

BELARUSAN AND RUSSIAN CULTURE ON THE PERIPHERY OF IDEOLOGICAL SYSTEMS: THE USE OF HISTORY TO CONTROL SYMBOLIC THOUGHT PROCESSES

KULTURA BIAŁORUSKA I ROSYJSKA NA PERYFERIACH IDEOLOGICZNYCH SYSTEMÓW: WYKORZYSTANIE HISTORII DO KONTROLOWANIA PROCESÓW MYŚLOWYCH

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the role of history and language for the country of Belarus, which is on the border of Western and Eastern ideological systems. The content is based on observation and discussions with individuals during the time-period 2003–2014. The aim of this article is to sociologically present a model which illustrates how post-Soviet authoritarian systems control time and space symbolically to recreate an ideological design that allows an authoritarian regime to maintain power through the use of the Soviet Symbolic framework. This model, based on the example of discussions with Belarusians, is applicable as a comparative tool to understand the processes taking place in the Ukraine and also in Russia. The argument in this article integrates history, systems of state ideology and identity formation on the border of two cultural civilizations. Comparative examples concerning the conflict with Russia and the Ukraine are used to apply the theoretical model based on current changes and events in the regional macro-infrastructure offering a sociological take on the link between historical and contemporary social and cultural changes in this region.

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule przedstawiono znaczenie kulturowych uwarunkowań, w szczególności historii oraz języka, dla Białorusi – kraju leżącego na pograniczu zachodniej i wschodniej cywilizacji. Zaprezentowany teoretyczny model ma na celu objaśnienie

działania postsowieckiego systemu władzy, gdzie autorytarny reżim wykorzystuje w sposób różnorodny elementy z przestrzeni symbolicznej w celu stworzenia ideologicznego uzasadnienia dla własnego funkcjonowania. W celu wyjaśnienia mechanizmów władzy na Białorusi odwołuję się do uwarunkowań historycznych, które oddziałują na oficjalną ideologię, tworząc tym samym tożsamość mieszkańców kraju. Przedstawiony model został wypracowany na podstawie badań empirycznych prowadzonych za pomocą techniki obserwacji i wywiadów indywidualnych w okresie 2003–2014 na Białorusi. Wydaje się jednak, że ma on szersze możliwości eksplanacyjne, pozwalające zrozumieć działania decydentów politycznych w zakresie legitymizacji władzy w innych rosyjskojęzycznych krajach, które powstały po upadku Związku Radzieckiego.

KEYWORDS: *Authoritarianism, Ideology, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, post-Soviet, Historical Ideology, Pan Slavism*

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: *autorytaryzm, ideologia, Ukraina, Rosja, Białoruś, postsowiecki, historyczna ideologia, Pan-Slavism*

INTRODUCTION

The impact of Russian language and culture on national ideological systems is investigated in this article to understand the influence of the legacy of the Russian and Soviet cultural paradigm on the modern states of Ukraine and Belarus, which are both involved in the process of constructing a revival of national identity and consciousness but face the obstacles of a Russian neighbor with a powerful media enterprise, local populations with access to a post-Soviet history, a post-Soviet Russian influence that involves ease of contact, and strong state centered governments, which discourage the participation of civil society. During March and April 2014, the Russian linkage of Russian language speakers with the right to territorial autonomy has brought about great controversy in the international media and locally in regions bordering Russia. Even prompting President Alexander Lukashenka to issue an address to the nation regarding the mutual right to the heritage of the Rus not a domination of Russian culture¹. This analysis provides a background in the historical and social processes shaping political decision-making in the country of Belarus that as the Ukraine is on the border of two-ideological civilizations. In this article, it is argued that as human beings we are

driven by historical cultural symbolism but on the border of two competing civilizations a choice is made to follow one symbolic ideology over the other. Economic opportunity and political power contribute to this choice; however, it is argued that established cultural patterns and the enforcement of authoritarian control measures upon these patterns also contribute to the choice. Latent historical and ideological processes control time² and space³ as one ideology reinforces over collective identity. **Essentially, individuals choose to interpret that which they know as they are bound by a temporal and physical reality. This temporal and physical reality is controlled by state history and official ideology which is based on traditional Soviet paradigms⁴ which decreases the rate of integration with global structures at the micro-level of civil society while keeping a populace, within an established framework, at bay from the power-center.** This article attempts to dissect and bring focus on some of these latent historical processes shaping contemporary identity and state relations in post-Soviet Eastern European societies by referencing Daniel Bell's concepts of ideology.

CONTEMPORARY EVENTS

During March and April of 2014, we have witnessed the transition of the Crimea from Ukrainian to Russian society. In the popular press and on various news blogs and commentaries we find support for the idea of returning Russian Crimea to the motherland. Tens of thousands of individuals in this area "bracing from the Fascist assault that is about to take place from the dangerous new Ukrainian leadership according to the Russian media"⁵. If we use our imperfect online instincts and turn to an excellent though at times not fully validated Wikipedia⁶ for a moment, we find background on the Crimean Tartars and find that Stalin through mass deportations diminished a claim to the territory which these Tartars had for over five-centuries⁷. True or not we have access to exploration⁸. Likewise, if we turn to more recent academic political literature we find a track record of Ukrainian concern for their status with the West after the Soviet Union disbanded⁹ (Burant, 1995). It is pretty clear from the texts that there was much concern regarding Russia's reaction to a Ukrainian turn to the West. Yet, the Western media presents Russia's reaction to protests in the Ukraine with great shock. How is it that history can be so torn? How is it that large populations

cannot have access to alternative discourse and understanding in a supposed age where all information is accessible? Access to media, sources of alternative information and a culture of political expectation may be components of this answer; however, this is a political discussion we are not entering into. **The sociological question considers how individuals and communities can be removed from historical identity and how the basic knowledge we have of our relationship to this external reality is temporal and selective? The goal of this article is to establish categories that serve as a model for interpreting the ideological misdirection that seeds itself in authoritarian structures and the propaganda machines, which they develop. Below, the following will be addressed: a) basic concepts and tendencies on the border of two cultures, b) choices of history from the Belarusian Perspective, c) the Soviet past and its ideological legacy, d) the process by which formerly Communist Eastern European authoritarian regimes maintain power through the control of Soviet symbolism, and e) a model illustrating the use of Soviet Symbolism in relationship to the individual.** Essentially asking, what is the machine, in the sense of Daniel Bell, what are the components of this ideological machine that allow it to exert power, authority and tangible relevance to world events and individual consciousness?

Understanding the Russian and Ukrainian Impasse (Disequilibrium in Symbolic/Historical Ideology) from the Perspective of an Analysis of Belarusian Interpretations of History based on Observation and Interview

In this segment, interpretations of history are presented by Belarusian citizens in various contexts. The purpose of these historical narratives is to serve as a comparative device to more fully understand the symbolic/historical impasse between Russia and the Ukraine. The observation and interview materials below provide instances of historical narratives that give focus to ideological and historical memory.

For Belarusians, the Second World War is very alive in national consciousness. On a trip to the small historical town of Chatyn, a memorial to a small village that was destroyed by German soldiers¹⁰, a visitor from Kazakhstan asked the question about the Second World War to our guide inquiring as to what happened. At some point in the discussion the guide told

us that Poland attacked Belarus and took the Western territory that was later reclaimed after the Second World War. Another example is of a Polish Soldier who after the Second World War, living on Belarusian land, started to despise his Polishness and to question the Pole's commitment against the Germans. In a sense, there is a constant fear, real or not, of speaking up and having your voice or idea heard because of the negative repercussions that could ensue. As happened to one individual who spoke up her mind and mentioned at work that it is both the Pole's and the Russians that have dominated us for centuries and spoke openly and critically about the President who doesn't do anything, this individual became demoted to a lower position at work, he believes as a result of this. (Interview with Respondent F) In another example, a respondent stated that what you need to do is clear, "Lukashenka stated on television that if anyone disagrees or even looks funny at the manager then that person should be kicked out of their work" (Interview with Respondent B).

A type of ideology binds each of these unrelated instances. A ritual of thought has been established which explains the social surroundings and gives meaningful tangible comprehension of one's identity. In the first instance, the identity of history, who I am and where do I come from and what side do I take. In the second instance, which history do I need to abide by so as to insure the basic survival of self and family and in the third how do I structurally manipulate my identity in order to insure my daily access to systemic survival, i.e., the income that allows one to exist. For those in the opposition who question the status quo this relationship to an alternative past and history is of nature, in the sense of Erving Goffman a type of manipulation of identities. Yet it is necessary to understand that this is an advanced state for those who have the time, the alternative knowledge and exposure to alternative historical truths and ideological systems. For many, the sheer continuity of the daily struggle prevents the ability to create alternative consciousness, and in a sense goes a step further, to question their reality and to think in the sense of C. Wright Mills Promise is actually an assault on the self, the work of creating a meaningful, social, and knowledgeable life becomes distorted by questioning the basis for their society. How can my society be wrong? Why would my history be a massive set of coordinated truths, i.e., a lie? In this sense, on the one hand the individual is limited by

the time it takes to understand an alternative historical reality and assumes that the history and knowledge of the society is a given and on the other hand the very act of questioning, unless attached to an alternative resource system, such as participation in an opposition movement, actually is counter-productive to the individual's self and position in the society. If we turn for a moment to Shoshana Keller's analysis of the creation of Uzbek identity, she indicates that "it was an intellectually violent process as it tore people out of the historical narratives they had created from templates of sacred time and inserted them into a secular Soviet narrative. The new narrative was intended to prove specific truths". She goes on that "the Soviet's cut out people and events that undermined the core argument or stretched boundaries of time and place to create the necessary evidence. The Soviet story began at a different point and used a different basis for periodization". She also indicates that "the flow and meaning of events erased large sections of Central Asian historical memory and replaced them with historical memories of other peoples". "A new historical set of historical heroes to emulate" (Keller, 2007, p. 260). This point can be compared to the Western cities of Grodno and Brest and surrounding regions where the Second World War began in 1939; however, due to Germany's arrangement with the Soviet Union, the popular memory is that the war began when the Soviet Union entered into the war approximately 2 years later on May 9, 1941.

In this sense, history as a vehicle of ideology is very significant to the Belarusian mindset, and to Belarusian politics because which history you observe means that you belong to separate ideological thought structures and you therefore have different goals and interests in the political or social apparatus of the country. In a sense, a way of showing your ideological bent privately and at home is by many making the conscientious decision to speak to immediate family members in Belarusian. In Belarus, where the Belarusian language is discouraged, or at least considered impractical by many, this is automatically associated with the BNF the Belarusian National Front or the opposition¹¹. Consciously or unconsciously aware of this fact, those Belarusians in the Grodno Region countryside use this language, or some form of it intermingled at times with Polish and Russian, and are therefore distinguishing themselves from the Polish and Russian influences

that have been juxtaposed on the nation through centuries¹². A conversation with one Belarusian gentleman about the Second World War revealed that they knew that something was wrong. They would secretly listen to Radio Free Europe and would learn some truth of what was happening, at the same time they had a reality that they had to live in. Many families had to begin a cycle of pretending. In some sense this cycle of pretending may carry on today. In the same vein the individual mentioned “it is difficult for a person at this time to know what was going on in the world. There was not much radio, TV, or news. Everything around you changed, big systems changed, but you only knew your field (home) in the country” (Interview with Respondent B).

It is necessary to take into consideration this cycle of pretending. In its basic form the goal is to preserve the family unit. Accept the power structure that is because if you do not you lose your chance to insure the survival of your family and to make sure that existence continues. This is a powerful motivator in and of itself; however, it also contributes to a self-sufficient and apolitical nature for many where the importance of daily events, daily life and its struggle are of great importance but the power to guide and to govern society is reserved for those in those positions of power. This does not mean that someone is not active, intelligent, ambitious and capable it means that the power and belief to change and have influence on society is continuously displaced by this deferment and likewise, a strong hand in everyday control by the state limits and marginalizes individual activity¹³. In a sense, there may be continuous news at the present and TV discussions on key political events that keep the populace in tune; however, in the sense of David Sciulli there is a difficulty in freeing oneself from pre-supposed possibilities (Sciulli, 2001). The news and world events are there and frequently imbued with mainstream propaganda that includes a spin or an omission. For some Belarusians, exposed to this type of information, at times not knowing what to think from gut feeling, it is the same belief as during the Second World War, the fate of Belarus is decided by the major powers.

Another significant distinction that is a territorial manifestation of the historical dilemma is the conscious belief of many Belarusians that there is a psychological, cultural and social difference between those

people in Eastern and Western Belarus. This may simply be pride in the territory that the individuals live in but some facts that denote the distinction, according to these individuals, are: our farming is better because it was not collectivized as much, our people work harder because they have individualistic values, and we are closer to Europe (Interview with Respondent X). Other comments state that for those peoples in the East, their sense of purpose has been destroyed, they are prone to alcoholism, they are poorer, they are more brainwashed, and they are less capable because of the heavier impact of Sovietization¹⁴ (Interview with Respondent C). These individuals take a sense of pride in their territory and lead to the belief that there is indeed a sharp contrast between the two regions of the country. This historical exploration gives us understanding of the cultural and ideological context of the country, which gives some insight into the values and beliefs of the Belarusians.

According to Shoshana Keller, the Soviet Union created Soviet Socialist Republics, which functioned as satellite states on borders to encourage groups in other states or national groups to join into the idea of the Soviet state (Keller, 2007, p. 258).

MACRO-INFLUENCES ON HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY

In this section, the focus is changed from the micro-statements from individuals and observations in order to shift to the pertinent yet latent macro-processes shaping the reality of Belarus. From the sociological perspective, it is understood that there are core fundamental values that create the foundation for the patterns that develop and become layered in an intricate culture. Yet, here we are on the border of two or several cultures with competing values and power struggles waged internally and externally for state domination. At its most basic level, how does this historical legacy work at the macro level and how does it interface with the individual, the citizen somewhere in a city or periphery consciously oblivious to the mechanisms and social structures ordering the everyday.

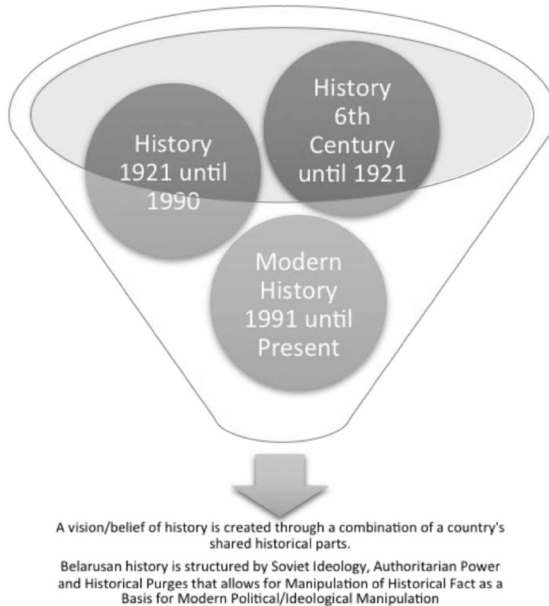
As a point to begin, the border regions of Russia and the EU have rich cultural histories, which are unknown due to historical changes in power structure coupled with established patterns of cultural operation. The basis

for a nation state is a type of history and evolution for a right of being for that state. In the case of Belarus and the Ukraine, we have states, which have not fully culminated the idea of the nation. Mass deportation, mass extermination, changing borders, forced settlement and presence on the border of two-ideological civilizations¹⁵ creates a dilemma similar to that of African countries after British colonization. As in the colonization of Africa, states with ideologies and ethnic groups that differ creating a divide and conquer politics; however, through extreme threat a parallel uniformity politics, as well. What is meant by divide and conquer politics is the choice of an ideological framework, which allows one version of fact and history to transcend over another leaving historical fact to political determination instead of academic study. In this sense, the problems of these two societies are based in the very cultural design of the society.

CHOICES OF HISTORY

The current crisis in the Ukraine is frequently labeled, in the popular press, as an example of Czarism. With the idea of Czarism is a politics of history, which is currently frequently labeled in the media as reigniting the power of the USSR or control over lands, which have formerly and historically been of Russian Empire. A historical belief structure, an ideology and political determination, which is not based on relevant and immediate needs within the society but based on a historical type of politics to reinvent the powerful ideology of the past society. In the model below, a model is drawn illustrating historical layering in the country of Belarus. The diagram below, quite simple, provides a glimpse into the choices of history. As in a funnel, there is a limited space for discussion of history in public apparatus. The space is usually limited by the ideology of the group in power, its desire to maintain power and the implementation of goals to serve the maintenance of power. The opposition may create an alternative modern Belarusian history by commemorating key historical events that took place in Belarus when it was a part of the union with Poland as Rzeczpospolita, whereas the authoritarian government, for most of the previous decade until recently, would point to the Soviet history of revolution, success against Fascism, and the historical definitions developed by historians in the USSR.

Figure 1.
The Creation of a Modern Belarusan Perceptual History



Source: Authored by Arthur Piszczatowski

As is known in the study of political science, history is not objective but a tool by elite to establish a chosen shared ideology that allows in the sense of Benedict Andersen for an imagined community to exist (Anderson, 1991). In all societies there is a shared vision of being that is created by fact, cultural myth, symbolic interpretation, power elite and ideological structures. Belarus is a country that lays surrounded by Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia and the Ukraine having experienced major cultural influences from a shared medieval kingdom with Poland, and Lithuania into regions of Ukraine and also sharing cultural ties to the Soviet Union and Russia. According to Jan Zaprudnik, a Belarusan historian, “Belarusans have lived in the Great Lithuanian Duchy as fully privileged members of a state that was their own, they experienced cultural influences from Poland that had the impact of Polonizing their gentry, and they have had a more recent, history of the cultural union with Russia” (Zaprudnik, 1993).

For the Belarusians, history is a very difficult matter because it has political and ideological implications, some of which were discussed earlier. Similarly, developing a true Belarusian history is very difficult as different ethnic and power groups subscribe to different histories. For example, the current Belarusian government, under Alexander Lukashenka has largely subscribed to a history that accentuates a union with Russia while opposition groups accentuate a history that points west to Poland, Lithuania, and Europe¹⁶. Those who speak Belarusian are viewed by the government as a part of the opposition to the idea of cultural unity with Russia and are deemed as nationalists¹⁷. In a sense, historical and cultural allegiance has far reaching implications concerning the political, economic, and social structure of the country¹⁸. To be a member of the opposition is not only to seek an alternative power structure in Belarus, but it is to subscribe to a democratic state that supports the rule of law, private property and a market economy, linkages that draw the country to Western Europe, which likewise has the impact of restructuring leadership and power-allegiances in the country.

As we discuss Belarusian history, we must remember that history is continuously in flux, if we consider the assimilation of immigrants to a society for a moment we find that these immigrants are not the only ones who are changing but so is the society as a whole. In this sense, even as Alexander Lukashenka has sought cultural, political and economic union with Russia, the more Soviet and authoritarian policies of Belarus have served to differentiate the country of Belarus and Belarusians from Russia; thus setting Belarus, regardless of intentions, on a new developmental path. This may at first seem as a very general interpretation of events in Belarusian society but it is these general interpretive categories that are continuously mitigated by an unobjective history and unobjective ideological slant to state-centered media that prevent the average citizen from having perspective on events in the country. Historical fallacies that allow for political rhetoric coupled with a lack of access to international sources allow for a large majority of citizens to be under the domination of the information base of the society. This informational domination coupled with the apolitical nature of the citizenry becomes a tool of domination.

Figure 2.
A Specific History Dominates



Source: Graphic authored by Arthur Piszczatowski

The illustration above denotes the current Russian (Soviet) centered history in Belarusian society. As in a funnel there is limited social space for multiple histories or a social discourse to take place on an honest and factual Belarusian history. This discourse is prevented because of the predominance of Russian language, a linkage to Russian interests in Belarus, an ideological education that teaches a Russian (Soviet) history, a lack of importance attributed to the matter by the Belarusian populace coupled with complacency. In all societies there is a dominant culture. It is said, that for societies to develop holistically their cultural values and social structures must be representative of the multitude of cultural values in the society (Rawls, 1972). In Belarus, openness, democracy, public organization, individual freedoms are values that are attributed to Western European culture. Such values as belief in a strong leader, a belief in the state as a source of remedy for social problems, political complacency, and collective identity are associated with an Eastern Influence. The Eastern influence is reinforced by a lack of media infrastructure that allows for communications and information to take place

totally within the Belarusian language. “We are reliant on external sources of media and information from Russian sources which automatically gives it that slant” (Interview Respondent B). Even though various ethnic identities and histories co-exist in a nation-state the dominant political system and the apparatus of the state is dominated by a choice in one direction or another. In a public debate between Stanislau Shushkiewicz, the former Head of the Belarusian State and Vladimir Zyrinowski on Russian television, Zyrinowski in his colorful way mentioned that it is not possible to go both ways for Belarus. It is a choice which block the Belarusians belong to with an implication that it is a choice they must make or face the consequences¹⁹. **The Soviet Past and Significance of Soviet History: How does the Culture of the Soviet Continue to Play a Role?**

As contemporary Belarus is analyzed, it is found that there is actually much similarity to the work of Daniel Bell and his development of concepts for Soviet ideology. Contemporarily, before we initiate in this comparison, it is necessary to note that the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a factual legal entity should not be confused with the dissolution of Soviet values. In discussions with Belarusians the Soviet is a period of grandeur, a value of what is our common culture, history and heritage “nasze”²⁰. It is a belief in a common past and in a sense a maintenance of identity. Memories of going to school in the Soviet Union, of movies, of heroes and ideas of right and wrong that have been formative in one’s identity. Likewise, consistent economic turbulence and political changes have culminated in a lack of trust in political systems. Almost everything that was a route to development, to career or ways of social interaction has been called into question or redefined. Yet, the everyday presents continuous struggle and new opportunities. Yet, identities have already been established and right or wrong interpretations of world history, events and facts is secondary to maintain order over one’s identity and the cultural programming and information that allows one to function within the society.

Vladimir Putin has been credited with the creation of order in Russia and Alexander Lukashenka has been credited with creating a system of economic and political stability under a contract with the populace of reduced freedoms as the society has been in a state of continuous turbulence. By maintaining

Soviet symbolism and ideological infrastructure the authoritarian elite of Belarus has been able to maintain common expectations of relevance. Streets that continue to be called Karl Marx Street, Statues of Lenin, the maintenance of the KGB, a focus on state controlled lands and industry. The maintenance of the traditional symbolism allows for markers for populations to coalesce around. This is effective in the sense that individuals know there is not a Soviet Union but the Soviet identity of strength, of the power to do anything, as well as a sentimental heritage play a role in how individuals perceive their identity. There is something, which links Belarusians to Russia: the common language, the common media infrastructure, a shared taught history, and a shared empire. It is this shared history that can be confusing to modern Belarusians as they perceive their relationship to Russia as one of Soviet partnership and the maintenance of shared ideals but the realization that the Soviet Union does not exist, in the sense of the shared value structure, but instead a relationship with a foreign state, i.e., interests of a foreign state are not cognitively addressed. To create order, the authoritarian elite maintains the traditional symbolism, which allowed for familiarity with social organization of the transforming society; however, the maintenance of the traditional symbolism creates a top down model of framework formation. Essentially, the living fossil of the Soviet memory continues to link individuals throughout the former empire as they continue to see an altruistic link that is constructed within the cultural model that they have been socialized into. The realization of foreign state domination in the cultural framework is a step into abstraction and not easily identified as the Soviet values have been internalized and the linkage is not questioned.

BACKGROUND TO A MODEL: IDEOLOGY, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, DANIEL BELL AND DISCUSSIONS OF CONTEMPORARY INTERNAL/CROSS BORDER ISSUES

In the field of social movements, frameworks are established that allow for redefinition of values in a society. Specifically, key points of contention are developed that allow for discussion and public reevaluation. In the case of modern Russia, we have the tenets of social movement framework building in the institutionalized framework of the authoritarian leadership elite. The

continuous change and redefinition of Russian society has institutionalized change in the society. A society under constant redefinition seeks aspects of order. A society that seeks order limits change. Below a review of Daniel Bell's work on ideology assists in identifying historical/cultural elements of propaganda in Russia's current foreign policy through comparison with more recent authors analyzing how contemporarily Russia has institutionalized social change in its society and has created a singular national type of social movement.

According to Daniel Bell, ideologies are "ideas, ideals, beliefs, passions and values...". He also suggests that ideologies move people to action (Bell, 1965, p. 591). Bell continues that the use of ideology can be used to justify specific interests and that what is important is not that they are true or false but which function do they serve (Bell, 1965, p. 592). Likewise, according to Bell, ideologies can be a type of formula that mobilizes people for action by organizing patterns and providing means for comprehending experience. Bell suggests that according to Lenin "ideologies are belief systems fashioned by intellectuals or professors for use in organizing the masses" (Bell, 1965, p. 593). He also uses a quote from Lenin which in summary suggests that there can be no independent ideology of the masses or of the workers themselves; from this historical perspective the choice was only bourgeoisie or socialist ideology without the possibility for a third course (Bell, 1965, p. 593). Bell suggests that by making ideology an either or phenomenon that it becomes synonymous with total belief (Bell, 1965, p. 594). In this sense, the Soviet ideology is a means of control as it designs the value range of the society (Bell, 1965, p. 595). **Bell calls this a type of mechanism, a type of virtual machine that is constructed for a designed product or cultural affect.**

Abstractly analyzing the actions of Russian media and the experience of the Ukraine, it is found that as Bell suggested, there is not a gradation of truth but a true and false functionality, designed to mobilize mass support through familiar values and ideas that allow for patterns of comprehension coordinated by the state. Any type of alternative discourse or analysis offered by competing media units, intellectuals or opposition is against a singular choice of thought that coincides with one total belief system. It is not about a natural outgrowth of truth or allegiance based on fact, but a means of control

to bring about a designed product or effect as Bell indicates. For Bell, this is a mechanism that works as a type of social movement, the society that works as a social movement makes promises in the future and the elite explain these changes in order to be successful (Bell, 1965, p. 596). Likewise Bell mentions the idea of Russia rejoining Western thought in terms of analysis and approach to fact, if we compare it to the Olympics in Sochi we find that Russia was at a high point of international integration yet instead to maintain power relations and elite hegemony has turned to a familiar historical framework reminiscent of Daniel Bell's Soviet Ideology analysis.

Alison Brisk speaks of more recent examples of rewritten political consciousness and reminds us that "states as well as their challengers spill blood and treasure for slogans, flags, rituals – and even inert flesh". The author speaks of a renewed interest in the study of the subjective influence of ideas and sources of information. According to Brisk, identities and cognitive constructions are increasingly studied. The author also indicates that "interests are not fixed needs, but rather deeply subsumed stories about needs that symbolically mobilized political actors can create new political opportunities by revealing, challenging and changing narratives about interests and identities". "The successful exercise of symbolic politics then leads to social change through shifting priorities, building collective identities, shaping social agendas or challenging state legitimacy". "Symbolic politics describes clusters of messages intended to change attitudes, which may be enunciated by individuals, groups, states, societies or international organizations". "Symbolic politics depicts legitimacy as a socially specific set of stories of justice, rights, and identity". "Successful collective action challenges these stories". "Part of politics is convincing people who they are" (Brisk, 1995, p. 560–566). "While symbols and stories of national scope transform readily into national political change, part of symbolic politics is a competition for attention and influence among national, local and global narratives" (Brisk, 1995, p. 573). In a sense, Russia has institutionalized this process of collective action and identity formation. Through the use of the Soviet cultural pattern, Russia has developed a framework by which to design the perception of right and wrong, attitudes, and narratives that have become the foundation to

create new political opportunities and narratives that as in any system, are constructed by an elite that creates the legislation, knowledge and historical symbolic content that reinforces its power status.

Benjamin Forest conducted research on Monuments and their impact on identity formation and addressed several valuable points: “After the failed coup attempt of August 1991 and the break-up of the Soviet Union Russia experienced a critical juncture that changed every aspect of Russian Identity – political, economic, and national”. “Russia faced the immense task of forging a national identity distinct from the Soviet Union and redefining itself as a nation rather than as the center of a territorial or ideological empire”. According to Forest, in this sense the politics of memory is very critical. “By co-opting, contesting, ignoring, or removing certain types of monuments, political elites engage in a symbolic dialogue with each other and with the public, to gain prestige, legitimacy and influence”. According to B. Forest, the elites tended to exclude civil society from the determined meanings of monument sites. “These trends in turn contributed to the persistence of authoritarian and imperial representations of the Russian nation” (Forest, 2002, p. 524–525).

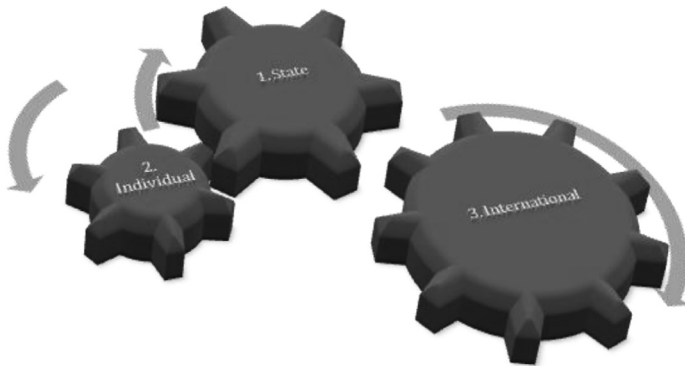
Likewise Forest’s comment that “to motivate political action and to create a sense of solidarity, nationalists self-consciously create the myth of an ancient, timeless nation, and may even come to believe in it themselves”, this can, in a sense, be linked to the global ideological impasse over the Crimea. Forest also suggests that those groups that are successful at manipulating symbolic capital are more successful in advancing their agendas that can include the maintenance of a particular world-view. According to Forest, “Russia’s national identity rested on its position at the center of a geographical and ideological empire..., as a result, Russian and Soviet identities were closely intertwined”, and Russia is attempting to reestablish a place in the global social order, but Russians are dealing with the loss of adjusting to a smaller homeland. Forest concludes, “after the USSR’s dissolution destroyed the geographical basis for Soviet identity, Russia engaged in an intensive search for a new post-Soviet identity and for a ‘usable’ past” (Forest, 2002, p. 526–528). Lowell Barrington, in his article “The Motherland is calling” suggests that Russian officials perceive Russia as the external national homeland of Russians abroad and

have claimed a right to monitor their treatment in other post Soviet states (Barrington, 2003, p. 290).

In this next section, a model is presented which outlines this current machine like dynamic behind the ideology and propaganda systems as they affect Russia and bordering post-Soviet states. It appears that from analysis of the press, official government statements, academic literature and interviews with individuals from Belarus that there is indeed a type of machine that serves as a sociological model to understand the process by which power and ideology function. A basic question arises, what is the fundamental relationship between the state, the individual and the international environment with the use of the traditional Soviet pattern?

Figure 3.

A Model of How Authoritarian Regimes Maintain Power Through Control of Traditional Soviet Symbolism



Source: Graphic authored by Arthur Piszczatowski

1. *The State: The context of state influence maintains hegemony over thought structure by – Use of Soviet symbolism – the society functions on known key words, which imply values and predicted responses.*
2. *The Individual: By maintaining a steady symbolic flow of traditional symbolism and values the rate of integration into the international is limited.*
3. *Due to state media and by many the symbolic language deficiencies allow for limited access of international into local thought processes.*

CONTEMPORARY MODEL ILLUSTRATING THE USE OF SOVIET SYMBOLISM

Soviet symbolism is a binding infrastructure. A very general phrase but it is into this generality that we must focus to understand the binding nature and simple construct of social structure. In endless abstraction and in the natural positive or negative evolution of social systems there arises change. During times of authoritarian crisis and the reinvention of a new social structure social order is generated by familiar **islands of thought**²¹. The ruling elite does not gauge the societies development on necessary changes to meet the changing external environment but instead uses traditional belief infrastructure already in the knowledge base of the populace and creates reinforcing beliefs and values in the external elements of the social structure that function as magnets would as citizens would gravitate towards the familiar value, the familiar belief or the familiar pattern of expectation that exists in the society. A belief in a strong USSR carries with it the experience of a stable society, common identification with other post-soviet states as once being part of the union and a common cultural heritage of successes at war, among other things. The Soviet Union no longer exists but many still find a cultural affinity to the other as a result of common cultural and social experiences. In this sense, as reality is constructed²² the efficiency and immediate need of authoritarian infrastructure creates a social reality that is simple to achieve and in a sense to manipulate. In this understanding, it is much easier for an authoritarian state to maintain social control by using established social patterns. The established social patterns are more immediate and create cognitive stability within the society. This is significant as it allows the ruling elite to govern; however, it comes at the cost of social development, global integration, personal initiative and across the board equitable economic growth. This process assists in explaining complacency in a populace as a populace continues to believe in systems of thought, which no longer exist. For example, membership in the Soviet Union can have imbued feelings of accomplishment, of stability and of international grandeur coupled with understanding of values of unity of nations among Russian speaking formerly Soviet Republics. In the cultural programming of an individual faced with constant change and immediate social pressure to deal with constant change at the micro-inter-personal level

what remains is the value of community as a remnant of the post-Soviet era. This aspect of community can be a longing for the stability of the recent past and also a hope for the recreation of the social structure that fell apart as it in memory implies a greater element of social strength. Yet, there is no Soviet Union, yet it is a composition of competing border Societies to the dominant Russian state in the former Soviet Union. The conception that separate states exist with competing interests is somehow stunted as there is a belief in the traditional values but the current relationship is one of weaker and stronger state relations based on economic and political power. This can be interpreted as a grey area of confusion in this region of the world. Populations have not developed a full sense of ethnicity, community and history while having maintained an established social pattern of affinity with the power center, competing ideologies within a social vacuum that is not based on immediate full scale global integration and development but filtered by established power elite for whom the traditional integrative pattern with the strong Russian state is a prism for economic and social development. These variables are discussed frequently in the international press but the sociological inter-relationship within this system is presented within this article to give focus to the interpretive confusion facing the societies bordering Russia and quite possibly the contextual inability of the Russians themselves to understand the limits of their own contextual pre-disposition.

CONCLUSIONS

This article provides insight from the perspective of Belarusians as to the relationship that border societies face with Russia. Each society has its own relationship to analyze; however, issues of politics and legal state infrastructure are not the only domains for interpretation. An additional area of exploration is in the deep crevices of cultural impasse. In some instances generations if not centuries of cultural control and domination to which the Russians themselves are not immune. From the perspective of this article what is critical is that an empire has long-fallen but its cultural patterns remain as Russia and neighboring societies work to define their identities and construct power elite on the border of competing ideological systems. Even if the Soviet Union does not exist there are citizens in various post-Soviet countries who possess

the cultural values and patterns while Russia in its necessity to redesign its society has chosen familiar historical models to bring order and to reinforce a power elite. There is no Soviet Union but people continue to believe in the common, values, principles of the Soviet Union through power elite, media and an apolitical nature. As Daniel Bell reminds us, there is a system or a machine that coordinates ideas. In this article, a contemporary model of this machine has been outlined. **Essentially, individuals choose to interpret that which they know as they are bound by a temporal and physical reality. This temporal and physical reality is controlled by state history and official ideology which is based on traditional Soviet paradigms²³ which decreases the rate of integration with global structures at the micro-level of civil society while keeping a populace within an established framework at bay from the power-center, according to this analysis.**

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Endnotes

¹ President Alexander Lukashenka's address to the nation and parliament on April 22, 2014 viewed through Belarusian public television. Specifically he stated that the Belarusians, the Ukrainians and the Russians all equally come from the Rus. In this sense, he was dispelling the cultural claim that Russians have made to Ukraine and Belarus while indicating a common culture with Russia.

² Time is understood at the rate at which information is disseminated.

³ Space is understood as the geographic regions that are bound by a media and social system that reinforces a cultural pattern over collective identity.

⁴ Soviet paradigms are understood as models of thought and cultural action that have become institutionalized through the Soviet nation state framework but continue to have cultural and political use in the current social structures of post-Soviet societies.

⁵ Grigas, Agnia and Van Herpen, Marcel for Forbes, The Media has Swallowed Five Russian Myths that have Helped Putin Win in Ukraine, September 17, 2014 from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2014/09/17/the-media-has-swallowed-five-russian-myths-that-have-helped-putin-win-in-ukraine/#4532b14d6114>.

- ⁶ Wikipedia is not fully considered a trusted historical source but the idea is of turning to any source that has an objective purpose in its nature. The fundamental idea is that any of us can turn to an alternative source.
- ⁷ Conant, Eva for National Geographic Behind the Headlines: Who Are the Crimean Tatars? April 2014 from <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/03/140314-crimea-tatars-referendum-russia-muslim-ethnic-history-culture/>.
- ⁸ In a discussion with a Russian citizen with family near the refugee zone near the Ukrainian border, “Russians have only one portrayal of truth in the media, they do not have access to the language skills necessary, and out there, information is just not accessible to find an alternative perspective”.
- ⁹ A review of the literature on Ukrainian Russian relations addresses the ethnic hotspot, the policies of NATO and compromises and provides a series of expectations with Russia relations.
- ¹⁰ According to more recent perceptions, Chatyn not to be confused with Katyn was reported as actually a massacre of the local population by Ukrainian Nationalists (Kasaty, Petr The Chatyn (Khatyn) Memorial, May 2015 from <http://www.belarus-misc.org/history/chatyn.htm>).
- ¹¹ This varies in time as this initial distinction in the early 2000’s was later changed as Alexander Lukashenka later opened to the development of Belarusan identity, at least in a non-structural (academic) but cultural sense (popular music).
- ¹² Aneta Pavlenko in her analysis of Russian language in post-Soviet countries devoted a part of her analysis to the country of Belarus, which according to her findings is the only post-Soviet country which continued with Russian as its dominant language, Russian is positioned as the main language in the country, 76 percent of nursery school and 77 percent of secondary school students attended Russian language schools. In terms of the Belarusan populace, 81.2 percent identify as Belarusan but 62.8 percent use Russian as their main language at home, 98 percent of the Belarusan population is proficient at using Russian. According to her research, the Belarusan language functions more as “a badge of ethnicity than a practical language”. Pavlenko, A. (2008). *Russian in post-Soviet Countries*, „Russian Linguistics” 32(1), p. 59–80.
- ¹³ There are different levels of individual activity, which will be addressed in a separate article. Contrary to Western belief, and arising from our observations, there is a type of ultra-individualism that highlights group activity in Belarus.
- ¹⁴ Daniel Bell refers to a gradation of allegiance to ideology there are those who are more or less closely tied to the ideological models of a society. Bell, D. (1965). *Ideology and Soviet Politics*, „Slavic Review” 24(4), p. 591–603.

- ¹⁵ A choice between two-ideological civilizations refers to the conflict between Western and Eastern Civilization as the societies of Belarus and Ukraine and earlier territories have been positioned in a geographical hot spot between two systems of power.
- ¹⁶ With Russian engagement in Ukraine the Belarusian President has addressed his country in the Belarusian language and has promised increased schooling in Belarusian and has also reaffirmed that Belarus does not want to be a part of Russia but is a sovereign country.
- ¹⁷ Russia's actions in the Crimea have caused a change where the authoritarian government of Belarus has also taken a more nationalist stance.
- ¹⁸ This is also a tool that changes as an authoritarian leader makes changes to preserve power position.
- ¹⁹ Solovyov, Vladimir, *Duel: Zhirinovskiy VS Shushkevich Evening with Vladimir Solovyov* translation from Russian: *Поединок: Жириновский VS Шусткевич Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым* on April 15, 2011 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVGi0UbyFiw>.
- ²⁰ In the Russian language "Nasze" refers to what is ours. It is commonly used to distinguish between cultures. For example, a discussion with a woman in the Ukraine whose children support the pro-Kiev Western government in the Ukraine reveals that the woman is also worried about the changes but subscribes to the common values, goals and information sources that she has known, it is the information she trusts and it is those who she identifies with as an explication of events taking place.
- ²¹ Term to denote oases of symbolic comprehensive stability.
- ²² In the sense of Niklas Luhmann and the Social Construction of Reality.
- ²³ Soviet paradigms are understood as models of thought and cultural action that have become institutionalized through the Soviet nation state framework but continue to have cultural and political use in the current social structures of post-Soviet societies.