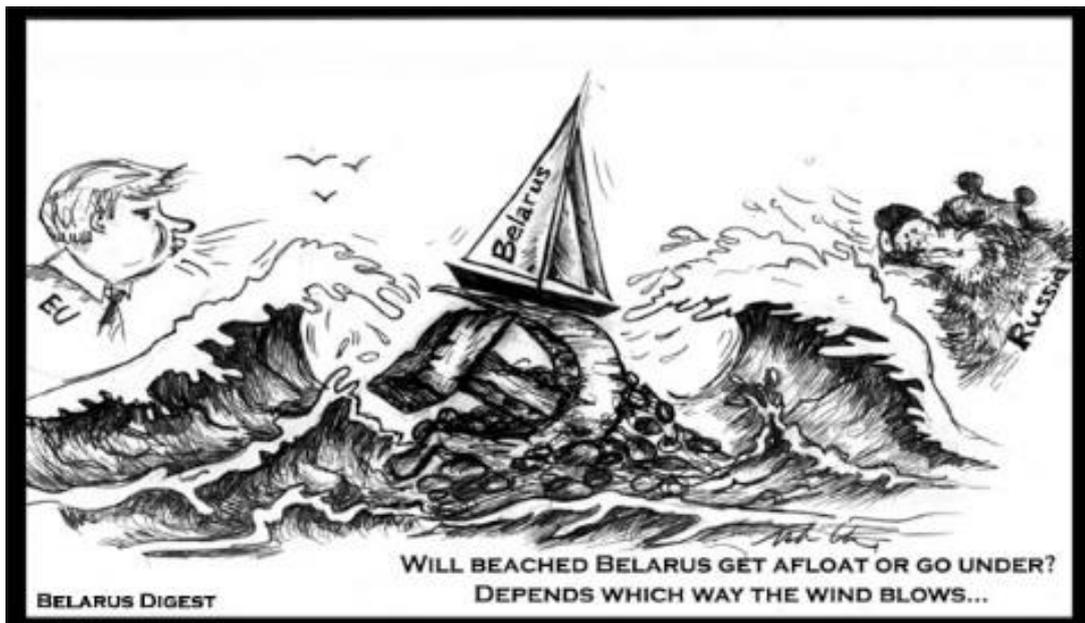


Belarusian Political Folklore and Nationalism within the European Context

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April 11 – April 21, 2016, 10:50-12:25
Room No. 307, Celetná 20



The course concentrates on political folklore in Belarus, the country of atypically short story of nationalist aspirations, ruled by the same president of neo-Soviet moods for 22 years. The search for the self-representation, national identity, and democratization is still taking place there, not as intensively as in other post-socialist countries in the 1990s, but continuously and invariably. As a response to constant negotiation of these issues, various genres of political folklore emerge. Based on fieldwork held in Belarus and in the Belarusian diasporas, this course focuses on several issues, which seemed most problematic and relevant to my interviewees. In particular, we will analyze folk biography of the Belarusian president, political jokes, Potemkinist (window-dressing) and nationalistic narratives, protests, and different kinds of political rumours and conspiracy theories.

Concentrating on Belarus, during the course we will draw many more examples from international political folklore, and those having little interest in Belarus should be sure that we will go for a broader analysis. The course will rely on general anthropology, folklore, ethnology, politics and economy theory bringing in many comparative materials, especially from American folkloristic research, socialist and post-Socialist countries, Central and Eastern Europe.

All students are welcome. No previous experience with folklore or anthropology is required.

April 11, Monday

The concepts of political folklore and ethnic identity

April 12, Tuesday

Political folklore: the case of Belarus

Required reading: Bekus-Goncharova, Nelly. 2003. An Invisible Wall: The Hidden Factor of Belarusian Reality. *Eurozine*. July 7.

April 13, Wednesday

The cults of personality and related rumors

April 14, Thursday

Political jokes

Required reading: Oring, Elliott. 2004. Risky Business: Political Jokes under Repressive Regimes. *Western Folklore* 63(3): 209–236.

April 18, Monday

Potemkin village narratives

Required reading: Scott, James C. 1990. Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. Chapter 1 (p. 1-16).

April 19, Thursday

Surveillance rumors and conspiracy theories

April 20, Wednesday

Nationalist narratives and political protests

Required reading: Schöpflin George 2007. The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths. – Geoffrey A. Hosking and George Schöpflin (eds.). *Myths and Nationhood*. London: Hurst, 19–35.

April 21, Thursday

Consultations on the essays

The course **assessment** (for the students seeking credits) will be based on two criteria:

1. Participation

The lectures will not consist of the lecturer's endless talks only, but also involve discussions. In particular, we will take time for the reading assignments (for some lectures), and you should be ready to discuss them (the reading materials are provided in pdfs). Also you are welcome to ask questions (since the information is specific) and should have relevant contributions to make in discussion. A successful course is a group effort!

2. Essays

Registered students are requested to write an essay on the chosen aspect of political folklore and identity-building in the chosen culture. The introduction to the essay (1/5-1/4 of its volume) must include the description of the context, other political folklore genres encountered, and the peculiarities of the nation/ethnicity-building of the particular country or territory. In the essay, the students must demonstrate the engagement with the lecture contents, course discussions, and suggested readings.

To choose the topic of the essay, the students are welcome to use the consultation hours at the end of the course, or at any other time convenient for both the lecturer and the student. In case you think you should read more on the particular topic, I will be happy to recommend you the readings. Make sure you avoid plagiarism and take care of all the necessary citations. The papers (2000-2500 words) are due on May 7.

The essays should be written in English, but you should contact me in case you have any issues with that. If you have any objects of particular interests emerging during the course, you are also very welcome to contact me or discuss them at the consultation hours.

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