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Historical Evolution of the Categories Familiar/ Other/Stranger/Enemy in the Belarusian Perception of Poles over the Last Two Hundred Years

Historyczna zmienność kategorii: swój/inny/obcy/wróg w relacjach Białorusinów z Polakami w ciągu dwóch ostatnich stuleci

Гістарычная зменнасць катэгорый свой/іншы/чужы/вораг у адносінах беларусаў да палякаў на працягу двух апошніх стагоддзяў

Abstract

This paper is devoted to the evolution of the sense of strangeness in the Belarusian perception of Poles over the last two hundred years. It addresses issues which have now become valid for both nations, particularly since Belarus gained independence. The concepts underlying their mutual perception have an impact on relations between the two states and societies. The aim of this article is to identify the reasons for changes in the following categories: familiar (*swój*), other (*inny*), stranger (*obcy*) and enemy (*wróg*). The study is based on the assumption that the key factors underlying the Belarusian perception of Poles (considering the history of Belarus and the culture of her people) include religion (Russian Orthodoxy dominant among Belarusians vs Roman Catholicism), the asymmetry of social structure (Belarusians perceived as peasants vs Poles perceived as landlords) and Sovietness (dominating in the 20th century). The relations in focus are analysed as a historical process and discussed with regard to three consecutive periods: the period of Partitions, the Soviet Union (and the Second Polish Republic) as well as independent Belarus. The study is based on the results of sociological surveys and a literature review including analytical studies of Belarusian folklore, descriptions of mutual relations as viewed by their participants and observers in the past and today. The analysis confirms the role of the factors mentioned above and reveals certain new elements, which are, however, of rather secondary importance. The class-driven image of the Pole as a 'landlord' has become weaker particularly since the 1970s, but it still persists in people's mentality. At the same time, the last two decades saw the historically conditioned sense of proximity in gradual decline, particularly among the younger generation. The two societies are drifting further apart as a result of their

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decision to become associated with two different cultures: the Russian-dominated Community of Independent States and the European Union.

Keywords: Belarusians, Poles, familiar, other, stranger, enemy

Abstrakt

Artykuł dotyczy ewolucji poczucia obcości w relacjach Białorusinów z Polakami w ciągu prawie dwustu ostatnich lat. Podjęta w nim tematyka stała się aktualna i ważna dla obu narodów zwłaszcza po uzyskaniu niepodległości przez Białorusinów. Celem artykułu była odpowiedź na pytanie, jakie przyczyny wpływały na zmianę znaczenia kategorii: swój, inny, obcy, wróg. Przed przystąpieniem do badań autor uznał – odwołując się do historii Białorusi i kultury jej mieszkańców – że ważnymi wyznacznikami określającymi stosunek Białorusinów do Polaków były: wyznanie (dominujące wśród Białorusinów prawosławie, w przeciwieństwie do katolicyzmu Polaków), niesymetryczność struktury społecznej (Białorusin widziany jako chłop, Polak jako pan) i dwudziestowieczna sowieckość. Badane relacje zostały omówione w ujęciu procesowym, historycznym, z uwzględnieniem trzech kolejnych okresów: zaborów, ZSRS (oraz II RP) i niepodległej Białorusi. W tekście odwołano się do literatury przedmiotu (zawierającej analizy folkloru białoruskiego, opisy wzajemnych relacji jako świadectwa ich uczestników, obserwatorów zarówno w odległej przeszłości, jak i obecnie) oraz ustaleń socjologicznych. W trakcie badań uwarunkowania te zostały potwierdzone i wzbogacone o elementy o charakterze raczej drugorzędnym. Wskazano, że zwłaszcza od lat 70. XX stulecia klasowy obraz „Polaka pana" powoli zaczął się dezaktualizować, co nie znaczy, że zanikł. Ponadto w ciągu ostatniego ćwierćwiecza niegdysiejsze „swojskość" i „bliskość" – uwarunkowane historycznie – stopniowo zanikły, zwłaszcza na poziomie młodego pokolenia. Oba społeczeństwa oddalają się od siebie, co jest konsekwencją wybrania przynależności do odmiennych kręgów kulturowych (rosyjskiego i WNP oraz UE).

Słowa kluczowe: Białorusini, Polacy, swój, inny, obcy, wróg

Анатацыя

Артыкул прысвечаны эвалюцыі разумення паняцця чужога ў адносінах беларусаў і палякаў на працягу амаль двухсот апошніх гадоў. Разгледжаная ў ім праблематыка стала актуальнай і, на нашу думку, важнай для абодвух народаў асабліва пасля атрымання Беларуссю незалежнасці. Безумоўна, змест узаемных уяўленняў пра суседа ўплывае на адносіны паміж дзвюма дзяржавамі і іх народамі. Мэтай артыкула быў адказ на пытанне: якія былі прычыны зменаў у аналізаваным перыядзе даследаваных катэгорый *свой, іншы, чужы, вораг*. Перад тым, як распачаць даследаванне аўтар меркаваў,абапіраючыся на ведаы па гісторыі Беларусі і культуры яе жыхароў, што важнымі дэтэрмінантамі, якія ўплывалі на адносіны беларусаў да палякаў, былі веравызнанне (сярод беларусаў пераважае праваслаўе, сярод палякаў – каталіцызм), несіметрычнасць грамадскай структуры (беларус – селянін, паляк – пан) і частка савецкай гісторыі ў XX ст. Даследаваныя адносіны былі паслядоўна разгледжаныя ў працэсе гістарычнага развіцця на працягу трох перыядаў: падзелаў Рэчы Паспалітай, панавання СССР (і II Рэчы Паспалітай) і існавання

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незалежнай Беларусі. У артыкуле выкарыстана існуючая літаратура па тэме, у якой аналізуюцца тэксты беларускага фальклору, апісваюцца узаемныя дачыненні ў сведчаннях іх удзельнікаў і назіральнікаў, як з часоў мінулых, так і нам сучасных, а таксама вынікі сацыялагічных даследаванняў. У ходзе даследавання нашы меркаванні пацвердзіліся, акрамя таго, былі выяўленыя новыя факты, якія маюць хутчэй другасны характар. Напрыклад, у 70-я гады XX ст., класавы вобраз "паляк–пан" ва ўяўленнях беларусаў траціць сваю актуальнасць, але не знікае цалкам. Адначасова, на працягу апошняй чвэрці стагоддзя колішняя "свойскасць" і "блізкасць", абумоўленыя гістарычна, паступова знікаюць, асабліва сярод малодшага пакалення. Абодва народы ўзаемна аддаляюцца ў выніку выбару сваёй прыналежнасці да розных культурных колаў (рускага і Садружнасці Незалежных Дзяржаў або Еўрапейскага Саюза).

Ключавыя словы: беларусы, палякі, свой, іншы, чужы, вораг

At the outset of these considerations, I would like to make a few introductory, general remarks with regard to the topic presented in the title. These will be, I presume, evident for the reader, as they concern one of the basic mechanisms observed in the functioning of human societies. Regardless of our connotations with the word 'strange' (along with its cultural and ideological context etc.), a human society is not and has never been a collection of individuals but of communities (groups), in compliance with what may be used imprecisely called our 'nature', (as it can be said that 'A human is a social animal') and with what we inherited from our very distant ancestors. A society's immanent (necessary) feature is therefore internal divisions, hierarchies, interpersonal distances as a condition of their endurance and survival. If we may call some people (family, friends) 'familiar', 'our own', 'close ones', then there must obviously be some 'others', 'strangers'. These might be, for instance New Guinea Papuans, as any contact with them would make us realise the sense of cultural otherness and strangeness, which does not necessarily mean hostility.

We cannot even imagine a fully egalitarian society, let alone make a realistic attempt at such visualisation. It would function without structures, distances, ties, and social roles that segregate the society on the one hand but give rise to proper dynamics and development within it. The problem lies not in the strangeness as such but in what it contains. This may be hostility, otherness, indifference etc. of undoubtedly gradual and contextual nature. Any generalization regarding strangeness, if it is provided with a high-order quantifier, can prove quite risky, since the strangeness described by indicating its objective and expressible features can be perceived very differently – depending on the culture, tradition, current political context and many other circumstances. Therefore, I am familiar with considering strangeness as an analytical category (situational rather than attributive) which allows for studying interpersonal distances in particular societies. It facilitates the analysis of their structures, features existing in multiple dimensions which prove interesting for the researcher, i.e. their how closed or open they are, stability or prospect of evolution, possibility of strong conflicts or

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social volatility. Strangeness may be thus regarded as a manifestation of the structuring process a society undergoes and its vital feature. This does not mean, however, that it is invariably actualised in completely acceptable forms.

It is not possible to describe or analyse the evolution of the concept of strangeness in a multimillion society over two centuries in such a short text. I have decided to pursue this topic as I consider it to be important and interesting for Poles and at the same time I believe it demonstrates a broader background of the problem. In this paper, I focus on the sense of alienation in the relations of Belarusians to Poles. This does not mean that the text is limited to these relationships. They will be discussed in procedural and historical terms, taking into account three consecutive periods: the partitions, the USSR (and the Second Republic of Poland) and the independent Belarus. It is the recent decades that are the focal point of the paper, with the partitions section being an mere introduction to the main part of the discussion. It will concentrate on the numerous communities (fragments) within the Belarusian society that determined the direction of the development of Belarusian identity, the identity of Belarusians, and consequently the content of the notion of 'strangeness'. The national circles in Belarus (with the nation understood in terms of Western categories rather than as the triune Russian nation) are beyond the primary focus of the text as they clearly form minorities in the society. This is also visible today, although these fragments of the Belarusian notion of strangeness are to some extent analogous to those in the Polish or Czech understanding of that concept.

Partitions

The 19th-century Belarusians associated the notion of Polishness with the nobility and landlords, hence the class-related distance towards Polishness as such (irrespective of how it was defined). The term 'Belarusians' used herein denotes Belarusian peasants of orthodox denomination, who constituted an overwhelming part (over 90%) of the Belarusian society. They considered themselves 'Russian' and only started to gradually adopt the term 'Belarusians' in the mid-nineteenth century, primarily in its toponymic dimension, being inhabitants of the Middle and Western regions of the Belarusian ethnic area. Since the majority of Belarusian peasants did not have any national identity whatsoever, Poles were not perceived in such ideological categories either. In addition to its class aspect, a characteristic feature of the sense of strangeness was the dissociation and incoherence of its description. In some instances, strangeness was simply the quality of being different without any trace of hostility. In other cases, the animosity was explicit, especially in situations of clear class conflict, such as during the January Uprising and throughout the years 1905–1906. The sense of strangeness/otherness augmented with the never-ending disputes about the land and servitudes upon the abolition of serfdom and enfranchisement of peasants. Throughout a significant part of the 19th century, particularly in the first half of the century, the distance

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between the peasant and the landlord corresponded with relations in the Polish society, both in terms of their remoteness and content. This began to change in the second half of the century, especially after the failed January Uprising. Interestingly enough, an increasing proportion of Belarusians now believe it was their insurrection as well. Peasants highly valued power, so the 'masters' standing plummeted after their defeat. The notion of strangeness in respect of the landlords denoted their possession of the land, which was deemed unfair. The distance also stemmed from the fact that peasants were forced to work for the landlords. More importantly, the landlords enjoyed what was the peasants' dream and desire – freedom.

It may seem that strangeness in this understanding also contained elements which slightly shortened the mutual distance. On a daily basis, both communities had to cooperate with each other. Maria Czurak, who analyses Belarusian folklore, indicates that peasants saw their landlords as cruel, touchy about their own greatness, frequently idle, naive, stupid, as well as helpless. Peasants considered themselves to be more cunning, clever and wise than their landlords. The landlord was portrayed in many comical stories in which he is ridiculed and mocked (Czurak, 1984, pp. 32–38). In the last decade of the 19th century, Emma Jeleńska described the attitude of the average Poleshuk towards the manor court in her village:

> (...) he is surprised by their way of life. They sleep long in the morning, but they stay up late at night. They will go to the forest or stroll through the village for no particular reason. Their rooms are full of knick-knacks. Near the house, they will plant wild and useless trees. One might see them along the road performing some funny activities, e.g. riding velocipedes or drawing some ordinary old huts. *„Na szto im heto! Ot, wiedomo, panż!" ['Why would they do that! Those masters, wouldn't you know!]* They never do anything. A completely useless tribe, as you can see from empty ears, but they hold their big heads high! Yet there has never been a trace of hostility or rebellious riots in our area (Jeleńska, 1892, p. 52).

This sarcastic attitude towards manor lords not only alleviated the potential constant conflict but also integrated the peasant community by highlighting its 'normality' or even superiority in some respects.

The attitude of the Belarusian peasants' towards Polish peasant settlers called Masurians proved not significant for the later sense of alienation towards Poles. Although often involving mockery, it was rather good on the whole. It was definitely much better than their attitude towards the Russians, who were called Muscovites in the 19th century. This was, however, not connected to their relation to the Russian state, a powerful empire encased in Orthodox church.

Yet it was Orthodoxy that contributed to the gradually growing distance the most, understood both in an objective and subjective manner, and thus reflected in the Belarusian identity. In the words of Leon Wasilewski, an outstanding expert on the Belarusian realities of the last decades of the partitions, 'As for Orthodox Belarusians, the Polish culture has had no access to them after 1863' (Wasilewski, 1917, p. 43).

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Orthodoxy gave rise to an entire spectrum of features objectively dividing both societies upon the creation of separate states (formerly BSRS – Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) in terms of culture, morality, mentality, or political choices. It divided them into two cultures or even civilisations, in the words of Huntington. Writing about Orthodoxy, Włodzimierz Pawluczuk states: '*Bytowoje chrystijanstwo* – this is how some Russian thinkers define Orthodoxy. It denotes such Christianity whose essence is not in the dogma but rather in life, i.e. habits, preferences and values, the ways of finding the sense of it all, community, landscape, relation to nature, to the world, to poetry, simply in the way of life' (Pawluczuk, 1998, pp. 125–126). After the union was dissolved, the Orthodox part of petty Belarussian nobles was suspended between traditional Polishness (connected with the class status) and the Russianness penetrating their culture. Relatively few urban Belarusian populations adopted either Russian or Polish viewpoints on the outside world (depending on their religious affiliation). There were also exceptions to this phenomenon, especially after 1900.

There are three core components of the sense of strangeness towards Poles. First of all, it is Orthodoxy. Secondly, the perception of the Polish landlord as a social class. It remained strong until the 1960s and collapsed in the 1970s and 80s, when many Poles embarked on trade expeditions into the USSR, including Belarus, but there are still some remnants of this type of thinking today. Thirdly and lastly, it is the Soviet nature, or more precisely the community of Belarusians identifying as Soviet-Russian in terms of their cultural and political identity who developed a sense of alienation towards Poles. Regardless of the political aspect, the sources of this Belarusian view of Polishness lie in the partitions, when the area transitioned from the Latin and Western civilization (which kept Belarusians and Poles directly connected) towards the Russian Orthodox culture. *Nota bene*, this is not meant to evaluate the phenomenon, but merely to describe it.

It is noteworthy that the development of attitudes towards Poles in the discussed period of almost two centuries is partly related to the structural evolution of the Belarusian society, their understanding of the term 'Belarusian', and the development of the Belarusian identity. In the 19th century, the notion of Belarusianness being separate from Polishness and Russianness denoted only the peasantry. It was namely used in the context of the Polonisation of the identity of local nobility, Russification (by the Orthodox) or Polonisation (by the Catholics) of the people who were climbing the social ladder. The beginning of the 20th century saw a tiny community of the Belarusian high society. It expanded in the 1920s, only to be almost entirely murdered by the Soviets in the following decade. However, it is the Soviet (and not national Russian) Belarusian elites that were formed already back then and especially after World War II. Reinforced in their independence after 1991, they occasionally managed to exist at a national dimension, but after 1994 they have rather been found outside the state structures of power. A stratified society, differentiated as to class, nowadays Belarus has a more multidimensional attitude towards Poles than its 19th-century peasants. It is also increasingly aware of divisions in the Polish society at

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the time of the Polish People's Republic and the Third Polish Republic. For the sake of brevity, the social divisions and categories cited herein could not be sufficiently discussed.

The USSR period

During the soviet interwar period, the strangeness of Poles became clearly political and unambiguously hostile. This resulted in the murder of over 100,000 Poles (or people who had the misfortune to have names associated with Polishness) in the USSR in the 1930s, primarily in Belarus and Ukraine. Andrzej Biały writes:

> Various documents from the early 1920s indicate a hostile attitude towards the Polish population in Belarus. (...). On top of the earlier religious animosities, the Polish-Bolshevik war played a very important role. In Soviet and Belarussian historiography, the Polish army has been depicted as the army of a partitioning power. They have been known as 'White Poles', although the Polish army never cooperated with the "whites". In the propaganda, local Poles were the 'fifth column' who cooperated with Polish troops on enslaving Belarusians and reclaiming their land (Biały, 2018, pp. 138–139).

This political dimension of the Pole as an enemy was mostly embraced by the socially engaged part of the republic's inhabitants. With time, however, the rural population joined in, especially the Feliks Dzerzhinsky Polish National District. Enthusiasts of the idea spread the image of Poles as the stinking rich who exploit the destitute Belarusian people. An invader and a historic class enemy (as well as a fascist during the period of the Second Republic of Poland), the Pole was said to have dissected the Russian (Belarusian) lands of Kievan Rus from the Russian motherland and 'catholated' the originally Russian population. This myth survived the Second World War, which in many Russian and to a lesser extent Belarusian literary sources (rather journalistic in the case of the latter) broke out because of Poles. To some extent it is still present in today's Belarusian mentality.

In simplistic terms, the attitude of Belarusians towards Poles in the Second Republic of Poland resulted mainly from a huge 'hunger for land' for lack of a better word. It intensified as Poles settled in the eastern territories of the Republic of Poland. In comparison to the tsarist period, the catholicity of the Polish state was also perceived more negatively by the Orthodox population. A large part of the society awaited the arrival of troops of its Eastern – presumably Orthodox – neighbour, i.e. from the motherland. Yet the Soviet invasion of 1939 proved that the reality they carried along was extremely different from the expectations. This plagued the Western Belarusians for quite a long time, although their awareness of those events is now disappearing with the generation change. Poland's defeat in September 1939 was used by Soviet propaganda to spread the image of Poles being poor warriors (see: Padhoł, 1997).

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With the rise of the Polish People's Republic, relations between the two societies gradually improved. The traditional image of a Pole lasted longest in the countryside, but this was a backward group not only in Belarus but in the entire East Slavic region. Although Poles were no longer the 'oppressors', the state institutions shaping the historical awareness of Belarusians failed to acknowledge that. The Belarusian historical identity was not as well-defined as among Poles, and it referred mainly to family memory while being strongly mythologised and falsified at the official level. In the West of Belarus, Polish newspapers and books were read, and even deep into the Belarusian Republic people listened to Polish Radio 3's summer programme called 'Lato z Radiem'[1]. Over the last years of the Polish People's Republic, and especially the second half of the 1980s, several myths about Poles were debunked. Firstly, the image of a Pole as a trader was marked rather strongly and negatively in the communist reality. Secondly, the Pole as a noble landowner, later a policeman, official, etc. was always approached with hostility, yet this myth was accompanied by that of a beautiful, haughty, but often helpful Polish lady, which did not endure contacts with the ladies of PRL, especially in urban areas.

Poland was regarded as a friend of the Soviet Union. In terms inherited from imperial Russia, this meant it was subordinated to its eastern neighbour and thus looked down upon, treated condescendingly and not without irony. The Russians imposed some of its categories of perceiving both the internal and external world on Belarusians, who are generally regarded as the most Sovietized republic. The overall attitude towards Poles and Poland was often positive and not hostile. Despite the Poles' otherness, they were not entirely strange to the Belarusians, which made them different from Russians. This applies to Poles living outside Belarus, whereas the Polish Catholic rural population of Belarus (easily recognizable) was seen as 'other but familiar'. After the Polish intelligentsia left the territories which became a part of the BSRS after the Second World War, Poles in Belarus became the worst educated ethnic (national) groups in Belarus (or one of the worst, if including the Roma). Their activity on the labour market and promotion opportunities were actively limited.

It is also worth mentioning that it was widespread in Belarus in the 1970s and 1980s (and even earlier), especially among well-educated people and the youth, to listen to Polish radio stations. In the western parts of the country, people would also watch Polish television and read the press. Polish music bands and singers were very popular, such as Niebiesko-Czarni, Niemen, Czerwone Gitary, Maanam and Lady Pank. The Polish popular culture was one of many images of Poland and Poles in Belarusians. These did not always overlap. Sometimes they were mutually exclusive, varied in different environments, and depended on the social context, time and place.

Writing about the 'amoral familism' of the 1980s in Poland, Jacek Tarkowski referred to disintegrative, competitive, aggressive attitudes and behaviours and to the

[1] A radio broadcast dating back to 1970s, popular among Belarussians in USSR due to various topics and well-developed music programme.

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following of 'ethical dualism: different for the 'familiar' ones and the 'strangers' (Tarkowski, 1994, p. 281). In the USSR, which was much more repressive than in Poland, the 'core group' of 'amoral familism' was limited to a small number of close relatives and friends. To build a coherent, ideologised image of the stranger was thus difficult. As Jurij Lewada points out:

> The cultural structures of a Soviet society were extremely rigid (based on a positive – negative dichotomy, i.e. 'right' and 'wrong' or 'familiar' and 'strange' etc. in terms of ethical, aesthetic, and cognitive standards), extremely authoritarian (...). (Lewada, 2011, pp. 375–378; see Dueva, 2012, p. 69).

In Belarus, even at the beginning of independence, a person was regarded as 'familiar' if their clothes and behaviour implied their folk origin, in contrast to e.g. a well-dressed businessman, who must have come from the outside, 'strange' to locals i.e. Belarusians.

At the same time, it is worth recalling that there have been no significant ethnic (national) conflicts in Belarus between Poles and Belarusians for many generations. Unlike in Ukraine and even Lithuania to some extent, in Belarus Russians did not play both communities off against each other. In the USSR, depending on the policy in force, they tried to Belarusify or Russify Poles. In Belarusian reality, however, Belarusians had virtually no national identity. To be more precise, it was only a few local communities that actually did develop it. Unlike Lithuania, Polish schools in Belarus were closed only a few years after the Second World War, and the social policy of the state focused on the Soviet Gleichschaltung. This affected the relationship between the two ethnic (national) groups and weakened the sense of strangeness within the Republic. Yet it should be borne in mind that the attitude of Belarusians towards the Polish minority in the Republic was rather specific in comparison to their attitude towards Poles to the West of Bug, similarly in relation of Poles to the German national minority in Poland as opposed to their attitude towards Germans in Germany or in the GDR before. On top of it, Russians actively promoted the sense of distance towards Western Slavs. Since these adopted Catholicism, a 'non-Slavic' religion in Russians' opinion, they can be considered as traitors to the Slavic civilization to some extent. They joined the enemy – i.e. the West, notably the pro-Western (now pro-American) Poles. This became particularly evident after Belarus gained independence when the environments which had been strongly Sovietized and Russified before now refer to the community of the 'Russian world' ('Russkiy Mir').

In the Soviet times, an old saying *курица не птица, польша не заграница* ('a chicken is not a bird and Poland is not a foreign country') became more common in the USSR and Belarus. To some point, it demonstrates the derogatory attitude towards Poland (Poles) as a minor country subordinated to a great empire. This imperial tone, characteristic of the Russians, reverberates at times among those Belarusians who bemoan the collapse of the USSR. Talking about this particular saying, one Belarusian

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adds: 'Poles in the Soviet Union were highly respected nevertheless because they were as a nation belonging to European culture and thus associated with foreigners. Therefore, they stood out from the "family of Soviet nations" to which Belarussians belonged' (Wagner, 2011, p. 47). I chose to quote his words as a testimony of the diverse picture of Poles among Belarusians.

Independent Belarus[2]

The evolution of the perception of Poles over the past three decades can be analysed in respect of two separate issues forming the concept of strangeness. First of all, whether and how the elements comprising this notion have changed. Secondly, yet not less important or interesting, what makes Belarusians see Poles in a particular way, differently than e.g. Germans or Czechs.

Upon the collapse of the socialist system, Belarus clearly aligned with Moscow (and CIS) in terms of culture, politics and economy while Poland faced the West (EU and NATO). Nobody could expect the image of the Polish neighbour to improve as a result of it. The sense of strangeness was more likely to deepen. However, for a significant part of Belarus's cultural and scientific elite in the early years of Belarusian independence and for the Belarusian society as a whole it was of little significance. At this point, it should be added that the distance to Poles (and perceiving them as strange) among the political elites was much greater both in the interwar period and now than in the peasant strata. This was due to stronger ties with Moscow and a larger impact of official ideology on their social view of the world[3]. Jerzy Waszkiewicz, co-founder of the Polish Association for Culture and Education 'Polonia' in Minsk, in 1990–1991 its president, and one of the co-founders of the Union of Poles in Belarus, writes:

> Today, from the perspective of several decades, we may draw more general conclusions. Without going into details, let me state that the attitude of the Belarusian authorities towards Poles was, in the vast majority of cases, distrustful, reluctant or even hostile. Although not explicit about it, they did everything to inhibit the development of Polish education and the Polish-language media in Belarus. We were under constant surveillance. The influence of Poland was limited to the greatest extent possible. Over the past twenty years, Belarus' policy has resulted in the final Russification of the society, which also includes the Polish minority.

[2] I would like to thank Dr Jerzy Waszkiewicz (Minsk, Belarus) for his invaluable remarks, which proved very helpful in compiling this paper, especially in respect of the independent Belarus.

[3] A statement of an activist not recognized by the Belarusian authorities of the Union of Poles in Belarus after it had prevented the organization of a ceremony to celebrate the centenary of Poland's independence: 'When an government office or an administration body in Minsk hear the word 'Poles', they shut the door at once. It's better not to talk about the Union out loud. The attitude of the Belarusian authorities towards the Polish minority has never been friendly. Now it even worse.' (Szoszyn, 2018 c, p. A9).

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> Both in terms of language and mentality, this process is most likely irreversible on a mass scale (Waszkiewicz, 2018, p. 13).

In the words of Andrzej Poczobut, a Polish-Belarusian journalist associated with Grodno, 'The Belarusian authorities consistently strive for a total Russification of the Polish minority. They want to eliminate Polish language teaching just like at the time of the Belarusian SSR' (Szoszyn, 2018a, p. A11). According to Andżelika Borys, an activist of the Polish minority in Belarus, '4,000 students in Belarus were taught Polish as a subject in secondary schools in 2000. During the 2017–2018 school year, there were only 400 of them' (Szoszyn, 2018 b, p. A7). Today's Belarus belongs to the Russian civilization and has adopted some of Moscow's values, attitudes and political culture, especially at the level of modern political elites. With the Polish but also Belarusian education radically reduced and the Union of Poles in Belarus disbanded in 2005, the authorities focus on criticising and limiting the religious and social activity of the Catholic Church. The reason for this is largely the Russian-Soviet tendency to subjugate all social processes. They aim at an atomized, fragmented society, deprived of any social pluralism and liberties. Lukashenka's anti-Polish policy is probably also firmly anchored in Moscow's policy. It may also be derived from post-Soviet Russified Belarusian political elites which are afraid of rapprochement with the West, including the higher hierarchy of the Orthodox Church, led by the Metropolitan Paul of Minsk and Slutsk, a man of Russian origins.

The image of Poles trying to 'catholicate' the Belarusian people, created and spread during the Soviet times, is still alive among Belarusian nationalists. It was particularly vivid in the first years of independence. The authors of 'Contemporary state policy of Belarus in the religious sphere', a significant paper published in 2016 in Minsk 'warn the reader at the very beginning of the book that the Vatican and the Catholic hierarchies of Poland regard the Belarusian territory as 'an area of pursuing their evangelist, social, political and territorial interests,' as Jerzy Waszkiewicz recounts (Waszkiewicz, 2016, p. 9). 'The final objective of this action,' the authors allegedly purport, 'is apparently to eliminate Orthodoxy, weaken the pro-Russian sentiment and orient the country's population towards the West' (Waszkiewicz, 2016, p. 10). Due to this policy of the Belarusian authorities, the perception of Poles as 'other' and 'strange' at times is reinforced despite the fact that they are citizens of Belarus.

After Belarus gained independence, Poles were attributed with such 'Western' qualities as being: haughty (manifested in disregarding Belarusians), individual, cunning, deceitful, treacherous, dissociated, materialistic' (Radzik, 2002, p. 201). They were also seen as anti-Russian (clearly not approved of by Belarusians) rebelliousness to the point of anarchy, strong inclinations to opposition, poor hospitality and, more importantly, excessive religiosity. The notion of a 'Catholic Pole' – a hypocrite who does not follow the rules of the religion which he practices with such zeal – was quite strongly rooted in the minds of Belarusians. At the same time, Poles were perceived as 'too polite, to the point of ridicule at times. Being chivalrous was perceived ironically and deemed to result from

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insincerity, or even insidiousness. According to Belarusians and Russians, the Western 'gracefulness' sometimes manifests itself in theatre-like forms. They highly value direct contact and condemn the lack of it'(Radzik, 2002, p. 205).

In 2004, Irina Lappo conducted unrepresentative studies among students of philology, history and pedagogy at two universities: in Minsk and Mogilev. The table encapsulates the 'four primary characteristics indicated by respondents'[4] (Lappo, 2005, pp. 123–124; Lappo, 2007, p. 59).

	Minsk 2004	Mogilev
Typical	cocky stingy religious clever / smart	friendly economic stingy busy
real	cocky religious cultural patriot	sociable economic friendly religious

The author of the study comments:

> The difference between a typical and a real Pole occurs in both surveys and consists of a more positive attitude towards a 'real' Pole than a 'typical' Pole. In Minsk and Mogilev, politeness and patriotism are at the top of the ranking list – rather than avarice and cunning. In Mogilev, avarice subsides while religiousness increases. The 'typical' Pole (in both surveys) is scanty, whereas the 'real' Pole (in both surveys) is religious.
>
> As to differences among particular regions, there is a greater difference in the image of a Pole in the East and the capital of Belarus than between a 'typical' and 'real' Pole within one region. Two characteristics of a typical and real Pole change depending on the region: in Minsk, Poles are invariably associated with pride and religiosity; in Mogilev, on the other hand, with kindness and thrift (Lappo, 2005, p. 124).

The intensity of negative traits was not strong enough to make Poles strange in a clearly hostile manner. A significant part of them diminished with time, along with accusations whereby Poles had betrayed against the USSR or socialism and joined the enemy. The latter, however, is nowadays mainly blamed on the Balts. In the course of time, people began to notice that Poland, considered poorer than Belarus at the end of the Polish People's Republic, was quickly becoming much wealthier than its eastern neigh-

[4] Referring the categories developed by J. Bartmiński, Lappo states that the 'typical' is important for the ontology of stereotypical images, next to the category of what is 'real'. The first modifier introduces a slightly different content of a notion than the latter. 'Typical' is purely descriptive and means 'the way it is', whereas 'real' is both descriptive and obligatory in its nature, stipulating 'the way it is and should be' (Lappo, 2005, s. 121).

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bour. This is often the root of jealousy, but at the same time more and more Belarusians are seeking opportunities for learning Polish in order to leave work in Poland or obtain the Karta Polaka [Polish Charter]. However, Belarusians are still under the influence of Russian TV, especially in cities, and targeted with aggressive anti-Western and sometimes anti-Polish propaganda. Hence recurring increases in anti-Polish sentiment. The Pole has become much less 'familiar' than he used to be and certainly different, strange, a 'foreigner, naturally making Belarusians grow distrustful and apprehensive.

In his book of 2018, Maciej Pieczyński draws attention to the fact that Belarusian historians, creators of culture, e.g. authors of the 2016 film 'Traces on Water' ('Следы на воде') which shows the story of the Soviet security apparatus fighting 'Polish AK gangs' are far less aggressive in their narrative tone in comparison with the clearly anti-Polish Ukrainian narratives used e.g. in 'The Company of Heroes' ('Залізна сотня') (Pieczyński, 2018, p. 395). He quotes an interesting comment found on the Belarusian (though often Russian-speaking) Internet:

> On May 18, 2017, Aksana Browacz, a journalist from the Belarusian edition of the 'Komsomolskaya Prawda', asked her Facebook friends the following question: 'Why, do you think, Belarusians dislike Poles? Or: can they like them?' A Źmicier replied (in Russian): '1. For Belarus under Polish rule; 2. For repression of our national elites (e.g. Branislaw Tarashkyevich). Moreover, Poles, just like the USSR, were not interested in the constitution of a Belarusian state; 3. For the fact that some "Poles still consider Belarusians as underdeveloped Poles, while Brest and Grodno – as their own cities."; 4. For the fact that some Poles consider us to be Russians); 5. For the fact that Poles claim the Radziwiłłs, Kościuszko and 'Żubrówka' to be their own. This list can grow really long.' A Max continued (in Belarussian): 'For the "Vilniusnash" [paraphrase of 'Krymnash', a Russian slogan extremely popular on the Internet among supporters of the annexation of Crimea]; 7. For the activities of the Home Army during World War II.' (Pieczyński, 2018, p. 373).

Among other comments, a Yury explained the anti-Polish sentiment is still present in Belarus because 'people still have the Soviet mind [homo sovieticus – ed.]. It is decades of propaganda.' A Lilia added, 'Russians don't like Poles, Belarusians like Russians, that's why Belarusians don't like Poles. There are really no other reasons.' (Pieczyński, 2018, pp. 373–374).

According to Franciszek Wiaczorek, a Belarusian opposition political activist and journalist:

> [on] the Internet you can find images trying to convince everyone that Poles are nationalists and want to take the Belarusian land from us. It is a manipulation rooted in Soviet stereotypes, back when every Belarusian kid knew that it was the 'Polish masters' who ruled the land before the Russian communists came. They will try to make you believe Poland cannot be our friend (Pieczyński, 2018, p. 411).

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Wiaczorka believes that this campaign is probably controlled by Moscow. They might wish to create the impression that 'it is far better to ally oneself with Russia than with the Polish lord' (Pieczyński, 2018, p. 411).

In another interview held by Maciej Pieczyński with Stanisław Szuszkiewicz, this well-known politician and the first chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus states that anti-Polonism does not exist in Belarus. He believes that Poland has no means of effectively influencing Lukashenka and Russia would not allow it to be in such a position. Asked what can Belarusians dislike Poles for, he replies:

> If anyone is already running any kind of anti-Polish propaganda in Belarus, this is the so-called Russian World ('Russkij Mir'). The supporters of this concept believe everything that is good comes to us from Russia, and everything that is bad comes from the West. All our neighbors, except Russia, are therefore really our enemies. This is how reality is explained by the presidential party of Belaya Rus. According to its ideology, Belarusians are just a variety of Russians (Pieczyński, 2018, p. 413).

Until the independent research institute IISEPS was closed in 2016, its research showed that Poles are in the group of nations closest to Belarusians. They obviously ranked lower than Russians, who are clearly considered to be the most familiar. Poles ranked 4, just after Ukrainians, and were followed by Western Europeans and Central Europeans (IISEPS, 2015, p. 16, table 31). It should be remembered, however, that a dozen per cent of the inhabitants of Belarus are Catholics, who identify with Polishness to a large extent. In contrast, respondents of the last sociological survey conducted by this institution in June 2016 were asked to 'list five countries that you think are the most friendly towards Belarus and five countries that are the most unfriendly towards it.' Poland was rated the fifth most friendly and the sixth most unfriendly country (IISEPS, 2016, p. 21, table 42). Therefore, Belarusians perceive Poles as people better than Poland as a country. When it comes to attitudes towards Poles, these are conditioned by seventy years of generally good and harmonious (often direct) relations with Poles and Polish culture in Belarus as well as in Poland. The attitude towards Poland as a country results from the Belarusian-Russian-Soviet version of the history of this part of Europe (Belarusian-Polish relations) and the current propaganda of the Minsk authorities, as well as the Belarusian and Russian mass media.

In January 2019, the Information and Analytical Centre of the Presidential Administration carried out representative sociological research on the attitude of Belarusians towards other nations. 89.5% of Belarusians expressed positive emotions towards Russians (with only 0.5% with a negative attitude), 73% (2.5% negative) towards Ukrainians and 64% (4% negative) to Poles. The latter shared a similar sentiment with Latvians and Lithuanians[5] (Gurnevič, 2019). In this respect, there is no symmetry between Polish and Belarusian society, but this matter requires separate consideration.

[5] The only large sociological centre in Belarus, not trusted by experts..

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An analysis of the perception of Poles as either familiar, other, strangers or enemies must take into account that any kind of generalisation regarding Belarus is far more risky than even in Poland. The Belarusian society is diverse in many respects and there is not much that holds it together. The young generation of Belarusians, born in an independent state, look at Poland (Poles) with a greater indifference than their parents and grandparents. Today, they live without referring to tradition or history, which brings them closer to the young generation of Poles. A Pole is a stranger to them, which does not necessarily mean hostile. The prevalent sentiment is simply cold, no longer fraternal but more and more like towards a Swede or a Finn, yet not entirely on the same level, and certainly not like a German. A Pole is a member of the European Union, which is culturally and politically foreign according to Russian stations, not to mention the hostile NATO. Poles' strangeness is perceived differently depending on the generation, region, social class, workplace and urban or rural status. I. Lappo, born in Belarus and having conducted ample research there, stated several years ago that 'the stereotype of a Pole in Belarus, once pronounced and manifest, is now fading and blurring, dissolving in the general characteristic of a Slav, simply disappearing' (Lappo, 2005, p. 134). For a long time, there have been no 'Polish masters' in kolkhoz villages or Poles holding power and offices cities once inhabited with Polish elites. Those Poles who do live there, apart from villages, are not recognizable by their national (ethnic) origin on a daily basis.

Secondly, there are interesting reasons why Poles (and not just Poles) are perceived the way they are. In many respects, the Belarusian and Polish societies have been formed in asymmetry, with different types of community, different values to some extent, different types of social reactions, existing hierarchies, everyday attitudes towards similar or identical social phenomena. A Belarusian researcher of the Belarusian identity, Nelly Bekus, does not agree that the formation of the Belarusian nation can only ensue in opposition to Russianness because in her opinion

> many Belarusians turned out to consider Russia not to be an 'external' entity. It is rather located 'within' Belarus as its integral part. (...) Therefore, all parties and political movements that put forward an anti-Russian geopolitical strategy for Belarus are perceived as 'foreign' because such strategy is invariably deemed as imposed by the West (Bekus, 2012, p. 337).

This view might just be a typical example of understanding the Belarusian community as an all-Russian nation which has clear boundaries with the West yet does not accept internal divisions beyond the Russian-Soviet traditions (republican in the Soviet and present meaning of the word). Belarusians are a regional 'nation-people' within the Russian nation, which is nearly along the line of both Putin's and Lukashenka's reasoning. Poor nationalization makes it difficult to build holistic, ideologised images of others, thus their perception is rather fragmentary and situational.

Larisa Titarienko, a Belarusian sociologist, depicts the negative identity of Belarusians. She writes:

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> It is characteristic for the contemporary Belarusian identity that it conceptualises social identity by strictly separating 'the familiar' (for the 'us – group') from 'the other' ('they – group'). The opposition between 'us' and 'them' is not visible in the same way in all spheres of life, but it is still relevant for nationality differences within social and political culture (it has been described in detail earlier by Ch. Cooley, E. Erikson and H. Pane) (Titarenko, 2007, p. 23).

Belarusians are immersed in two worlds: (post) Soviet-Russian and peasant. In their case, sovietism was imposed on Russian-Orthodox peasantry, giving rise to a modern (unified by means of ideological bonds, however poor they may be due to their Soviet character) Belarusian society for the first time in this non-national world (as opposed to the Baltic nations for instance). For many historical reasons, it has been a rather unstable society, prone to social mimicry. First of all, they were deprived of the elites of both Polish and Russian origin in the course of the Bolshevik revolution. Secondly, the area was subject to multiple sweeping changes of confession (Orthodoxy, Uniate, Catholicism, and even Protestantism among the elites at times), state affiliation (Kievan Rus, Grand Duchy of Lithuania, First Polish Republic, Russia, Poland, USSR, independent Belarus), languages (Old Belarusian, Polish, Russian, Belarusian of the 1920s, and eventually Russian again along with the accompanying disappearance of Belarusian language) and political systems (starting from the noble democracy through the tsarist regime, Stalinist totalitarianism, faulty democracy of the Second Polish Republic, to the hybrid regime of the independent Republic of Belarus.

Belarusians are a society in which Jews, Russians and Poles once dominated in cities. After World War II, rural residents began to flow into rapidly expanding cities up to the point of tens of thousands of people per year in Minsk. At the same time, Russians were deporting potentially subversive part of the population from cities and towns, less often villages deep into the USSR). Cities were rusticised as a result (Mironowicz, 2007, p. 243), cementing the peasant view of the world for generations. With a poor Belarusian higher culture, developed in the 1920s and destroyed as a result of mass murders of Belarusian elites from the 1930s, and limited linguistically, especially from the 1950s, the inwardness and closed mindset propagated by the Russians in the USSR was combined with rusticism cherished within the borders one's own farm, later a collective farm. The line between familiarity and strangeness is generally much closer towards self than in fully formed nations. The notion of strangeness/otherness is close, even if only visible in details. Because it is generally not nationalized or ideologised, it is usually not very distinct. Manifestation of attitude towards strangers/strangeness is hardly perceptible. The change in the category of social view of the world is occurring at a slow pace. Imitation (copying) of Western realities observed during trips to the West is rare. In this context, the insularity and detachment of the Belarusian peasants is pointed out, along with their lack of unrestrained and lively behaviour. Any strangeness is rather of ethnic, cultural and religious nature rather than national one.

If I were to summarize these considerations briefly, the reasons for the sentiment of strangeness towards Poles present among Belarusians would be rooted primarily in the

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cultural, political and civilizational dissolution of both societies with the adoption of Orthodoxy and then the exceptionally strong (even exemplary) Sovietisation of Belarus, as well as the asymmetrical social structure (stratification) of both neighbouring countries. Poles are seen differently in the countryside and cities, differently by Orthodox and Catholics, in the east and in the west of the country. The historical awareness of Belarusians is poor and strongly mythologised, which also limits the perception of others. The others, including Poles, are subject to vague stereotypes and pictured largely on the basis of fragments of knowledge, e.g. family experience, much more than in the case of clearly outlined and strongly nationalised communities. Finally, the Pole is a different person for a Belarusian nationalist and for a homo sovieticus. It also depends on the degree of Russification. All these conditions and circumstances are principally alien to Poland.

The state border on the Bug river had never existed before, perhaps only back at the time of Kievan Rus. Yet it seems to be extremely durable as a line dividing contemporary Europe into clearly different civilisations. Poland and Belarus have been clearly growing apart over the past three decades and know little about each other today. This does not necessarily mean that otherness becomes strangeness and animosity. Sadly, this is often the case due to the influence of Moscow as well as the Sovietized and Russified Belarusian elites, especially political ones. The Polish attitude is dominated by ignorance along with the stereotype of Belarus as the country ruled by 'the last European dictator'.

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