'³²); and *low mental abilities* ('do not fool a Muscovy, it's stupid anyway'³³). It is possible that the idea of Russians' mental inadequacy resulted from their awkward attempts to explain themselves in the local dialect: 'Once, Maskals stopped in a village, so one of them would ask some pepper to spice eggs, and he says to an old woman: "Hey! Baba, can you pepper my balls?" And she answers: "A murrain on you! I'm too old for balls!"'.³⁴

In contrast to images of Russia and Ukraine, the image of Poland is mythologized to a lesser extent in the traditional worldview of Belarusians.

²⁵ Станкевіч Я. Беларуска-Расійскі (Вялікалітоўска – расійскі) слоўнік. New-York 1990. С. 678

²⁶ Сержпудоўскі А.К. Казкі і апавяданні беларусаў-палешукоў. Мінск, 1999. С. 103.

²⁷ Recorded by the author in 1993 from S.S. Dobyš, born on 1923 in Krašniki village (Dokšycy district).

²⁸ An exception from this rule would be Russian Old Believers, who drank alcohol on very special occasions only.

²⁹ Никифоровский Н.Я. Простонародные приметы и поверья, суеверные обряды и обычаи... Витебской Белоруссии. Витебск, 1897. С. 82.

³⁰ Сержпудоўскі А.К. Казкі і апавяданні беларусаў-палешукоў. Мінск, 1999. С. 68.

³¹ Federowski M. Lud białoruski na Rusi Litewskiej. Warszawa, 1935, T. IV, p. 267.

³² Ibidem, p. 179.

³³ Насовіч І.І. Слоўнік беларускай мовы. Мінск, 1983. С. 291.

³⁴ Анталогія беларускага народнага анекдота і жарта / Уклад., прадм. А.С. Фядосіка. Мінск, 2001. С. 37.

It is interpreted through popular understanding of real history. This is because Belarus and Poland shared a single historical destiny for quite a long time and following the Union of Lublin of 1569 coexisted in a single federal state – *Rzeczpospolita*.

Nevertheless, Poland, like almost any foreign country, keeps expressive features of the other world, as opposed to ‘our land’, the ‘motherland’. The correlation between Poland and the infernal, destructive sphere of the universe is particularly clearly reflected in the legend ‘Eternal Frontier’: ‘Once upon the time there lived a prince of our land, Radar. First he was a blacksmith and later he was elected to be prince. And in Lach lands there lived King Lach, who had a snake Krahavej. The snake got into the habit of visiting our land: he would come, eat people or kill those whom he didn’t eat.’ The result of the duel between the mythological heroes was the victory of Radar. He harnessed the snake and ploughed a furrow with it, which became the bed of the Bug river, and at the same time, the border between Poland and Belarus.³⁵

On the other hand, Poland, in the folk dimension, is a country whose people possess supernatural qualities and are endowed with the qualities of cultural heroes. Thus, the legendary Mieniesk, the founder of Minsk, is a native of Poland: ‘This city was founded by some hero and magician Mieniesk, who came here from Poland’.³⁶ Significantly, the idea of the extraordinary ability of the Poles survived into the twentieth century in Palešsie: ‘we have had a Polish forester. He could turn clouds away. He could stop a cloud or tear it apart. He had a stick. In June vipers and grass snakes are playing, and who managed to divide them by a stick can then use this stick to stop clouds’.³⁷ At the same time, natives of Poland, as well as other ‘outsiders’, could be attributed harmful features: witchcraft, for example. It was reflected in spells: ‘I will ask God, learn the lessons. From Polish eyes, from Russian eyes, from the female condition, from the male condition’.³⁸

³⁵ Легенды і паданні // Склад. М.Я. Грынблат і А.І. Гурскі; рэд. тома А.С. Фядосік. 2-е выд., дап. і дапрац. Мінск, 2005. С. 80–81.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 288.

³⁷ Белова О.В. “Чужие” в Полесье // Живая старина. 2000. № 3. С. 10.

³⁸ Барташэвіч Г.А. Замовы // Уклад., сістэм. тэкстаў, уступ. арт. і камент. Г.А. Барташэвіч; Рэдкал.: А.С. Фядосік [і інш.]. Мінск, 1992. С. 265.

However, it should be noted that these characteristics apply only to ‘foreigners’ living among ‘us’; they do not concern the neighboring people as a collective trait. On the contrary, at the household level in the traditional worldview, the population of the neighboring country was endowed with a number of features that put it closer to the world of nature, contrasting with the ‘normal’, ‘local’, and ‘our’ people. People from the traditional culture thought in local terms, which is why on the Mazury, the Belarusian-Polish borderlands, the inhabitants of the Polish Mazovia neighboring Belarus, were very often portrayed as the embodiment of all Poles. The idea that Poles belong to the world of ‘anti-culture’ is also conditioned by the distance between the languages. It is no coincidence that the Polish language is perceived as ‘not ours’ or incomprehensible and is correlated in riddles with natural categories: ‘it would go to the field, puff up like a sack, neigh like a horse, weep like a Pole’ (a goose); ‘a horse is flying, in Polish neighing, and who would kill him, would have his own blood on his hands’ (a mosquito).³⁹

In the traditional world view of the Belarusians, Poles were also identified with a number of shortcomings of social, moral and ethical character. Short-sightedness and opportunism can be named among them (‘a Pole becomes wise only after damage’, ‘Lach only looked around, but caught ague’), as well as idleness (‘Mazur is only good at playing’), bullying and conflict (‘fighting for a Mazur is like bread and butter for normal people’), haughtiness and conceit (‘how can one tell a Poll from other people? – By a shiny buckle on the belly’), excessive lust (‘Mazur is lustful, running after girls like a boor’).⁴⁰ The latter characteristic made advances of Polish men on local girls especially dangerous: ‘Oh, what have you done to me, Lach, / What’s dancing in my belly? / Either a fish, or small fish, or a small human being?’⁴¹

According to the Belarusian world view, Mazury, like animals, are born blind (‘Mazury are born blind’, ‘the Mazur is blind until the

³⁹ Грынблат М.Я. Загадкі / НАН Беларусі, Ін-т мастацтвазнаўства, этнаграфіі і фальклору; Склад. М.Я. Грынблат, А.І. Гурскі. 2-е выд. Мінск, 2004. С. 131, 150.

⁴⁰ Federowski M. Lud białoruski na Rusi Litewskiej. Warszawa, 1935, T. IV, p. 181.

⁴¹ Фядосік А.С. Жартоўныя песні / Рэд. А.С. Фядосік, Г.І. Цітовіч. Мінск, 1974. С. 108.

seventh day') and have a special physical mark ('every Mazur has a black palate').⁴²

Lithuanians shared the same 'inhuman' marks, according to the beliefs of Belarusians. The expressive category 'hirhun/Litwin/Lithuanian with a black palate' meant 'bad, evil Lithuanian': *'They say that Lithuanians are evil. They say: "a Lithuanian woman with a black palate!" Well, that's evil. In the old times when choosing a dog or a small puppy we opened its mouth and looked at the palate. If it was black, the dog would be angry, if light, then... So ...they can say, You are a Lithuanian man or woman with a black palate.' That means very evil.'* (Smarhoń district).⁴³

The language feature of Lithuanians in the borderland area formed the basis of their collective nickname: hirhuny/hierhuny. This microethnonym reflects Lithuanian's peculiarities of speech ('they "hierhiet" something, difficult to understand'⁴⁴). The microethnonym hirhuny, spread mainly in the Astraviec, Ašmiany, Smarhoń, Vilnia and Šalčyninkai areas had a mocking, dismissive, and sometimes abusive expressive character. One may also note that the name 'hirhuny' was frequently transferred from borderland residents to a broader group and representatives of the Lithuanian ethnic group in general (compare: '-And where do hirhuny live? -Hirhuny, well Lithuanians. Hirhun. -Where do they live? -Well, where do they live? In Lithuania, but there are some here. Two village councils over there'⁴⁵).

The etymology of the term 'Hirhuny' is closely connected with the Lithuanian gergėti, 'to cackle' (of geese), and the Belarusian hierhač 'to cackle' (of geese), and 'hierhielič' (to chatter).⁴⁶ The words are of onomatopoeic origin. It is no coincidence that the Lithuanian language, perceived as 'foreign' and incomprehensible, is in this case correlated with

⁴² Federowski M. Lud białoruski na Rusi Litewskiej. Warszawa, 1935, T. IV, p. 181.

⁴³ Recorded by V. Vajtkiavičius, L. Sakalavajte, J. Unukovič in 2007 from Valdemar Fiedarovič, born in 1942, in Niestaniški village, Smarhoń district.

⁴⁴ Recorded by V. Vajtkiavičius, L. Sakalavajte, J. Unukovič in 2007 from Marjan Rohač, born in 1938, in Bujaki village, Smarhoń district.

⁴⁵ Recorded by V. Vajtkiavičius, L. Sakalavajte, J. Unukovič in 2007 from Ivan Sidarevič, born in 1940, in Bujaki village, Smarhoń district.

⁴⁶ Слоўнік беларускіх гаворак паўночна-заходняй Беларусі і яе пагранічча: у 5 т.: уклад. Мацкевіч Ю.Ф. [і інш.]; рэд.: Мацкевіч Ю.Ф. Мінск, 1980. Т. 1: А–Г. С. 400. Federowski M. Lud białoruski na Rusi Litewskiej. Warszawa, 1935, T. IV, p. 364.

the natural, non-human category - the cackling of geese. ‘These hirhuny, they can be different... “Geese”, we call them. - How? - Geese [laughs]. - Why? - Well, they talk like geese’⁴⁷. (Compare this with an entry by M. Federowski, which probably has the same semantic meaning: ‘in Samogitia, even chicken are people’⁴⁸). Similar characteristics are related to the Latvian language: ‘they never spoke our way. Among themselves I mean. They speak Latvian with their people and our language with us. Go to their house and you would hear: “Herr, herr, herr”. They hierhiet, there is no way to understand anything.’⁴⁹ Accordingly, in domestic situations, the incomprehensible ‘bird language’ was the subject of ridicule and irony: ‘The locals laugh a lot. Look, Latvians, look, they speak in a strange way.’⁵⁰

However, contrasted with the image of local (‘our’) Lithuanians, who have always lived in the Belarusian border region and formed part of Belarusians’ living space, one can clearly see the image of ‘repulsive’, ‘inveterate’, ‘pure’ Lithuanians (‘there were Lithuanians here for ages. Hierhuns from Hierviaty who have been there as long as I can remember’, Astraviec district⁵¹). Active acquaintance with Lithuanians from different ethnographic regions occurred mainly in the second half of the twentieth century, as a result of the increased mobility across the border region. The events of 1939–1940 can be regarded as the starting point for this image formation, when, under an agreement between the Republic of Lithuania and the Soviet Union, part of the Vilnius region became part of the Lithuanian state. As is well known, when establishing the state border between Lithuania and Belarus, only the interests of the political leadership of the USSR were taken into account; naturally formed ethnic boundaries were not considered. The newly – formed state border, which actually divided the living space of the local population into ‘this’ and the ‘other’ side had direct impact on people and definitely

⁴⁷ Recorded by J. Unukovič in 2008 from Zyhmund Biarozkin, born in 1934, in Jackany village, Šalčininkai district.

⁴⁸ Federowski M. *Lud białoruski na Rusi Litewskiej*. Warszawa, 1935, T. IV, p. 364.

⁴⁹ Recorded by the author in 2008 from Valancina Bumaha, born in 1933, in Vaclavova village, Ušačy district.

⁵⁰ Recorded by the author in 2008 from Valancina Bumaha, born in 1933 in Vaclavova village, Ušačy district.

⁵¹ Recorded by V. Vajtkiavičius, L. Sakalavajte, J. Unukovič in 2007 from Maryja Vajciul, born in 1927, in Makrunya village, Astraviec district.

influenced the image of the neighboring people.⁵² Such a traumatic event for the local Slavic population could not go without proper evaluation and interpretation: *'Litvin ran, ran, ran, and set a striped pillar to have more beyond the border. He fell down and was about to die. A Belarusian went out, while making samahonka, lifted him, and that's all. Belarusians are good people, Lithuanians are bad. They are invaders? They want more and more. And they are evil, evil ... To have more land, he carried a stropped pillar on his back. Ran, ran, ran, ran to put a stake, then fell and died near this stake'* (Astraviec district).⁵³

In Soviet times, the image of Lithuanians in the national perception of Belarusians in the border region acquired new peculiarities and characteristics. Socio-economic changes that took place in the Soviet Republics in the 1950–1980s led to intensive migration and urbanization processes. Vilnius became a centre for the active migration of people in the border region at that time. It was at this time that the Belarusian people started to attribute Lithuanians the characteristic of providing an incorrect destination or even refusing to show the way (in response to requests for directions). It is a clear indication of being 'different' or 'other'.⁵⁴ *'I often travelled to Vilnius during the communist times to buy some flour. And, you know, very few, if any, people there openly say where the store where one can buy flour is. They would hierhiet, and following their directions you would get so deep it would be difficult to get out. And that doesn't happen here. We ask in the Belarusian language. If someone does not know, then he does not know, but if he knows, he says'* (Ašmiany district).⁵⁵

⁵² Внуковіч Ю.І., Лобач У.А. Вобраз літоўцаў у беларускай народнай культуры // Беларускае Падзвінне: вопыт, методыка і вынікі палявых і міждyscyплінарных даследаванняў: зб. навук. прац міжнар. навук.-практ. канф., Полацк, 21–23 красав. 2011 г.: у 2 ч. Ч. 1 / Полацкі дзярж. ун-т; пад агульн. рэд. Д.У. Дука, У.А. Лобача. Наваполацк, 2011. С. 171.

⁵³ Recorded by V. Vajtkiavičius, L. Sakalavajte, J. Unukovič in 2007 from Sofja Simanovič, born in 1941, in Małyja Sviranki village, Astraviec district.

⁵⁴ Мазько Э. Падарожжа па-за лакальнасць: «нашыя» людзі паміж «сваім» і «чужым» светам // Pogranicza Białorusi w perspektywie interdyscyplinarnej = Памежжы Беларусі ў міждyscyплінарнай перспектыве / red. E. Smułkowa i A. Engelking. Warszawa, 2007. С. 201.

⁵⁵ Традицыйная мастацкая культура беларусаў. У 6 т. Т. 3. Гродзенскае Панямонне. У 2 кн. Кн. 2 // А.М. Боганева [і інш.]. Мінск, 2006.

Thus, a preliminary analysis and characterization of Belarusian's traditional concepts about their ethnic neighbors shows that their image in the mythopoetic world view was formed according to geographical, historical, social, political and ritual contexts. It relates mainly to infernal zone of the other world, marked as 'strange', a 'foreign land' and is opposed to 'our', the 'motherland'. The distance in languages between Belarusians and 'outsiders' played the greatest role in the formation of ethnic extra-images, as well as real-world experience of intercultural interaction, where even minor features in behavior and way of life, or ethnic character acquired symbolic, identification status within the traditional worldview. In its turn, it was a powerful factor of self-identity which is ethnocentric at its core.