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THE LONG ECHO OF SOVIET FOLKLORE: COMPOSING AND PERFORMING NEW SONGS IN MODERN BELARUS

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This article considers a group of new songs that have appeared in the repertoires of folk ensembles in recent decades. The themes of these new songs are local and national holidays, glorification of the native village and the rural way of life and the wealth and prosperity of villagers, and they also include ironic *chastushkas* (short humorous folk songs) created on "the topic of the day". These songs are "disguised" as folk songs, but have different performance pragmatics, connected with the dominant ideology, and are largely addressed to officials. Their origin is directly related to the implementation of the Soviet Folklore project in the 1930s–1950s and its consequences. We argue that the reconceptualisation of folklore's social function – and the concurrent elevation of performers to authorial status in this period – represented a pivotal transformation, providing the framework for the subsequent flourishing of songwriting within folk ensembles. It was also facilitated by state support for amateur artistic activity. The study has revealed that a lack of critical rethinking of the Soviet Folklore project led to members of folk ensembles currently continuing to use the old Soviet strategies and models for creating new songs. New songs become part of a living folk-type culture and gain "folk" status not through anonymous provenance but via collective authorship, ritual deployment and emotional response among rural residents.

KEYWORDS: Belarusian folklore, Soviet folklore, new folk song, repertoire, holidays, amateur activity, ensemble.

The idea for this article came during field work in Hrynki village, Svislač district, Hrodna region, where I was studying the current song repertoire of folk singers. This place is famous for the recordings of folk songs made here in 1936 by Ryhor Šyrma, a well-known Belarusian folklorist and choir conductor. In Soviet times, there was a choir consisting of sixty-eight people. Later, the Spadčyna (Heritage) Ensemble was created. In 2020, nine local senior women sang in it. This folk ensemble has toured and participated in various

concerts and festivals. Their repertoire includes about three hundred songs and *chastushkas*, a third of which are self-composed songs about current topics. These are songs by individual authors, which both singers and listeners classify as folk based on a number of other characteristics: theme, melody, performer and so on. More than twenty songs were dedicated to the theme of the native village. This experience became the impetus for understanding the phenomenon of the *new folk song*.

There is no special term for these songs because they were outside the scope of research interests and were not the subject of folklore studies. In this article, we will use the term "new folk song", which refers to the concept of Soviet Folklore, which was, for the most part, a song by an individual author on current topics, to some extent, loosely based on folklore.

New folk songs have attracted little scholarly attention for several reasons. First, despite the significant changes that have taken place in folklore studies in the last two decades, namely the anthropological turn and the study of modern folklore forms, the attention of Belarusian researchers is still focused on old, classical folklore. It is still sought out and recorded during field work, while "new" songs are not recorded due to their non-folkloric nature and, often, ideological bias. Even literary works of amateur authors of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) of the 1940s–1950s, who represented Soviet Folklore, are not included in the research fields of modern folklore and literary studies (Hulak 2020, 93). Second, the study of folk songs is carried out within the framework of the scientific paradigm that was formed in Soviet times, when folklore studies were attributed to philological science. It is the text that continues to be the object of study or serves as a source of information for further research into social, mythological and other aspects (Valodzina 2018, 7–13). Songs in academic studies did not represent a person: the singer's private repertoire rarely became the subject of research. A rare exception is A. Lis's essays on folk singers (Lis 1989, 3–8; 9–36). Thus, for researchers focused on authentic folklore, the informant became a "folklore bearer". Despite many prerequisites, the anthropological turn in Belarusian folklore studies did not happen.

The research's theoretical background relies on Sovietological works dedicated to the culture of the Stalin era and its shaping of Soviet Folklore and literature. Frank Miller's study, *Folklore for Stalin. Russian Folklore and Pseudo-folklore of the Stalin Era* (Miller 1990), plays a key role in revealing the mechanisms of new Soviet Folklore creation, its relationship to traditional folk art and its transformation after Stalin's death.

The study also applies Czesław Robotycki's concept of *kultura typu ludowego* (folk-type culture) – a model that captures how symbolic thinking and performative practices rooted in folk traditions continue to function in post-socialist societies (Robotycki 1992). Robotycki defines this concept as a hybrid cultural formation in which symbolic thinking, stylised performance and aesthetic continuity persist

beyond traditional folk boundaries. Within this framework, rural Belarusian song practices are not merely residual traditions or ideological artefacts, but expressive tools shaped by collective memory, heritagisation and post-Soviet ritual use.

In *Performing Russia: Folk Revival and Russian Identity* (Olson 2004), Laura Olson demonstrates how post-Soviet folk revival in Russia involves the creative reinvention of tradition shaped by Soviet cultural legacies, where stylised performances and curated repertoires serve as vehicles of identity and symbolic continuity. Her observation that staged folklorism and amateur creativity coexist within a politicised landscape resonates strongly with Belarusian ensemble practice. Olson's approach reinforces the idea that contemporary folklore is not merely inherited but actively constructed through recognisable codes, communal emotion and performative loyalty.

Ulrich Morgenstern's article (Morgenstern 2022) offers a nuanced reinterpretation of Soviet engagement with traditional music, emphasising its dual character as both restrictive and generative. He argues that, while Soviet authorities sought to control and reshape folklore for ideological purposes, they also inadvertently created spaces for its adaptation and survival within amateur and institutional frameworks. His perspective complements analyses of Belarusian ensemble practice by revealing how state cultural policy could stimulate the creation of enduring symbolic forms that remain active in post-Soviet cultural expressions.

To understand the phenomenon of new folk songs, it is essential to consider the history of Soviet amateur artistic activity. This cultural practice provided a framework for musical creativity that shaped both the aesthetic and social dimensions of song-making during the Soviet era. Amateur ensembles functioned as key sites of localised cultural production and ideological negotiation (Rumyantsev 2000).

This article also draws on the works of Konstantin Bogdanov (Bogdanov 2009), Alexandra Arkhipova and Sergei Neklyudov (Arkhipova and Neklyudov, 2010), who analyse the intersection of folklore and state ideology in a totalitarian society. Research by Aliaksandr Hužaloŭski (Hužaloŭski 2018; Hužaloŭski 2020) and Anastasija Hulak (Hulak 2019; Hulak 2020; Hulak 2021; Hulak 2022) provides crucial insights into the Belarusian cultural landscape, especially the legacy of Soviet folkloristic discourse.

The study of new folk songs is conducted within the anthropological paradigm, employing folkloristic methods to interpret three cases of song creation on topical rural issues. Analysis of over thirty interviews with members of folklore ensembles reveals both motivations for composing new songs and the models and methods of their creation.

This article is based on materials collected by the author during fieldwork from 2011 to 2024 in all regions of Belarus. During fieldwork, sixty singers without musical education were interviewed. Most were women (56 out of 60) aged 50 to 93. Ten leaders of folklore groups and directors of rural cultural centres were also

interviewed. The interviews with the singers were built around the theme of song culture in the village, part of which was a block of questions about new songs and their place in the repertoire. The archives of the Institute of Art History, Ethnography and Folklore of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus were also used.

This article focuses on the lyrics of new folk songs, since this is the area where the creativity of folklore ensemble members is primarily manifested – they work on writing the text. Most of the new songs are written in *Trasianka* (a mix of Belarusian and Russian), while old folk songs were performed in Belarusian.

THE ORIGIN OF NEW FOLK SONGS

To understand the ongoing processes, it is necessary to turn to the experience of the past, namely, to the implementation of the Soviet Folklore project under state control in the 1930s–1950s. In the ideological discourses of this period, a special place belonged to folklore (Bogdanov 2009). During this period, the role of folklore and the status of the folklore performer changed. Frank J. Miller's detailed study of Stalinist folklore shows: "During the early 1930s, Iurii Sokolov, Russia's leading folklorist, analysed the nature of folklore and asserted its value in promulgating party doctrine among the masses. As early as 1931, in an article in 'Literatura i marksizm', he argued that the development of folklore should be controlled and that folklore should give direction to the newly developing poetry of the masses" (Miller 1990, 7). Then, "he emphasized the kinship of literature and folklore, pointing out the creative role of the singer in the performance of a work and asserting that the performer was at once creator and author" (Miller, 1990, 7). Thus, folklore performers were encouraged to create texts on contemporary themes. Folklorists helped performers become singers of contemporary life. Such creators received various benefits from the state: they became members of the Union of Soviet Writers, and their work was widely published in newspapers, literary magazines, traditional folklore collections and separate publications. In addition, they received monetary rewards. Competitions and festivals were held to stimulate the composing of new works, and valuable prizes were awarded for participation. The first two "new songs" appeared in *Pravda* – one in December 1935 and the other a year later (Miller 1990, 11).

Although Frank J. Miller conducted his research on the material of Russian Soviet Folklore, his conclusions are supported by Belarusian material. Belarusian folklorist Anastasija Hulak examined the establishment of an extensive project known as Soviet Folklore in the academic and cultural discourse. She concluded that Belarusian folklorists were claimed to be incorporated into finding and representing the work of new Soviet Folklore art, authorised and ideologically defined by those in authority. The strategies of adherence among intellectuals to the socialist discourse

during the 1930–1950 period included various forms of compromise between science, bearers of traditional culture, mass recipients of Soviet culture and the authorities. The methodological crisis in socialist science has expressed itself through the unification of folklore and the established canon (i.e., the corpus of texts of explicit ideological modality), the elimination of an entire layer of uncensored folklore texts from the scope of study, the ignoring of the dialectal nature of traditional culture in collection and editing practices, the blurring of the research subject in folklore studies due to the legitimised role of an active amateur artist, as well as amateur art and publication integrated into the research paradigm (Hulak 2019, 633–640). Many of the author's conclusions are also true in relation to military folklore of WWII (Hulak 2022).

Archival materials also indicate the close collaboration of Belarusian folklorists with folklore performers. Thus, during the first postwar decade, Michail Hrynblat, the leading ethnologist and folklorist in the BSSR, supervised several authors and performers of *skazy*[1]. The most famous of these was the storyteller Safija Sackievič. This researcher prepared the book Сказы Сахвеі Іванаўны Сацкевіч (The Skazy of Sachvieja Ivanaŭna Sackievič) for publication in 1946 (Hrynblat, M. 1946-1948). Despite the fact that many items of Stalinist folklore were never performed repeatedly or were never performed at all, rural performers learned that writing such items could be encouraged by the state (Cybikava, 1948).

It soon became clear that Soviet Folklore had poor artistic quality. Folklorists noticed that "the use of antiquated poetic forms such as the *bylina* [a Russian oral epic], the historical song, the magical tale and ceremonial poetry as a basis for the description of twentieth-century life had resulted in works devoid of artistic merit" (Miller 1990, 93). After Stalin's death in 1953, Russian folklorists attempted to redefine Soviet Folklore and to distinguish it from literature. In doing so, they abandoned the principle that a work of folklore is not essentially different from a work of literature and that the performer of a folk piece is at the same time its author (Miller 1990, 93). Most Russian folklorists regarded collectivity as the prime criterion of folklore, while a second group believed that all amateur artistic activity should be regarded as folklore (Miller 1990, 95). Eventually, scholars reached a consensus in discussions of Soviet Folklore – it began to be understood as authorial literary work of varying degrees of success (Miller 1990, 94). However, its connection with folk art remained, and the ideas about the kinship of literature and folklore and the performer-creator concept firmly took root not only among folklore researchers, but also among performers.

There was no critical rethinking of the concept of Soviet Folklore and its main characteristics in Belarusian scholarship. Belarusian folklorists continued to repeat

1 The new poetic works on contemporary life composed by folklore performers.

the thesis about the kinship of folklore and literature in the following decades (e.g., Kabašnikaŭ 1958, 159; Bartaševič 1969, 15). At a conference devoted to the results of studying Belarusian folk art, which took place in February 1969, the main focus was on modern folklore (especially in its two most popular genres – songs and chastushkas). According to researchers, the key to the development of Soviet folk song was the continued rapprochement with literature and the strengthening of their relationships (Achrymienka 1969, 15), creative exchange in the field of the song cultures of different peoples and constant innovation, strengthening the connection of songs with life and reflecting modern processes in them (Skidan 1969, 10). To confirm these theses, an example of a new group of songs about native towns and villages was given:

> Many songs (for example, "*Niasviž Lyrical", "Kapyĺ Lyrical"*) appeared precisely as derivatives of professional works, many of which use the melody of well-known songs and the rhythm of modern verse. Such works are not folklore in a 'chemically pure' form. Rather, they are the individual creativity of more or less talented representatives of the people, and it is possible to attribute them to folk art only on the basis of their wide distribution, the extent to which such works have become an integral part of the artistic life of the working masses. In general, in folk art, the individual beginning is gaining increasing importance (Bartaševič 1969, 6).

When discussing the chastushkas, the first genre of new Soviet Folklore, researchers draw attention to another aspect – its dynamism and involvement in the current political agenda:

> Working selflessly in the agricultural cooperative, the collective farmers simultaneously demonstrate their abilities in artistic creativity. Oral and poetic creativity develops in the collective farm. Modern folk poetry has become more meaningful and ideologically rich. By expressing the thoughts and feelings of Soviet people, it glorifies their creative spirit and reveals the typical character traits of a person in a socialist society. The most common form of mass poetic creativity, along with songs, is the chastushka, which is especially respected among the collective farm youth. ... In our time, the laconic song form of the chastushka has proven to be very convenient for quickly responding to various political events, which are so rich in the life of the Soviet country. Dynamism and topicality are two of the most essential features inherent in the chastushka as a special genre of song creativity. The repertoire of chastushkas existing in the collective farm is enormous. As if on wings, it flies here in different ways: on the radio, through the newspaper, songbooks, and from neighbouring collective farms. Many ditties are created right here, by the collective farmers themselves (Hrynblat and Malčanava 1958, 95).

These characteristics made chastushkas in demand in the sphere of agitation and propaganda, but also "the first 'repressed' oral genre – the first censorship campaign was directed specifically against chastushkas" (Arkhipova and Neklyudov 2010, 87).

To substantiate the concept of Soviet Folklore, Halina Bartaševič, the famous Belarusian folklorist, proposed the concept of *artelnost* (an ethos of collectivity, cooperation and teamwork). Artelnost refers to the collective process of creating songs together within an ensemble. "More often, collectivity manifests itself in the finalisation of a song, in bringing it to the 'right condition', in its performance, and in its assimilation by the masses" (Bartaševič 1969, 9). An example of artelnost was the composition of a song by members of a folklore ensemble. When justifying the concept of artelnost, Bartaševič relied on the example of the creative work of the Azierščyna Folk Choir, one of the most famous at that time in the BSSR. The choir was created in 1936 in Azierščyna village, Rečyca district, from a family singing group. It consisted of 25 singers and worked under the direction of the village house of culture. The choir's repertoire included folk songs in the regional Polesie style, songs of Belarusian composers and songs of their own composition (Babič 2010, 77). Here, the poetic texts of new songs were created by a group led by a teacher of a seven-year school, and the melody was created by another group. "But only after creative processing by the entire ensemble does the song come to life," emphasised Bartaševič (Bartaševič 1969, 9).

In the 1970s, folklorists focused their attention on authentic folklore. This happened in connection with the preparation of the multi-volume series *Беларуская народная творчасць* (Belarusian folklore)[2]. Despite the fact that the first volume in the series was Песні савецкага часу *(*Songs of the Soviet era) (Kabašnikaŭ 1970), all the other volumes were devoted to traditional folklore genres. Since the late 1980s, during perestroika, under the influence of the Belarusian national revival, interest in the revival of folk traditions and holidays has appeared. The history of Soviet Folklore seemed to be exhausted. Researchers stopped recording, and singers stopped performing such songs on stage.

In the 1990s, folklorists tried to understand what was happening outside the established ideological framework. Speaking about the past, they only briefly mentioned the issues of the authenticity of some works of Soviet Folklore:

> Unfortunately, until recently, we did not have an objective description of post-war folk art. Noting the emergence of new songs, chastushkas and other works, researchers

2 The series "Беларуская народная творчасць" (Belarusian Folklore) has been published by the Institute of Art History, Ethnography and Folklore of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus (formerly the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR) in Minsk since 1970. It contains almost all the basic genres of oral folklore. The series was awarded the State Prize of the BSSR for 1986 and, today, has about fifty volumes. Its publication continues today.

> kept in sight only a certain part of them, leaving everything else out of their attention. The subject matter of new works, especially in the first post-war decades, was associated with the events of the past war, with some events of local, national and international scale. In the conditions of a complicated and contradictory life and the dominance of ideological dogmas, the folklore process turned out to be just as complex and contradictory, in which one can notice both the official, largely falsified direction and free, uncensored creativity. [...] Works that corresponded to the official ideology were published in numerous collections, the purpose of which was to glorify the existing order, its leaders, their policies and real and imaginary achievements. [...] The artificiality of the overwhelming majority of works of the official direction is colourfully confirmed by the fact that they remained the individual creativity of famous and unknown authors (storytellers, professional and amateur poets and composers) and did not go beyond the pages of these publications or official amateur concerts and were not folklorised. The people did not accept them. Another fate awaits those new works that did not correspond to the official ideology and even opposed it (Kabašnikaŭ 1993, 16–17).

Until the early 1990s, the concept of Soviet Folklore and the principles for its composition were not critically rethought. Its role in Belarusian culture has not been fully studied to this day.

FOLKLORE ENSEMBLE AS A PERFORMER AND CREATOR

The practice of creating folklore ensembles was widespread in Belarus after the beginning of the twentieth century during the national revival period (Hrynevich 2024, 94). However, it reached an unprecedented scale during the Soviet period. Folklore ensembles were created and worked within the club institutions whose tasks included organising the leisure time of workers and their communist upbringing, education and development of creative abilities. They include clubs, houses of culture, houses of creative workers, teachers' houses, leisure centres and so forth, which organise leisure for residents of a particular area, the activities of amateur folk art groups and other club formations. In the late 1990s, well after the collapse of the USSR, new forms of club institutions appeared in Belarus, such as folk art centres, and some cultural and leisure institutions were re-profiled (Voronich 2007, 87–88). However, their functions have remained the same. At the present stage, ensembles continue their activities under the guidance of cultural centres and rural clubs, which in turn are subordinate to the state departments of culture at city/district/regional executive committees[3], which largely inherited the Soviet system of cultural administration.

3 The executive committee is the executive and administrative body on the territory of the region, city, district, village or village council (Kramnik 2006, 806).

Folklore ensembles are predominantly female, which is determined by the demographic situation in Belarusian villages[4]. They usually consist of women of pre-retirement and retirement age. 56 and older. As a rule, these are residents of one or more nearby villages. These are women who run the household or do ordinary village work – work on a private or collective farm, at the post office or in a village store. Singing is their way of spending their free time and is not financially rewarded.

The ensemble is headed by an artistic director, whose place is often taken by the most experienced and knowledgeable singer. The singers do not have any special musical education (the only exception could be the music directors) but have learned to sing in natural conditions from their closest relatives, older people (mothers, grandmothers, aunts, etc.): "They went to work in the field, or went to the forest, where they collected cranberries or strawberries. They grew up on these songs. It was not necessary to teach them"[5]. Olson's ethnographic observation underlines the fact that those older women in village ensembles function not only as performers but as living repositories of memory and identity (Olson 2004).

The desire for public performances manifested itself early – many participants of folklore groups note that from an early age they were involved in amateur art activities in amateur ensembles at the level of school, technical school or their first workplace. The performers not only experienced Soviet practices and principles of managing amateur cultural activities, but also largely formed as singers under them. Basic ideas about the official repertoire for mass public events were also laid here. Thus, such ensembles were more than performative collectives: they were laboratories of cultural negotiation, where participants internalised prescribed narratives while subtly reshaping them through personal emotions and collective practice (Rumyantsev 2000).

REPERTOIRE OF THE FOLKLORE ENSEMBLE

The repertoire of folk ensembles is based on local and regional folklore, which the participants know and perform well. It includes calendar and family ritual songs, as well as folk song lyrics, ballads and chastushkas. Often these are songs that the singers have known since childhood.

> – And how do you choose folk songs: from the Internet, from books, or do you remember them yourself?

4 National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus. *Population by age, sex and locality type, 2019 Census data.* Retrieved from https://census.belstat.gov.by/saiku/?guest=true&lang=be&default_view_state=edit#query/open//public/F101N_be.saiku

5 Recorded by S. Doŭhušaŭ in the village of Smalianica, Pružany district, Brest region.

– First, we remember who, where, when and what was sung.
– What my mother used to sing, what my aunt used to sing (Hrynevich, Hruntou. 2020).

Two distinct modes of song preservation emerge from ethnographic interviews. Some singers rely solely on oral memory, associating songs with personal experience and long-standing emotional resonance: "I know these songs from youth, they never leave the head. These are songs of my early years" (Hrynevich, Vnukovich, Shrubok 2019). Others maintain curated songbooks, including regularly performed items and new compositions intended for future use. These archives encompass a diverse thematic range: folk songs and songs by individual authors, ballads and chastushkas.

The repertoire is not static: ensembles actively expand it in response to public and seasonal needs. As one informant explained:

– And how many songs do you have in your repertoire?
– Oh, my dear, a hundred!
– What?! There were a hundred and one songs in the repertoire seven years ago! Perhaps there are already two or three hundred songs. Some of them we sing only once, and there are also many humorous songs, chastushkas (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020).

Ensemble members and artistic directors collaboratively serve as collective censors, determining which songs are appropriate for public performance.

The informants put the songs they compose themselves into a separate category: "Oh, and what songs do we sing! Well, first of all, we sing folk songs, we sing asongs by individual authors. We have sung a lot of songs like 'Na Mamayevom Kurgane' [On Mamaev Mound]. These kinds of songs we sang in the past. We compose our own songs" (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020). The singers distinguish between the modern and Soviet repertoire by the presence of Russian folk songs in it: "Here I say, we used to sing a lot of songs by individual authors and even Russian folk songs, but now we sing mostly Belarusian ones" (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020).

The singers make a clear distinction between the official, public and private repertoire. Unlike the private repertoire, which is performed independently or in the company of relatives or close friends, and through which there is an unlimited expression of intimate feelings and experiences associated with personal destiny, the "official" one allows less freedom and is limited by stricter frameworks. There is a group of songs, well known and loved by all informants, which is rarely performed on stage, although it is present in the official list of songs from the repertoire of the folklore group (Hrynevich, 2014). These are the so-called "pitiful" songs

– romances – the plots of which revolve around family and love stories that have a tragic ending: murder, suicide or death from grief. The romances "Matrasenok na reke" (Sailor boy on the river), "Kalasilas' v pole rozh' gustaya" (Thick rye was sprouting in the field), "Na Varshavskom stolichnom vokzale" (At Warsaw Central Railway Station) and others have long been popular among rural inhabitants. These songs have been recorded in almost every folklore expedition over the past ten years (e.g., Hrynevich, Vnukovich, Shrubok, 2019, Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020, Hrynevich, Vasiljeva, 2020, etc.)

Folk ensembles face an imperative to renew their repertoires in order to stay meaningful within changing public and ritual contexts. To expand their repertoire, they use different strategies. One common strategy involves processing and adapting the text of a well-known folk song to new needs (so-called *perelazhenie* (the adaptation of a well-known folk song to create new lyrics or fit a specific occasion):

> And also ... if we need a song for some event and we don't have enough, we can make it ourselves. In short, let's take a well-known melody, this one "Iz-pod kamnya, iz-pod belogo ..." [Out from under the stone, from under the white stone], there is such a "Techet Rechen'ka" [The stream flows]. We didn't like the line "The husband took his wife to drown", and composed a song specifically for the victory, for the war. We simply wrote the lyrics ourselves, and in the end, we got such an interesting song (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020).

Reworking the text leads to too much "swaying" of the message's meaning, which can lead to a partial or even complete loss of the transmitted information (Neklyudov 2013). Thus, the songs in the ensemble's repertoire are supplemented with new themes and models of text creation that are not typical for folklore.

An important strategy for repertoire replenishment in Belarusian folk ensembles is the translation of foreign folk songs, especially Ukrainian ones. In Hrynki village, for instance, singers deliberately seek out "cheerful and life-affirming" Ukrainian melodies to offset what they perceive as the predominantly melancholic tone of Belarusian songs. One ensemble member explained:

> Belarusian folk songs are all so sad – unhappy love, marriage – and she suffers there, poor thing. Ukrainian songs are all cheerful, and we take some interesting Ukrainian song, our author translates it into Belarusian, and we sing it. And a dispute arises. Here, Ukrainians do even say "This is our song." And we say, "No, you took it from us." (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020)

Once integrated into the Belarusian ensemble repertoire, these translated songs undergo a process of aesthetic and functional transformation. According to Chistov, they "not only lose their distinctive local features and broaden their social reach, but they also cease to vary and, most importantly, come to inhabit non-traditional contexts – non-everyday, non-ritual settings such as staged or professional performances, printed editions or media broadcasts – and in so doing acquire new meanings, structures and functions that they never had before" (Chistov 1986, 10).

Another significant source of replenishment of the repertoire is the writing of new songs. Ensemble members routinely collaboratively compose new lyrics for local festivals, state holidays and anniversaries. They highlight several dominant themes: the native village, or local or state holidays. The song's appearance about the native village is timed to the village festival, which does not have a single date and is held in large villages once every four years. Among the state holidays, the most important for amateur artistic activities are Victory Day[6], the Day of the Elderly[7] and Mother's Day[8]. Songs dedicated to these events are always included in festive concert programmes. We also recorded songs, composed by folk group members, which were dedicated to the harvest festival, which has been of national importance for the last twenty-five years. This practice underscores performers' active role as both bearers and creators of symbolic culture, reinforcing Czesław Robotycki's notion of folk-type culture as a living system in which tradition and invention coexist.

These strategies for forming and replenishing the repertoire highlight ensembles' creative agency and the fluid boundaries of "folk". The status of a song as "folk" derives not from its anonymous origin or a fixed tradition, but from communal recognition, ritual utility and symbolic resonance. Translated Ukrainian tunes and newly authored works alike attest to a living folk-type culture, continually replenished through performative adaptation and shared memory transmission.

CELEBRATION OF THE BEGINNING OF THE HARVEST IN THE FIELD

Since 1996, the traditional Dažynki[9] Harvest Festival has received a stronger ideological context. In its new format, Dažynki is held as a fair where the best grain growers are awarded. The festival began to be viewed by propaganda as a report of rural

6 Celebrated on 9 May.

7 Celebrated on 1 October.

8 Celebrated on 14 October.

9 Traditionally, rural communities celebrated the beginning and end of the harvest. Today, the most important of them is Dažynki, which marks the end of the grain harvest.

workers to the authorities, to the president. The nationwide festival has been held annually in one of the major regional centres. In 2014, the concept changed: Dažynki began to be held in agro-towns, and at the regional level – in one of the district centres of each region, with the exception of the regional centres.

Every year, the authentic Chatovičy Folk Ensemble[10] from Chatyničy village in Hancavičy district, Brest region, known for preserving the local authentic manner of singing, takes part in the celebration of the beginning of the harvest – *Zažynki*. The festival is attended by combine harvester drivers, the head of the district, the head of the village council, the head of the agricultural cooperative, the priest and a folklore ensemble. A ritual is performed on the field. First, the singers greet the field, and second, while singing songs, they manually reap the first sheaf. After that, the first sheaf is handed over to the "master of the field" – the agricultural cooperative chairman and the district head. On this occasion, a new song appears in the ensemble's repertoire. Despite the presence of a large corpus of folk songs dedicated to this holiday, among them there are no lyrics addressed to important participants in the event – representatives of the authorities: "We sang to our combine drivers and the chairman. This is what we composed ourselves, our ensemble"[11]. The basis of such relations between the working female reapers and singers with the chairman is the peasant/lord model described by A. Engelking. In her research, she came to a conclusion about the long duration of cognitive structures that, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, continue to categorise social reality according to pre-modern, deeply archaic models belonging to the era of feudalism (Engelking, 2014, 254–272). The new song describes what happens in the field during the ritual:

Jduć kambajny ŭ polie žyta zažynać
A žonki z sierpami kalasy źbirać
A žonki z sierpami kolosy źbirać
Našy kombajniory chlopcy-molojcy
Ubirajuć žyto do samoj nočy
J ubirajuć žyto do samoj nočy
Predsiedacieĺ jedzia j ulybajecca
Joho rož hustaja j ubirajacca
Joho rož hustaja j ubirajacca
Joho rož hustaja j ubirajacca
Žyź taka prekrasna prodalžajecca
Žyź taka prekrasna prodalžajecca[12].

10 Chatovičy Folk Ensemble was created in 1976.

11 Recorded in 2018 by S. Doŭhušaŭ in the village Chatyničy, Hancavičy district, Brest region.

12 Recorded in 2018 by S. Doŭhušaŭ in the village Chatyničy, Hancavičy district, Brest region.

Combine harvesters go to harvest rye,
And the wives go with sickles to collect ears of corn
And the wives go with sickles to collect ears of corn
Our harvesters are good guys
Rye is harvested until nightfall
And rye is harvested until nightfall
The chairman of the collective farm is driving and smiling
His thick rye is reaped
His thick rye is reaped
His thick rye is reaped
Such a beautiful life goes on
Such a beautiful life goes on.

Although the singers attribute the song as "harvest, modern", it is based on the melody of a well-known drinking song. To compose the song, the authors used perelazhenie – processing and adapting the text of a well-known folk song to new needs. The songs are enriched with new themes, not typical of folk art. Songs composed on the model of folklore or stylisation are perceived by singers as "folk".

The local manner of performance does not allow an unprepared listener to recognise the song as new. However, the text inherits the folk harvest song. Its content is concentrated around the field that gives bread: ripe rye; the main character is a working person, a female reaper, who appears against a broad natural and social background (Lis 1993, 6). In this example, the traditional harvest song's glorification of the hard-working reaper who worked late in the field is replaced by the glorification of new characters – the combine operators and the chairman of the agricultural cooperative. The usual images taken from the agricultural sphere are replaced by a more relevant and appropriate situation to express a new meaning – a demonstration of symbolic loyalty to the authorities in the person of the chairman.

SONGS ABOUT THE NATIVE VILLAGE

Songs about the native village, which began to gain popularity in the 1960s, are today the most widespread group of new folk songs. Their creation is dedicated to the celebration of Village Day, which is usually held once every four years. The only exceptions are villages with a large number of residents, where the holiday can be held annually.

This song was performed at a song contest and is a vivid example of new songs about the native village:

Himn Dukory
Miž luhoŭ šyrokich, miž liasoŭ zialionych
U siaredzinie minskaj voĺnaje ziamli
Ty staiš pryhoža, rodnaja Dukora,
A vakol runiejuć rodnyja pali.
Ty bahata chliebam, malakom i miasam,
Dobra rodzić buĺba i na buraki,
A jašče bahata rodnaja Dukora
Čystymi damami, dobrymi liudźmi. U-u-ch!
Na vajnu z fašyzmam ty synoŭ paslala –
Baranić radzimu, rodnyja pali.
I ŭ centry vioski ŭzniali my pomnik
Tym, chto pachavany ŭ čužoj ziamli. U-u-ch!
Kab žyla ty viečna, darahaja vioska,
Bahaciei-liudzi ščasliva žyli.
Kab byli štotydzień u sialie viasielli,
A ŭ damach pryhožych i syny rasli,
Kab byli štotydzień u sialie viasielli,
A ŭ damach kab dočki i syny rasli.

Anthem of Dukora
Between wide meadows, between green forests
In the middle of Minsk free land
You are beautiful, dear Dukora,
And native fields are ripening around.
You are rich in bread, milk and meat,
Potatoes and beets give a good harvest,
And you, dear Dukora, are full of
Clean houses and good people. Whoah!
You sent your sons to the war with fascism –
Defending the homeland and native fields.
And we erected a monument in the centre of the village
To those who are buried in a foreign land. Whoah!
We wish that you live forever, dear village,
That rich people live happily.
To have weekly weddings in the village,
And sons to grow up in beautiful houses,
To have weekly weddings in the village,
And daughters and sons to grow up in houses.

The song is involved in creating the image of the village and the region, which determines its content and form. These are descriptions of local nature, the village

way of life, which is, as a rule, idealised. Simple plots are made up of lists of things that symbolise prosperity, wealth as understood by the villagers and historical events in which the village was involved. Often, the song ends with wishes for the village to continue to exist and to increase the number of young families and children.

Bo *ŭ* Hrynkach – častujuć usich "puščankaj",
Bo *ŭ* Hrynkach – jaječki jesć i škvarka
Bo *ŭ* Hrynkach – smiatana i miadočak,
Bo *ŭ* Hrynkach – pad kožnym pniom hrybočak,
Bo *ŭ* Hrynkach – usie dzietki jak malinki,
Bo *ŭ* Hrynkach – i matablok-mašyna,
Bo *ŭ* Hrynkach – žyvuć usie bahata,
Bo *ŭ* Hrynkach – što ni dzień to sviata.
A *ŭ* Hrynkach – karovy tut pasucca,
A *ŭ* Hrynkach – usie kurački niasucca,
A *ŭ* Hrynkach – kabančyk u kožnaj chacie,
A *ŭ* Hrynkach – by kvietki dziaŭčaty,
A *ŭ* Hrynkach – rascie ŭsio ŭ aharodzie,
A *ŭ* Hrynkach – zabavie čas znachodziać,
A *ŭ* Hrynkach – usie samahon smakujuć,
A *ŭ* Hrynkach – spiavajuć i tancujuć.

Because in Hrynki, locals treat everyone with *pushchanka*[13],
Because in Hrynki, there are eggs and lard,
Because in Hrynki, there is sour cream and honey,
Because in Hrynki, there are mushrooms under every tree stump,
Because in Hrynki, all children are like raspberries,
Because in Hrynki, there is a walk-behind tractor,
Because in Hrynki, everyone lives richly,
Because in Hrynki, every day is a holiday.
And in Hrynki, cows graze,
And in Hrynki, all the chickens are laying eggs,
And in Hrynki, there is a boar in every house,
And in Hrynki, girls are like flowers,
And in Hrynki, all plants grow in the garden,
And in Hrynki, everyone finds time to have fun,
And in Hrynki everyone tastes moonshine,
And in Hrynki, everyone sings and dances.
(Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020)

13 The local name for moonshine, a strong alcoholic drink.

Songs about the native village can become the calling card of folklore ensembles over time. Such songs often begin performances at various concerts and festivals. Field materials show that people try to learn new songs by heart. Learning them happens rather quickly and easily, since the theme of the native village, their homeland, is very close to the villagers.

The performance of such songs evokes a feeling of community and local patriotism, which unites people. An expeditionary case related to the implementation of this work is indicative in this regard. The leader of the Spadchyna Ensemble first began to sing the piece several times because she could not hold back her tears, and then explained that "I'm just getting sentimental with my old age" (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020). During the interview, the woman returned to the song several times and emphasised that it accurately describes the local nature, which she missed so much while living abroad.

The singers are constantly looking for new lyrics to create songs about their native village: they follow the publication of poems by local poets in regional newspapers (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2021; Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020). The newspaper *Друг пенсионера*[14] (The Pensioner's Friend) is extremely popular among the older generation. The last page contains popular songs and poems, including those dedicated to the homeland and the village. A significant part of these songs entered the repertoire from external sources, the main one today being the Internet: "And now the Internet is a great force! We find songs there. There are some interesting videos from the feast" (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020). When preparing a song for inclusion in the repertoire, a certain amount of textual work takes place, and the musical side of the song is also processed – new arrangements are created. Radio and television continue to be important sources of new songs. For example, the TV show *Наперад у мінулае* (Forward to the Past) is dedicated to the song culture of Belarus. Each programme is a weekly report on an expedition to a village where folklore heritage is still preserved. Belarusian folk songs acquire a modern sound through a new arrangement by pop singers.

Popular foreign folk songs and their translations into Belarusian take a special place when creating songs about the rural way of life: "Ukrainian songs are cheerful, and we take an interesting Ukrainian song, our author translates it into Belarusian, and we sing it" (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020).

In the absence of a special song about their native village, singers used the song "Derevnya moya, derevyannaya dal'nyaya" (My Wooden and Distant Village) to the words of the Kazakh poet Vladimir Gundarev. This song has firmly entered the repertoire of the older generation of singers, as expedition materials show. Another group of original works performed as songs about the native village are works

14 A weekly newspaper for seniors with a TV programme. Published since 21 October 2003.

dedicated to Belarus ("Naš kraj" (Our Land), "Bielaruś maja" (My country Belarus), "Kraj suničny, kraj rabinavy" (Strawberry Land, Rowan-Coloured Land)). In addition, we recorded Russian-language songs from the repertoire of Russian vocal groups, which are used as songs about the native village ("Derevnya moya zateryalas'" [My Village was Lost]), "Zhdut v derevne garmonista" [The Village is Waiting for an Accordion Player], "Zhivet selo rodnoye" [My Native Village is alive], etc.). They reflect themes of homesickness, regret for a youth and childhood that have passed quickly, the desire to return to those times and the simultaneous awareness of the impossibility of this. The images of the village, its inhabitants and the peculiarities of rural life are idealised and contrasted with the city and its way of life. Often, such songs end with a call to return to the place of birth.

At the same time, some collectives introduce well-known works about the village into their repertoire, varying the songs during the tour according to the state of the village. For example, in large villages they sing about well-being and prosperity, and in sparsely populated ones, about decay (Hrynevich, Vasiljeva, 2020).

CHASTUSHKAS

Today, as in Soviet times, the chastushkas remain one of the most productive forms of folklore. Singers prefer chastushkas of their own authorship over already known and published ones. If composing a new song is a long process involving several members of a folk ensemble, then composing a chastushka is more of a quick reaction to current local events or some socio-political issues, which does not involve serious work on the text: "And we have many of these chastushkas, satirical ones. And even on the radio they say 'crisis'. He gives us this crisis, and we give chastushkas!" (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020).

Rankam voču adkryvaju,
tut i radyjo hučyć,
prezident naš vystupaje,
navučaje jak nam žyć.
Pra dabaŭku nie pytajcie,
bo z hrašyma nie viazie,
tužaj pojas zažymajcie,
kryzis užo da nas paŭzie.

I open my eyes in the morning
The radio is playing here
Our president speaks
Teaches us how to live.

Don't ask for extra payment
Because he was unlucky with money,
Tighten your belt,
The crisis is already creeping up on us.
(Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020)

Despite the fact that this chastushka is included in the Spadchyna Ensemble's concert repertoire and is often sung at concerts, its performance to folklorists caused sudden embarrassment in the artistic director of the ensemble and a refusal to repeat or discuss its text

According to the singers, chastushkas are very popular at concerts, which stimulates the creation of new texts: "And when we travel, and we travel a lot with these concerts in the regions, everywhere they always ask us to sing these chastushkas 'on the topic of the day'" (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020). The members of this ensemble sang the most popular chastushka:

Oj, i hora biez nudy,
a ja baba choć kudy,
haryć usio u maich rukach,
toĺki treba mužyka.

Oh, and grief without boredom
And I am a capable woman
Everything burns in my hands
I just need a man.
(Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020)

Some chastushkas contain a critical message that is understandable to local residents, but addressed to the heads of the district administration: "Until they built a highway for us", Seryoga wrote to us: "The road twist[ed] and turn[ed] making teeth chatter ... When we were driving, our road was so disgusting, and we sang, because we live in a dead end and no one comes to us" (Hrynevich, Hruntou, 2020). The singers note that the audience reacts positively to such works. The performance of such chastushkas, which touch on sensitive topics for local residents, makes the folklore ensemble's repertoire relevant and not clichéd.

CONCLUSIONS

The origin of new folk songs is directly related to the project known as Soviet Folklore. Its implementation in the 1930s–1950s, which involved folklorists, folklore performers and the government, led to long-term consequences. We argue that the reconceptualisation of folklore's social function – and the concurrent elevation of performers to authorial status – during the 1930s–1950s represented a pivotal transformation, providing the framework for the subsequent flourishing of amateur creativity within folk ensembles. The idea of the role of folklore in society changed significantly: its value began to be directly related to assistance in the growth of socialist construction. The concept of folklore has been redefined, and the idea of its authorship and the attitude towards the performer have changed. Despite the criticism of the term Soviet Folklore after Stalin's death in 1953, performers did not forget the experience of pseudo-folklore creativity. Pseudo-folklore works continued to be published and performed on stage by folklore ensembles. Later, in the 1960s–1980s, state support for amateur creativity contributed to the enduring popularity of writing new folk songs.

There was no critical rethinking of the term Soviet Folklore in Belarusian Soviet science. Folklorists continued to repeat the thesis about the kinship of folklore and literature and the growth of individual authorship in folk art in the following decades. The growing interest in authentic folklore and rituals left the results of the experiment in creating Soviet Folklore outside the scope of research attention.

Even after the collapse of the USSR and the acquisition of independence in Belarus, the consequences of implementing the Soviet Folklore project were not critically assessed, and the management practices of amateur cultural activities were not revised. This provided space for the further development of amateur creativity based on old models.

Under the new political and socio-cultural conditions, folklore ensembles continue to compose and perform new songs. They continue to use models learned during the Soviet era to produce new songs for official public events. Such creativity stimulates demand in cultural amateur activities and the appearance of new dates in the holiday calendar (according to field research, the most important for rural areas are Village Day, Mother's Day, Elderly Persons' Day, Victory Day and harvest holidays).

The largest group of new songs are songs about the native village. Songs about the native village become the calling card of the ensemble and represent the village and the singers at official events, concerts and festivals. Songs about the native village construct narratives about the homeland and idealised rural life, directly appealing to folk tradition and realising the authors' ideas about beauty. The plots of such songs are created through the description of prosperity and wealth, including natural wealth – important in the mind of a villager. The songs also include Soviet codes about the absence of war, peaceful work, soldiers who died in battle, monuments and obelisks. Their transmission is an act of loyalty both at the level of action and at

the level of content. Songs about the native village are local phenomena that exist within the boundaries of specific villages and regions.

Another group of songs inherits ritual songs and is performed during the celebration of holidays associated with calendar rituals. Stylised as a folk song at the level of text or melody, it has new meanings and has different pragmatics of performance, largely focused on representatives of authorities.

Composing chastushkas, the most productive folk genre today, is the result of a positive reaction from the public. Their themes cover local events, holidays and issues from socio-political life. The performance of ditties related to local realities, which have a critical message, makes the repertoire in demand among the local public.

When creating new songs, the authors use already known techniques and models. They compose new texts to well-known folk melodies, adapt the texts of folk songs or translate them from one language to another. Songs created on the model of folklore works or stylisation are perceived by singers as "folk". Newly composed "folk" songs are recognised as such, not because their origins are anonymous, but because they satisfy the formal, functional and social criteria of folk-type culture.

These songs reproduce the melodic patterns, formulaic language and ritual pragmatics of folklore repertoire. By setting fresh lyrics to familiar tunes, adapting stock motifs (village, harvest or community) and deploying them at specific points in the calendar or at official ceremonies, performers weave new material into existing folk-type templates. Audiences hear the same rhythmic and stylistic features that mark folk songs.

Second, authorship remains collective rather than individual. Although specific ensemble members draft texts or arrange tunes, the songs emerge through collaborative rehearsal, oral transmission and iterative local validation. They are learned by heart, taught in village clubs and passed down alongside older repertoire – just like "real" folk tunes.

Finally, the performance context and emotional response of rural residents confer authenticity. These pieces are sung by folk ensembles at festivals, anniversaries and public gatherings where the symbolic power of folk music is mobilised. In Robotycki's terms, they achieve "folk" status through communal recognition, ritual deployment and emotional investment. In other words, they become part of a living folk-type culture by doing exactly what traditional songs do: binding community, commemorating shared experience and continually renewing themselves through performance.

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