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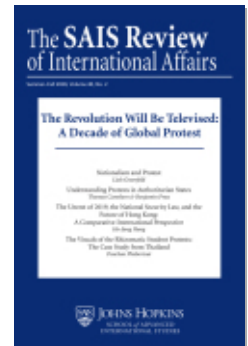
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## National Awakening in Belarus: Elite Ideology to 'Nation' Practice

Tatsiana Kulakevich

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# National Awakening in Belarus: Elite Ideology to ‘Nation’ Practice

*Tatsiana Kulakevich*

*This article examines the formation of nationalism in Belarus through two dimensions: elite ideology and everyday practice. I argue the presidential election of 2020 turned into a fundamental institutional crisis when a homogeneous set of ‘nation’ practices against the state ideology replaced existing elite ideology. This resulted in popular incremental changes in conceptions of national understanding. After twenty-six consecutive years in power, President Lukashenka unintentionally unleashed a process of national awakening leading to the rise of a new sovereign nation that demands the right to determine its own future, independent of geopolitical pressures and interference.*

## Introduction

August 2020 witnessed a resurgence of nationalist discourse in Belarus. Unlike in the Transatlantic world, where politicians articulate visions of their nations under siege—by immigrants, refugees, domestic minority populations—narratives of national and political failure dominate in Belarus resonate with large segments of the voting public. Narratives critical of President Lukashenka and the Belarusian government culminated in a mass social mobilization under the historic white-red-white flag, with the *Pahonia* coat of arms (a charging knight on horseback).<sup>1</sup>

I argue the presidential election of 2020 in Belarus turned into an reordering moment. By mobilizing against the Belarusian government under historical national symbols largely suppressed by the state, the Belarusian people obtained a feasible option for formation of a new Belarusian national identity. The opportunity for *nationalism-as-practice*, in which historical symbols are tools of national identity, substantially increased during the post-presidential election mass protests, displacing the dominant *nationalism-as-ideology* of elites.

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Dr. Tatsiana Kulakevich is a researcher on Eastern Europe born and raised in Belarus. She is a permanent instructor at the University of South Florida School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies and research fellow at the USF Institute on Russia.

I conceptualize nationalism as a heterogeneous cultural domain consisting of generalized knowledge shaping quotidian, individual understandings of reality and cultural settings.<sup>2</sup> The meanings attached to the nation are unstable

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This study differs from existing research on Belarusian politics and nationalism because it highlights the largely neglected *nationalism-as-practice* paradigm in established nation-states and analyzes the novel, ongoing develop-

ment of nationalism in Belarus. In this study, I propose to redirect scholarly attention toward nationalism among everyday people rather than elites amidst widespread social upheaval. Most nationalism scholarship is preoccupied with exceptional moments of social transformation, namely the rise of the modern nation-state and more recent efforts by nationalist movements to realign existing state boundaries.<sup>3</sup> This work contributes an analysis of national awakening in Belarus to the existing scholarship. Popular nationalism in an established nation-state holds the potential for democracy to determine a new path for the Belarusian nation.

Existing research acknowledges that Belarus has struggled over its identity. Marples labeled Belarus a *denationalized nation*.<sup>4</sup> Many authors recognize the development of identity discourses through official state ideology.<sup>5,6,7,8,9</sup> For example, Bekus discusses coexistence of the ideology of statehood promoted through the *official Belarusianness* and the *bad nationalism* of political opposition.<sup>10</sup> Authors such as Rudling, Wilson, and Posokhin also argue that over the last several years the Belarusian government has started to undertake a kind of *soft Belarusization* by more intensely engaging in nation-building.<sup>11,12,13</sup> According to Rudling, historical analysis in Lukashenka’s Belarus can be divided into two parts: before and after 2002.<sup>14</sup> Since 2002, the Belarusian government has emphasized consolidation of Belarusian statehood through appropriation of opposition narratives (uses of symbols and historical references) without altering the authoritarian nature of the state. Wilson also recognizes the existence of managed rapprochement, but mostly focuses on security concerns triggered by the war in Ukraine and the desire for Belarusian neutrality.<sup>15</sup>

The remainder of the study is organized as follows: In section one, I examine the development and operation of *nationalism-as-ideology* maintained by the Belarusian state for the past twenty-six years. Section two focuses on *nationalism-as-practice* involving people thinking, talking, or participating in various resistance tactics such as marches, civil disobedience, or consciousness raising. First, I focus on the formation of popular discontent in Belarus. Subsequently, I review the mistakes of the Belarusian government leading to mass mobilization and the embrace of historic symbols in the protest against the official state to express dissatisfaction with the regime. I conclude by discussing how my findings enhance general knowledge in the area of social movements and democratization studies.

### Nationalism as Elite Ideology

Research on nationalism as an elite ideology has focused on modern nation-state formation and reconfiguration of the boundaries of existing states.<sup>16,17,18</sup> Central debates in this field concern the causes of the emergence of nation-states (e.g., colonial governance, industrialization) and the historical status of nations as either modern creations of centralizing states or successors to preexisting ethnic groups.<sup>19</sup>

From this vantage point, the Belarusian government successfully used a non-ethnic form of nationalism by upholding membership in the nation on the basis of shared values, rather than shared blood.<sup>20</sup> Rather than Belarusian ethnic references, such as language, the Belarusian founding myth underlying national ideology, advanced by Lukashenka, centered primarily on the Great Patriotic War—a struggle to defend the state from an external aggressor.

When Lukashenka came to power in 1994, he replaced national symbols with slightly modified Soviet ones, initiated the introduction of Russian as the second official language, and stopped and reversed support of Belarusian language in education, media, government and society. According to the 2009 population census, only 27.7 percent of Belarusian citizens indicated that they used Belarusian language in everyday communication. Compared to the 1999 census, the number of people who know and speak the language has decreased by 16.7 percent. The number rose to 30.3 percent in 2019 after the Belarusian government demonstrated an intent to promote Belarusian sovereignty as a response to the events in Ukraine in 2014.<sup>21</sup> Lukashenka was not ready for any systemic changes, therefore he limited liberalization in the cultural sphere. Slightly modified Soviet myths and symbols remained at the center of the historical narrative deployed by the Lukashenka regime.

After Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, in which Russia used ethnic affiliation and common language as a justification for invading Ukrainian territory, Lukashenka’s government, fearful the same fate might befall Belarus, began to look closely at the consequences of its own Russification policy domestically and internationally. The Belarusian government implemented tactical adjustments to its ideological and cultural policies in a bid to strengthen patriotism and reinforce the public’s allegiance to independent Belarusian statehood.

The Belarusian authorities became more tolerant of nationally- (as in nationally-oriented) oriented actions with historic (official during the period 1991-1995) and national symbols.<sup>22</sup> A state-authorized campaign in 2011 advertised “the taste of Belarusian language,” which promoted the use of Belarusian using billboards across the country. The Belarusian authorities permitted the operation of Belarusian

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language courses, *Mova Nanova*. The openings of monuments to historical figures of Belarus—Tadeusz Kościuszko, Duke Algerd in Vitsebsk, and Duke Hedymyn in Lida—occurred without conflict from the authorities.<sup>23,24,25</sup> In 2014, the Belarusian Parliament adopted a resolution regulating the Belarusian state’s cooperation with its diaspora, which speaks to “the need to build a supra-territorial community, moreover, one which is based on the national culture.”<sup>26</sup> In 2016, the pro-government youth organization, Belarusian Republican Union of Youth (BRSM) led an initiative for embroidered clothing, organizing the “day of embroidered national clothing” with the approval of the government’s Council of Ministers.

Since 2018, the Belarusian authorities have gradually changed attitude towards the celebration of Freedom Day, which commemorates the declaration of the Belarusian National Republic (BNR).<sup>27</sup> Until 2018, Minsk regarded the BNR as “a puppet-state created with the support of the occupying German forces.”<sup>28</sup> In 2018, for the first time in more than 20 years, the Minsk City Executive Committee authorized the celebration of Freedom Day in the city center and agreed to establish a memorial plaque on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the BNR.

Additionally, in 2018, many government officials expressed their new attitudes towards the BNR. For example, the head of the presidential administration of Belarus, Natalia Kachanova, said her department was ready to join

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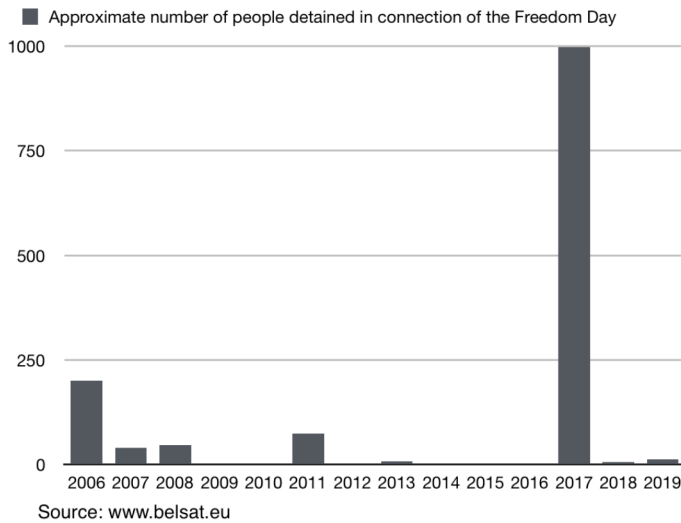
the celebration of the BNR together with the opposition. At the time Interior Minister Ihar Shunevich stated the authorities and organizers of the centenary celebration of the BNR should find a middle ground that would suit everyone and conduct events in a civilized manner.<sup>29</sup>

While the steps taken by the Belarusian authorities demonstrated an intention to promote Belarusian sovereignty and develop a national ideal of Belarus, the nature of the Belarusian government’s policy was extremely

cautious and limited. The authorities’ response to the Freedom Day celebration shows that, officially, Minsk allowed only a limited expansion of space for freedom of expression in the country. By continuing detentions, though preventive and on a smaller scale, the authorities wanted to demonstrate their readiness to use force in response to any signs of political protest (figure 1).

The Belarusian authorities were not ready for systemic change. The Belarusian government refused to pass electoral reforms and a moratorium on the death penalty. The role of the president remained unchanged and civil society’s room for maneuver remained narrow. The opposition did not win any seats in Belarus’s November 2019 parliamentary election, and Lukashenka announced his intention to run for president again in the 2020 presidential election. Belarusian authorities had no interest in communicating with nationalist organizations to engage in effective nationalist development, but rather responded to

Figure 1. Approximate number of people detained in connection of the Freedom Day



external challenges from its eastern neighbor. Belarusian sovereignty acted as a response to the events in Ukraine in 2014 and demands for deeper economic integration within state frameworks demanded in 2018 by the so-called integration ultimatum formulated by the Kremlin.<sup>30</sup>

### Nationalism as Everyday Practice

Nationalism as everyday practice involves processes of thinking, talking, and identifying the range of meanings that identify the nation.<sup>31,32</sup> The central units of analysis in this tradition are not ideologies but symbolic representations and identifications with the nation-state. The nation is not only a political entity but a collective narrative through which people perceive social reality and construct routinized strategies of action capable of transforming nationalism from symbolic rituals and structured micro-interactions into organizational and institutional practices.<sup>33</sup>

From this perspective, the protests in Belarus following the presidential election in August 2020 can be understood as a symbolic struggle over the nation's contested meaning. The meanings attached to nationalism in Belarus began shifting in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis when

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nationalist organizations received limited space to promote Belarusian culture. It was the presidential elections of August 2020, however, that served as a critical juncture that drew Belarusian people together against the injustices of the government. Lukashenka's hubris and extreme violence by law enforcement in the days immediately after the electoral vote galvanized support for a mass movement embracing historic red and white symbols in its opposition to the Lukashenka regime.

### *Limited Discontent*

After the annexation of Crimea, the Belarusian language started making a comeback. Efforts to promote the language and elevate its public support have grown since 2014. Private Belarusian language courses offered by several writers and journalists beginning in 2013–2014 have increased in number, spreading across Belarus, and remain popular with all age groups. Free Belarusian language courses, known as *Mova Nanova* (literally “language anew”), are now available in fifteen cities and towns and are visited weekly by 650 students. According to *Mova Nanova*'s website, since October 2014 it has issued more than 2,200 student IDs. In November 2014, the course received state registration as a socio-cultural institution of the “Belarusian language and culture *Mova Nanova*.”<sup>34</sup>

In the last six years, Belarus developed a new social layer of defenders of the Belarusian language. The so-called “Language Inspectors” put together complaints on individuals and entities that speak disrespectfully about Belarusian language. The first such complaint was made in 2013 when Gleb Labadzenka wrote to the prosecutor's office because the utility company provided him a written response in Russian. As a result, the director of the utility company was ordered to pay a fine. At least three people were fined because of complaints by Homel activist Ihar Sluchak (the creator of the term “Language Inspector.”) In 2018, Alina Nagornaya and Ihar Sluchak published a *Handbook for Protection of Linguistic Rights* that provides guidance on how to behave if a person is discriminated against for using the Belarusian language or what to do if legal documents lack Belarusian language.<sup>35</sup>

Belarusian nationalism is also promoted through national clothing. Especially after the events of 2014 in Ukraine, embroidered shirts or dress became a symbol of defiance, freedom, and national identity. National clothing is important because it provides an alternative way to express nationalist sentiment for those who cannot easily switch to Belarusian language or openly display a white-red-white flag. In 2014, an independent public cultural initiative, *Art-siadziba*, fostered the idea to celebrate the “day of embroidered national clothing” and popularized t-shirts embroidered with the national ornament (*vyshy-maika*). The trend was picked up by local clothing brands such as LSTR and Honar and received media coverage from a large number of publications which covered the stores, the brands, and the people producing embroidered products.

For years, the Belarusian authorities either repressed those who publicly celebrated Freedom Day (commemorating the declaration of independence by the BNR) or allowed its celebration only in remote areas of Minsk. In 2018, on the eve of the centenary, the opposition obtained permission for the first time to hold a meeting and a concert in the center of Minsk near the Opera House.

However, competing with Russian as a dominant language in the Belarusian education system has been an uphill struggle. Similarly, celebrations of the BNR and attempts to change the national discourse have been happening in a sensitive environment dominated by the Belarusian government. Strengthening of Belarus’s national identity happened in a very limited space and did not result in a widespread support of the people.

### *Rise of the Nation*

Lukashenka unintentionally unleashed an active grassroots movement and increased dissatisfaction with the Belarusian regime by mishandling COVID-19. Belarus’s presidential election, expected to deliver Lukashenka a sixth consecutive term, instead precipitated an unprecedented political crisis and led to the rise of a mass self-determinist social movement.

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for civil society. When the coronavirus reached Belarus, the administration made a vital mistake by disregarding the threat and neglecting citizens. Belarus did not impose a national lockdown and remained the only country in the region with open borders. President Lukashenka labeled the coronavirus a “psychosis” the Belarusian people should ignore.<sup>36</sup> As a result, civil society quickly built the foundations of self-help. For example, Belarusian doctors joined the global flash mob #StayAtHome. The Belarusian opposition and civil leaders called for a “People’s Quarantine,” asking people to stay home, minimize all social contact, and publicized the rising number of cases and authorities’ cover-up of the fatalities.

The Belarusian government has consistently lowered COVID-19 mortality statistics. The UN Statistics Division reports the biggest spike in death toll in Belarus in June 2020 (figure 2).<sup>37</sup> This translates into 3,440 deaths, or a 35.92 percent increase in the Belarusian death toll in June 2020 in comparison to the average death toll in June for the past nine years, and 3,753 deaths, or a 40.52 percent increase in deaths in comparison to June 2019 (figure 3).<sup>38</sup> However, the Belarusian authorities officially reported that only 245 patients died of COVID-19 in Belarus in June, twenty times less than the increase in mortality statistics for June.

Lukashenka ignored the signs and the scope of popular discontent. For the first time in the history of independent Belarus, ahead of the presidential vote on August 9, a series of street protests against Lukashenka, known as the “Slipper Revolution,” spread to at least 35 regional centers, including Minsk.<sup>39,40</sup> In the weeks before the election, presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, wife of imprisoned blogger Siarhei Tsikhanouski, attracted large crowds at rallies across the country, including one that drew at least 63,000 supporters

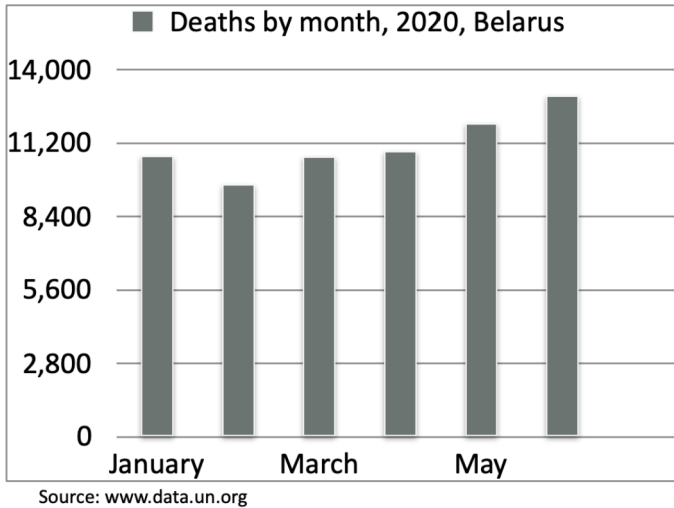
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Figure 2. Death toll by month in Belarus, 2020



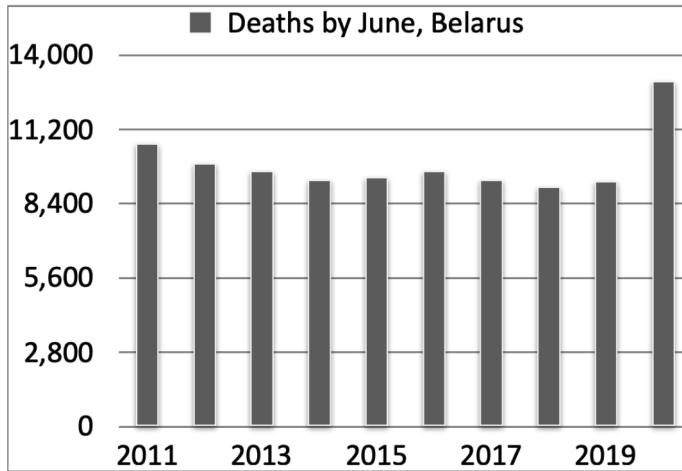
in Minsk, a city of 2 million, and one that drew around 20,000 supporters in Brest, a city of 350,000.

As in the previous three presidential elections, Lukashenka secured over 80 percent of the vote.<sup>41</sup> While he had long gotten away with improbably high electoral margins, this time was different. The solidarity and connections generated as a result of the epidemic soon expanded into the political sphere. Protests erupted across Belarusian cities in response to the contested results. Violent police crackdowns on peaceful protests have left at least eight dead.<sup>42</sup> The UN received reports of at least 450 documented cases of torture and mistreatment of people deprived of their liberty, including sexual abuse and rape with rubber batons. Since the presidential vote on August 9, various sources claim authorities detained as few as 17,000 to more than 30,000 citizens exercising their right to peaceful assembly, including journalists and passers-by who were arbitrarily arrested and hastily sentenced. Human Rights Watch has formally declared that 167 of those detained are political prisoners.<sup>43,44,45</sup> Reports of rubber bullets, water cannons, and an internet shutdown have only increased protester numbers.

Different symbols have emerged as the protests have turned into a movement, but the most visible symbol has become the historic red and white Belarusian flag. After the 1995 referendum, the flag became a symbol of opposition to the Lukashenka government and has been indispensable icon of street protests in the country. Over the weeks following the presidential election, the flag has taken on a new life, as the inspiration for opponents to Lukashenka across the country against election fraud and the use of violence against demonstrators.

Despite no official ban on the white-red-white flag, due to its historical importance, the government has gone to great lengths to make the flag disappear from public view. Police have confiscated it from protesters and removed clothing or curtains from apartment balconies that have been hung up to look like the flag. The state militia has removed the flags displayed on buildings

Figure 3. Death toll by year for the month of June in Belarus



Source: [www.data.un.org](http://www.data.un.org)

and charged those carrying the flag with prison sentences. The state ideology has demonized the flag as representing fascism, referring to the Great Patriotic War-era, when Belarusian nationalist organizations used the symbol while cooperating with Nazi occupation forces.<sup>46</sup>

However, people have developed inventive ways of displaying symbols of resistance by putting up more flags, coordinating their balcony lights to represent the historic flag in an innovative manner, replacing white-red-white

flashes with hundreds of white and red ribbons making it difficult for the removal of a national symbol of change for Belarus. In the weeks following the presidential vote on August 9, every Sunday, protesters would come out under white and red colors to express disapproval of the Lukashenka regime in Minsk and across the country. Every Saturday thousands of women wear white clothing, hold hands, and carry flowers to demonstrate their resistance to Belarusian government violence. Belarusian women joined international demonstrations in more than twenty-five countries for the Global Women's

March on October 10. Mondays turned into a day when thousands of pensioners, Lukashenka's core electorate, marched across the country protesting violence and injustice and sported the symbols of resistance, the nationalist red and white colors. Marches of people with disabilities have been occurring every Thursday since October 15.

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The unprecedented brutality of the authorities has drawn more and more people into resistance, forcing them to create structures of mutual support, new forms of communication to form a civil society with common norms, and develop symbols different from the ones associated with the brutality of Belarusian authorities. For example, students are known to sit in a white-red-white color coordinated manner at universities, volunteer lawyers aid victims of repression, and workers display white-red-white flags on factories. In situations where the Belarusian authorities block the Internet and restrict communication on social media and instant messengers, the Telegram messaging platform has helped bypass state censorship. For example, Telegram channel *Nexta* (translated from Belarusian as “someone”), with some 2 million subscribers, served as a mobilizing structure for protesters and a source of encouragement for Belarusian people by coordinating the demonstrations and connecting Belarusians through sharing news, videos, and photos.

A phenomenon of the Belarusian protest is its localization in small towns and public spaces, such as courtyards. Courtyards in Minsk, including in the Serabranka, Kamennaya Gorka, Zhdanovichy, Loshytsa, and Suharava neighborhoods, citizens have gathered to protect their white and red colors and to express solidarity against regime violence and lies. People unite through courtyard chats and gather daily with tea, cookies (often in white and red colors), street art, and songs. For example, the residents of Smargousky tract and Charviakova Street turned their courtyard into a “Square of Changes,” a symbol of peaceful protests of Minsk residents against violence from security forces. Well-known actors, musicians, and famous people visit the “Square of Changes.” There is a legendary mural, “DJs of Changes,” a large white-red-white flag between two high-rise houses, and a plaque with the inscription “Square of Changes.”<sup>47</sup> Though Property Maintenance Services have repeatedly painted over the mural, artists continue restoring it. White and red ribbons get cut off and white-red-white flags are removed, however, residents persistently return everything to its place—inspiring people and demonstrating that they are not ready to give up. On November 11, Raman Bandarenka, a resident of the “Square of Changes” courtyard was beaten to death by Belarusian security forces for protecting white-red-white symbols of peaceful protests in Belarus in his courtyard from the people taking down the white-red-white ribbons. The death triggered outrage in Belarus: thousands gathered to mourn Raman Bandarenka with red-white-red flowers and candles across the country and abroad.

The confrontation is also unfolding in virtual reality. Since the end of August, “Cyber Partisans of Belarus,” as they call themselves, have hacked into the official websites of the Lukashenka administration, including several times into the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus, the website of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the National Archive of Belarus, the websites of official broadcasting channels (BT and ONT), the National Science and Technology Portal of Belarus, and multiple websites of state labor unions. On the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, for example, a wanted list including Alexander Lukashenka and the Minister of Internal Affairs, Yury Karaeu, replaced the official roster of wanted persons. The online activists encouraged the indifferent

to join their movement, regardless of gender, age, and religion. Every time the Cyber Partisans of Belarus hack into websites associated with the government, on the home page, they leave an image of a hacker with the coat of arms, *Pahonia*, on a laptop, and the caption "Belarusian cyber partisans."

Art in support of peaceful protesters and against violence has appeared on social media and in art galleries across Belarus. A well-known Belarusian artist, Uladzimir Tsesler, created more than fifty posters reflecting on the Belarusian political moment, many in the white and red of resistance (including a white-red-white flag mimicking the stripes of the American flag). Artists can freely post their works on the online art store, *artcenter.by*, which lists paintings depicting definitive moments of the Belarusian protests along with white and red symbols.<sup>48</sup> On Facebook and Instagram, pages such as *Artists with Belarus*, are updated daily with new art pieces demonstrating solidarity with people of Belarus fighting for freedom from the Lukashenka regime. Many musicians have also joined the protests, adopting the red and white symbols in their iconography. Belarusian musicians Pomidor/OFF, Sary Olsa and others dedicated video clips featuring white and red symbols to Raman Bandarenka. The musical group, Tor Band, released a song titled, "We're not '*narodets*,'" (a diminutive term for nation), declaring that Belarusian people are worthy to be called a nation. J:Mors band released a music video for the song "Forgive" apologizing to those who have been fighting for Belarusian freedom for the past ten to fifteen years for taking so long for catching up with them.

As authorities increasingly try to tear down red and white symbols of protest, the more actively Belarusians seem to use them, even as the onset of winter has made protest conditions worse. With each attempt to tamp down these symbols, canny Belarusians come up with new forms of protest, creating holiday decor in white and red and freezing white-red-white flags under ice to make them more difficult to remove from public spaces. Sustained resistance to the Belarusian authorities associated with the historic white-red-flag, red and white colors, and *Pahonia* coat of arms suggests that a growing number of Belarusians are unwilling to be silenced. The broad-based opposition is united in its desire for change.

## Conclusion

Research on nationalism has long been preoccupied with elite-driven historical change at the expense of nationalism steeped in emotional meaning that imparts a popular sense of self and guide social interactions and political choices.<sup>49</sup>

For more than a quarter of a century the Belarusian government exploited nationalism to stay in power. Excessive violence and injustice immediately after the presidential elections in August 2020 opened an opportunity for the Belarusian people to protest against the government under historic white-red-white flags. Mass mobilization helped the Belarusian people become aware of each other, thus inspiring a sense of honor and pride for their country. This gave birth to a new Belarusian national identity predicated on the basis of shared

Belarusian ethnicity and culture, departing from the narrative of the shared Soviet values cultivated by the Lukashenka regime for decades.

The ongoing events in Belarus create a vast field for potential research on the topic of democratization and social movements within a complicated geopolitical confluence of European Union and Russian interests. The Belarusian social movement highlights the vast aspects of mobilizing structures of protests, including diaspora, gender, technology, and scale.

Belarusian political evolution in the past decade has created many preconditions for democracy. This includes an educated and homogeneous population able to travel, work, and study abroad and able to access and process alternative sources of information, not only foreign language media, but also Telegram and YouTube channels. The new generation is not influenced by the failures of the post-Soviet transition. The Belarusian diasporic community, socialized in democratic states, is ready to financially support changes in Belarus.

Events are still unfolding, but one thing is clear even at this stage: Belarus is already a nation reborn. Belarusians embrace historic symbols and create innovative ways to protect them, contributing to a unified force strengthening nation-oriented practices under symbols different from those associated with the Lukashenka regime.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The white-red-white flag was originally adopted in 1918 by the Belarusian National Republic. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, it became the flag of independent Belarus. But in 1995, Lukashenka restored the green and red flag of Soviet Belarus (albeit without the hammer and sickle), thereby making the red-white-red flag a symbol of resistance to his rule.

<sup>2</sup> Orlando Patterson, "Making Sense of Culture," *Annual Review of Sociology* 40, (July 2014): 1–30.

<sup>3</sup> Bart Bonikowski, "Nationalism in Settled Times," *Annual Review of Sociology* 42, (July 2016): 427–49.

<sup>4</sup> David Marples, *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation*, (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1999), 1–27.

<sup>5</sup> Nelly Bekus, *Struggle over Identity: The Official and the Alternative "Belarusianness,"* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 211–220.

<sup>6</sup> Maryia Rohava, "Identity in an Autocratic State: Or What Belarusians Talk about When They Talk About National Identity," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 32, No. 3 (2017): 639–668.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Pershai, "Localness and Mobility in Belarusian Nationalism: The Tactic of Tuteishasc," *Nationalities Papers* 36, No. 1 (March 2008): 85–103.

<sup>8</sup> Per Rudling, "Unhappy Is the Person Who Has No Motherland: National Ideology and History Writing in Lukashenka's Belarus," in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*, ed. Julie Fedor et al. (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 71–105.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Frear, *Belarus under Lukashenka: Adaptive Authoritarianism*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1–11.

<sup>10</sup> Bekus, *Struggle over Identity: The Official and the Alternative "Belarusianness,"* 211–220.

<sup>11</sup> Rudling, "Unhappy Is the Person Who Has No Motherland: National Ideology and History Writing in Lukashenka's Belarus," 71–105.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Wilson, "Belarus: From a Social Contract to a Security Contract?" *Journal of Belarusian Studies* 8, No. 1 (2017): 78–92.

<sup>13</sup> Ivan Posokhin, "Soft Belarusization: (Re)building of Identity or 'Border reinforcement'?" *Colloquia Humanistica* 8, (2019): 57–78.

<sup>14</sup> Rudling, "Unhappy Is the Person Who Has No Motherland: National Ideology and History Writing in Lukashenka's Belarus," 71–105.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Wilson, "Belarus: From a Social Contract to a Security Contract?" 78–92.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Anderson, 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 1983), 1–9.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Wimmer and Yuval Feinstein, "The Rise of the Nation-State Across the World, 1816 to 2001," *American Sociology Review* 75, (2010): 764–90.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 56–70.

<sup>19</sup> Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism*, (Minneapolis: Open University Press, 1997), 66–85.

<sup>20</sup> Natalia Leshchenko, "The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, No. 8 (2008): 1419–1433.

<sup>21</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, <https://www.belstat.gov.by>.

<sup>22</sup> Historic white-red-white flag, red and white colors and *Pahonia* coat of arms (charging knight on horseback).

<sup>23</sup> Tadeusz Kościuszko, Belarusian by origin, is an international hero of liberty for oppressed nations. He took part in the American War for Independence and led the revolt against the Russians in 1794.

<sup>24</sup> Duke Algird was Duke of Vitsebsk, Belarus, for over 20 years before becoming Grand Duke of Lithuania (1345–1377). He is honored as a unifier of all Belarusian lands within one state and is known for fighting successfully against Teutonic knights, Tatars, and Muscovites.

<sup>25</sup> Duke Hedymyn is the founder of Lida, Belarus, he is also credited with founding the city of Vilnius, Lithuania. He ruled the Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the beginning of the 14th century and significantly expanded its territories.

<sup>26</sup> Piotr Rudkouski, "Soft Belarusianisation. The ideology of Belarus in the era of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict," *Ośrodek studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia*, November 3, 2017, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2017-11-03/soft-belarusianisation-ideology-belarus-era-russian-ukrainian>.

<sup>27</sup> The Belarusian People's Republic (BNR) was declared on 25 March 1918 and represented an attempt to create a Belarusian state on the territory controlled by the German Imperial Army during the World War I. The BNR existed from 1918 to 1919.

<sup>28</sup> Alesia Rudnik, "Belarusian Freedom Day 2019: are the authorities warming to the idea?" *Belarus Digest*, March 25, 2019, <https://belarusdigest.com/story/belarusian-freedom-day-2019-are-the-authorities-warming-to-the-idea/>.

<sup>29</sup> Victor Loshchyts, "Belarusian Nationalism and the end of the Lukashenka's epoch," *Edaily.com*, March 6, 2018, <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2018/03/06/beloruskiy-nacionalizm-i-konec-epohi-lukashenko>.

<sup>30</sup> The Treaty on the Creation of a Union State between Russia and Belarus was signed on 8 December 1999 but exists only on paper.

<sup>31</sup> John E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," *Ethnicities* 8, (2008): 536–63.

<sup>32</sup> J. Paul Goode and David Stroup, "Everyday Nationalism: Constructivism for the Masses," *Social Science Quarterly* 96, (2015):717–39.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Skey, *National Belonging and Everyday Life: The Significance of Nationhood in an Uncertain World*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1–9.

<sup>34</sup> "Belarusian language and Culture Mova Nanova," <http://www.movananova.by>.

<sup>35</sup> Elena Liashkevich, "Language Inspector Ihar Sluchak celebrated his Birthday with presentation of a Handbook," *Novychas.by*, September 10, 2018, <https://novychas.by/hramadstva/mouny-inspektar-ihar-sluczak-adznaczyu-dzen-naro>.

<sup>36</sup> Tatsiana Kulakevich, "The Belarus government is largely ignoring the pandemic. Here's why," *The Washington Post (Monkey Cage)*, April 21, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/04/21/belarus-government-is-largely-ignoring-pandemic-heres-why/>.

<sup>37</sup> The graph is made by the author using the data reported by the UN Statistics Division, [www.data.un.org](http://www.data.un.org).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Lukashenka was widely labeled a "cockroach", and his opponents were vowing to "squash the pest" with a slipper.

<sup>40</sup> Kulakevich, “The Belarus government is largely ignoring the pandemic. Here’s why.”

<sup>41</sup> Lukashenka was declared president with 76% of the vote in 2001, 83% in 2006, 80% in 2010 and 83% in 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Aliaksandr Taraikousky, Aliaksandr Vihor, Genadz Shutau, and Raman Bandarenka are considered victims of the protests. The circumstances of the deaths of Kanstantsin Shyshmakou, Mikita Kryutsou, Aliaksandr Dziamidau, Artsiom Parukau are unknown. Their relatives and friends believe they could have been killed during the protests.

<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Center, “Viasna”, <https://spring96.org>. This figure is current as of December 28, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> “29,894 detentions have already taken place in Belarus during the protests”, *Nasha Niva*, November 16, 2020, <https://nashaniva.by/?c=ar&i=262501>.

<sup>45</sup> Human Rights Center “Viasna”.

<sup>46</sup> Artyom Shraibman, “Red-Green Vs White-Red-White. The Two Flags of Belarus Explained,” *BelarusFeed*, August 18, 2020, <https://belarusfeed.com/insights-flag-of-belarus-red-green-white-red-white/>.

<sup>47</sup> The DJs of change are Uladzislau Sakalousky and Kiryl Galanau, the former employees of the Palace of Children and Youth, who played Victor Tsoi’s song “Changes” at a pro-government rally and were jailed for that.

<sup>48</sup> Examples include the paintings called, “Birds with the People” in which different birds are painted with white-red-white flags in their beaks, “Rebirth,” in which a female is wearing white-red-white dress, and “Belarus-2020,” in which a child with white and red balloons is looking at a scared security officer.

<sup>49</sup> Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism*, 66–85.