Ethnologia Polona, vol. 46: 2025, 5–16
PL ISSN 0137 -4079, DOI: 10.23858/ethp.2025.46.3961

S P E C I A L I S S U E

INTRODUCTION: THE END OF THE "POST"? BELARUSIAN ETHNOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY AFTER THE SOVIET ERA[1]

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The idea for this issue was born in the summer of 2024, during a conference in Sanok, Poland, devoted to building dialogue between Polish and Ukrainian anthropologists[2]. The organisers invited Katarzyna Waszczyńska and Stsiapan Zakharkevich to introduce the participants to the situation of ethnology in and of Belarus, in the form of a discussion panel. Anna Engelking, a co-editor of this special issue, was also present during this conference. This special issue can be seen as an extension of this event.

We decided not to narrow the issue to a specific topic or issue, but to take a generalist approach. Our question has been: How diverse are the approaches among ethnologists, anthropologists, ethnographers – whatever they call themselves – who are engaged with Belarus both as researchers as well as citizens? What issues do they address? What methods do they use? What theoretical fields do they refer to? It is worth recalling Chris Hann's words in the preface to the now-classic book *One Discipline, Four Paths*:

> It seems to me undeniable that the diverse trajectories of anthropology (which, of course, we take as an umbrella concept, subsuming fields such as ethnology and ethnography, as well as folklore, museum studies, and so on) have indeed been deeply marked by their "national" settings, that is, by different intellectual contexts as well as different social and political environments. This is nowhere more evident than in East-Central Europe. (Hann 2005: VIII)

It was this notion that became the foundational idea for this issue. We have abandoned disciplinary distinctions such as ethnology, anthropology, folklore studies

1 This research was supported by EU4Belarus – SALT II grant number ENI/2021/423-841-0057

2 See conference report here: https://journals.iaepan.pl/ethp/article/view/3959

and others, although they do exist in contemporary Belarus. We have sought to preserve and convey what can be called the Belarusian intellectual context, in which researchers move and of which they are a part. We also wanted to show the spectrum of this intellectual context as it is reflected in the differences between the modes of writing articles in this volume, their themes, logic, methodology and theoretical approaches. We do not want to speculate about the relations of those differences to factors such as generational differences or the greater or lesser involvement of particular authors in Western academia. We leave all this to attentive readers. Our goal is to show the spectrum in which the academics who base their work on research in Belarus move.

Why does the title of this issue, *The End of the "Post"?*, end with a question mark? The prefix "post-" often denotes a theoretical or historical departure from the previous dominant paradigm. This does not always imply a complete rejection, but rather a reassessment and engagement with the legacy of the previous era. Examples include postsocialism, poststructuralism and postprocessual archaeology, each of which represents a departure from or critique of prior approaches. Our reflections and decisions were obviously influenced by the concept of postsocialism, used in reference to Central and Eastern Europe for over thirty years now. Postsocialism is not simply the period after socialism, it also reflects an attitude towards the socialist past, often implying the need to overcome its legacy (Humphrey 2002, Buchowski 2012, Müller 2019, Šliavaitė 2020). Our title signifies not only a recognition of the need for change in Belarusian ethnology and anthropology but also an actual shift in methodology, subject matter and critical reflection on the role of the past period. We did not seek to conceptualise the development of Belarusian scholarship in a unilinear, directed manner. The question mark signifies the ambiguity or impossibility of determining a specific chronological framework for the post- related changes. The issue also includes texts by authors who either no longer feel the influence of the Soviet era on the development of ethnology/anthropology in Belarus or have managed to avoid it, pursuing their academic careers outside of Belarus. The title problematises the theme of continuity, power and categorisation (Šliavaitė 2020, 12).

The release of the "Belarusian" issue of the journal *Etnologia Polona* coincides with the de facto centenary of Belarusian academic ethnology. While this was not the original intention, the issue ultimately has a symbolic and commemorative dimension. In March 1925, a separate structural unit, the Ethnographic Commission, was established at the Institute of Belarusian Culture in Minsk.[3] It was intended to become a centre for the development of research on the culture of Belarusians and other peoples inhabiting Belarus. In the summer of 1925, the Ethnographic

3 The first Belarusian academic institution (1922), which in 1929 was transformed into the Belarusian Academy of Sciences. In Belarusian historiography, it is commonly abbreviated as Inbelkult.

Commission announced its research plans and began its work that fall. The commission gathered those interested in the ethnography of Belarus at the time (a very small group, likely no more than a dozen people). It is worth noting that professional ethnographers (those with specialised higher education and a clear understanding of ethnographic research methodology) were virtually nonexistent at the time. Ethnography was primarily carried out by well-educated humanities scholars with backgrounds in history, philology or literary criticism. The commission brought together a small group of researchers – Isaak Serbov, Mikhail Meleshko, Alexander Shlyubsky, Nikolai Kasperovich, Vaclav Lastovsky and others. This largely represented a nationally oriented generation of humanities scholars who sought to formulate their own Belarusian national discourse through the ethnography of Belarus. Particular attention was paid to moving beyond Polish- and Russian-centric views of Belarusians and Belarus. This national discourse was made possible by both the changes in the general historical context as well as within the Belarusian ethnographic community. Firstly, the creation of a national state (the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic) within the Soviet Empire forced the Bolsheviks to agree to the creation of Belarusian national scientific and artistic institutions that developed language, literature, theatre, art, architecture and so on.[4] Secondly, in the early 1920s, a generational shift in ethnography occurred in Belarus – a nationally oriented generation replaced that of imperial ethnographers-officials, whose research was done within the Russia-centric colonial context.

Despite the small number of nationally – oriented Belarusian ethnographers and the fact that most of them were repressed by the Soviet regime, with many dying as a result in the 1930s, it was this generation that laid the foundation for the further development of ethnography in Belarus. Collections of folklore materials and articles on the material and spiritual culture of the Belarusian rural population were published. Attempts were made to create and develop ethnographic journals and collections. Research into the history of Belarusian ethnography began, and ethnographic expeditions were conducted. This activity inspired the emergence of a new generation of Belarusian Soviet ethnographers (the revolutionary Marxist generation), who received their professional training in Soviet academic centres (primarily at Leningrad State University) – Olga Boyar, Moisei Grinblat, Ivan Dyshchenko, Anton Supinsky and others. It was this revolutionary generation that, during the political repressions of the 1930s, carried out the epistemological transformation of the idealistic, nationally oriented ethnography of Belarus into the rigid framework of Marxist ideology, class struggle and also ideals of positivist science. The introduction of mandatory fieldwork expeditions, photographic documentation and artefacts

4 The process was called "Belarusisation".

sketched by artists, the division of culture into the material and the spiritual, the focus on the "remnants of the past" and "traditions", all were hallmarks of this period. A dramatic example of epistemological violence through physical violence is the fate of the only professional ethnographer of the nationally oriented generation of Belarusian ethnographers – Alexander Shlyubsky (Zakharkevich 2025). A sharp critic of Polonisation and Russification, he sought to identify and describe the uniqueness of Belarusian national culture in the 1920s. After two arrests and exiles (in 1930 and 1935), he was forced to change his scientific and political views and received the right to publish articles in an ideologically correct Marxist spirit in the central Soviet ethnographic journal *Soviet Ethnography*.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, repressions continued, ultimately cementing both ideological and epistemological control over Belarusian ethnography by the political authorities of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) and the USSR, as well as the metropolitan Soviet academic centres. The academic career of folklorist Maria Meerovich was ruined, and one of the leading Soviet folklorists, Lev Barag, was expelled from Belarus. These repressions resonated widely within the Belarusian Soviet academic community and further strengthened control over ethnography and the academic community's self-censorship.

In addition to the ideological and theoretical restructuring of Belarusian Soviet ethnography, it was simultaneously integrated into the hierarchical imperial academic system, relegating ethnographers to the secondary role of "hardened field workers" with a deep understanding of local specifics. Essentially, centralisation and strengthening of epistemological control occurred in Soviet ethnography (as in other humanities and non-humanities sciences) through the creation of a power and disciplinary academic hierarchy with centres of power in the metropolis. This hierarchy had already begun to take shape during the Russian Empire, when various scientific societies were founded in St. Petersburg. Branches were then opened in the regions; for example, the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (1845) opened the Northwestern Branch of the Russian Geographical Society in Vilnius in 1867. Its research goals and interests covered the territories of modern-day Belarus, Lithuania and Latvia. In the USSR, the Academy of Sciences of the USSR was established, to which the Academies of Sciences in the Soviet republics were formally subordinate. A somewhat different, but similar, system was formed at universities. It was the branches of the USSR Academy of Sciences and the departments and faculties of Moscow State University and Leningrad State University that dominated the formal academic hierarchy. After World War II, the practice of holding annual ethnographic conferences in Moscow was established in Soviet ethnography. These conferences summarised the results of the fieldwork season and formulated theoretical and methodological frameworks for all the ethnographers in the USSR. Belarusian ethnographers

were required to participate, and they then disseminated the stated epistemological requirements among local researchers. The publication of final theoretical articles by Moscow and Leningrad scholars in the central journal *Soviet Ethnography* reinforced this practice. Subscriptions to the journal were mandatory for all relevant academic institutions, as well as for all leading researchers in all Soviet republics.

The institutional hierarchies were reinforced by disciplinary ones. After the heated debates of 1929–1933, ethnography took a position of an auxiliary historical discipline within the Soviet humanities – this significantly historicised ethnography. In Belarus, from 1930 to 1957, academic ethnography was part of the Institute of History. In 1957, a new institute – the Institute of Art History, Ethnography and Folklore – was created within the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR. This was an important step towards strengthening the subjectivity of Belarusian ethnography and its position within the hierarchy of the humanities in the republic. Ethnography emerged from the direct subordination of historical science, although it remained somewhat epistemologically and formally dependent.[5] After World War II, folklore studies in the USSR (and, consequently, in the union republics) gradually became part of philology, leading to a disciplinary divergence between ethnography and folklore studies. Gradually, ethnographers focused on the material culture of Belarusians, while folklorists concentrated on their spiritual culture. However, common ground certainly did not disappear.

The only university department that offered training in ethnography during the Soviet period in Belarus was located in the Faculty of History of the Belarusian State University in Minsk. This was the Department of Archaeology, Ethnography and Auxiliary Historical Disciplines (established in 1973).[6] A full-fledged university specialisation in ethnography did not exist in Belarus during the Soviet era. For a long time, Belorusian ethnographers were trained in Leningrad and Moscow. Only in the 1960s did a national Belarusian academic community of ethnographers begin to form (nine candidate and two doctoral theses on Belarusian topics were defended in the 1960s). In the 1970s, this trend continued, with twelve candidate dissertations defended. From the 1960s to the 1980s, scholarly collections and monographs on the ethnography of Belarus began to be published regularly, though the number of titles was small. It was during this period that the institutionalisation of Belarusian ethnography was finally completed. If we take 1925 as the starting point, it took roughly fifty years to create a sustainable system of knowledge transfer

5 For example, dissertations in ethnography were defended in historical councils, or those who defended them received a candidate's or doctoral degree in historical sciences. This formal relationship persists in Belarus to this day.

6 We are talking specifically about ethnography. Folklorists, as representatives of philological sciences, were trained in philological faculties.

and self-development. However, there was no epistemological independence for Belarusian Soviet ethnography.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Belarusian ethnographers focused on studying the culture of Belarus's rural population. Researchers examined the works of imperial nineteenth- and early twentieth century ethnographers (Pavel Shein, Nikolai Nikiforovsky, Evdokim Romanov, Vladimir Dobrovolsky, Isaak Serbov, M. Dovnar-Zapolsky and others), viewing their texts as authentic historical sources documenting the living culture of nineteenth century Belarusians. Concurrently, field expeditions were conducted during which ethnographers searched for traces of cultural elements or processes mentioned in nineteenth century texts. These were viewed as "remnants" or archaic features that allowed the evolution of Belarusian culture to be traced. Thus, the concept of a "traditional culture" of Belarusians gradually took shape theoretically, as a complex of material, spiritual and social features from the last third of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth centuries. In the 1990s and 2000s, this concept became the dominant discourse in Belarusian ethnology and was adopted by other humanities; it continues to function as such to this day.[7] Contemporary Belarusian ethnology has yet to rethink the legacy of imperial ethnographers critically. However, we can see some initial signs of it, which are also visible in some of the contributions to this volume.

The secondary nature of Belarusian ethnology and its dependence on Russian academic centres started to be gradually recognised in the 2010s and 2020s. However, the process of emancipation is far from complete. Decolonisation is a conscious process which has to be embraced. This is particularly challenging given the limited size of the academic community of ethnologists/anthropologists in Belarus and the long-standing epistemological dependence of Belarus on Russian ethnology.

A century after the creation of their own national academic discipline in 1925, Belarusian ethnologists and cultural anthropologists remain a small group, where everyone knows each other personally and is familiar with each other's research topics. On the one hand, this fosters personal connections, which underpin the development of academic networks and information exchange. On the other hand, a significant number of important and relevant topics that are well established in global anthropology remain out of the spotlight. However, contacts with ethnologists and anthropologists from Western academia, the penetration of Western theoretical and methodological ideas (primarily through Russian or Polish scholarship) and the emergence of a new generation of Belarusian ethnologists and anthropologists who have been and are currently being educated at institutions inside

7 For example, the latest work by the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus, published in 2025, was titled *The Traditional Worldview of Belarusians. Book 3. Man*. The book offers no explanation of the concept of a "traditional worldview"; the authors assume it is self-evident.

the European Union and are actively and successfully assimilating into the Western academic community indicates changes in Belarusian ethnology/anthropology. Still, this process is neither unilinear nor certain.

This issue includes works by several generations of Belarusian ethnologists, from established ethnologists/folklorists schooled in classical Belarusian ethnology, to contemporary anthropologists fully integrated into Western academia. There are, however, commonalities between all of them. All authors are committed to active and ongoing fieldwork and a reliance on their own ethnographic material. We sought to bring together in a single issue authors who can present a variety of topics and approaches to interpreting various aspects of Belarusian culture. At the same time, the studies collected in this collection demonstrate processes and problems characteristic of the entire region of Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. We see the relevance of the themes of war and violence, propaganda and ideology, and the desire to document and interpret fading rural cultures, their transformations and the reinvention of new practices and traditions on the symbolic or formal foundation of "traditional Belarusian culture". The topic of borders and their understanding and use by people living alongside them, as well as overcoming the limitations associated with them and the impact these borders have on many aspects of people's lives, sometimes even unexpected ones, is a pressing one. Women's social and cultural role in communities, power relations and religious relationships, as a social support system in difficult economic and political times, is no longer peripheral in Belarusian ethnology and anthropology. Themes of ethnic heterogeneity and religious practices remain important, especially in the historical and current borderlands.

Roman Urbanowicz's article, "Nonsense of Border and Ontologies in the Making: Production of Difference in the Belarusian-Lithuanian Borderland", examines the influence of the state border between Belarus and Lithuania, in many parts populated by Poles on both sides, on the concepts of difference circulating along and across it. The author focuses on the content of these differences. The state border between Belarus and Lithuania emerged where no meaningful boundaries or differences previously existed. The author reflects on the arbitrariness of the border's trajectory, which does not correspond to any preexisting cultural differences, leading local residents to perceive it as an absurd phenomenon. Roman Urbanowicz demonstrates how the border and its associated bureaucratic procedures successfully create mutual alienation through specific spatial regimes of uncertainty, instability and even humiliation, rebuilding local worlds and (re)territorialising communities according to the externally imposed contours of nation-states. This alienation created by the border works to eradicate once-existing emotional ties between friends and family. The internal logic of this distinction is largely determined by the conceptual assumptions of narratives of Europeanness and their analogues. In the postscript,

the author addreses the pandemic, the flight and migration of Belarusians following the 2020 protests and the migration crisis since 2021.

Uladzimir Lobach's article, "'Westerners' vs. 'Easterners': Soviet-Polish Borderland in the Anthropological Dimension of Belarusian History", examines the formation of regional identity and mutual stereotypes among Belarusians who found themselves within the Polish state and the BSSR following the creation of the Soviet-Polish border on Belarusian territory in 1921–1939. Drawing on oral history materials from borderland residents, the author argues that Soviet state ideology and propaganda, which relied on the geopolitical disunity of the Belarusian ethnic territory and the weakness of Belarusian national identity, exploiting the image of an external "enemy", contributed to the emergence of new forms of identity among the populations of Western ("Westerners") and Eastern ("Easterners") Belarus. According to the author, the social attributes of "Westerner" and "Easterner" were finally formed after the end of World War II. These notions are based on a "wealth-poverty" dichotomy, as well as a set of associated connotations: "individual farmer–collective farmer", "hard worker–slacker", "believer-atheist", "policeman-partisan", "individualist-collectivist" and "secretive-sociable". This fragmentation of Belarusian categorisations, according to the author, was due to the dominance of local and religious identities among (predominantly rural) Belarusians in the first half of the 20th century, which, for political reasons, could not yet develop into a national identity.

Volha Bartash's article, "How Many Miles to Warsaw? Popular Catholicism, Women's Agency, and Everyday Resistance in the Belarusian Soviet Countryside", explores a local example of the everyday religiosity of peasant women in the Catholic rural area of Little Warsaw (near the city of Molodechno in the Minsk Region of Belarus), so named by both local residents and the surrounding Orthodox rural population. Drawing on oral interviews and ethnographic fieldwork among Catholic women against the backdrop of a century of historical changes, the author examines the religious practices of peasant women in a Belarusian village as a way for "ordinary people" to resist state pressure. The article reveals the agency of rural women in Little Warsaw, who effectively organised an underground religious community amid the atheist struggle in the USSR. In her study, Volha Bartash emphasises the importance of faith and local religious practices to the identity and intergenerational continuity of Little Warsaw's older generation (born in the 1920s and 1930s). These practices created space for the expression of local solidarity and resistance. According to the author, silent resistance enabled the preservation of religiosity and its revival in the 1990s. Amid the Soviet collapse of formal religious structures, it was informal female solidarity that formed the basis for the silent religious resistance of Little Warsaw's residents.

Volga Labacheuskaya's article, "Women's Ritual Practices in the Culture of Belarusians", explores the dominant position of women in the symbolic space of Belarusian

rural culture from the nineteenth to early twenty-first centuries, studying the role of women's ritual practices, known among Belarusians as *abroki* and *abydenniki*. Women resorted to such practices from time to time during illness, epidemics, crop failures, natural disasters and wars, both individually and collectively. In some cases, these rituals took the form of annual ceremonies. According to the author, they helped maintain balance in the symbolic relationships between people, ancestors and the sacred. She also advances the crucial importance of women's shared spinning and weaving, which became a tool for shaping female identity through interaction with ritual knowledge and practices within the context of subsistence farming and intergenerational women's communities. Drawing on extensive fieldwork, the author demonstrates that home weaving persisted in the culture of the Belarusian collective farm village until the 1980s. It was in this context that distinctive forms of folk religiosity, combining Christian and pre-Christian beliefs, ideas and rituals, as well as women's ritual practices, remained relevant. The author demonstrates the process of cultural transmission from the folk culture of the first half of the twentieth century, through the practice of *abydzen* rites during World War II, to the present, when in 2020, during the pandemic, the *abydzen* rite was again performed in Minsk.

Tatsiana Valodzina's article, "Incantation Practices of Belarusians: Characterisation in Search of a Research Paradigm", aims to understand the trends and methodology of studying incantation practices in Belarus within a broad historical context and drawing on her own extensive ethnographic fieldwork. The author seeks to link the development of Belarusian folklore studies to the history of Belarus (pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet), as well as the political and ideological influence of the authorities. However, she simultaneously considers the influence of the Moscow and Tartu schools, European intellectual traditions and contemporary academic networks. Tatsiana Valodzina emphasises not just the importance, but the primacy, of ethnographic fieldwork in the study of incantation practices. She emphasises that new and unique ethnographic fieldwork material on Belarusian incantation practices is constantly accumulating in Belarus, which compels Belarusian folklorists to remain within their existing methodological frameworks, despite the importance of Western European experience and reflection. The author also draws attention to the emergence of new contemporary forms of conspiratorial practices through new media. These new manifestations, which must be documented and studied, enter into epistemological conflict with the principle of maintaining "archaic purity". The article concludes with the revealing statement: "time dictates new themes, but the old holds fast as well".

Yanina Hrynevich's article, "The Long Echo of Soviet Folklore: Composing and Performing New Songs in Modern Belarus", analyses new songs that are "disguised" as folk songs but have different performance pragmatics linked to the dominant ideology

and are largely addressed to officials. These songs have not previously been the subject of research in Belarusian folklore studies. The author believes that the origins of these songs are directly linked to the implementation of the "Soviet Folklore" project from the 1930s to the 1950s and the lack of subsequent critical rethinking. Contemporary members of folk ensembles continue to utilise old Soviet strategies and models. These new songs become part of living folk culture and acquire the status of "folk", not through anonymous origin (as was the case previously) but through collective authorship, ritual use and the emotional response of rural residents. Yanina Hrynevich points out that the new songs were created using a so-called "synthetic" technique, *perelazheniye* – the reworking and adaptation of well-known folk song lyrics to meet new needs. In modern Belarus, such creativity by rural folk ensembles is sought after by authorities and incorporated into propaganda narratives. The issue of the authenticity of such folk songs is resolved through collective authorship and public recognition. The author simultaneously raises the question of cultural "authenticity", the role of experts (scholars) in defining "folkloricity", correctness and other frameworks of Belarusian culture in the process of its research.

In her article, Alena Leshkevich analyses the symbolic functions of the Belarusian bagpipe (*duda*) in the narratives of modern urban bagpipers. The article attempts to periodise these functions. The author distinguishes the symbolic functions of the Belarusian bagpipe from its practical function of music-making: the bagpipe as a national symbol, as an artefact, as another art project, as an object of research, as a tool of entertainment and political protest and as an object of emotional attachment. In the article, the author offers her own periodisation of the functional use of the bagpipe, beginning with the revival of the bagpipe tradition in the 1970s. According to Leshkevich, the national symbolism and emotional connections of the Belarusian bagpipe have always been present. Its transformation into an artefact occurred during its revival in Belarus in the 1970s–1990s, thanks to artists and craftsmen. With the wider spread of bagpipes and modern technologies for reproducing ancient bagpipe recordings in the 2000s, the bagpipe gradually acquired the status of an instrument for entertainment.

In his article, "Smiles and Tears: Observations on the Current Changes in Belarusian Cemeteries", Siarhei Hruntou, studying the development of contemporary memory culture and memorial practices in Belarusian cemeteries, aims to clarify contemporary Belarusians' understanding of the afterlife. This is an interesting attempt at scholarly reflection on the contemporary Belarusian worldview. The author synthesises classical ethnological themes with contemporary anthropological approaches and concepts. Drawing on extensive fieldwork, Siarhei Hruntou emphasises that contemporary Belarusian views on the afterlife are diverse and contradictory. He believes this was influenced by the secularisation of society in the twentieth century. However, he

also finds numerous connections and parallels with nineteenth century ideas, which were already recorded by ethnographers at that time (dates of death, refreshments, tableware, alcohol, etc.). The author suggests that even in the context of Belarus's ongoing, slow secularisation, the practice of visiting cemeteries and bringing offerings to the deceased will persist. However, this practice will be more a matter of practice than of ideas about the afterlife. The author offers the following conclusions: the social status of the deceased is changing, and the strict memorial conventions common in the twentieth century are rapidly being lost; frequent depictions of the deceased in the context of their working profession testify to the continuing significance of labor for the identity of Belarusians; the organisation of burials is changing towards minimal care; the marking of graves with crosses (in the form of monuments or images) identifies their affiliation with a particular Christian denomination, but, at the same time, the model of the Christian afterlife is being simplified (Hell is usually excluded, and the dead inevitably end up in Heaven); and the popularity of cremation and burial in columbaria leads to an inevitable decline in traditional memorial practices.

Anton Dinerstein's and Todd L. Sandel's article, "'Power' as an Identity Category in the Russian-Language Political Discourse: The Case of Belarus", analyses ways of discussing politics in Belarus's Russian-language political discourse. The authors use cultural discourse analysis and the ethnography of communication to analyse the key cultural term "power". This term, in their view, describes the relationship between society ("people"), "country" and "state" in contemporary Belarus. It is based on the idea of a cultural clash between two parallel Belarusias – representing grassroots culture and state culture. Drawing on a significant database of media materials, the authors identified key cultural terms characteristic of Belarus during the 2020–2022 protests: "state", "country" and "power". Moreover, in their opinion, the cultural term "power" is the most important, as it is both a form and a means of identity. The authors explicitly state that the term "power" is a category of membership. This could become a key problem for the Belarusian political field, as power becomes an identity, not just a quality. This could mean that the transfer of power deprives the subject of their core identity: the loss of power means the loss of identity. This is made possible by the existence of metonymy in Russian-language political discourse – "state" is conceptualised in terms of "country"; "country" in terms of "those in power"; "people" in terms of a non-political entity that simply lives in the country; "sovereignty" in terms of "state", defined in terms of "country", which belongs to those "in power"; and so on.

Overall, this issue was not only intended to introduce Belarusian ethnology/anthropology to the Western academic community. Specialists are already well acquainted with it, and some authors are directly involved in these communities.

The Belarusian issue is inspired by the idea of the diversity of experiences and development paths of scholarship within historical and cultural contexts. This diversity allows us to recognise and understand theoretical and methodological limitations and decolonising opportunities. The national context and specific political and social conditions have influenced Belarusian ethnology/anthropology, but this is increasingly determined by the thematic choices of research and the interests of the scholars themselves.

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