

# **The Image of the Father of the Nation in Contemporary Belarusian politics: the Case of A.R. Lukashenka**

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## ***Abstract***

In my thesis I analyze the image of the father of the nation performed by the current Belarusian president A.R. Lukashenka. I try to show the complexity of this political image, pointing to the number of connections that this image has with the authoritarian power, patriarchal family model, militarism and hegemonic masculinity. I intend to study how the image of the father of the nation is constructed in contemporary post-socialist space through the analysis of the mass media and popular culture materials, dedicated to the political image of A.R. Lukashenka. I analyze the strategies that allow this image to exist in the assumingly democratic state, and I intend to indicate the specific traits of this image, which make it successful despite its oppressive nature.

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## ***Introduction***

The image of the father of the nation was used by a number of authoritarian rulers, for example, by J. Stalin, N. Ceausescu or F. Castro. After the fall of the socialist system and the beginning of transition in Central and Eastern Europe, the majority of post-socialist states began the processes of democratization in order to overcome the negative effects of authoritarian rule they had experienced in the past. Since the image of the father of the nation had too strong connections with the socialist past, authoritarian power and lack of democratic freedom, it was not expected that it would be used by the new politicians, which came to power after historical changes in 1989 and 1991. Despite these assumptions, in the former Soviet republic of Belarus the situation started to develop in a very different way, and the president Lukashenka managed to gain an enormous popularity among people and to become one of the most charismatic rulers of the post-Soviet space, openly using the image of the father of the nation.

Such a paradoxical popularity calls for a serious analysis, particularly from a gendered point of view, therefore I have decided to choose the case of the Belarusian president as an object of my master thesis.

My claim is that the image of the father of the nation is used by Lukashenka to legitimize additionally his authoritarian form of rule, and to reinforce patriarchy and male domination in the society. In my thesis I intend to explore how Lukashenka's image supports the idea of the legitimacy of the authoritarian power in the country, and which are the means used to create this image. In order to support theoretically my claims I am going to rely on the scholarly researches on hegemonic masculinity, gender and nationalism and stereotyping in representation. In terms of methodology, I intend to use the discourse analysis and the visual analysis. In my work I am going to focus on Lukashenka's self-representation, analyzing his public speeches and

interviews, but also the visual images of the president as he appears in public events. Additionally, I will use mass media materials, dedicated to Lukashenka, such as various articles of Belarusian official and oppositional newspapers and magazines, and TV reports of Belarusian channels.

The appearance of Lukashenka on post-Soviet political arena, which is characterized by strong references to the Soviet times and to the Communist political traditions, cannot be unambiguously explained. The success of his political image indicates that certain values from the Soviet era and some legacies of its repressive political regime have been preserved in the case of Belarusian society. Going beyond this obvious link, I want to show in my analysis that some important elements of Lukashenka's image are also rooted in patriarchal tradition, which privileges the role of the father as the holder of the supreme power in the family.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, each of 15 former republics chose its own way of development. The Republic of Belarus also started its development as an independent and sovereign state, trying to find its place, balancing between two economical and political powers: the EU and Russia. In 1994, after the first presidential elections in independent Belarus, Alyaksandar Rygoravich Lukashenka became the President of the Republic. In 2001 he was reelected, and in 2006, after the changes in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus A. R. Lukashenka was reelected again, gaining 83.5% of the votes (Central Election Committee of the republic of Belarus, 2006).

The change of the Constitution in Belarus caused very negative reactions of the EU, the US, and some other states, and also provoked the upraise of the oppositional political movements in Belarus itself. The President Lukashenka since then was repeatedly called “the last dictator of Europe” in predominantly Western mass-media (BBC, 2007) and Belarusian oppositional press

(Hartyya`97, 2009). In Belarus itself and its neighborhood countries, such as Russia and Ukraine, long before the significant elections of 2006 the leader of the Belarusian state received a very telling nickname *Batka* that literally means “father”. This nickname clearly reflects the model of Lukashenka’s rule and the political image he uses – the image of the father of the nation, for whom it is ‘natural’ and ‘rightful’ to rule over his family in an authoritarian way. In my study I will work with the image of the president, analyzing types of masculinity he uses, in order to support his assumed position of the father in relation to ‘his’ nation. I am planning to explore and to criticize numerous paradoxes of this image in relation to the actual political and social situation in Belarus.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I am going to look through the current scholarly debates, dealing in the first place with dominant masculinities and hegemonic masculinity. I will also deal with specific problems of stereotyping processes and more precisely with stereotypes connected with relations between national identity and gender.

In the second chapter of my thesis, I am going to study self-representations of Lukashenka using discourse analysis of his public speeches and interviews, and visual analysis of his images taken during important political events.

In the third chapter of my thesis, I am going to analyze current interpretations and comments of Lukashenka’s image of the father of the nation that are given, firstly, by the official Belarusian media, and, secondly, by the oppositional Belarusian media. Additionally, within my third chapter, in order to see the impact of this image in popular culture, I want to analyze several texts of popular songs, dedicated to Lukashenka, and performed by Belarusian and Russian singers.



# ***1. The Theoretical Framework of the Research***

## **1.1. Masculinity, Political Power and Militarism**

Within my analysis of the political image of A.R. Lukashenka the issue of masculinity and its representations will play a significant role, since it is obvious that the image of the father of the nation is based on a number of assumptions about what the ideal masculinity is and how it must be implemented within particular contexts, such as politics, warfare, or family relations.

Although the image of a ruler belongs mainly to the realm of politics, in order to succeed it must be rooted in other important realms, like those of army and family, as well. In all these three realms the main figure (the one of the ruler, of the commander, and of the head of the household) is assumingly male. Any case, in which the mentioned positions are occupied by women, from the perspective of patriarchal societal order and gender stereotypes can be seen as anomaly. Therefore, it is possible to point to strong connection between politics, militarism, patriarchal family model and masculinity, and this connection makes the concept of masculinity essential for my analysis of the image of the father of the nation, performed by the current Belarusian leader A.R. Lukashenka. In this subchapter I intend to explore how the issues of masculinity, including its intersection with politics, are discussed in contemporary scholarly literature.

As Connell states, “knowledge about masculinities has developed very rapidly over the last two decades, and the accomplishments of researches in the field are considerable with new methods, new topics of investigation and new groups being studied” (Connell, 2005, p. xvi). At the same time Connell mentions that along with development of masculinity studies several concerns dealing with this field of study appeared. The first concern, as Connell reports, comes

from the feminist side, and it is connected to the point of view that “a focus on men will result in resources being diverted from women” (Connell, 2005, p. xvii). The second concern deals with the descriptive character of the majority of masculinity studies works. As Connell states, “these methods [descriptive methods] are still productive [...], but [...] are yielding fewer new insights than before” (Connell, 2005, p. xvii). The third concern addresses some degree of isolation of the masculinity studies from other fields of humanities and social sciences (Connell, 2005, p. xx). John Tosh in his article on hegemonic masculinity also points out that “a reading of the current research tends to convey the impression of masculinity as being everywhere in the sense of being freely acknowledged, but nowhere in that it is perceived through a blurred conceptual lens” (Tosh, 2004, p. 41).

Coming back to the notion of masculinity itself, it is necessary to say that the definition of it clearly differs from one epoch to another, from one culture to another. As Connell puts it, “all societies have cultural accounts of gender, but not all have the concept ‘masculinity’. [...] ‘Masculinity’ does not exist except in contrast with ‘femininity’. A culture, which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarized character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture” (Connell, 2005, pp. 67-68).

As Connell states, there have been four main strategies to define masculinity (Connell, 2005, p. 68). The first strategy is essentialist, which is based on choosing “a feature that defines the core of the masculine” (Connell, 2005, p.68) and try to apply it to particular men`s life experiences. This strategy`s main weakness is obvious: one can pick any features one wants, and claim that they reflect the nature of masculinity, and in any case this choice will be quite debatable. Second strategy is positivist (Connell, 2005, p.69), it is based on “finding the facts” in

order to see “what men actually are” (Connell, 2005, p.69). Connell names three main problems of this strategy. First of all, under any circumstances the descriptions meant to be neutral, will have some standpoint, which will influence the result of the study (Connell, 2005, p.69). Second, this strategy from the very beginning implies that all people are divided into men and women. “Positivist procedure thus rests on the very typifications that are supposedly under investigation in gender research” (Connell, 2005, p.69). Third, as Connell writes, “to define masculinity as what-men-empirically-are is to rule out the usage, in which we call some women ‘masculine’ and some men ‘feminine’, or some actions and attitudes ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’, regardless of who displays them” (Connell, 2005, p.69).

The next strategy, Connell mentions, is normative (Connell, 2005, p.70). This strategy is based on the assumptions about “what men ought to be” (Connell, 2005, p.70), they set an ideal, a standard of behavior. In reality each man can either meet this ideal to some extent, or not. The main problem of this strategy is that it suggests taking as normative something which is almost never achieved by the majority of men (Connell, 2005, p.70).

The fourth strategy is semiotic (Connell, 2005, p.70). It defines masculinity by opposing it to femininity (Connell, 2005, p.70). This kind of approach evokes number of problems, related to necessity to define femininity, as well, while it is rather doubtful that it is possible to come up with one universal and unambiguous definition.

In my case study, I will rely mainly on the normative strategy, since in the empirical part of my thesis I am going to explore how A.R. Lukashenka creates the image of the father of the nation, using references to stereotypical and idealistic male roles.

Since in my thesis I intend to analyze the image of the president, the most important sphere, in which this image can be constructed with respect to stereotypical assumptions of ideal

masculinity, is the sphere of politics. It is clear that in contemporary world, politics still remains a domain of men. As Connell puts it: “public politics on almost any definition is men`s politics. Men predominate in cabinets, general staffs, the senior civil service, political parties, and pressure groups as well as in the executive levels of corporations” (Connell, 2005, p.204). Tosh sees the political order “as a reflection of the gender order in the society as a whole, in which case the political virtues are best understood as the prescribed masculine virtues writ large” (Tosh, 2004, p. 41), and he points to the “reciprocal” character of relationships between politics and masculinity (Tosh, 2004, p. 42). Hopton, in his turn, sees a “reciprocal relationship between masculinity and militarism” (Hopton, 2003, p. 115) that is strongly connected to the political sphere. Kovitz in her article on military masculinity pays attention to several very important issues of warfare, connected to gender. These issues are the “deliberate exclusion of women from combat” (Kovitz, 2003, p. 5), praising aggressiveness in men, constructing men as soldiers (Kovitz, 2003, p. 5), and using war as a tool to gain power (Kovitz, 2003, pp. 3-4). Hopton also points to huge interest of the state in stressing the connection between military domain and masculinity, since this connection gives the state possibility “to manipulate public support for its right to use violence to pursue its policies at home and abroad, as well as to encourage young men to join the armed forces” (Hopton, 2003, p. 115).

Hopton (Hopton, 2003) and Kovitz (Kovitz, 2003, p. 9) also notice the authoritarian character of militarism, which is based, according to Kovitz, on the inviolable ranking system and “the construction of gender along male-female axis of opposition” (Kovitz, 2003, p. 9). Militarism plays a very important role in politics mainly because “the celebration of military culture [...] represents an affirmation of the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity” (Hopton, 2003, p. 119), which is crucial for the power hierarchy existing in the state.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is strongly connected to political and military affairs, as well as to authoritarianism, which is essential for the absolute majority of military organizations. Therefore, this concept appears to be very important for my case study, since the image of the father of the nation is also constructed within political and military domains with obvious references to hegemonic masculinity.

In my next subchapter I will overview the contemporary scholarly debates on hegemonic masculinity.

## **1.2. The Notion of Hegemonic Masculinity in Contemporary Scholarly Debates**

Term “hegemonic masculinity” was introduced by Connell in the article “Men`s bodies” (Connell R. W., 1983). Connell`s concept of hegemonic masculinity helps to avoid number of weaknesses of sex role theory, which, as Demetriou reports, gained its popularity as early, as in 1950s (Demetriou, 2001, p.337). For Connell, sex role theory had number of issues that were making it inefficient and insufficient for the use of developing masculinity studies, women studies, gay studies, and other disciplines dealing with gender. First of all, Connell criticizes the sex role theory for its failure to display actual power relations that take place within various gender structures, but also the resistance to this power that, according to Foucault, surely must appear in response to any power (Connell R. W., 1979). Second point of Connell`s critique deals with sex role theory`s reliance on expectations, instead of analysis of real behavior of individuals and their interactions with each other. Connell notes that the ideal male role or ideal female role remain in the sphere of theory, and almost never appear in practice. Besides, this kind of division leads to the simplification of actual relations between and within genders (Connell R. W., Gender and Power, 1987, pp. 48-52). Another problem of sex role theory, stated by Connell, is

related to its attempt to connect expectations towards both sexes and standard, normative and typical behavior for the majority of men or women. Through acknowledging expected behavior as standard, sex role theory, therefore, ends up with one typical sample of masculinity or femininity, without taking into consideration those masculine and feminine behaviors that do not meet the standards set. All the masculinities and femininities that cannot be recognized as normative are then treated by sex role theory as anomaly, which leads to their marginalization (Connell R. W., *Gender and Power*, 1987, pp. 48-52).

In order to cope with problems that remain unsolved within the sex role theory, Connell introduces the notion of hegemonic masculinity and with this notion “grasps not only the complex nature of femininities and masculinities, not merely the power relationships between genders and within genders, but also the possibility of internally generated change” (Demetriou, 2001, p. 339). After claiming that there is no femininity or masculinity of one type, Connell also mentions that femininities and masculinities can be performed differently in different historical, cultural, class or racial environments (Connell R. W., *Gender and Power*, 1987, pp. 167-172).

Therefore, through the concept of hegemonic masculinity in this context, the power relations that exist between various masculinities and femininities can be acknowledged. Connell assumes that gender relations at least in Western societies can be described through the system in which men generally dominate over women (Connell R. W., *Gender and Power*, 1987, p. 158), and hegemonic masculinity helps to support the existing patriarchal system and makes it stable and socially accepted.

Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity has a great influence on contemporary masculinity studies. This concept is discussed in a number of scholarly works.

For example, Demetriou in his critique of Connell's concept, tries to develop Connell's ideas in order to grasp the complexity of relations that appears between masculinity and femininity and within masculinity itself. While it is widely recognized by various scholars (Pateman, 1988; Yuval-Davis, 1997) that men in the majority of the societies have a lot of privileges in comparison to women, it is not always acknowledged that men do not constitute homogeneous entity, and that there are also power relations within the dominant gender, not just between the dominant (male) gender as an oppressive structure and dominated (female) gender as oppressed.

To stress the role of power relations within the dominant gender, Demetriou introduces the term "external hegemonic masculinity", which refers to dominance of men over women, and so displays the interactions between two genders, and the term "internal hegemonic masculinity" (as he puts it later in the text "leadership" (Demetriou, 2001, p. 345)) that refers to the situation in which some particular kinds of masculinities are more privileged than others. Therefore, internal hegemonic masculinity deals with power relation within dominant gender (Demetriou, 2001, p. 341).

Demetriou believes that external hegemonic masculinity is realized through the spheres of labor market, state and family. In all these spheres men dominate over women, gaining more privileges as breadwinners, leaders, and heads of the household.

Internal hegemonic masculinity stands for "a social ascendancy of one group of men over others" (Demetriou, 2001, p. 345). One of the most vivid examples of internal hegemonic masculinity is the domination of heterosexual men over homosexual men.

At the same time Demetriou mentions that "hegemonic masculinity is rather a cultural ideal that is constantly promoted by the civil society through the production of exemplary

masculinities [...], which are consistent with the reproduction of patriarchy"(Demetriou, 2001, p. 342). Since hegemonic masculinity is an ideal, it cannot be directly exercised by the majority of men, but it can be accepted and set as a role model for them. So, in his later works on hegemonic masculinity, Connell also introduces the term “complicit masculinity” (Connell R. , 2005, pp. 76-81), which refers to the masculinity of men who “do not act in the way, prescribed by the hegemonic model, but still (passively) sustain it and thus realize the patriarchal dividend” (Demetriou, 2001, p. 342).

In addition to pointing out two different forms of hegemonic masculinity – external and internal- that I named earlier in the text, Demetrou introduces the term “hegemonic masculine bloc” (Demetriou, 2001, p. 348), which, in his opinion, allows to avoid number of weaknesses of Connell’s conception. The main problem that Demetriou sees in Connell’s conception appears when Connell defines external hegemonic masculinity as a dominant form of hegemonic masculinity, while internal hegemonic masculinity for him remains some kind of “strategy” that functions through oppression of those masculinities that “inconsistent with currently accepted strategy for the subordination of women” (Demetriou, 2001, p. 344). In addition to this Connell, as Demetriou notices, seems to see the internal hegemony as a very “elitist” process that means that he excludes the idea of mutuality, of interaction within different types of masculinity (Demetriou, 2001, p. 345). Therefore, in Connell’s conception, hegemonic masculinity is opposed to all the other masculinities, it “relates to non-hegemonic ones only by subordinating and marginalizing them and thus their potential pragmatic value in the construction of hegemony is underplayed while the project of internal hegemony seems to become [...] an end in itself” (Demetriou, 2001, p. 346).



In order to avoid Connell's opposition of hegemonic masculinity and non-hegemonic masculinities, Demetriou, relying on Gramsci's understanding of class hegemony, introduces the term "hegemonic masculine bloc", which for him "implies a non-reified and non-dualistic understanding of masculine power and practice" (Demetriou, 2001, p. 348). According to Demetriou's thoughts, this term is able to grasp the interactions that take place between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity, to refer to the processes of mutual practices and resistance.

In his critique of hegemonic masculinity conception Demetriou does not seem to have problems with a very general character of the term, while, for instance, Beasley in her critique tries to narrow the term, to concretize it. She argues that the conception of hegemonic masculinity, as Connell puts it is to some extent problematic. In her critique Beasley points out "a slippage between its meaning as a *political mechanism* tied to the word *hegemony* – referring to cultural moral leadership to ensure popular or mass consent to particular forms of rule – to its meaning as a depictive word referring to dominant (most powerful and/or most widespread) versions of manhood, and finally to its meaning as an empirical reference specifically to actual groups of men" (Beasley, 2008, p.88). Such a broad meaning of the term allows very different interpretations and may lead to the loss of actual meaning of the term. Beasley sees a necessity to narrow the meaning of the term "hegemonic masculinity" to the political ideal or model [...], which mobilizes institutions and practices" (Beasley, 2008, p.94). In her opinion it would help to avoid "a slide towards depictions of men with institutional power and instead concentrate the term on its legitimating function, which may or may not refer to men with actual power" (Beasley, 2008, p.95).

In my case study I would like to concentrate on a particular example of constructing a political image, referring to hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, I suppose that Beasley's suggestion can be very useful for my analysis, since, assuming that hegemonic masculinity is an ideal, I will be able to apply it to the case of my study as an ideal that influence behavior strategies of A.R. Lukashenka.

I also find it useful to rely on Demetriou's interpretation of Connell's concept, since it pays a lot of attention to the relations that exist between the hegemonic masculinity and non-hegemonic masculinities, which appear to be important for the case I analyze.

Taking for granted that hegemonic masculinity is a kind of ideal model, in which the image of the father of the nation can be implemented, I do not really explain how this image is constructed. If I assume that the image of the father of the nation appears on intersection of political, military, and family spheres, I need to mention through what means it is constructed.

I suppose that the image of the father of the nation must be based on stereotypical symbolical representations of nation, household, and masculinity. That is why in my analysis, I will have to deal with a number of stereotypes, referring to the ideal family relations, the figure of the ideal ruler, and the ideal image of the nation. In my next subchapter I will give an overview of scholarly works on stereotypes and stereotyping, in order to indicate, how stereotyping can be used in the process of creation of the political image.

### 1.3. Stereotypes

Through understanding of the process of stereotyping it is possible to see, how stereotypes, in my case stereotypes about the ruling father, work and influence consciousness of the public. In case of the political image of A.R. Lukashenka patriarchal stereotypes of this kind serve as references to particular model of masculinity, strongly imbedded into patriarchal idea of a ruling father. These references interact with political actions performed by the president, and all together create the image of the politician, in the studied case, the image of the father of the nation. In my thesis I will use the term 'patriarchal stereotypes' in order to name those stereotypes that imply the reference to the patriarchal ideals of the dominant masculine power, dominated femininity, and perception of a man as a ruler in contrast with a woman, who is always a subject to a ruler.

In various scholar works on prejudice and politics of representations there are quite different views on stereotypes and stereotyping. As Oakes, Haslam and Turner report (Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam, John C. Turner, 1994), in the early studies of stereotyping in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, stereotypes were primarily characterized as a negative feature of human psychology. Such authors as Lippman, Katz & Braly, and partly Mace claimed that stereotypes are quite rigid, and therefore they narrow down the reality through generalization and simplification (Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam, John C. Turner, 1994, pp. 3-4). But at the same time, as Oakes, Haslam and Turner point out, Mace then comes to the conclusion that nevertheless, stereotypes do reflect some general truth, since they show the process of interaction of different social groups and their ideas about each other. Mace compares stereotypes with a

caricature, which is made “both, to reveal and distort essential truths” (Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam, John C. Turner, 1994, p.4). Later on, as Oakes, Haslam and Turner claim, while some authors as Bogardus, Hayakawa and Klineberg continued to study stereotypes in relation to prejudice, seeing them mostly from a negative perspective, some other scholars, as, for example, Vinacke, Asch, and Sherif started to study stereotypes in the context of group interactions and group psychology, pointing out that they tend to reflect groups` interaction experience. In the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such scientists as Tajfel and Hamilton, observing stereotypes as part of social psychology came to the conclusion that stereotyping is an absolutely normal process, common for all people that help each individual to deal with information that he or she faces in everyday experience through necessary generalization and categorization (Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam, John C. Turner, 1994, pp. 4-9).

The issue of stereotyping is still being discussed within cultural studies, gay and lesbian studies, etc. As Michael Pickering puts it, “the stereotype remains an important concept in contemporary cultural analysis. In the study of what is still sometimes called ‘mass communications’, the process and effects of stereotyping have long been of concern. [...] Its causes and consequences have been taken up in cultural history, human geography and social anthropology, and in various social movements, such as feminism, anti-racism and gay rights activism” (Pickering, 2001, p.1). In my case, I will rely more on cultural and feminist understanding of the stereotyping process, since in my research I will deal mainly with a number of patriarchal stereotypes on masculinity and fatherhood looking at them from gender perspective.

Another idea, which is, in my opinion, also relevant to my research deals with viewing stereotypes as “a form of social control” (Pickering, 2001, p.5). Since stereotypes exist mainly within interactions of different social groups and create different kinds of power relations, they

also can be used as a part of the manipulation techniques common for the sphere of politics that I work with in case of my research. This idea was not a focus of the early studies of stereotyping, but, as Michael Pickering suggests implicitly it was present in the majority of those studies.

In the first part of 20<sup>th</sup> centuries there were debates among scholars, dealing with the question, whether stereotypes tend to change or not (Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam, John C. Turner, 1994, p. 4).

In contemporary researches the invariable character of stereotypes is widely assumed, and, for instance, Michael Pickering in his book on stereotyping even opposes stereotypes to categories, claiming that in contrast to categories, which are predominantly flexible and tend to change, and “stereotyping attempts to deny any flexible thinking with categories. It denies this in the interests of the structures of power which it upholds. It attempts to maintain the structures as they are or to realign them in the face of the perceived threat. The comfort of inflexibility which stereotypes provide reinforces the conviction that existing relations of power are necessary and fixed” (Pickering, 2001, p.3).

Since ideas about ‘proper’ gender roles in modern European societies do not tend to change dramatically, I suppose, it is possible to use terms ‘stereotype’ and ‘stereotyping’ in relation to the ideas about traditional and/or socially accepted gender roles, and therefore in my thesis I will use the terms ‘stereotype’ and ‘stereotyping’, relying on the definition of stereotyping given by Oakes, Haslam and Turner: “stereotyping is the process of ascribing characteristics to people on the basis of their group memberships” (Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam, John C. Turner, 1994, p.1).

In addition to gender stereotypes in my thesis, I will have to work closely with stereotypes related to nation and nationality, since I assume that in order to build an image of the

father of the nation, it is necessary to refer to stereotypical images of homeland, nation and representatives of the nation. Pickering in his book on stereotyping defines the very idea of “national belonging” as a vivid example of “positive belonging” (Pickering, 2001, p. 79). Stereotypes about nation and nationality help to create the imaginary entity in minds of the members of one nation/nationality. As Pickering notes, “members of a nation do not (and cannot) know each other personally, and so can only be conceived as ‘the same together’ through a shared cultural history and a shared national territory” (Pickering, 2001, p.85). There are several ways to construct the nation. The nation and homeland can be imagined through “symbolic settings, imaginary landscapes” (Pickering, 2001, p.85), imagined national character” (Pickering, 2001, p.95) or references to “heroic and venerable past” (Pickering, 2001, p. 101). Stereotypical images of the homeland in comparison with ‘other’ lands help to imagine the nation. These stereotypical images or references to them tend to appear in political speeches and visual representations of politicians. I am going to analyze these references in the particular case of A.R. Lukashenka.

In my thesis I intend to explore through what means the image of the father of the nation is created and established within the realm of politics, and how it corresponds with the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

## ***2. The Analysis of the Self-Representations of A.R. Lukashenka***

### **2.1. The Image of Lukashenka in Scholarly Debates**

The image of the father of the nation is traditionally connected to the authoritarian power. Therefore, it appears to be rather strange that this kind of image still can gain support and success in a number of contemporary states that claim to have a democracy.

The vivid example of such paradoxical success of the image of the father of the nation is the Republic of Belarus. Belarusian president Lukashenka due to his controversial political strategies that imply usage of the references to patriarchal societal models and authoritarian models of ruling the state along with constant claims about the democratic nature of the current political regime in Belarus, has already become an object of research in works of such scholars as Yekadumau (Yekadumau, 2002), Silitski (Silitski, 2002, 2003), and Marples (Marples, 1999, 2004).

Marples points out that “among the former Soviet republics, there is no leader directly comparable to Lukashenka” (Marples, 1999, p. 10). He portrays Lukashenka as “a man of limited vision who perceives the world in black and white, and treats the country as a personal fiefdom [...] a petty and vindictive man, who is quick to take offence, but can change his opinions almost at whim” (Marples, 1999, pp. 9-10). At the same time, Marples admits that Lukashenka remains one of the most popular politicians in the state, and significant percentage of population trusts him, and supposes that president Lukashenka is a strong ruler, the one Belarus needs during the hard times of transitional period (Marples, 1999, p. 122). As Marples and Silitski point out, Lukashenka has the greatest support among older generation, which sees Lukashenka’s references to Soviet past as one of his the most positive characteristics (Marples,

1999, 2004, Silitski, 2002, 2003). Going further, Marples also claims Lukashenka to be “a virtual cult figure”, and this characteristic indirectly connects Lukashenka to authoritarian rulers of the Soviet times, who also played the role of the cult figures in the state (Marples, 1999, p. 122).

At the same time, it is obvious that there is a very problematic ambiguity in the political image of Lukashenka. On the one hand, we have a portrait of a narrow-minded, highly authoritarian politician, on another hand, a strong ruler, respected and praised by people of Belarus. Besides, as I have mentioned before in my Introduction and Chapter 1, Lukashenka openly uses the image of the father of the nation, which evokes questions about the connection between authoritarianism and patriarchy, and seemingly controversial success of the authoritarian power, referring both, to the Soviet past, and to the traditionally patriarchal social order, in the officially democratic state. In addition to this, the image of the father of the nation, performed by Lukashenka, can be viewed from the perspective of Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, since such an image clearly requires references to the dominant model of masculinity, accepted in the society. Taking into consideration everything that was said above, I claim that the image of the father of the nation that appears in the contemporary political discourse calls for critical feminist analysis.

Therefore, in the second chapter of my thesis I am going to analyze self-representations of Lukashenka as the father of Belarusian nation in order to find out, through what means Lukashenka proves his fatherly relations with the nation, and how he uses the image of the father of the nation to legitimize the authoritarian power in the assumingly democratic state. As data for my analysis I will use the texts of interviews of A.R. Lukashenka, dedicated to different kinds of topics, and pictures of Lukashenka during important political events.



## 2.2. Lukashenka and Belarusian Identity

Political image of the father of the nation *a priori* requires presence of clearly stated relations between the ‘father’ and ‘his’ nation. One of the ways to identify oneself with the nation and the state is to use the official and unofficial symbols of the country and the nation. This possibility becomes even more important in case of a president; since official symbols belong mostly to the realm of statehood, through the usage of the official symbols a political leader can clearly build up a connection between his figure, the state and the nation. Lukashenka also uses references to the official symbols of Belarus in order to show his unity with his nation and the state.

Shortly after Lukashenka became the president of Belarus for the first time in July 1994, he initiated the referendum in the Republic of Belarus, after which the national symbols of Belarus (national anthem, national flag and national coat of arms), adopted in 1991 [see pic.1 in Appendix 1.] were changed to the new ones [pic. 2], which highly resembled the symbols of Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic [pic.3] that was a part of the USSR. This action of Lukashenka made Belarus the only post-Soviet state whose symbols directly refer to the symbols of the Soviet times. Through this change Lukashenka highlighted his strong connection to the Soviet traditions, which were then, as I stated earlier, noticed by such researches as Marples, Silitski and Yekadumau (Marples, 1999, 2004, Silitski, 2002, 2003, Yekadumau, 2002). At the same time the action of Lukashenka is highly problematic from the perspective of the relations between the father and ‘his’ nation. A ruler would probably be expected to treat the history of its nation with respect, if he wants to be believed to be the father of the nation, but in this act of changing the symbols the respect was not really shown. Opposition still blames Lukashenka for

the fact that national symbols were changed without official ceremonies, as if it was an everyday practice (Svaboda, 2006). Especially, opposition stresses the fact that the white-red-white flag, adopted in 1991 and changed to the current flag of Belarus, was cut into pieces by the officials right after it was lowered, and Lukashenka was not even present during this event (Feduta, 2005). In fact, Lukashenka changed the symbols of the country and completely ignored the ones that were before, as if everything in Belarus was to start just with his rule and everything that had been before simply did not exist. In this change of national symbols two very important references can be noticed. On the one hand, Lukashenka implicitly comes back to the symbols of the Soviet times, which are associated with lack of democratic freedom, but, at the same time, with stability. On the other hand, by adopting the new symbols at the beginning of his rule, he states the beginning of his 'relationships' with the nation and the state. This act to some extent can be compared to the act of marriage in its patriarchal sense, when a woman (here a nation) is to become a part of her husband's household, and some symbolic act (for example, the change of a last name) is to state her new belonging, and her dependence on a man, who is now her husband.

New symbols of Belarus are frequently used by Lukashenka in order to state his strong connection to Belarusian state. Although during the official events (i.e. meetings with ministers or leaders of other states) he tends to dress up neutrally, for some less formal occasions Lukashenka uses elements of national symbols in his clothes. For instance, during the military parade in honor of the Independence Day in July 2007 Lukashenka was dressed in a neutral official suit, but it was decorated with red and green ribbons that referred to the colors of the national flag [pic. 4], then during the same event by the president appeared a little girl in a white-red-and-green dress [pic.5]. This moment is even more significant for my analysis, since here we

have Lukashenka as a ruler, and a father of the nation (red-and-green ribbons symbolize Lukashenka's connection to Belarusian statehood, and a little girl in a dress of national colors, which looks fragile, weak and dependent on Lukashenka, first, as a grown-up, and second, as a man. Another important moment is that the nation is often imagined as female (Yuval-Davis, 1997), so the girl here can be easily associated with Belarusian nation. Moreover, in both, Belarusian and Russian languages, the word *Belarus* is grammatically feminine, and this fact implicitly reinforces possibilities of gender-based interpretations of this scene. In general, the choice of a girl (not a boy) for this scene seems to be absolutely deliberate, since it allows Lukashenka to be seen as a father of the nation during a very important event, directly connected to Belarusian identity and a history of Belarusian nationhood.

For the Independence Day in 2008, and for the visit to the Olympic Village in Beijing the same year, Lukashenka wore classical suit, but white, and with red-and green accessories and a national coat of arms, embroidered on a pocket [pic.6]. The choice of white for the suit is understandable, since *Belarus* literally means 'White Rus'. Later, during his visit to Olympic Beijing, Lukashenka appeared for the meeting with journalists in the uniform of Belarusian Olympic team [pic.7], and it made him look as a part of this team, stressing his Belarusian identity and his support for the national team, and therefore, for his nation in general. Besides, Lukashenka is frequently shown on TV doing sports, mainly hockey, and then he is also dressed in the uniform with national symbols [pic. 8]. Recently there has been another attempt of Lukashenka to play with national symbols in his appearance, and this attempt provoked a new wave of attention towards the Belarusian leader. During his visit to Venezuela in March 2010 Lukashenka gave an interview to a Russian-speaking journalist from Argentina. This interview took place on a beach, and while giving it, Lukashenka was dressed in a white T-shirt and red-

and-green swimming pants [pic 9]. Significantly unofficial image of the president provoked discussions in Belarusian and foreign media (Hartyya`97, Newsru, 2010). In this example I see Lukashenka`s attempt to connect nationalism and particular image of masculinity. His body in this case becomes a symbol of Belarusian nationhood all together with masculine power and sexuality, and these connections allow Lukashenka to tie himself and Belarusian nation into one indivisible entity once again.

Although Lukashenka does use official national symbols as tools to construct his political image, there are other important issues that all together create imagined Belarusian identity. Another very important element of Belarusian identity is Belarusian language.

According to the Constitution, the Republic of Belarus has two official languages: Belarusian and Russian (Konstituciya Respubliki Belarus [The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus], 1996). Nevertheless Lukashenka himself seldom speaks Belarusian, using Russian language in the absolute majority of his speeches. He gave some speeches in Belarusian at the very beginning of his presidency, for example on the Independence Day in 1996 (BT TV-channel, 1996) . These days Lukashenka speaks mostly in Russian, and so does the majority of Belarusian officials. Such scholars as Marples and Silitski mention Lukashenka`s preference of Russian language as one of the consequences of his obvious attempts to keep good relationships with Russia, as well as of his strong connection to the Soviet ruling tradition (Marples, 1999, Silitski, 2003) . One would expect that problematic relations with Belarusian language would affect negatively the image of the father of the nation, but paradoxically in case of Lukashenka it does not happen.

During the interviews he is frequently asked, why Russian language in Belarus is so privileged, while Belarusian language is in decline. Lukashenka answers this kind of questions in

a very interesting way. For example, in his interview from December 2009 he stated several things. First of all, he pointed out that “language is a sphere that does not stand any dictatorship and any violence”<sup>1</sup> (BT, Press-konferenciya presidenta Respubliki Belarus A.G. Lukashenko predstavitelyam belorusskih SMI [The press-conference of the president of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko to the representatives of the Belarusian media, 2009]. Therefore, everybody in Belarus is free to speak the language he or she wants. Second, he told that “only an idiot can reject Russian language in Belarus”, since in some spheres, like, for example, science or medicine, Belarusian terms do not exist so far, so the strict prohibition of Russian would stop the development of these spheres (BT, Press-konferenciya presidenta Respubliki Belarus A.G. Lukashenko predstavitelyam belorusskih SMI [The press-conference of the president of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko to the representatives of the Belarusian media], 2009). Third, and the most significant, as I suppose, was the linguistic game that Lukashenka played during his answer. In his answer to the question he mixed Russian and Belarusian language, saying everything that related to Belarusian language in Belarusian. This way, he, firstly, clearly distinguished Belarusian from non-Belarusian, and in addition to this, demonstrated that he uses Belarusian, he does not reject it. But the most interesting, in my opinion, is how Lukashenka defines Russian language in order to create an image of the father of the Belarusian nation. In the analyzed interview president Lukashenka said exactly the following: “this language, which is called Russian (rus.) and *not Raseyski* (bel.), as some our people call it, there`s a soul of our nation in it. The last century, or, maybe, even more this language was our language; we invested a lot in it. So, why we are trying to forget so fast something that we created ourselves, why are we trying to throw away...we don`t have to carry it on our back, as people say” (BT, Press-

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<sup>1</sup> All the interviews, speeches, and other texts used as data for this thesis are translated from Russian by the author.

konferenciya presidenta Respubliki Belarus A.G. Lukashenko predstavityam belorusskih SMI [The press-conference of the president of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko to the representatives of the Belarusian media], 2009). The trick here is that in Russian language the word *russskiy* [Russian] historically related to the word *Rus*, which is the name of the state that existed from the 9<sup>th</sup> century till the epoch of feudal division in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries on the territories of contemporary Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. In Belarusian language the word *raseyski* is related to *Raseya* that stands for *Russia*. It means that by insisting on the fact that the language is *russskiy* and not *raseyski*, Lukashenka implies that it belongs to Belarusian nation as much as to Russian nation, and by claiming this, he constructs his ‘nation’ not in the borders of contemporary Belarus, but in the borders of almost imagined Rus that existed at least 8 centuries ago.

This attempt immediately evokes several problems connected to Belarusian independence (mainly from Russia), and the significance of Belarusian identity *per se*, and not in relation to broader Eastern Slavic or entire Slavic context. If Lukashenka claims to be the father of the Belarusian nation than his tendencies to exercise his power and care over other Slavic nations, seem to undermine the created image.

Despite constant attempts to construct his nation within the borders of Rus, Lukashenka talks a lot about his feelings towards Belarus and Belarusian nation, and in his references to his nation, it is possible to find all the signs of authoritarianism, based on fatherly care and father`s dominance. For example, in his interview to Russian newspaper *Russkiy Kuryer* as early as in 1996, Lukashenka compared his nation to “a baby” that he “carries in front, being afraid to fell down somewhere” (Interview presidenta Belorussii [The interview of the president of Belarus], 1996), in 1998 during his meeting with people in Grodno, he repeated this idea once again,

claiming that he had been “carrying [Belarusian nation] on his shoulders for three years” (BT TV-channel, Novosti [News], 1998) .These metaphors, used by the president in his speeches, reinforce ‘parental’ nature of his power over Belarusian nation, and prove his position as a father of the nation. Another significant detail is that in some of his speeches Lukashenka also claims, how much he is willing to sacrifice for the happiness of Belarus. In one of his interviews in 1997 he, talking about his feelings towards Belarusians, said: “I have never had my private life, just the life of these people” (Citaty [Citations], 2008) , and in 2006 Belarusian political magazine *Planeta* published Lukashenka`s speech, where there was the following statement: “I will defend my nation by myself, if it`s necessary – with arms in my hands, if it is necessary – alone” (Personalii: Aleksandr Lukashenko [Personalities: Aleksandr Lukashenko], 2006, p.1). This statement clearly refers to patriarchal stereotypes of a man, a father as a defender of his household, his family, but in this case the nation stands instead of the household, and therefore this phrase and the associations it provokes also serves as tools to create the image of the father of the nation. Another important moment is that this Lukashenka`s claim provokes associations with military domain, where the concepts of defense and fight belong, and the military domain is the one, where both, the hegemonic masculinity and authoritarianism at any level can be fully realized. So, the usage of the references to warfare allows Lukashenka to connect his masculinity to the state and power, and, at the same time, through patriarchal stereotypes about a man as a defender of the household to support his image of the father of the nation.

At the same time, as I mentioned before, Lukashenka`s fatherly care has a tendency to be exercised not only over Belarusian nation, but over Russian, and, partly, Ukrainian nation, as well. Lukashenka constantly repeats in his speeches and interviews that “Belarusians and Russians are the same nation” (BT, Press-konferenciya presidenta Respubliki Belarus s

predstavitelyami vedushchikh rossiyskih SMI [The press-conference of the president of the Republic of Belarus with representatives of the leading Russian media], 2009), and that he worries not just about Belarusians, as his nation, but about Russians, as well (BT, Press-konferenciya presidenta Respubliki Belarus s predstavitelyami vedushchikh rossiyskih SMI [The press-conference of the president of the Republic of Belarus with representatives of the leading Russian media], 2009). This kind of claim, on the other hand, does not stop him from criticizing Russian and Ukrainian governments. He, in a way, intends to give to “brotherhood nations” the care they lack, having their governments (BT, Press-konferenciya presidenta Respubliki Belarus s predstavitelyami vedushchikh rossiyskih SMI [The press-conference of the president of the Republic of Belarus with representatives of the leading Russian media], 2009) . In one of his early speeches in 1995 Lukashenka said the following: “they view Belarus as a savior of Slavic civilization, and we are obliged to save this civilization” (Citaty [Citations], 2008). The role of the ‘savior of Slavic civilization’ that Lukashenka gives to his nation, symbolically allows him to broaden geographical and political borders of his power, and overcome ambiguity that exists in his position, trying to state both- Belarusian independence and uniqueness, and, at the same time, strong connections to Russia.

So, in case of Lukashenka the image of the father of the nation seems to be rather successful, but only if the nation will be constructed with respect to the ideas of Slavic (or in some situations Soviet) brotherhood.

### **2.3. Lukashenka and Political Power**

The image of the father of the nation to some extent serves to ‘naturalize’ and ‘legalize’ the authoritarian power of the ruler over his state and his nation. Serving as a reference to



patriarchal traditions, the image of the father of the nation legitimizes the power of the ruler as natural, and given to him as to the father, and allows to interpret political actions of the ruler from the perspective of fatherly care of his nation. Therefore, I suppose, it is rather important to explore how Lukashenka himself refers to his power, how he wants his power to be understood.

First of all, Lukashenka tends to react very emotionally on attempts of various media to call him a dictator. In his interview from 2006 he said: “I hate idolatry and cult of the leader. I am not an [authoritarian] leader; I am not a dictator and not an administrative leader” (BT, Rech Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus A.G. Lukashenko [The speech of the president of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko], 2006). In his speeches Lukashenka claims his country to be a democracy that has the president, elected by people.

At the same time, he allows himself make statements that openly contradict democratic way of ruling the state. For example, right after he had become the president of Belarus for the third time in 2006 through the change of the Constitution, which limited presidential terms to maximum one reelection, Lukashenka publically confessed that the results of the elections were falsified. Lukashenka claimed that in reality he gained 93, 5% of votes, but then he decided to change it to 86% in order to make the results look “European” (BT, Rech Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus A.G. Lukashenko [The speech of the president of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko], 2006). Actually, this comment of Lukashenka demonstrates that the only power that exists in the country is his power, but he claims this power to be used only in the way that benefits the nation. Before the elections in 2006 Lukashenka said: “There`s one thing that can kill me, it`s the obloquy that I have taken something from someone or have stolen something....And when they tell it to me – and they know that I can be hurt by it- I get sick after it. During all these years, having a great power, dealing with milliards of dollars, I have never

seen my personal interest in it” (BT, Predvybornaya rech A.G. Lukashenko [Pre-election speech of A.G. Lukashenko], 2006). In this quotation several things are obvious: first of all, Lukashenka insists on his honesty, although at the same time he openly admits his great power in the country. Second, he pretends to share his feelings with the audience, and by this he symbolically changes public discourse into private, and makes the political speech sound as a family talk. These details once again state him as a father of the nation and serve to legitimize his power, which openly overcomes the borders set by the Constitution. Once Lukashenka treats his nation as his own household, it is important to observe, how he refers to his own family, and what role he pretends to play there.

## **2.4. Lukashenka and His Family**

According to the official, widely-spread information, Lukashenka is married, but his wife does not live with him, and she has never lived with him since the moment Lukashenka became a president in 1994. As a president, Lukashenka moved to Minsk, and his wife stayed in the village near the city of Shklov. At the very beginning of Lukashenka`s presidency, the ‘absence’ of the first lady evoked a lot of questions. In 1997 Lukashenka himself commented on this in a very interesting way: “I suppose that members of my family must not deal with politics. [...] Wives have nothing to do in the political affairs. And I think that when some politician leaves the plane, holding the hand of his wife [...] it is often just a show. [...] I am not used to it. And besides, it is not in traditions of our nation, to demonstrate everywhere your family. [...] People in Belarus understand me” (Citaty [Citations], 2008).

Basically, in this quotation Lukashenka openly states the division of public and private spheres, politics and household, claiming, politics to be a domain, where “wives have nothing to

do”. The majority of scholars that explore gender issues claim the division between private and public domains to be the basis of patriarchal social organization (Pateman, 1988, Yuval-Davis, 1997, Connell, 2005), therefore through his statement Lukashenka reinforces patriarchal order, and moreover, he claims it to be a norm for Belarusian nation. By doing this, he builds Belarusian identity within the framework of patriarchy, so that his power over his wife, and then over his nation becomes embedded into both, nationalist-traditionalist, and patriarchal discourse.

Lukashenka also has two grown up sons from his wife. In 1997 Lukashenka mentioned that he is very satisfied with the fact that his children are not known in the country. He said that “the main merit of presidents [...] it is when nobody knows about their children or other members of the family” (Citaty [Citations], 2008) . Nevertheless, two of his sons have very significant posts in the country, and they are not that marginalized from Lukashenka`s life, as his wife.

Ten years later, in 2007, Lukashenka mentioned that he has a third son. As a matter of fact, he mentioned it in the context of political power: “Neither the first one, nor the second son will be a president, but, maybe, just the third son will be a president”. After that he repeated “if to talk about the successor, I will prepare the youngest one. [He is] a unique person” (News, 2007) . Although it is not quite clear how serious Lukashenka is in these words, such statements refer again to the patriarchal model of a family, where a son eventually is to inherit the power of his father in a household or in a state. This kind of model seems unbelievable in the contemporary European state that claims to have a democracy, but in the whole context of the ‘father’ and ‘his’ nation relationships they sound rather logical. For one more year nobody saw the third Lukashenka`s son, but then the president started to appear in public events with a little boy and later said in his interview to the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* that the little boy is

his son Nikolay (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 2008). In this interview Lukashenka insisted that his public appearances with his son have nothing to do with PR: “he just can’t stay with anybody else. [...] Of course, he adds some extra work to me. Because neither to dress him, nor to feed him nobody can, just me” (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 2008, para. 50). Despite the claims of the president, the presence of his son during Lukashenka’s official meetings, and almost constant references to family stories about his youngest son (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 2008, BT, Press-konferenciya presidenta Respubliki Belarus A.G. Lukashenko predstavatelyam belorusskih SMI [The press-conference of the president of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko to the representatives of the Belarusian media, 2009]) in Lukashenka’s public speeches of last two years leaves an impression of the long-term PR-action that aims to stress Lukashenka’s fatherly care of his son, and implicitly of his nation.

At the same time, it is very important to mention that the exact information about the boy’s mother is not available. She has been never seen publically neither with Lukashenka, nor with the little boy. According to the rumors, spread by media, the mother of the boy is Lukashenka’s former private doctor, but the son spends all the time with his father (Irinu Abelskuyu vernuli k zhizni [Irina Abelskaya was brought back to life], 2009, Mama Koli Lukashenko ne popala na Den Rozhdeniya syna [The mother of Kolya Lukashenko did not come for the birthday party of her son], 2009). No matter, what the situation really is, the figure of the mother, alike to the figure of the wife in case of the official wife of Lukashenka, is almost ignored. The president is imagined as a father, taking care and communicating mainly with his sons, and that again refer to the classical patriarchal model, where the representatives of the family are men, and women are not that important, they stay in a private sphere of the household and are not really recognized publically as members of the family.

The absence of the wife or the mother figure in the image of Lukashenka's family, in my opinion, has another very important meaning. The place of the wife in the private domain is occupied by the nation in a public domain. The images of the sons, involved into the political discourse, stress fatherly characteristics of the ruler. So, the whole image of the family, reflected to the public discourse serves to support the image of the father of the nation.

Recently, Lukashenka appears with his youngest son almost everywhere: on sport events (even on Beijing Olympics [pic. 10]), on meetings with politicians and other important persons (for example, on a meeting with Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich [pic. 11] or the Roman Pope [pic.12], and on military parades [pic. 13] and maneuvers [pic. 14]. As a matter of fact during the Russian-Belarusian military maneuvers in October 2008 4-year-old Nikolay Lukashenka was dressed in the copy of his father's Supreme Commander in Chief's uniform, and representatives of Belarusian army reported not to Lukashenka, but to his son (Lukashenko s synom na voennyh ucheniyah [Lukashenko with his son on military excersises], 2008). This situation resembles a tradition to take on all the public events the heirs to the throne, but in the democratic country, which Belarus is, according to the Constitution, such behavior seems to undermine all the democratic values, but, as I have already mentioned, it does not contradict the image of the father of the nation in any sense, moreover it supports this image and *vice versa*.

In general, Lukashenka's relationships with his family to some extent can be seen as the model of his relationships with his nation.

## **Conclusion to Chapter 2**

The image of the father of the nation in case of Belarusian president Alyaksandar Lukashenka is constructed through a number of different techniques: the verbal and visual

representations, references to well-known models of patriarchal family and state. It serves to support the idea of legitimacy of authoritarian power that exists in the state through changing the notion of authoritarianism and lack of democratic freedoms to the notion of the father's authority and father's care that is exercised by the ruler over his nation.

Moreover, the image of the father of the nation is clearly constructed within the framework of hegemonic masculinity. In order to create a successful political image, Lukashenka refers to a 'normative', dominant masculinity, which is strongly embedded into patriarchy, clearly connected to political power and militarism and remains unambiguously heterosexual. The image of Lukashenka's family also serves to support his image of the father of the nation, since within the context of his family he is introduced as the head of the household that has a great power over the family members and that represents his family in the public sphere. The images of Lukashenka's sons additionally reinforce the image of the father, performed by Lukashenka, and the fact that Lukashenka tends to treat his sons as his heirs can be interpreted as a reference to the patriarchal family model, in which sons are assumed to inherit their father's power over the household, and, in case, of Lukashenka's family, over the state and the nation.

Another very important point here is that the image of the father of the nation, performed by Lukashenka, is not locked in itself, it is created in order to provoke, most desirably, positive reaction among population, so that the president can gain enough support. In this case, the very important role in the process is given to media that shape the perception of the president by the nation. Different interpretations of the image, given by different media, make the very image of the father of the nation much more complex, and in order to study the image of the father of the nation, performed by Lukashenka, in its complexity, I need to analyze the interpretations of this

image, as well. That is why the third chapter of my thesis is dedicated to the media interpretations of the image of the father of the nation.

### **3. The Analysis of Media and Popular Culture Interpretations of the Political Image of A.R. Lukashenka**

#### **3.1. Lukashenka as the Father of the Nation in the Official Belarusian Media**

In the case of Belarus, the interpretations of the image of the father of the nation, performed by Lukashenka, can be divided on those, given by the official media, which are very much controlled by the state, and therefore, tend to give a rather positive image of the president, those given by the oppositional media, which tend to criticize the president severely, but do not have a lot of opportunities to access wider audience.

In this subchapter I am going to analyze how the image of the father of the nation, performed by Lukashenka, is discussed in the official media. Since the number of official Belarusian newspapers and magazines is quite high, for my analysis I will use just newspapers *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi*, and a magazine *Planeta* that are sold all over the country, and therefore have a potential to influence the population greatly. I will also analyze some video materials about Lukashenka, brought by three central Belarusian TV-channels: *BT*, *STV* and *ONT*.

##### **3.1.1. Lukashenka`s position in relation to Belarusian Identity in the Official Media**

As it was said in the second chapter of my thesis, Lukashenka`s position in relation to Belarusian identity is quite problematic, since along with stating his willingness to take care of Belarus, and even to personally fight for it if necessary, Lukashenka tends to construct ‘his nation’ not within the borders of Belarus, but within the borders of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine,



and in this way he problematizes the very concept of Belarusian identity, extending it into some form of the broader Eastern Slavic context.

Despite this fact, official media tend to minimize the ambiguity of this position of Lukashenka, on the one hand, stressing Lukashenka's connection to Belarusian statehood, culture, and identity, and on the other hand, depicting Lukashenka's union with Russia, and attempts to view Belarusians and Russians as one nation as his strong desire to keep good relationships with neighborhood and brotherly nations.

For example, reporting about Lukashenka's meeting with students of Mogilev University, specially stresses the fact that the room, where the event took place was decorated "not just with the president's flag [...], but also with Belarusian towels. Red embroidery on white linen. The towels like these were weaved by our grandmothers in the villages" (Sovetskaya Belorussiya, 2010, para.1). The reference to Belarusian national colors of red and white, grandmother's embroideries, and Belarusian traditions, in general in this context creates an interesting attempt to connect the president and the state with Belarusian identity and Belarusian nationhood. This attempt, to some extent, supports the image of the father of the nation, performed by the president.

Problematic attitude of Lukashenka towards Belarusian language, and very significant domination in public use of Russian language, which is now the second official language of Belarus, is obviously presented in a neutral way in official Belarusian media. For example, when the TV-channel *ONT* reports about the participation of Lukashenka in the all-Belarusian population census, it is specially mentioned that Lukashenka admits that he has two native languages: Belarusian and Russian, and then in a few minutes the same idea is actually repeated by Lukashenka himself, when his direct speech is included into the video material (ONT, 2009).

This moment signifies that the problem of the language, and Lukashenka's relations with Belarusian language does exist, but the official media tries to depict it as a kind of philosophy, based on equally positive attitude towards both official languages of the state. Here appears a very important slippage of meaning. On the one hand, as the head of the state, which, according to the Constitution, has two official languages – Belarusian and Russian- Lukashenka can safely use such a position, but, on the other hand, in the case of Belarus such a move implicitly suggests that Lukashenka in his politics is oriented to Russia, since historically Russian language is strongly connected to Russian political presence on Belarusian territories. Due to such implications, Lukashenka's unclearly stated language preference can be seen as a sign of betrayal of his own nation and national identity, which does not go well with the image of the father of the nation.

Moreover, since Belarus, to some extent, still develops under Russian influence, the question of language is strongly connected to independence. In this way, Lukashenka's alliances with Russia, and his attempts to construct Belarus and Russia as one indivisible entity can be treated as questioning Belarusian independence. Official media in such a delicate situation try to stress Lukashenka's focus on Belarus, and make Russia seem as insignificant for Belarus as possible. For example, reporting about Lukashenka's speech during the parade in honor of the Independence Day *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi* stresses the fact that “only in the middle of the 10-minute speech Lukashenka mentioned Russia” (*Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi*, 2008). At the same time, the very fact that Lukashenka mentions Russia during his speech in honor of the Belarusian Independence Day, and that the media source feels necessary to inform its audience about this fact, proves that Lukashenka's position in relation to Russia evokes questions about the degree of Belarusian independence, and through this, to some point,

undermines Lukashenka's image of the father of the nation, since as the father of the nation he is to protect the independence of 'his' state and self-sufficiency of 'his' nation.

Besides, Lukashenka's constant references to Russia, and to the Soviet Union that is directly associated with oppressive political regime, portrays him as a very authoritarian ruler and questions the officially democratic nature of his rule.

### **3.1.2. The Nature of Lukashenka's Regime in Official Belarusian Media**

The image of the father of the nation through its strong connection to patriarchy is often associated with authoritarian regimes, and moreover, historically, as I mentioned earlier, it was used by a number of dictators. The case of Lukashenka is not an exception in this way, since the political image, performed by him also has strong references both, to authoritarianism and patriarchy. At the same time, Belarus officially remains a democracy. In addition to this, Belarus is the state that proclaimed its independence just in 1991, less than 20 years ago, and through proclaiming its independence from the Soviet Union it, in a sense, rejected authoritarian political order. But for some reason within a few years the state came back to the authoritarianism, after electing a president who remains in power for more than 15 years now, playing the role of the father of the nation.

Official Belarusian media not surprisingly stresses the point that Belarus is a democratic state, referring to the Constitution, and to those citations of Lukashenka that do not contradict the statement about the democratic nature of contemporary Belarusian state. For instance, *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* in the article dedicated to the coming presidential elections of 2011, in the middle of the text gives in bold the statement that "in Belarus the presidential post cannot be inherited"(Sovetskaya Belorussiya, Prezidentskie vybory v Belarusi [Presidential elections in

Belarus], 2010, para. 4) , while, at the same time, the other two statements, given in bold in the same article suggest ideas that openly contradict democratic values. The first statement says that “so far there are no factors that could prevent Lukashenka from participating in the next presidential elections” (Sovetskaya Belorussiya, Prezidentskie vybory v Belarusi [Presidential elections in Belarus], 2010, para. 2), and the second statement refers to the issue of the capital punishment, informing that “the absolute majority of Belarusian population is for keeping the practice of capital punishment in the country” (Sovetskaya Belorussiya, Prezidentskie vybory v Belarusi [Presidential elections in Belarus], 2010, para. 22). The example of this article shows how in contemporary official Belarusian media the democratic claims, referring to the Constitution are mixed with totally undemocratic ones in a way that they do not seem to contradict each other, and do not question the assumingly democratic nature of Lukashenka’s power regime.

Some articles openly praise Lukashenka, like the one published in 2006 by the magazine *Planeta*, which is comparing him with Charles de Gaulle (Personalii: Aleksandr Lukashenko [Personalities: Aleksandr Lukashenko], 2006, p. 1). This comparison is rather provocative. First of all, de Gaulle was a general, a military official, and his political career is deeply related with World War II and post-war events. The attempts to compare Lukashenka to a military leader bring us back to Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, and the ideas of some scholars that military masculinity is one of the forms of masculinities, in which hegemonic masculinity can be realized (Kovitz, 2003, Hopton, 2003). Later in the text of the above mentioned article it is said that Lukashenka “saved Belarus” through keeping “the control of the state”, instead of choosing a quite risky way of liberalization (Personalii: Aleksandr Lukashenko [Personalities: Aleksandr Lukashenko], 2006, p. 2). Besides, it is important to mention that in this article the only person

to be mentioned in paragraphs, dedicated to the achievements of Belarus, is Lukashenka, although it is quite clear that the president is not the only politician in the state, responsible for its political, economical and cultural situation. In this case, it appears that restored authoritarianism becomes an achievement to be praised for. Therefore, official media supports the political regime that exists in the country by depicting it as successful, and by exaggerating the role of the president in the development of the state.

### **3.1.3. Lukashenka and His Family in Official Belarusian Media**

As I said in the second chapter, the way Lukashenka`s family is introduced to public, seems to be very much rooted into the patriarchal tradition. The first lady does not really exist, although officially Lukashenka is married, while all of three Lukashenka`s sons are somehow involved into politics of their father, and are included into the context of his power.

Official Belarusian media very seldom mentions the name of Lukashenka`s wife. At the very beginning of Lukashenka`s presidency some interviews of the first lady appeared in media, but in the last 5 years only one interview of Galina Lukashenka was published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi* (Komsomolskaya Pravda Belarusi, Intervyu Pervoy Ledi Belarusi Komsomolskoy Pravde [The interview of the First Lady of Belarus to Komsomolskaya Pravda], 2005) .

The image of the first lady that can be constructed on the grounds of this interview obviously corresponds with the image of a wife in the traditional patriarchal family. In the first paragraph of the article, dedicated to the wife of Lukashenka, the journalist describes her as “kind” and “openhearted” (Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi, Intervyu Pervoy Ledi Belarusi Komsomolskoy Pravde [Interview of the First Lady of Belarus to Komsomolskaya Pravda],

2005, para.2). Then, out of her own statements, it becomes clear that the first lady was brought up in a very strict family, that she was a successful student, and when she became a wife of Lukashenka, she dedicated her life to the family, taking care of two sons, and deeply respecting her husband, who always had the last word in all the discussions, except for those dealing with daily household activities (Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi, Intervyu Pervoy Ledi Belarusi Komsomolskoy Pravde [Interview of the First Lady of Belarus to Komsomolskaya Pravda], 2005, para. 50-52). In addition to this, it is several times stressed in the article that the first lady of Belarus lives the same life as the majority of Belarusian citizens: she works on a regular job, goes shopping herself, takes care of her house, she has never been abroad, and does not really want to go anywhere from her native village, except for visiting her husband, children and grandchildren on holidays. She is not known publically, so she can go anywhere she wants without being recognized (Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi, Intervyu Pervoy Ledi Belarusi Komsomolskoy Pravde [The interview of the First Lady of Belarus to Komsomolskaya Pravda], 2005, para. 68).

This interview, as well as some interviews of the president himself, create a very problematic image of the Lukashenka's family. It appears that in this family the role of the woman is diminished to household activities. The first lady of Belarus in her interview openly states that she is not in any sense involved in her husband's politics, and that she does not even feels at home in the presidential residence in Minsk (Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi, Intervyu Pervoy Ledi Belarusi Komsomolskoy Pravde [The interview of the First Lady of Belarus to Komsomolskaya Pravda], 2005, para.32). In a sense, Galina Lukashenka in the official media is constructed as a wife of the president, but not as the first lady of the country. The private and public spheres become strictly separated again, and the wife is not allowed into

the public sphere even symbolically, through the role of the first lady. In the public domain Lukashenka`s family consists only of the president himself, and his three sons. As a matter of fact, two elder sons of the president are married and have kids, but official media very seldom mention this fact.

The information about the sons of Lukashenka frequently appears in the official media. Two elder sons of Lukashenka are usually mentioned in the context of sport (BT, Novosti [News], 2007) (usually hockey that they play with their father), and military service (Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi, Prezident Lukashenko sluzhil pogranichnikom [President Lukashenko served as a frontier guard], 2010, para. 3) . In the article dedicated to the military service of Lukashenka`s sons, published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi*, it is specially mentioned that both sons of Lukashenka could avoid military service, but “as men” they decided to join the army, and just like their father they were serving as the frontier guards (Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi, Prezident Lukashenko sluzhil pogranichnikom [President Lukashenko served as a frontier guard] 2010, para. 3) . These kinds of reports have a clear reference to the traditional male roles and male education, when sons are brought up by their fathers as ‘real men’ through sport and military exercises, since in future they are to be soldiers of their state and defenders of their household.

But, as I stated in the second chapter of my thesis, for the last couple of years Lukashenka almost all the time appears on public with his youngest, born out of wedlock son Nikolay. The official media often report about actions of the little boy more in detail than about his father`s actions. Official media tends to stress the fact that Lukashenka is a very good father, and he really takes care of his little son, loves him, and teaches him to be strong, brave and healthy (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 2008, CTV, 2010). These reports again bring us back to the

traditional male education on the one hand, and Lukashenka's fatherly care of his son, and therefore, of his nation, on the other hand. As a matter of fact, official media do not report about the mother of little Nikolay, he is always shown only with his father, and it is interpreted as a norm, official media do not stress the point that the mother seems to be not really present in the little boy's life.

Oppositional media tend to see the situation differently. In the next subchapter I am going to analyze the interpretations of the image of the father of the nation, performed by Lukashenka as they appear in the oppositional publications.

### **3.2. Lukashenka as the Father of the Nation in the Oppositional Belarusian Media**

Oppositional media in Belarus do not have a lot of opportunities to address the audience. Newspapers and magazines, which publish the materials that contradict the officially accepted ideology are at risk to be closed or banned (Hartyya '97, 2009). Therefore, oppositional newspapers and magazines are active mainly in the Internet. For my analysis I will use the following oppositional electronic newspapers: *Hartyya '97*, *Belorusskiy Partizan*, *Salidarnasts* and *Kompromat*. These sources tend to interpret the actions of Lukashenka in a much more critical way than the official media that is controlled by the state.

#### **3.2.1. Lukashenka's position in relation to Belarusian Identity in the Oppositional Media**

In contrast with the official media that praise Lukashenka for 'saving' Belarus, and for rejecting liberalism and market economy (Planeta, 2006), oppositional media blame the president



for the very same thing, calling him a “collective farmer in power” (Hartyya`97, Belarus -strana, kotoraya zamerzla v svoym proshlom [Belarus is a country that has frozen in its past], 2004, para. 14) that brought the country back to the Soviet times and turned it into “the museum [...] where the Cold War had never ended, and the Soviet Union had never collapsed” (Hartyya`97, Belarus -strana, kotoraya zamerzla v svoym proshlom [Belarus is a country that has frozen in its past], 2004, para. 2).

One of the most important sides of this problem in the eyes of opposition is the issue of Belarusian identity and independence, since even symbolical return to the Soviet era suggests that the country is led back to the times when it did not have its own statehood and independence. So, one of the first actions of Lukashenka at the beginning of presidency –the change of the national symbols, adopted right after the collapse of the USSR to the one that significantly resembles the symbols of Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic-is interpreted by Belarusian oppositional media as an act of betraying the ideas of Belarusian independence, and as attempts to go back to the times when Belarus was a part of the territories, controlled by Moscow (Hartyya`97, Belarus -strana, kotoraya zamerzla v svoym proshlom [Belarus is a country that has frozen in its past], 2004).

Another concern of the oppositional media in Belarus is the decline of Belarusian language in comparison to Russian language. Oppositional media blames Lukashenka for ignoring Belarusian language and culture, and brings up numerous examples of disrespect towards Belarusian language (Hartyya`97, Belarus -strana, kotoraya zamerzla v svoym proshlom [Belarus is a country that has frozen in its past], 2004, para. 14, Belorusskiy Partizan, 2008) that never appear in the official media.

Opposition is also rather skeptical about attempts of Lukashenka to construct Belarus as a ‘savior of Slavic nations’, as well as a keeper of heroic Soviet past, claiming that Belarus is historically more connected to the Baltic states (mainly Lithuania), and there is no point in connecting it neither with contemporary Russia, nor with the Soviet Union (Hartyya `97, Belarus -strana, kotoraya zamerzla v svoym proshlom [Belarus is a country that has frozen in its past], 2004).

For the opposition any kinds of alliances with Russia or references to the Soviet past are associated with oppressive political regimes. On the contrary, the possible alliance with the EU (mainly, through Lithuania or Poland) is seen as a possible and preferable way of the development.

Therefore, Belarusian oppositional media to some extent deconstruct Lukashenka`s image of the father of the nation, depicting him as a betrayer of his own nation and his own identity, stressing his authoritarianism and his strong ties both to Russia and to an almost mythical Soviet past. It is quite logical that in the eyes of opposition the ‘Europeanization’ of Belarus is directly connected to the democratization of the state, that is why a lot of oppositional media materials are dedicated to the nature of Lukashenka`s power in the country.

### **3.2.2. The Nature of Lukashenka`s Regime in Oppositional Belarusian Media**

In oppositional Belarusian media Lukashenka has very negative image. He is mostly seen as a narrow-minded, authoritarian ruler, who wants to keep his power at any costs. Reacting to Lukashenka`s third presidential term, oppositional media used a very telling label “self election” (Kompromat, 2007, para 1) that was meant to expose the undemocratic character of Lukashenka`s rule in Belarus.

In oppositional media there are three main nicknames that are used to refer to Lukashenka. These are “the president for life” (Hartyya`97, Belarus -strana, kotoraya zamerzla v svoym proshlom [Belarus is a country that has frozen in its past], 2004, para. 2), “the last dictator of Europe” (Hartyya`97, Neskolko shtrikhov k portretu poslednego diktatora Evropy [A few traits to the portrait of the last dictator of Europe], 2009, para.1) , and *Batka/ Batska* (Kompromat, 2007, para 1) – stylistically marked ironical word for ‘father’. All these nicknames are rather important for the understanding of opposition`s attitude towards Lukashenka. The first two indicate the opposition`s opinion about the nature of Lukashenka`s power and the opposition`s tendency to see Lukashenka as a highly authoritarian ruler; they connect his style of ruling the state to the Soviet political tradition, since life-long rule and dictatorship were common for the majority of the Soviet leaders. The third nickname, which is also widely used by Russian (Komsomolskaya Pravda, Lyubyat li Batku na Batkovshchine? [Do they love Batka in his motherland?], 2004, para. 2) and Ukrainian media (Delfi, 2010, para.1) , refers to Lukashenka`s attempts to play the role of the father of Belarusian nation. In the context of oppositional media this nickname has very ironical implications, and is obviously used to show the absurdity of such image when it is used by a politician in a contemporary European state. For a long time Lukashenka himself was not commenting this wide-spread nickname, but a few years ago on the official site of the president appeared the following note: “A. G. Lukashenko<sup>2</sup> values the support of the nation and is proud of the fact that people call him ‘batka’ – this is how people have been calling authoritative persons who courageously defend the interests of the family and community” (The Official Internet-portal of the president of the Republic of Belarus, 2008, para 33). This sentence is an obvious attempt to interpret the highly ironical nickname *batka*,

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<sup>2</sup> A.G. Lukashenko – Russian version of the name of the Belarusian president, used in the cited source. In the main body of my thesis I use the Belarusian version of the name- A.R. Lukashenka.

given to the president, in a very positive way through the inclusion of it into the context of family and community that bring us back to the image of the father of the nation that Lukashenka performs. Here again Lukashenka is shown as a man that defends his household and takes care of his family, which is in this context is a metaphor of the Belarusian nation. Oppositional media, in their turn, tend to use this nickname ironically in order to show the unacceptability of such power-regime in the assumingly democratic state.

Another object of oppositional critique is the image of the Lukashenka`s family and its involvement into his political activities.

### **3.2.3. Lukashenka and His Family in Oppositional Belarusian Media**

Discussing Lukashenka`s family life, opposition does not really pay much attention to the figure of his wife. They just point to the fact that Lukashenka`s marriage does not really exist, especially since Lukashenka started to appear in public with his youngest son Nikolay, whose mother is not Lukashenka`s wife (Hartyya`97, V Moskvu Lukashenko snova ezdil s Koley [Lukashenka brought Kolya to Moscow again], 2009).

The figures of Lukashenka`s sons are discussed by oppositional media much more often, especially in the context of possible inheritance of power in Belarus. As a possible candidate, oppositional media sees the eldest son of Lukashenka – Viktor. As a matter of fact, while talking about Viktor`s coming into power, oppositional media deliberately use the metaphor of “ascending the throne” (Kompromat, 2007, para. 3). Such a metaphor serves as a reference to patriarchal model of the family, where the eldest son is to inherit the power of his father over the household, which in this case is replaced by the state and the nation.

In 2008, after Lukashenka for the first time took his 4-year-old son Nikolay to a public event oppositional media turned their attention to the little boy, comparing him to the “heir to the throne” (Belorusskiy Partizan, 2009, para. 1), especially when he started to accompany his father not only during the public holidays, but on official meetings with foreign political leaders.

The most discussed events in the oppositional media of the last two years are military parades and military exercises that Nikolay Lukashenka attends with his father (Belorusskiy Partizan, 2009), and during which, as I mentioned in my second chapter, generals report not just to Lukashenka, but to his little son, as well. The oppositional newspaper *Belorusskiy Partizan* compared these events to clownery, claiming that Lukashenka’s attempts to involve his son into politics totally belittle him as a political figure (Belorusskiy Partizan, 2009, para.1).

Although Belarusian oppositional media do not pay attention to a number of facts that are significant from the perspective of gender analysis, such is the absence of the female figure in the official biography of the ruler, and the strong connection between militarism, sport, masculinity and authoritarian political power, they do show the absurdity of the image of the father of the nation, created by the contemporary ruler in a country that is proclaimed to be democratic.

Despite critique of the opposition, the image of the father of the nation has become a well-known brand, directly associated with Lukashenka in Belarus and some neighborhood states. As a consequence this image has its interpretations not only in official and unofficial media, but in art, as well. In my next subchapter, I intend to analyze how the image of the father of the nation is interpreted in the artistic sphere.

### 3.3. Interpretations of the Image of the Father of the Nation in Popular Culture Arts

The fact that the political image of the ruler has its interpretations in art, suggests that the relevance of this image for the society is quite high. There were attempts to interpret the image of Lukashenka in visual arts (Multclub, 2008) and in theatric forms (First Channel (Russia), 2001), but the genre of the popular songs is, in my opinion, the most influential one, since it obviously has a much larger audience. That is why as an object of my analysis I have chosen the genre of popular songs. In this subchapter I will analyze the texts of four pop-songs, dedicated to Lukashenka. Two of them create a positive image of the president, another two are full of irony that is also present in the oppositional media, as I mentioned before.

#### 3.3.1. Positive Readings of the Image of the Father of the Nation in Popular Culture

The first popular song (Kharchikov, 1997), praising Lukashenka, appeared in 1997, not in Belarus, but in Russia, and had a title *Lukashenko*,<sup>3</sup> *come!* [see Appendix 2]. Still, I find it necessary to include this song into my analysis, since it creates an image of the president, which is very interesting from the perspective of gender analysis. In this song Lukashenka is called a “hero”, a “leader”, a “redeemer”, a “knight” and a “brother” These metaphors create a highly idealized image of a perfect ruler, who can become a savior of the “betrayed” country, which is how Russia is portrayed in the text of the song. It is important to mention a parallel that clearly exists here between the images of a ruler, and poeticized military images of a knight and a redeemer that reinforce the connection between militarism and statehood and that indicate that

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<sup>3</sup> Lukashenko – Russian version of the last name Lukashenka

politics as an exclusively male domain. The image of the brother, on the one hand, refers here to the military brotherhood, and therefore is also strongly connected to the ideal of hegemonic masculinity, and on the other hand, it reinforces associations with family domain and allows to see the nation as a family, and through this to view the ruler as the father of the nation, who in the idealized world, created in the text, can be turned into the “bright knight” and the “redeemer”.

The second song (Syabry, 2006) that I want to analyze, appeared in 2006 during the third presidential campaign of Lukashenka and had a very different tone. The title of this song is *Listen to Batka!* [see Appendix 3], but although it has a very ironical character it does not diminish the image of the father of the nation created by Lukashenka, moreover, it implicitly praises it. Although the name of Lukashenka is not mentioned in the song, it is clear that the imaginary character of the song *Batka* refers to him.

It is important that *Batka* in the song is pictured as “the head of the household”, who “can set a discipline everywhere”, and in comparison to whom “our boyfriends are nothing”. And again he is treated more as the head of the household, rather than a head of the state, his power is quite authoritarian, and he remains an ideal of ‘true’ masculinity. All these traits of the father of the nation are given as absolutely positive, therefore, each verse of the song ends with suggestion: “Listen to Batka!” and sounds as an admonition that a little child could get from someone. The point is that the imaginary child here stands for Belarusian nation, which is taught how to respect its ‘father’.

### 3.3.1. Negative Artistic Interpretations of the Image of the Father of the Nation

Other two songs that I want to analyze use irony in order to show the absurdity of the image of the father of the nation. The first song (Murzilki International, 2008) with the title *Lukashenko is...* [see Appendix 4] appeared in 2008 in Russia and was written in a form of a dialog between Russia and Belarus. In this song Russia criticizes Belarus for electing Lukashenka for presidency, since he is “husky, clumsy, screaming”, and “all Europe is already against” him, and it is easier to “make him a tsar” than to claim that he is a president. Belarus, in its turn, replies that Lukashenka “is the best [because] he plays hockey” and all the other issues do not matter that much. This song is meant to show how the serious shortcomings of Lukashenka are ignored in the official Belarusian discourse, while rather insignificant traits, such as his passion towards hockey, are constructed as his most important and most positive traits. Basically, the attention of the official media towards Lukashenka’s sport activities also can be interpreted through the perspective of the dominant masculine discourses. Constructing the president as an active hockey player, official media implicitly construct him as a strong man, ‘real’ man that can be trusted. The choice of the favorite sport here is also very important. Hockey is a very rude and aggressive game, and these are the traits that stereotypically are praised in men, moreover, it is a team game, and the cooperation with the team and the atmosphere of brotherhood are also very important for the dominant masculine discourse that has strong militaristic implications.



In reality, it appears, that Lukashenka's image of the strong man can overcome his image of the dictator that does not respect the laws, and is free to do whatever he wants to. The song *Lukashenko is* shows this paradox in an ironical way.

The second song (Lyapis Trubetskoy, 2006) with the title *Lukashenko* [see Appendix 5] appeared in 2006, and in this song Lukashenka is called a “funny story-teller” and a “cheat” that manages to make people believe in miracles. This song is obviously a reaction towards the efforts of the Lukashenka's administration to construct Belarus as a successfully developing state that has all its success and prosperity thanks to Lukashenka.

The fact that the image, created by Lukashenka, already has its interpretations in popular culture suggests how strong its presence is in public sphere.

Marples in his works, dedicated to the political situation in Belarus tends to explain Lukashenka's popularity with his constant references to the Soviet past, which is associated with stability and prosperity, especially among the older generation of Belarusians (Marples, 1999, 2004). I suppose that Lukashenka's popularity is to be explained in a much more complex way. It is based also on his image of the ‘real man’ who is willing to defend his family and his nation, which basically means that Lukashenka uses the stereotypical images of the dominant types of masculinity, such as military masculinity, sport masculinity, political masculinity in order to prove his power and to gain respect of the population. In addition to this, the authoritarian character of Lukashenka's power does not give people a choice, leaving him almost the only significant and influential politician in the state.

## Conclusion to Chapter 3

It is quite obvious that official media materials, dedicated to Lukashenka, do not contradict the image of the father of the nation, performed by the president, moreover the publications that appear in official media tend to stress the points, which are essentially important for that image. For example, as I mentioned in this chapter, pro-Lukashenka magazines, newspapers and TV-channels tend to pay a lot of attention to president's warm relationships with his sons, to the fact that Lukashenka is doing sports or is familiar with military service. All these small details, brought together, compose the image of the father of the nation, built through the references to dominant, heterosexual masculinity situated within the frameworks of politics, militarism and sport.

Although, the oppositional media try to show the weak sides of the image of the father of the nation, they can speak mostly just through the Internet, while Lukashenka himself, and the official media, which support him, have a lot of opportunities to spread the information among the population.

## ***Conclusion***

In my thesis I have intended to explore the connections of the image of the father of the nation with hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal family model. I have analyzed this image as it is performed by the current Belarusian president Alyaksandar Rygoravich Lukashenka. In my analysis, I have looked into the strategies, used to create the image of the father of the nation through exposing the relationships that are set between the president and the nation, the president and the power, and the president and his family. As a part of my research, I have also observed how verbal and visual self- representations of Lukashenka serve to create the image of the father of the nation, and what are the interpretations of this image given by the official and the oppositional media, as well as in popular culture, aiming to support or diminish Lukashenka`s assumed status.

My starting point was that the very fact of the existence of an influential image of the father of the nation within the political discourse of a contemporary European state that such as Belarus seems to be paradoxical. While on the one hand contrary to newly adopted policy of democratic change, this image is obviously rooted both in communist or socialist authoritarianism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in a traditional model of the family, which gives supreme power to the father. Moreover, I see in this connection with the traditional family model one of the significant sources of the popularity and the obvious political success of this image in Belarusian society. Therefore, I have claimed that the image of the father of the nation, having a clear connection to hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal family model legitimizes the authoritarian power of the

leader, representing it as normative model of power, which is based on the ‘natural’ authority of the father over his household, which in the political discourse is translated into the nation.

During my research, I have found a number of evidences to support my claim.

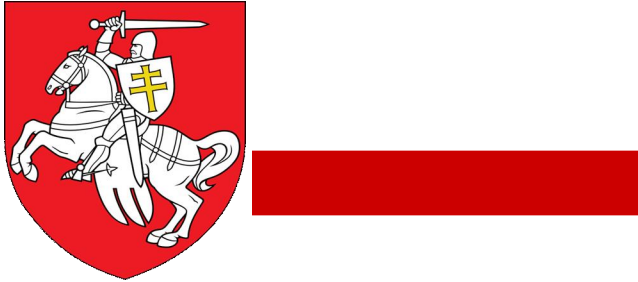
At the same time, while working on my thesis, I have realized that the political success of the image of the father of the nation is a highly complex phenomenon, and that it was impossible to address all of its sides within a scope of this thesis. There are several issues that should be researched further, like the intersection of the communist model and the patriarchal model of the society that allows the image of the father of the nation to be effective in Belarus and in a number of other post-Soviet states, such as Azerbaijan or Turkmenistan or a relations that exists between the proclaimed democracy and the actual authoritarianism.

Also, in my case, there was no space to pay more attention to artistic interpretations of the image of the father of the nation, and this topic still requires a profound research.

I think that further study of this phenomenon can contribute significantly to a better understanding of specific paths of development that occurred in traditional countries, in which more authoritarian forms of rule were preserved. In my study, using the Belarusian case, I wanted to show that an extensive use of the image of the father of the nation is one of highly gendered aspects of the new forms of authoritarianism.

## *Appendices*

### **Appendix 1**



Pic. 1.



Pic.2



Pic.3



Pic. 4



Pic. 5



Pic.6



Pic. 7



Pic. 8



Pic.9



Pic.10



Pic.11



Pic.12





Pic.13.



Pic.14.

## Appendix 2

Александр Харчиков	Aleksandr Kharchikov
<b>Лукашенко, приди!</b>	<b>Lukashenko, come!</b>
Честному белорусскому вождю. Дай Бог, чтобы нам в нём не ошибиться.	To the honest Belarusian leader. God, don't let us to be mistaken about him.
Великороссы и белые россы Кровные братья навек. Не потерпи же злобной угрозы Русич - герой - Человек!	Great Russians and White Russians Are blood brothers forever. Then, don't stand a cruel danger Russian-hero-man!
Лукашенко, приди в Россию, Александр Григорич, приди! Разбуди, подними, встряхни нас! Через смуту нас проведи!	Lukashenko, come to Russia, Aleksandr Grigoryevich, come! Wake us up, cheer us up! Take us through the revolt!
Тяжкому рабству не видится края, Продана и предана Наша любимая, наша родная Падает в пропасть страна.	There's no end seen for the hard slavery, Sold and betrayed, Our beloved, our native Country is falling into precipice.
Лукашенко, приди в Россию, От измены очисти Москву, Будь вождём настоящим, сильным, Утоли нашу боль, тоску!	Lukashenko, come to Russia, Clean Moscow up from betrayal, Be a real, strong leader, Cure or pain and sorrow!
Стыд поражения, горечь утраты Жгут и тиранят нас.	The shame of defeat, the bitterness of loss Burn and tyrannize us.

<p>Как избавителя - витязя - брата Ждём мы сегодня Вас.</p> <p>Лукашенко, приди в Россию, Светлым витязем к нам приди. Александр Григорич, веди нас, До Победы вперёд веди!</p> <p>Ведь из одной же мы колыбели, Вместе - из честной семьи, Хоть ренегаты - выродки - звери Нас по углам развели.</p> <p>Александр, приди в Россию Под фанфары и гром, приди, Будь заступником нашим, спаси нас, Через смуту Русь проводи!</p> <p>В дни испытаний, бед и сомнений Светоч нам- Белая Русь. Русские с Вами, русские верят В новый Советский Союз!</p> <p>Лукашенко, приди в Россию, Александр Григорич, приди. За собою, братьев, веди нас До Победы вперёд веди!</p>	<p>As for the redeemer – knight-brother, We are now waiting for you.</p> <p>Lukashenko, come to Russia, As a bright knight come to us. Aleksandr Grigoryevich, lead us, To the Victory lead us!</p> <p>We are from the same cradle, though, All together – from the honest family, Although the regents-degenerates-beasts Caused the quarrel among us.</p> <p>Aleksandr, come to Russia, With fanfares and thunder, come, Be our defender, save us, Take Rus through the revolt!</p> <p>In the days of trials, troubles and doubts, The light for us is White Rus. Russians are with you, Russians do believe In the new Soviet Union!</p> <p>Lukashenko, come to Russia, Aleksandr Grigoryevich, come! Lead us, brothers, To the Victory lead us!</p>
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### Appendix 3

‘Сябры’	‘Syabry’
<p><b>Слушай Батьку!</b></p> <p>Вокруг вздыхают: "Настоящих нет мужчин. Красивых, умных и с особенною статью." И значит, есть у нас сегодня сто причин, Вам рассказать про собственного Батьку!</p> <p>Когда наш Батька начинает песни петь, То соловьи в садах застенчиво краснеют. И в след часами могут женщины смотреть, И всем понятно, почему они немеют.</p> <p>Припев:</p> <p>Ладно сшит и крепко сложен, Он плохому не научит. Батька всех построить может, Батька всех других покруче. Разведет легко обиды, Он надежен и спокоен. Только глянет - сразу видно, Кто у нас хозяин в доме! Найра-найра-на-ра... Слушай Батьку! Утром, ночью и днем - Слушай Батьку! Если плохо тебе - Слушай Батьку! Если все хорошо</p>	<p><b>Listen to Batka!</b></p> <p>People around are complaining that there are no real men.</p> <p>Handsome, intelligent, and with some special stature.</p> <p>So, we have a hundred reasons to tell you today about our Batka!</p> <p>When our Batka begins to sing songs, Nightingales in the gardens blush bashfully, And women can follow him with their eyes for hours, And everybody understands why they lose their ability to speak.</p> <p>Choir:</p> <p>Nicely and strongly built, He will never teach you wrong, Batka can set a discipline everywhere, Batka is cooler than anybody else. He will easily solve all problems. He is reliable and calm. Once he glances – and it is clear,</p>

<p>Не надо в паспорте года его искать,  Огнеопасный до сих пор имеет возраст.  Он первым в воду и в огонь привык шагать,  Ему по пояс кавалеры наши просто.</p> <p>И за словами не полезет он в карман.  Наш Батка строгий, но и справедливый  тоже.</p> <p>И про него напишут не один роман,  И на него нам быть хотелось бы похожим</p> <p>Припев</p>	<p>Who is the head at our household!</p> <p>Listen to Batka!</p> <p>In the morning, at night, and in the afternoon-</p> <p>Listen to Batka!</p> <p>If everything is bad-</p> <p>Listen to Batka!</p> <p>If everything is good.</p> <p>There is no need to check his age in the  passport,</p> <p>He is still in the inflammable age.</p> <p>He has a habit to be the first one to enter water  and fire,</p> <p>All our boyfriends are nothing in comparison  to him!</p> <p>He will not search for nice words, when it is  not necessary.</p> <p>Our Batka is strict, but fair, as well.</p> <p>And there will be not just one novel written  about him,</p> <p>And we all want to be like him.</p> <p>Choir</p>
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## Appendix 4

<p><b>‘Мурзилки- International’</b> <b>Лукашенко –это</b></p> <p>-Вот говорила я тебе много раз: Кого ж ты выбрала, дурная, Это просто атас! Какой-то сиплый, несуразный, Все крисит и крисит, То журналистов в тюрьмы садит, То канал отключит, Его уже же, же Никто не хочет!</p> <p>-Как надоело мне тебя слушать,Русь, Не лезь с советами, родная, Я сама разберусь! Не наговаривай на Сашу, Все пиар и обман, Ведь если очень приглядеться, Он отличный пацан!</p> <p>Припев: Лукашенко-это Президент планеты! Ла-ла-ла-ла-ла! Лукашенко-это Президент планеты! Ла-ла-ла-ла-ла! Лукашенко-это</p>	<p><b>‘Murzilki International’</b> <b>Lukashenko is</b></p> <p>Russia: I’ve been telling you many times: Whom have you chosen, silly, It`s just horrible! He is husky, clumsy, Screaming and screaming, He is imprisoning journalists, Or banning TV-channels, Nobody wants Him anymore!</p> <p>Belarus: How tired I am from listening to you, Rus! Do not intervene with your advice, I will manage it myself! Do not blame Sasha, It`s all PR and lies, Since if to look very closely, He is a great guy!</p> <p>Choir:</p> <p>Lukashenko is The President of the planet! La-la-la-la-la!</p>
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<p>Президент планеты!  Ла-ла-ла-ла-ла!  В выборы играем:  Сашу выбираем!  Ла-ла-ла-ла-ла!</p> <p>-Делай все, что хочешь,  Хоть танцуй в неглиже,  На Лукашенко вся Европа  Ополчилась уже!  Давай-ка вот какую тему  Мы с тобой перетрем:  А может, Сашу коллективно  Сразу сделать царем?  И пусть сидит-дит-дит  Себе на троне!</p> <p>-Не приставай ко мне,  Все будет ОК,  Он лучше всех на белом свете:  Он играет в хоккей!  А если там кого-то  Иногда и того,  Мы все равно проголосуем  За него одного!</p>	<p>Lukashenko is  The President of the planet!  La-la-la-la-la!  Lukashenko is  The President of the planet!  La-la-la-la-la!  We are playing elections:  Electing Sasha!  La-la-la-la-la!</p> <p>Russia: Do whatever you want,  Even dance naked,  All Europe is already  Against Lukashenko!  Let`s discuss this kind of idea:  Maybe, we should collectively  Made Sasha to be a tsar,  And let him sit  On his throne!</p> <p>Belarus: Do not bother me!  Everything will be OK,  He is the best:  He plays hockey!  And if he somewhere somehow  Did something to someone,  We will still vote  Just for him!</p>
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## Appendix 5

<p><b>Ляпис Трубецкой</b> <b>Лукашенко</b></p> <p>Он с доброй сказкой входит в дом! Он с детства каждому знаком! Он не ученый, не поэт, Но покори́л весь белый свет! Веселый сказочник и плут, Скажите, как его зовут? Лу! Ка! Шен! Ко! Лу! Ко! Шен! Ка! Я убедился нынче сам, Что можно верить чудесам! Поверить в это мне помог Один веселый мужичок! Он очень скоро будет тут! Скажите, как его зовут? Лу! Ка! Шен! Ко! Лу!</p>	<p><b>Lyapis Trubetskoy</b> <b>Lukashenko</b></p> <p>He comes to the house with a fairy-tale! Everybody knows him from the childhood! He is not a scientist, not a poet, But he has conquered the whole world! Funny story teller and cheat, Tell, what`s his name? Lu! Ka! Shen! Ko! Lu! Ka! Shen! Ka! I realized myself That it is possible to believe in miracles! The one merry man Helped me to believe in it! He will be here in a moment, Tell, what`s his name? Lu! Ka! Shen! Ko! Lu!</p>
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<p> Ко!  Шен!  Ка!  И Дуремар, и Карабас  Им одурачены ни раз!  Лиса хитра, и Кот прохвост,  Но ведь и он не так-то прост!  Он очень скоро будет тут!  Скажите, как его зовут? </p>	<p> Ka!  Shen!  Ka!  All cheats  Are fooled by him  Not just once!  The Fox is artful,  And the Cat is the fraud,  But he is not that simple himself!  He will be here in a moment,  Tell, what`s his name? </p>
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