NEW INTELLECTUALS GO PUBLIC: "COMMUNICATION EXPLOSION" IN AUTHORITARIAN MINSK

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate the phenomenon of burgeoning public lectures in Minsk. In spite of the constraints imposed by the authoritarian regime, independent public educational and cultural activities are growing. People who stand behind them are usually the scholars who received Western education, strive to integrate themselves in the global academic market, but at the same time remain on the margins of the academic establishment in Belarus. I use Bourdieu's field analysis to investigate the position of new intellectuals in the university field in Belarus. Besides, I use the theory of public sphere to explain the "public" dimension of the informal educational initiatives. Data for this research were collected through the fieldwork in Minsk in April 2015. The results show that due to the fact that the state authorities retard the transformation of the university system and preserve it as highly centralized, hierarchical, and state-controlled, it is difficult for new intellectuals to integrate themselves into the system. As the result, they create an alternative intellectual sphere where they can use cultural capital they accumulated and follow alternative ways to pursue academic careers in Belarus. The strategy of "going public"–to give, attend, and organize intellectual public events–is one of the ways to create alternative discursive arenas and counterpublics. The thesis explores recent changes in the cultural and academic landscape of Belarus and brings more understanding of the post-socialist symbolic space.

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INTRODUCTION

The way contemporary Belarus is represented always has a touch of hopelessness. It is an authoritarian country where people suffer and human rights are violated. The same message was repeated in the film "Dangerous Acts Starring the Unstable Elements of Belarus" (Sackler 2014) that opened Verzio Documentary Film Festival in Budapest in the fall of 2014. The film told the story of the Belarus Free Theater, an independent underground group whose performances were critical of the state authorities; as a result, the actors put themselves at serious personal risks and were eventually forced to exile. After the screening, I tried to escape the cinema as soon as possible—the film drew such an unbearably hopeless picture of the Belarusian society that I couldn't help but feel sorry for the fact that I am a Belarusian.

The idea of this research came to me as a kind of protest to the representations of this sort. I decided to tell another story about Belarus, not bluntly denying the fact that it is an authoritarian country but trying to look at different alternative activities happening in spite of the political regime. One such example is the burgeoning growth in independent public educational and cultural initiatives in Minsk. I remember the day when I spent the evening moving from one public lecture to another. The very possibility to have free access to information, to public intellectual events, the possibility of choice, the choice of both place and content struck me then as something I had not experienced before in Minsk. I was not alone in these observations. The *Partizan* magazine, which writes about the contemporary Belarusian culture, interviewed more than forty representatives of the Belarusian independent cultural scene, asking what was peculiar and important in the outgoing year of 2012. Most experts underlined the "communication explosion" in the public sphere of Belarus (*Partizan*, 2013). What was called a "communication explosion" by the local experts is an unprecedented number of public events—public lectures,

presentations, workshops, exhibition openings, and round table discussions. Public events of this sort may be perceived as an integral part of everyday life in any democratic country, but in the case of Belarus, where the public sphere is monopolized by the state, where mass media, educational institutions, political and economic life still remain under the strict control of the authorities, the independent public activity is a much more complex phenomenon. The goal of this research is to explore intellectual public events and the people who are behind them.

For my fieldwork I spent one month in Minsk in April 2015, attending everything that was "on the menu"—*Artes Liberales* arts and humanities festival, *European Café*'s public lectures, several book launches, project presentations, and exhibition openings. I did not attend lectures with a registration fee, motivational speeches, lectures on health and business, etc. I was interested in a very specific type of event—educational and intellectual open public lectures in social sciences, arts, and humanities. I wrote field notes documenting observations and multiple informal conversations. I also collected eleven in-depth (semistructured) interviews (lasting approximately one hour each, all held in Russian) with the key informants—those who give, attend, organize, and host public lectures in Minsk. The quotations from the interviews were translated by me and approved by the informants. Some names have been changed for those who preferred to remain anonymous.

Being an art critic, researcher, and a lecturer at the European Humanities University, I participated quite actively in the public life of Minsk before I picked public lectures as a research topic. At the same time, I always wondered what makes me and my colleagues go public, why public activism constitutes an integral part of our professional practice. These questions, or "foreshadowed problems" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007), I brought with me into the field did not just stimulate the research but also caused its major limitation. I occupy a very specific

position in the field I choose to explore and I am interested in a very specific group of people. Throughout the text, I use the notion of "new intellectuals" which I borrowed from Elena Gapova's writings on the post-Soviet academia. Gapova refers to new intellectuals as the scholars embodying "a special habitus that became possible with the deconstruction of state control over the production of knowledge" (Gapova 2010, 208). I understand new intellectuals in the same way—as "Westernized intellectuals" who received Western education and who want to include themselves in the global symbolic market. However, the aspect that was not important in Gapova's analysis of the new group formation is crucial in my research—the geographical location of new intellectuals. I believe that those of them who do not leave Belarus but pursue academic careers in the authoritarian country constitute a separate and important sub-group. As challengers and outsiders of the traditional academia, they explore structural opportunities for alternative professional trajectories and alternative discursive spheres.

The difficulty of being a scholar in Belarus includes specific problems with the resources (libraries, grants), traveling (visas), publishing, defending dissertations, and getting jobs at universities, to name but a few. Some of these problems are discussed in the thesis. The adaptation of the post-Soviet academia to the global environment is not an easy process. The need to catch up with the more developed Western countries is accompanied by the slow realization of the impossibility to catch up and of the sad truth that joining the global academic market does not presuppose equal membership. The new intellectuals are academics on the margins. They experience a double marginalization—both within the Western academia and within the official Belarusian education. This marginalization, its structural constraints, and opportunities are examined in the thesis.

My initial hypothesis is that the new intellectuals are becoming an active and influential force on the local market of symbolic goods and that they use the strategy of "going public" to legitimize their cultural capital and take their position in the academic field under specific conditions of Belarusian authoritarianism. Or, to put it otherwise, my research question is: How and in what ways does the specific position in the academic field make new Belarusian intellectuals actively engage in public lecturing in spite of the authoritarian regime? I approach public lectures as a practice in a Bourdieusian sense—as something that can be observed but not immediately explained, like the conundrum of the scene that opens the book on bachelors in Bearn—"standing at the edge of the dancing area, forming a dark mass, a group of older men look on in silence" (Bourdieu 2008). I asked all my informants why they go public. But of course I wanted to know the bigger picture behind the immediate responses—the life stories, educational background, career trajectories, professional networks, affiliations and communities, survival strategies, in other words, the ground of the feel for the game.

What is missing in this approach is that I never talked to intellectuals who are successfully integrated in the mainstream of the official academia. This causes the biggest shortcoming of the research. I analyzed new intellectuals, their practices, their positions in the field and their critique of the official academia, but in order to understand the field as such, the state-sponsored academics need to be researched as well. While the new intellectuals distance themselves radically from the system of state control, it would be mistaken to see the intellectuals inside the state system just as silent mediators of the state ideology. For certain, there are elaborate devices which help academics escape system control and even exploit it. What is more, the collaboration between official and non-official academia is another crucial topic for further analysis. My research confirms the findings of Gapova's inquiry—the collaboration does not exist, as the two

groups of intellectual elites do not perceive each other as legitimate agents of the academic field. But the big events, like the International Congress of Belarusian Studies organized by the independent Institute of Political Studies called "Political Sphere" and the International Congress of Belarusianists organized by the National Academy of Sciences, offer interesting cases of cautious communication between the two academias.

Intellectual public lectures turn into a research problem only in the specific context of authoritarianism and the clash of two scientific systems. These important aspects of the context are explained in Chapters 1 and 2, correspondingly. The discussion on the public sphere and public space in Belarus helps to provide a historical and political context and to explain why going public is actually not an easy practice in Belarus. The theoretical framework includes references to J. Habermas, N. Fraser, and M. Warner and puts a stress on the conceptualization of the public sphere and politics provided by Belarusian scholars, particularly by N. Bekus and V. Silitski. In its core, the framework connects public sphere theory, urban studies, discussions of post-socialism, and sociology of intellectuals.

I examine the intellectual landscape of Belarus, marked by a radical divide between official and non-official academia, through the language and methodology provided by Bourdieu's field analysis and his case study of the French academia. Bourdieu argues that "[o]ne can and must read *Homo Academicus* as a programme of research on any academic field" (Wacquant 1989, 11). Of course, it is important to be aware of the gap between the historical, political, and social context of the intellectual field Bourdieu explored and the new intellectuals in the context of contemporary Belarus. It does not deny, however, the possibility of posing the same questions—What is at stake? What are the forms of specific capital? Who defines what is legitimate? Who controls the reproduction of the institutions? Even though the contexts, the institutional bodies,

and agents are different, it is possible to reveal common mechanisms and main oppositions which organize the space of intellectual production. The application of Bourdieu's field analysis to the Belarusian university system allows to place the local specificity into the global context and gives the possibility to compare the Belarusian academic field with any other.

As soon as the context is explained and the discussion is started, I provide the ethnographic material of specific places (*Gallery Ў, ЦЭХ*), initiatives (*European Café*, *Flying University*), events (*Artes Liberales* festival) and people in Chapter 3. Special emphasis is placed on the festival, and this part turned out to be the most difficult for me to write, as it reveals the core of the conflict and moves closer to personal dramas. Here, I talk about the European Humanities University, my alma mater, and the scandalous events which are happening around the university and which are changing the intellectual landscape in the country.

I address my research to a wide audience, though while writing the thesis I was having in mind first of all my Belarusian colleagues and friends who are called here the new intellectuals or academics on the margins. "So, you are going to show that there are people here," my colleague commented ironically after I told her about the research. Yes, my intention is to tell the story about a certain group of people dramatically unrepresented and almost invisible in the context of general discussions of political climate of the "last dictatorship of Europe"—those who live in Belarus and struggle to have academic careers outside the politicized institutions of the authoritarian state. I believe that the research will bring more understanding of the post-Soviet symbolic space and the role that knowledge as a form of power plays in post-Soviet social structuration.

CHAPTER 1: PUBLIC SPHERE IN BELARUS

Twenty copies of a new book titled *Anthropology. Ethics. Politics*, written by Tatiana Shchyttsova, philosopher and professor at the European Humanities University and published by the EHU Press in Vilnius, were confiscated by the Belarusian customs officers at the Belarusians–Lithuanian border on suspicion that the books may be a threat to national security. Shchyttsova wanted to have some copies of her book for the launch event which was scheduled on that very day, 9 April 2015, within the framework of *Artes Liberales* festival in Minsk. Despite the incident on the border, the book launch at *Gallery Ў* went with no obstacles. The authorities did not perceive it as a threat.

Every time I talk abroad about intellectual public events in Minsk, the audience most frequently asks whether those independent lectures are underground. They are not. They are public and open to everyone. The information about events—topic, time, place, abstracts of the talks—is distributed openly via social media (Facebook and VKontakte) and various newsletters. It may seem as a common way of doing things nowadays. However, in Belarus the authoritarian regime is famous for its strict control of the public sphere. In 2015, Freedom House (https://freedomhouse.org) has still ranked Belarus as "Not Free," noting that the government—among other things—systematically curtails press freedom and freedom of assembly for critical independent groups. This makes the phenomenon of mushrooming public lectures so specific: They are taking place in spite of the unfavorable climate of the authoritarian regime.

In this chapter, I present a theoretical and contextual ground for further exploration of Minsk public lectures. I start with Jurgen Habermas's classical definition of the public sphere because it highlights the importance of rational-critical public debates and a special role that the salons, the coffee houses, and the table societies played to institutionalize early public sphere as

an independent realm of criticism of public authority. Despite the fact that the Internet, new media, and the global market have necessitated a profound reconsideration of Habermas's definition (Bauman 1999; Calhoun 1992; Crossley and Roberts 2004; Fabiani 2011; Fabiani 2014), the rudimentary form of the public sphere is still at stake in the context of Belarus. Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner contribute to the contemporary reconceptualization of Habermasian "bourgeois public sphere" and acknowledge the multiplicity of discursive arenas, publics and counterpublics. This more complex understanding of the public sphere helps approach Nelly Bekus's key argument about the co-existence of the official and alternative "Belarusianness"—what it means to be Belarusian—in the contemporary political and cultural landscape of the country. One of the features related to this divide between the official and oppositional discourses is the co-existence of two disconnected public spheres, where each of them "functions on the basis of its own sources of information, its own social organizations, and two different cultural spheres" (Bekus 2010, 6). Bekus's analysis builds an important bridge between Habermas's concept of the public sphere and the conundrum of two academias explored in Chapter 2. My claim is that by opposing itself to the official educational institutions, the alternative academia creates its own public sphere where public lectures and informal educational institutions are the key elements.

However, the public sphere that the alternative academia currently creates in spite of the constraints imposed by the existing political regime is not a sudden explosion of criticism and contention. Public cultural and educational events have their historical precedents and analogies in other parts of the cultural sphere. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, and particularly after Belarus declared its independence in 1991, a massive cultural revival and awakening of national identity took place. There emerged dozens of cultural and art associations that called themselves

non-formal, non-official, or avant-garde. It was the time of burgeoning cultural activity. In 1994, the context changed drastically when Aliaksandr Lukashenka came to power and started to build an authoritarian state. Some intellectuals, particularly those of an older generation, who are active now in the public sphere, refer to the early 1990s as the spirit of freedom that they want to recreate now. Besides, the "Jeans Revolution" of 2006 and the subsequent protests made it clear that a certain social group, a counterpublic, emerged that wants the Belarusian society to be different from the official vision of Belarusian identity and that is ready to participate in the public sphere in order to declare their beliefs.

It should be noted that the development of the Internet also contributed greatly to the creation of the alternative public sphere independent from state control. For example, in my research on art communities in Belarus I explore the extreme popularity, starting from 2004 and onward, of *Znyata* forum, as it came to be the first and the only place where art photographers from all over the country could discuss publicly the topics that are important to the local art community (Poleschuk 2013a, 2013b). These virtual discussions happened alongside the booming exhibition activity. If at the beginning of the 2000s there were hardly a dozen photo-exhibitions per year, then by the end of the decade there were more than a hundred. However, a problematic and uneasy collaboration with the state art institutions led many artists to explore different kinds of alternative exhibition spaces—libraries, literary museums, cinemas, shopping centers, schools, bars, and cafés. Independent intellectuals share the same tendency of creative appropriation of the city space in their public activity.

1.1 Alternative Public Arenas

Habermas's definition of the public sphere can be used as the starting point in analyzing the public sphere as such with its key ingredient—an independent critical discussion. Although *The*

Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere ([1962] 1999) describes mostly the decline of the European public sphere, Habermas highlights several fundamental characteristics of the key concept that remain relevant till the present day. In the book, he theorizes the late seventeenth and the eighteenth century as the golden age of the public sphere, when all the major building blocks of publicity were formed for the first time in history. The concept of the public sphere is based on the idea that private individuals organize themselves in a public body of citizens in order to discuss the affairs of the state and society. The public space is a special realm mediating between private and state authorities. It is different from the private sphere because individuals are not supposed to discuss their private lives in public. Also, it is separate from the state, even though the state creates the conditions for the public sphere to exist: The public sphere is a sphere where the state is criticized and controlled.

According to the definition, the public sphere is inclusive and, thus, different from closed circles and societies. It is open and accessible for everyone. Habermas highlights property ownership and education as the only criteria of admission to the public sphere, since these qualifications guarantee private autonomy, a necessary basis for participation in public debates (Habermas 1999, 86). The person's status and position in social hierarchy did not matter, only "the authority of the better argument." Habermas describes an ideal (and idealized) speech situation where speakers are involved into the rational public debate over the common good and where only the best argument wins. Here, Habermas follows the Kantian idea of the Enlightenment and his call to "make public use of one's reason." Thus, public discussions of privatized individuals constitute the essence of the public sphere.

Equally important is the fact that the early public sphere emerged in the world of letters—in French salons, German table societies, and London coffee houses, which were the centers of art

and literary criticism but later extended the critical discourse to political and economic issues. Habermas illustrates the critical authority of the discursive space created by the literary public sphere:

> There was scarcely a great writer in the eighteenth century who would not have first submitted his essential ideas for discussion in such discourse, in lectures before the academies and especially in the salons. The salon held the monopoly of first publication: a new work, even a musical one, had to legitimate itself first in this forum. (Habermas 1999, 34)

Even though the public sphere in its more developed state is no longer attached to a specific physical space, the fact that the literary aspect of the public sphere has been lost is one of the shortcomings of contemporary adaptations of Habermasian concept. According to McGuigan (2011, 82), "the literary public sphere was not so much about transient news topics as about complex reflection on the problems of life, meaning and representation, which is characteristic of art". In other words, if Habermas referred to the physical space of salons, coffee houses, and table societies as just early institutional forms of the public sphere which later made way for the printing press with its more obvious political functions, then the literary aspect still needs to be preserved, because it helps understand the public sphere more broadly than just as critical debates over political issues.

Habermas's concept of bourgeois public sphere has received a detailed critique from many scholars. Nancy Fraser, one of his key postmodernist critics, identified fundamental shortcomings of the concept, in particular Habermas's neglect of the issues of significant exclusions and of inequality permeating the public sphere. In his preoccupations with rationality, Habermas did not pay attention to the fact that even the free access to the public sphere (let alone direct exclusions such as the exclusion of women and working class from politics) does not guarantee the equality of participation. Fraser insists that the concept of bourgeois public sphere has to be reconsidered, it should be disconnected from its history and include alternative public spheres and subaltern

counterpublics. Moreover, she contends that the gender and class bias of the concept of publicity should be eliminated and the conflictual nature of the public sphere should be recognized. In other words, as Fraser states, "[t]he revisionist historiography suggests a much darker view of the bourgeois public sphere than the one that emerges from Habermas's study" (Fraser 1990, 61–62). In her critique of Habermas's concept of the monolithic public space, Fraser argues that under the conditions of dominance and subordination, when it is impossible to reach equality in participation in the public space, subordinated groups tend to create their own parallel discursive arenas to produce "oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, needs" (Fraser 1990, 67). Multiplicity of "subaltern counterpublics," Fraser insists, has more advantages in explaining the society than Habermasian idea of a single public sphere open to everyone.

Michael Warner develops Fraser's claim concerning the existence of multiple publics instead of a single one, though he criticizes Fraser for using the term "subaltern" too vaguely and for the too inclusive understanding of a counterpublic. A discursive difference cannot be the sole criterion to constitute neither a "subaltern counterpublic" nor a counterpublic as such. A counterpublic has to consciously oppose itself to the dominant public sphere. As Warner puts it, "[o]ther publics mark themselves off unmistakably from any general or dominant public. Their members are understood to be not merely a subset of the public but constituted through a conflictual relation to the dominant public" (Warner 2005, 118). Warner refers to a lesbian and gay public as an example of a counterpublic which opposes itself to the discourse of a dominant public that Warner describes as one that is taken for granted and that he addresses as "universality or normalcy" (122). The practice of addressing is an important way for a public to find its boundaries and to exist. In this sense, the dominant public and the counterpublic function in the same way—they have to be open to everyone, not just to a circle of friends, colleagues, or

like-minded people. A public, according to Warner, addresses itself to indefinite strangers and promises any stranger a possibility of participation. A stranger pays or does not pay attention to the offer, participates or does not participate. Warner states: "The act of attention involved in showing up is enough to create an addressable public" (88).

According to this reasoning, a counterpublic opposes itself to the dominant public, it addresses strangers but it "also addresses those strangers as being not just anybody" (120). Those who want to participate in this counterpublic discourse and want to take the risk of this participation partake as well in creating this public as a social entity and in creating their own identities. Thus, Warner's analysis is particularly useful because it not only confirms the existence of counterpublics but also explains how the counterpublics attract their members. In providing this reasoning, Warner's theory of the public sphere serves as an important link to understanding the counterpublic of alternative "Belarusianness" which Nelly Bekus explores in her book *Struggle Over Identity: The Official and the Alternative "Belarusianness"* (2010).

In her analysis of the post-Soviet development of Belarus, Bekus observes a profound division in the Belarusian society which is much deeper than simply a political struggle between the authorities and the opposition. According to Bekus, it is a struggle over identity, over the visions of what it means to be Belarusian. One would think that it is a normal (democratic) coexistence of different understandings of identity, different interpretations of the past and different expectations for the future. However, what makes the Belarusian case specific is the intolerance of the country's authorities to any kind of alternative discourse. For those who have oppositional views—as far as politics, culture, history, and education are concerned—it is very complex to manifest these views publicly. That is why Bekus emphasizes a "total polarization of the public sphere," by which she means a radical divide between official and oppositional

discourses which produce different representations of the society, of the national idea and fundamental issues of life. Bekus believes that the official and the alternative public spheres are "two disconnected but, in a way, self-sufficient public spheres" (Bekus 2010, 170); they are fostered by the different sources of information, organizations, and cultural spheres, and they include different participants. Cooperation and mutual recognition of these two parallel discursive arenas are close to point zero. This stress on the lack of dialogue is particularly important, because it corresponds fully to the divide between two academias I explain in Chapter 2.

What is interesting is how the alternative public sphere, a counterpublic, exists in Belarus and what strategies it uses to actualize itself. There is a strive for the homogenization of the public sphere behind the intolerance of authorities towards alternative voices. The Belarusian state has produced a particular model of the "people power" that erases a political dimension and serves as an alibi for authoritarianism. In this model, the public is substantialized and represented as something monolithic, tolerant, and rational. The independent NGOs and political parties which present alternative views are marginalized, since they are treated as hostile to the authorities and to the "true" public (Fours 2006).

What constitutes the paradox of the authoritarian publicity in Belarus is that the manifestations of the alternative discourse are not fully suppressed, they are just not admitted to the official cultural and political space. Bekus gives multiple examples of this marginalization of the counterpublic. For example, the meetings of the opposition may be allowed in places other than the center of Minsk. Those meetings are relocated to the peripheries of the city; therefore, they are *de facto* excluded from the official public life. There are numerous outstanding Belarusian musical bands that gained international appraisal, but their songs are banned on the

radio, their concerts are prohibited in the country, and they never appear on Belarusian television because of their strong oppositional stance. The famous Belarus Free Theater holds its workshops and performances "in private apartments, bars, cafés, and clubs, often outside the city, because none of the official institutions want to take the risk of hosting them" (Bekus 2010, 235).

In my analysis of Minsk public lectures, I fully endorse Bekus's final conclusion regarding the existence of a communicative processes outside the state control and the existence of the general divide between state and non-state discursive arenas. Besides, the emphasis on the expulsion of the manifestations of alternative discourse from the official public sphere to the margins, in terms of both power and space, gives a clue to analyze public lectures and alternative educational institutions existing outside the official educational landscape. I claim here that an alternative educational sphere is proliferating and is tolerated by the regime mainly because it is located in cafés and art galleries and never enters the official public domain.

At the same time, I cannot accept Bekus's assertion that there are only two public spheres. I find it quite reductive, as it presupposes internal homogeneity and strong opposition of the spheres. It is not the case, especially in the recent years in Belarus when both the state ideology and the response of the opposition have become more diverse. In this sense, Fraser's stress on the proliferation of alternative public spheres as a means of widening discursive contestation and Warner's references to the counterpublics (in plural) are extremely useful for analyzing the current situation in Belarus, because it helps grasp the diversity of public resistance.

1.2 Contestation And Counterspaces In The Authoritarian City

In the field of urban studies, there is a concept of "the contested city." It is a city where the events "temporarily invert the urban power structure through symbolic control of the streets" (Low 1996, 391–92), where streets and squares become "a space where new forms of the social

and the political can be made, and the powerless can make history" (Sassen 2011, 574), where people "appropriate a space to which they then declare they belong" (Holston and Appadurai 1996, 202). Various studies focusing on urban protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, and occupy movements are proliferating. But to what extent can the concept of the contested city be applicable to Minsk? To what extent can an oppositional discourse occupy the streets of the city?

One of the constantly repeated slogans about the country's capital is that "Minsk is a clean city." Unfortunately, the meaning of the "cleanness" is both environmental and political. Described as the last true dictatorship in the heart of Europe by the former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Belarus is known for its highly unfavorable conditions for the development of public sphere and civil society. Mass media, educational institutions, political and economic life are under the control of the state authorities. Public sphere is rigorously monitored and monopolized by the state. Due to a highly efficient repressive apparatus, any kind of contentious collective action is meticulously cleaned up.

Even though it might be legitimate to doubt the very possibility of political participation in the society with such limited structural opportunities for the public life, there have been certain events in the history of independent Belarus that temporarily inverted the urban power structure. One of the brightest examples here is the so-called "Jeans Revolution" that turned Minsk into a contested city. Aliaksandr Lukashenka is known as a "serial election-stealer" (Wilson 2011, 258), since he falsified the votes in the referendum of 1996 and then in the elections of 2001, 2006, and 2010. On the wave of color revolutions in the region—Yugoslavia's Bulldozer Revolution (2000), Georgia's Rose Revolution (2003), Ukraine's Orange Revolution (2004), Lebanon's Cedar Revolution (2005), Kuwait's Blue Revolution (2005), Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution

(2005)—the protest movements in Belarus borrowed the repertoires of contention to organize the "Jeans Revolution".

On the day of the elections in 2006, after the results were announced (84.4% of the votes were in favor of Lukashenka), protests sparked against the falsification, with demonstrators estimating at 5,000 to 10,000 people. In the center of Minsk on October Square (called "Ploshcha" in Belarusian, which literally means "Square"), people organized a tent camp. In Belarus, as Alexandra Goujon argues (2009, 221), "the Jeans Revolution represents one of the most important mobilizations since the middle of the 1990s." With some hundreds of inhabitants, the tent camp survived for four days on the central square in Minsk, only to be brutally destroyed by the police later. The protesters were put in jail.

While everyone expected a revolution in Belarus, it did not happen. The reason is probably because Lukashenka learned a lesson from the experience of other countries: To not even play with democracy and to eliminate any opposition. The oppositional parties never receive access to legitimate participation in national politics. This is one of the repetitive arguments in Goujon's comparison of the Belarusian and Ukrainian political scenes. According to Goujon, one of the key elements of the success of Ukraine's Orange Revolution was political pluralism, when the presence and activity of the opposition were perceived as legitimate. In contrast, the opposition in Belarus did not receive any kind of institutional representation either on the local or national level (Goujon 2009, 209). The opposition was (and still is) denied access to the public sphere, since the squares and the media remain under the strict control of the state authorities.

Vitali Silitski called "preemptive authoritarianism" the strategy of the authorities to uproot the alternatives before they develop into a real threat . He writes:

> Preemption aims at political parties and players that are still weak. It removes from the political arena even those opposition leaders who are unlikely to pose a serious

> challenge in the next election. It attacks the independent press even if it reaches only small segments of the population. It destroys civil society organizations even when these are concentrated in a relatively circumscribed urban subculture." (Silitski 2005, 84)

According to Silitski, preemption creates a sense of hopelessness in the hearts and minds of the opposition and the society, because it thwarts any attempts to challenge the dominant power. In Silitski's view, the "Jeans Revolution" is the epitome of the preemptive techniques carried to perfection—even despite the fact that the democratic contention in fact reached the main square of the city, making the oppositional discourse visible in the official public sphere. Preemptive authoritarianism has remained the key feature of the regime afterwards. This conceptualization contributes greatly to the explanation as to how the state power functions in the public sphere.

There are numerous examples—sad, shocking and bizarre—of the impossibility for the citizens to voice their demands in the public space: The severe suppressions of the demonstrations in 2010, the arrests of the people participating in the hand-clapping protests in 2011, the detentions of the artists who performed urban interventions in 2012 ("Going Public" project and Mikhail Gulins's arrest), the detentions of people distributing ribbons with the traditional national ornament in 2014, to mention but a few. In all these cases, the authorities blocked interventions into the public sphere at the early stages of any contention.

The controversial character of the public sphere in Belarus has long been of interest for Belarusian intellectuals, mostly philosophers (N. Bekus, V. Fours, A. Ousmanova, O. Shparaga). Their main concern was to understand how the concepts of the public sphere, public and private can be applied to the post-Soviet context of Belarus (as the authoritarian conditions seem to contradict the whole idea of openness and freedom to express opinions). Vladimir Fours (2006) describes the state's current monopoly over the public sphere as the "political economy of fear" that returns citizens to the pre-political state of encapsulating in private life, remaining passive

and politically indifferent. Vitali Silitski (2012, 52) notes that the current state ideology in Belarus "mobilizes people to passivity", meaning that citizens are not welcome to participate in a political life.

Commenting on the difficulties of solidarity and mobilization under the authoritarian regime, Olga Shparaga argues: "The people are disengaged, driven into the labyrinths of their private lives, and when they enter the public sphere they face many obstacles, even dangerous to life" (Shparaga 2010, 164). Nevertheless, Shparaga reacted to the protests of 2006 with optimism: "In the public space of *Ploshcha*, in this open but dangerous dialogue of citizens, there was a flash of hope that politics as voluntary action for common purpose was emerging" (Shparaga 2008, 5). The very fact that hundreds of people came to *Ploshcha* despite the risk of arrests meant the return to the basic forms of the public life and the strengthening of civil society.

The "Jeans Revolution" of 2006 failed in the same way as the protest movement against the presidential elections of 2010 that were "stolen" from the population. It was a bitter lesson to learn for the counterpublic that direct confrontation with the authorities cannot succeed under the current political conditions. New forms of contentions emerged. For example, flashmobs and art interventions are used as an efficient form of symbolic resistance and as a way to create alternative public sphere (Ousmanova 2010; Ousmanova 2013; Goujon 2009, 203). The proliferation of alternative intellectual and educational events can also be regarded as a way of symbolic contention.

One of my informants, Artem, is not just a regular visitor of public lectures in Minsk. He takes part in organizing public lectures, workshops, and conferences and is engaged in editing the online magazine. Following the six years of living in Europe and getting his BA and MA degrees, he returned to Minsk. As an Urban Studies specialist, he started to look for people who obtained

a similar education in the field of architecture from state-run universities in Minsk. Together with his new colleagues, Artem soon discovered that the official system of education lacks profoundly in practical knowledge. Students of architecture departments do not receive up-to-date information and theories, do not have courses in humanities, and do not get trained to discuss urban planning critically. Therefore, Artem and his colleagues created an informal organization with the aim to promote education, collaboration, and research in urban issues. They invite lecturers from abroad and attempt to foster dialogue with local authorities. They organize small workshops where they teach citizens how to participate in the life of their neighborhoods. Artem said he was motivated by his previous study visits to Berlin and his discussions with urban activists:

> They didn't say that everything is fine, that they do easily what they want to do. Quite the opposite, they talked about their problems. And you understand that, in essence, their problems and our problems are very similar. They don't have an easy life. And you feel … well, OK … it's not easy there; it's not easy here; what's the matter then? I can stay here and do something here… I am always thinking about running away from here. Maybe I would escape if I realized I had nothing to do. If I understood I couldn't do this or that, then I would run. But I still feel I can do something here, I can do this thing and that thing. I spend all my time doing that is pleasant and interesting for me and related to my education. And I feel satisfied.

I asked Artem directly why his organization focuses on educational activities and not on artistic or political ones. He says he does not see a contradiction. "Urban studies is a just a cover," he commented smiling. "When we explain to people their right to the city in our workshops, it is a very political statement."

Public lectures as a research topic would probably not exist in another political context. It is exactly the highly problematic status of the public sphere that makes such kind of public activism so significant. This need to establish open discussion platforms outside the state control, nonprofit nature of these platforms, and the focus on arts and humanities refer to Habermasian classical scenario of the formation of the public sphere, underline the discursive specificity of the

activities, and imply the creation of the parallel discursive arena of the counterpublic as a way of symbolic contention. Also striking is the very practice of careful attempts and creative solutions which emerge as the only possible tactics in the context of the highly repressive state. Preemptive authoritarianism maintains the climate of not only fear and hopelessness but also profound uncertainty—you never know if the authorities will identify as threatening the things that you do. People who organize and participate in intellectual public events do so not because they are sure that such kind of activity is allowed in the authoritarian state, but because they overcome the uncertainty by making endless attempts of exploring what is possible to do.

CHAPTER 2: NEW CHALLENGERS OF OFFICIAL ACADEMIA

Being a student at the Central European University, I receive dozens of daily invitations to public lectures. With its intensive educational and research programs, CEU creates the intellectual dynamics that it is difficult sometimes to imagine that an academic milieu can function in a different way or that it can cause a feeling of intellectual deterioration and the hunger for intellectual stimuli that can be satisfied only outside the university building. However, these are the feelings my informants shared with me during my fieldwork in Minsk. Moreover, a number of Belarusian intellectuals shared the same feelings publicly in their talks and articles (Ousmanova 2005; Shabohin 2011). Belarusian universities do not have the reputation of vigorous intellectual centers. This leads me to the presupposition that the "communication explosion" happening in Minsk may have not only political reasons behind it. My point is that public lectures do not just build an alternative space outside the state ideology but also develop a discourse alternative to the official academia.

In this chapter, I locate the ground under this deep dissatisfaction with the official educational establishment. I start with the recent acceptance of Belarus into the Bologna process. The chapter helps place Belarus in the broader context of the European education and also shows how the authoritarian regime has destroyed institutional autonomy and academic freedom. After Belarus gained independence in 1991, the higher education system asserted profound attachment to the Soviet past and no significant reforms have been undertaken. The higher education system in Belarus is still very centralized, politicized, strictly controlled, and supervised by the President and the Ministry of Education. I present both the context and personal stories of scholars who have an experience of being inside the official academia.

During my fieldwork, I managed to talk with the representatives of three groups of intellectuals: (1) those who graduated from a Belarusian university and then continued their education and career in Western Europe; (2) those who left the official academia looking for alternative intellectual ventures in Belarus; (3) those who graduated from a Belarusian university and continued to work there, but at the same time started to participate actively in independent intellectual initiatives. Although I refer to all of them as new intellectuals, this differentiation is important. The new intellectuals are new agents in the academia. Their work is possible thanks to Western grants, they gained educational or research experience abroad (for example, through the participation in the International Higher Education Support program (HESP) of the Open Society Institute or degree programs at the European Humanities University in Vilnius), they acquire new cultural capital and produce a new type of knowledge that is markedly different from that in the Belarusian official academia. However, those who do not want to emigrate and pursue their academic careers in Belarus (though distance themselves from the state universities) need to find alternative public spheres and alternative public spaces within the constraints of the authoritarian regime.

2.1 Conservation Strategies of Academic Orthodoxy

It is not a mere coincidence that Belarus was banned from the Bologna process for a prolonged period of time. To join the European Higher Education Area, a national system of education has to be harmonized not only in the standards and quality assessment but also in certain social goals and democratic principles such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy, student participation, student and faculty mobility. Obviously, this is not in line with the authoritarian regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka. Kazakhstan, country with the similar political climate, was accepted into the Bologna process in 2010, thus, creating a precedent for other

countries with authoritarian regimes. Belarus, however, was banned on the grounds that it was unable to make a commitment to academic freedom (Corbett 2015; Mundell 2015; "Bologna Process: Last Outsider in Europe" 2015). On 14 May 2015, the resolution of the European education ministers eventually approved Belarus's admission into the process. However, experts remained skeptical and called not to expect sudden democratic changes in the national education (Shushkevich 2015; Dunaev 2015).

The Independent Bologna Committee, a civic initiative in Belarus, issued the memorandum claiming that Belarus is not ready to accept the values and goals of the EHEA, because the "violations of academic freedoms in Belarus' universities remain systematic and widespread" ("Memorandum By Independent Bologna Committee On The Second Application Of The Republic Of Belarus To Join The European Higher Education Area" 2014). The Committee evaluated the current academic autonomy of the Belarusian higher educational institutions as not exceeding 10%.

Independent Belarus inherited a highly centralized and hierarchical system of Soviet scientific institutions. It is known that the Soviet science existed as a symbiosis between the scientific community and the state control apparatus (Krementsov 1997). The management system of higher education in Belarus has not undergone considerable reformation since the Soviet times and still remains extremely centralized and authoritarian. There is a number of acts and regulations which declare the necessity to synchronize educational, teaching, and research practices with the current state ideology. As a result, students and teachers are easily expelled from universities if they happen to participate in oppositional protests, express their political views, or do something that contradicts the state ideology. Each university has a vice rector and each department has a vice dean responsible for managing ideological work, which means,

among other things, monitoring the ideological climate of the unit, developing personnel policy, and taking part in the recruitment process.

The rectors themselves are not elected by the academic community but appointed by the President of Belarus or by the Minister of Education. Similarly, they can be easily dismissed. In the memorandum, the Independent Bologna Committee mentions the scandal around Professor Shved's and Rector Rouba's dismissals in 2013 as an example of vulnerability of even top academic executives. Viachaslau Shved, doctor of historical sciences and head of the department at Hrodna State University, published his historical research of the Belarusian city of Grodno at the Polish Academy of Sciences Publishing House. Such "liberty" was not tolerated by those who monitored the ideological work at the university, and it was followed by the dismissal of both the professor and the rector. The story of Viachaslau Shved is not unique. The Committee's website (http://bolognaby.org/) presents a gallery of academic repressions victims: Eleven most infamous cases of political persecutions of academicians in Belarus with detailed descriptions of the reasons for and processes of dismissals.

Political censorship, preemptions, and persecutions create a climate of fear and insecurity and block the freedom of teachers and students to pursue knowledge and do research without the state interfering with their work. Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka feels obliged to regulate the field of academia personally. In addition to appointing university rectors, he appoints the Head of the Academy of Sciences and the Head of the Higher Attestation Commission (*Vysshaia attestatsionnaia kommissia*, or *VAK*); recommends topics and strategies for research institutes; approves the budgets; and reviews the quality of scientific output. In 2004, it was Lukashenka's personal decision to close the European Humanities University in Minsk on the grounds that "the school's main goal was to educate new Belarusian elite that would make the

nation pro-Western" (Charter'97 2004). Now that Belarus has been accepted to the EHEA, the system of higher education will have to undergo transformations. Though it is doubtful that academic freedom and institutional autonomy will be recognized by Lukashenka overnight. The official academia in Belarus remains dependent on the authoritarian regime, and those who stay inside academia have to be cautious about all political subtleties.

To supervise science policy and the scientific community as such, the Belarusian authorities preserved the Higher Attestation Commission (*VAK*), a special governmental agency which was initially created in 1930s in the Soviet Union with the aim to approve every degree and title awarded throughout the system. It was an integral part of the overall administrative control the state established over institutional structures, scientific personal and research policy to fix the status of science as the property of the state. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the *VAK* remained in a number of states, including Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan among others. It was abolished in some countries as part of the reorganization of academic structures—but not in Belarus.

Defending a doctoral thesis is an important stage of consecration to the scientific field. In Belarus, it is not only a long bureaucratic process but also a way to get rid of scholars who do not express their loyalty to the regime. The process forces a candidate to defend the research three times before three different panels of expert examiners. As soon as the thesis and the necessary number of peer-review publications are prepared, a student takes a preliminary examination at the department he/she is affiliated with. In case the defense was successful, a student is allowed to present the thesis on the next level—to the Dissertation Advisory Committee (*Dissertacionnyj sovet*) which consists of experts with higher academic qualifications (*doktor nauk*). Then the thesis is submitted for the final approval to the *VAK*. The third panel of experts reviews the

thesis, and only after their endorsement is a student awarded with the Candidate of Sciences degree (PhD equivalent).

After a thesis is written, it usually takes more than a year for a student to get a degree. A lot of documents need to be collected along the way, such as applications, recommendations, reviews, extracts from the protocols, etc. "The folder with the documents was twice as thick as the thesis itself," the informant describes her colleague's experience of defending a thesis in Minsk. The most difficult part of the process is to get approval from the *VAK*. *VAK*'s decisions lack transparency, and it is not uncommon when, after a successful defense at the Dissertation Advisory Committee, the thesis is vetoed by the *VAK*. This is exactly what happened with my informant's colleague, ruining her academic career. "She devoted eight years of her life to get a PhD but was left with nothing," the informant comments.

A student is allowed to make a second attempt—to rework the text and then go through the same three stages of defense. In case of failure, the thesis cannot be submitted for defense anymore. As the system of awarding degrees is centralized, it is difficult to recover from the defeat by switching to another graduate school and preparing a new thesis. It is possible to get a state-funded place at a graduate school only once. If a student decides to study at a graduate school one more time, he/she needs to pay a fee. A thesis can be prepared outside a graduate school, but it still has to be submitted to the Dissertation Advisory Committee and then to the *VAK*. That means that a student needs to be in contact with many professors, which is difficult to achieve without a formal affiliation.

The process of defense is highly bureaucratic and based on personal connections as well as on the supervisor's reputation, both academic and "ideological." Olga, currently a lecturer at a state university, explains in her interview the reasons for not defending a thesis. When she was a

graduate student, the school's administration changed and a lot of professors, including her supervisor, were forced to leave the school, as they were tacitly accused of having oppositional political views. "We were said we would never defend our dissertations, taking into account who our supervisors were and what topics we chose to research," Olga says. The graduate school's new director let the students finish the school but refused to assist them in getting the degrees. "Well, I could have fought, I could have invested I can't imagine how much energy in that, and nobody knew what would be the upshot of it all," Olga adds. She believes that she has no chances to get a PhD in Belarus, because she did not choose the "right" supervisor.

The system does not tolerate mistakes. The wrong choice of a topic, a supervisor, a temporal job position, or an error in the documents can cost a student his/her career. I heard a lot of similar stories from my own colleagues at the European Humanities University who tried to combine teaching at EHU with defending their theses in Belarus. As soon as the supervisor or committee members knew that they collaborate with EHU, they were expelled from the defense process. The reputation of EHU as an oppositional university in exile was enough to make a candidate's research topic unacceptable. It may sound as though it is easier to get a PhD abroad, but the degrees obtained outside the *VAK*'s centralized system are not recognized in the country without the process of validation (*nostrificatcja*), which is said to be as complicated and unpredictable as the defense itself.

Some of my informants work at state universities but they gave up the idea of earning a PhD. They are aware of their vulnerable position on the academic job market and, if need be, are ready to look for non-academic jobs. At the same, they are grateful that the deans of their departments tolerate the fact that they lack the necessary qualifications. According to my informants, most of their colleagues do not have degrees and are not going to defend theses,

taking in account the complexity and unpredictability of the process and the lack of financial motivation. Salaries of university professors are low. Moreover, in 2012 the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus gave a 50% rise to the wages of university lecturers and assistants who "have not yet defended their PhD" (Belta 2012). The decision was based on the statistics that there were more than 13,000 non-PhD people working in the academia. The government used the rise to make academic jobs more attractive, keeping the academic system as it was reproducible. However, the fact that the salaries of professors and lecturers became almost equal does not motivate scholars to gain high academic qualifications.

It is not only the defense process but also publishing that keeps the official academia strictly protected from any kind of external heresy. The *VAK* provides a list of about 300 Belarusian journals recognized as scientific. Any text published there, even in a tiny bulletin of a provincial university included in the list, is treated as a legitimate academic publication. At the same time, the *VAK* does not recognize a number of Belarusian journals like *TOPOS*, *ARCHE*, *CROSSROADS* which are published by independent local research centers and have earned international renown. The latter journals present original research papers and book reviews which follow the Western standards of academic writing; they are peer-reviewed and have international editorial boards. But, according to the *VAK*'s criteria, these journals exist outside the scientific world. In order to defend a dissertation in Belarus, a student has to publish at least three academic papers in the journals approved by the *VAK*. This is one of the first gatekeeping practices of the state academia which exercises "a *de facto* censorship of heretical productions, either by rejecting them outright or by simply discouraging the intention of even trying to publish them" (Bourdieu 1975, 30). The students are forced to wait for years until their articles will be accepted, reviewed, and eventually published.

2.2 New Intellectuals As Heretical Newcomers

Despite Lukashenka's attempts to control educational sphere, he cannot control the production of knowledge. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Western donors started to support the local education and research. Independent research centers, universities, journals, and temporary projects emerged in Belarus, as well as the new intellectuals whose work was made possible with the Western grants, travel, publications, and conference support. Using Belarus as a case study, Elena Gapova investigates power struggles between two opposing groups of post-socialist intellectuals—those who remained attached to the Soviet academic system and those who became involved into the global academia and thus are "able to symbolically 'ignore' the old academic hierarchy" (Gapova 2009, 281). Gapova argues that "[u]nlike the Soviet intelligentsia whose capital was often closely tied to their administrative positions, 'new intellectuals' tried to establish their academic credentials by embracing the cultural capital of 'Western' theoretical concepts" (282). Traveling abroad, participating in various educational and research programs, and building the networks of Western partners, new intellectuals started to acquire new cultural capital and produce a new type of knowledge, distinctly different from the official Belarusian academy. The latter remained unbelievably rigid, not willing to transform itself and accept new agents inside its system, which explains why new intellectuals were excluded from the official academia and were forced to form alternative symbolic/educational sphere (Gapova 2004; Gapova 2009; Gapova 2010; Pershai 2006).

The dissatisfaction with the state universities and the search for new platforms outside the official academic establishment, where the new intellectuals could pursue their academic careers, resulted in the emergence of non-governmental educational initiatives like the Yakub Kolas National State Humanities Lyceum in 1991 (shut down by Belarusian authorities in 2003), the

European Humanities University in 1994 (following its closure in 2004, it was reopened in Vilnius as a university in exile), the Belarusian Collegium in 1997, the Flying University and the Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere" in 2009, the European College of Liberal Arts in 2014. The initiatives signify a demand for alternative knowledge as well as academic autonomy, openness, and free discussions. The mission goals are stated as the integration of Belarusian researchers into the international academic context, development of critical thinking, and promotion of the public space of ideas and knowledge, pursuit of the values of open and democratic society, development of creativity, launch of free intellectual communication, freedom from rigid hierarchies.

The scientific field in Belarus is marked by the divide between official and non-official institutions, academics who act inside the state-controlled universities and academics who build their professional careers taking alternative paths. This divide forms the basic structure and the basic line of the field struggle. The concept of "struggle" is important to understand the coexistence of two academias in Belarus. According to Bourdieu, "the university field is, like any other field, the locus of a struggle to determine the conditions and the criteria of legitimate membership and legitimate hierarchy" (Bourdieu 1988, 11). In his analysis of artistic and literary fields, Bourdieu describes the permanent form of field struggle as being based on the opposition between orthodoxy and heresy, establishment and the challengers, those who dominate the field of production and the newcomers. In the academic field, at stake is "the power to impose the definition of science (i.e. the delimitation of the field of the problems, methods and theories that may be regarded as scientific)" (Bourdieu 1975, 23). That is why, according to this line of reasoning, in Belarus the question is who does the "right" science—those who follow the *VAK*'s

written and unspoken rules of the game or those who follow the standards they learned from their acquaintance with the Western academic world.

A struggle between orthodoxy and heresy is a struggle between positions, capitals, and discourses. Orthodox discourse is produced by those who occupy the dominant positions in the field in order to preserve the *status quo* and to present the arbitrariness of doxa as a norm and maintain the principles on which the dominance is based. In the case of Belarus, these are the agents possessing high amounts of the capital of academic power inside the structure of official educational and research institutions (for example, rectors, deans, members of the committees). "The dominant are drawn towards silence, discretion and secrecy," Bourdieu notes (1993, 83). In other words, the dominant position of the official academia obviates its need to struggle for legitimacy, to justify its definitions and criteria, and to start a dialog with the outsiders of the field. On the other hand, heterodoxy, or heresy, is a discourse initiated by those who are in a dominated position, who are poor in economic capital but rich in cultural capital. Heterodoxy produces an opinion about possible alternatives or competing visions of reality. It is radical questioning of the prevailing social order, legitimate practices, and rules of the game within the given field. Heresy deroutinizes what is taken for granted, brakes the silence of doxa, displays the arbitrariness of the rules and values, and legitimizes the alternatives (Bourdieu 1977).

The conflict between those who defend orthodoxy against those who advocate heresy is the conflict between those who possess monopoly over the legitimate definitions of the field and its boundaries against the "new entrants" who pursue subversion strategies. The new intellectuals in Belarus occupy the position of challengers striving to achieve a complete redefinition of the established principles of scientific legitimacy. They refuse to recognize *VAK*'s list of journals, criticizing the state academia for bureaucracy and low quality of research. Instead, they submit

their papers to the international and local independent journals. This revolt, however, makes it impossible for them to be integrated in the official academia, to defend dissertation and be officially recognized as scholars in Belarus. The state holds monopoly of the academic legitimacy, but the number of people who contest the orthodoxy is growing, which leads to the emergence of the alternative academic sub-field.

In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu describes two opposing types of capital and lifestyles in academia—academic capital versus scientific and intellectual capital. Academic capital is referred to the ability to participate in the reproduction of the *status quo* in academia, to control the instruments of reproduction via teaching and holding the "gatekeeping" positions and preserving the established hierarchy. Bourdieu observes that the accumulation of academic capital takes time because it demands moving throughout all the stages of the orthodox itinerary, "from the Ecole Normale to the Institute, passing through the stages of assistant lecturer, doctoral thesis, promotion from assistant lecturer to lecturer and then a chair at the Sorbonne" (Bourdieu 1988, 87). The scholars struggle for academic power by accumulating academic capital in the form of administrative and honorific positions inside academia. As a result, the extent to which a scholar is able to respect and follow the established principles of the hierarchy becomes more important than the scientific quality of the scholar's work. This is exactly what distinguishes the holders of academic capital from those who are rich in intellectual capital.

Academic capital is specific for the university field. Hence, it is not easily convertible to other types of capitals. The intellectual capital is a symbolic capital of external renown. The scholars are more interested in research (than in teaching), in international cooperation, and writing in foreign languages, they are well represented in new disciplines and new methodologies, they try to accumulate the most prestigious titles of academic recognition

particularly those titles and indices that are most recognized by the general public (Bourdieu 1988, 106). Although they work in the field of restricted production, they do not limit their products to students and peers but try to reach the broader educated public. Thus, they transcend the academic field as such and strive for a position in a more general intellectual field. This is the same kind of opposition between the university establishment and university "avant-garde" that takes place in the field of arts.

Bourdieu's analysis of the French university system not only showed the multiple positions and power struggles inside the field but also explained the stances taken by university professors to the May 1968 student movement. It turned out that the most hostile to the movement were those professors who were the richest in academic capital because the reforms the movement claimed would threaten the established hierarchy and legitimate definitions of their profession. The field analysis helped explain the differences in political participation and attitudes. Taking into account how difficult it is to accumulate academic capital in highly rigid and ideologized university field of Belarus, it may not be surprising that scholars rich in academic capital are loyal to the current state authorities. Academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and faculty mobility are inevitably sacrificed to preserve the very possibility to remain inside the academia. This is the reason why academic power in Belarus does not look attractive to many intellectuals who cannot accept science without academic freedom and intellectual autonomy.

The new Belarusian intellectuals express their reluctance to collaborate with the state universities, because that would mean for them a (symbolic) threat to their scientific reputation. If Bourdieu speaks of conservation, succession, and subversion as three different types of field strategies (Swartz 1997, 125), then in the case of Belarus the subversion strategies may vary. The one who decides to pursue an academic career has an option to get a degree and a job in the

Western academic market, including the European Humanities University; or to be engaged in informal educational and research initiatives in Belarus; or to get a job at a state Belarusian university but do not compete for academic power there.

One of my informants, Alina, received a specialist degree in Belarus, and then got her MA and successfully defended her PhD in Western Europe. When she came to Minsk to take part in *Artes Liberales* festival in April 2015, she already had a teaching position at a university in Western Europe. I asked Alina if she considers a possible collaboration with the official academia in Belarus, and she said:

> I keep myself aloof from the state universities. Well, I don't know, maybe something has changed there. But I spent five years there as a student, that is why I know the system of Belarusian universities and I don't like it, nor the research practices, nor the rigid hierarchy, nor the lack of respect. [...] Besides, I don't see much sense in this collaboration. It is obvious I will never work at a Belarusian university in future; my PhD is not even recognized here. But if they invited me, I would hardly reject the invitation. I can spare, I have some research projects. If they are interested, I am ready to collaborate, but personally I will not initiate of course... Well, it is a kind of snobbery… But I have more colleagues from the West, I collaborate with them, because I know that in order to do projects and apply for European grants, one needs Western partners. That is one of the reasons why I maintain the contacts. This is how my professional field is structured now.

Those who work at state universities find their way to organize their intellectual life outside universities. They participate in research projects, attend lectures, seminars, and conferences and maintain contacts with the professors they admire. "On the menu" are regular lecture series at the Flying University and the Belarusian Collegium, monthly public lectures of the *European Café*, annual conferences and the International Congress of Belarusian Studies organized by the Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere," dozens of public lectures delivered by the students and staff of the European Humanities University during the annual festival *Artes Liberales*, several literary clubs, regular seminars on psychoanalysis at the café *La Manche*, and exhibitions which are usually accompanied by some kind of educational program with

roundtables and public lectures by artists and art theoreticians from abroad. Thus, when state universities are unable to provide the environment that would satisfy the interest of scholars, the latter look for the opportunities in the informal institutions and initiatives.

"I feel like I am in a desert. I suffocate. Then water flows and I grow," this is how Natalia describes her experience of moving between the job of a lecturer at a state-run university and participating in informal public intellectual events. "If you want to survive, you'll grope. It's stifling here, so I groped," she continues. Attending public lectures in this case is a survival strategy. Of course, survival is implied in intellectual rather than physical sense. The radical rhetoric leads to the idea of the boundaries of the field and a specific form of interest produced and presupposed by the field. In other words, what specific issue is at stake in the field of Belarusian academia? For Natalia, to preserve a job at the university is undoubtedly important. But she is not satisfied with a formal affiliation and standard academic practices like teaching, supervision, research, and publishing (which are all present at her university). What is missing and what is important for her as a scholar? What are the scientific ambitions? What kind of competences is looked for despite the fact that the university doesn't require these competences, and on top of that the lecturer risks her job by participating too actively in not always "ideologically right" public events?

The orthodoxy/heresy opposition described is not just the problem of the struggles between old and new scholars. In the case of Belarus, it is the problem of the historical transformation of the whole academic field from the Soviet system to the European one. Lukashenka backpedaled the transformation as soon as he came to power; he wanted to control the science. The pro-Western universities did not look appropriate in the ideological landscape of the country, and "too free" students turned out to be active participants of the oppositional movements. That is

why by taking the academia under his personal control Lukashenka wanted to neutralize academia as a political subject. However, the borders of the country have never been closed, and many people go to Western Europe to gain up-to-date knowledge they cannot find in their own country. They learn languages, get access to the libraries, attend degree and non-degree programs, conferences, various schools, and consequently get the feeling of the Western academic game.

To enter the official academic field and struggle there for academic power is not a possible or desirable option for many scholars. That is why the efforts shift to accumulating intellectual capital and subverting the rules of the game by creating alternative symbolic spheres. Theories, methods, and concepts as well as the public dimension of intellectual activity became the principle weapons of the struggle for intellectual recognition and new type of legitimacy (Bourdieu 1969). The distinction from rigid, ideologized, and state-controlled academy is at the core. Now in the "result of EU's flirting with Lukashenka" (Shushkevich 2015), Belarus was admitted to the Bologna process, which means that education fields have to be transformed. The experts have doubts that Belarusian education can be democratized inside the authoritarian state. But if the changes happen, what will be the changes ? If the official academia opens itself to the West and supports the mobility of teachers and researchers, how will it influence the position of the new intellectuals?

CHAPTER 3: NEW INTELLECTUALS GO PUBLIC

The state authorities are paranoid about protecting a few concrete places in Minsk. These include not only the KGB building which nobody is allowed to take pictures of but also October Square where no form of contention is tolerated. In 2012, Belarusian artist Mikhail Gulin together with his assistants brought six yellow and pink cubes to October Square and built a column out of them there. The art intervention was performed within the project *Going Public—On the Difficulty of a Public Statement* supported by the Goethe-Institute in Belarus, Lithuania, and Kaliningrad. Gulin's intervention, however, was interrupted in few minutes. The artist and his assistants were arrested by the Special Police Force, escorted to the District Office of Internal Affairs, beaten and accused of resisting arrest. Later Gulin was discharged at court, but his contract with the Belarusian National Technical University where he worked as a lecturer was terminated.

Gulin's failed intervention could have been a good case for another documentary film on the violence of the Belarusian political regime. The political opposition, social contention and art interventions are denied access to the dominant public sphere. However, the counterpublics are not encapsulated in the private life but occupy the creative backstage of galleries and cafés in order to participate in critical discussions concerning the hottest issues of Belarusian society. The cafés turned out to be the public space enabling political claims and challenging the hegemony of the official discourse. The similar role of the cafés that function as an intellectual meeting place and the space of agency and resistance is explored in the recent research on the Jewish-Arab mixed city of Jaffa (Monterescu 2009; Monterescu and Schickler 2015).

In Belarus, the emergence of creative strategies of resistance is stimulated by the impossibility (and inefficiency) of direct confrontation with authorities. In her analysis of the

performative strategies of public protests, Almira Ousmanova (2013) argues that the public sphere exists in Belarus rather as a "fluid publicness"—playful, spontaneous, critical, and reclaiming not the place, but memory and imagination. Can this activation of independent intellectual and artistic life bring some changes in the society? After the failure of the "Jeans Revolution" in the streets, can we talk about a new (latent) revolution in the lofts? The answer can be positive if one takes into account the Habermasian vision of the public sphere as the space where an independent critical discussion is possible and if one acknowledges the transformative potential of the "soft power" (Polglase 2013) of education, debate, and discussion. In this chapter, I write about physical spaces where intellectual public activities happen in Minsk, alternative educational initiatives, *Artes Liberales* festival, the European Humanities University as a Belarusian university in exile and its role in shaping the intellectual landscape of the country.

3.1 Loft Revolution

When the streets and squares remain clean from any kind of contention and when the general public is "mobilized to passivity," what happens in the sphere of art and culture can remain unnoticed. However, several examples of recent urban transformations reveal the development of alternative discursive spaces. The contemporary Art Gallery Ў[1] is the first case to discuss. Located in the very center of Minsk, in the small building of the former glass bottle recycling center, it is undoubtedly the center of artistic and intellectual life in the city. The gallery's exhibition hall is linked to a bookshop and a café which are under one roof and which usually function as venues for lectures, roundtables, book launches, or just as the most popular intellectual meeting place in the city. When 2012 was called the year of communication

[1] Ў is a short U, a unique letter of the Belarusian Cyrillic script. As the gallery's name, it refers to the Belarusian identity of the gallery. The gallery's choice to use Belarusian as the language of communication has an obvious political statement, taking into account that the current political regime suppresses and marginalizes the Belarusian language.

explosion because of the unprecedented number of artistic and intellectual events, it was the *Gallery Ў* that many referred to. Registered as a non-commercial organization in 2009, it functions with the help of private sponsors and endless fundraising, it receives no support from the state, and exists in constant fear of being closed down for either financial or ideological reasons.

The *Gallery Ў* is famous for its capacity to survive and the gallery director and curator Valentina Kiseliova's sensitivity to the fluctuations of the state's politics. In one of her interviews, Kiseliova states that the "officials from the Ministry of Culture do not rush to offer us assistance or cooperation. Directors of state-owned museums and art experts visit us, but it doesn't convert into any communication or cooperation (Kiseliova 2011, 106). The gallery functions independently and takes all the risks, including the risk of being closed because of the miscalculation of what if permissible, the degree of the authorities tolerance towards the content of the art shows and public discussions. But when all other galleries refuse to collaborate with anything that concerns politics, the *Gallery Ў* still manages to host the most controversial exhibitions, for example, the *World Press Photo* exhibition in 2012—an event like this was organized for the first time in the country's history.

Running a private gallery in Belarus is a risky and hardly profitable business, particularly if the director is ambitious enough to make it the center of artistic and intellectual life. Valentina Kiseliova kept wondering why other people did not try to open anything resembling the *Gallery Ў*. Basically, the gallery remained the only "trendy space that gathered crowds" (Kiseliova 2011, 102) till 2013 when a competitive platform called *ЦЭХ*[1] finally emerged. The gallery, or rather "a creative space" as they called themselves, was located in an abandoned factory workshop in the center of the city. It hosted numerous events from photographic exhibitions (*ЦЭХ*'s director Julia

[1] ЦЭХ is translated from Belarusian as a room in which manufacturing is carried on.

Darashkevich is a professional photographer) to the lecture series dedicated to Hannah Arendt's legacy, or book launches like Svetlana Alexievich's controversial *Second-hand Time. The End of the Red Man*.

The flow of the independent cultural and intellectual events was endless, but in December 2014 Darashkevich received a note that the lease will not be extended. It is a common practice to close a gallery in Belarus: without any explanations the property owner refuses to grant a lease. In such cases, the owner usually receives a call from the authorities a couple of days before in which they inform him or her that the gallery is no longer allowed to lease the building. So, the decision is not financially but ideologically based, and that is why it is difficult (and usually impossible) to negotiate. This is the nightmare scenario for everyone who chooses to open a gallery—after the preliminary investments necessary to open the business, the gallery can be easily closed with no profit return.

In two months, *ЦЭХ* was reopened in a new place, next to popular hipsterish café *Hooligan*. Darashkevich describes *ЦЭХ*'s forced relocation as a painful experience:

> These moves from one place to another… we won't manage another move. I thought we didn't manage this move. But everyone leaned on me, everyone repeated Julia you have to, and I agreed. I thought I would never take a lease again. We are head over ears in debt, because, you see, in December they kicked us out, January is a dead month. And then *Hooligan*'s owner invited us, so we are here in less than two months. If nobody prevents us from being here, we will recover and will work without interruptions. Because all these moves, kicks out, they all are so painful. Firstly, all the clients disappear immediately. Secondly, we fall into such a deep financial hole, that an average person would never climb out of. We are watching every penny.

This lack of stability in the country which has the reputation of the most stable one is very discouraging. Cultural initiatives like this do not receive any support from the state. Quite the opposite, they struggle to survive in spite of all. Taking into account the difficulties, it is not surprising that *ЦЭХ* never agrees to host a political seminar or lecture, as it would endanger the whole project. On the other hand, *ЦЭХ* gives the preference to educational, cultural, and social

events over the purely commercial ones. To run a gallery demands a lot of time and energy, as Darashkevich explains, so it is better to invest time and energy into something interesting and pleasant. The focus on intellectual and cultural events definitely places *ЦЭХ* as one of the agents in the field of cultural production, which gives a certain legitimacy and reputation to the gallery.

3.2 Flying Cafés And Flying Universities

The project under the title *European Café* provides a certain solution to the "rent problem." The *European Café* (http://n-europe.eu/eurocafe) is an ongoing series of public lectures and discussions organized by the *New Europe* (*Novaya Evropa*) online magazine (http://n-europe.eu/), an independent intellectual online platform that publishes critical articles and reviews on social, cultural, and political issues related to the general idea of Europeanization of Belarus. The magazine exists since 2006, and in 2012 it risked to launch offline public events. The lecturers are local and foreign intellectuals, and the range of topics is enormous—contemporary arts, education, gentrification, mass media, religion, and democracy.

The truth is, however, that despite its name the *European Café* does not refer to any particular café or a lecture hall. The organizers rent a café for some hours only to have a lecture there. Of course, *Gallery Ў* and *ЦЭХ* are the most common venues for the *European Café*, but the organizers also try to explore new places. As the magazine *New Europe* is pretty famous in the cultural milieu in Belarus, the café that agrees to host the magazine's event attracts new public and raises its status as an intellectual trendy place. That is why many owners risk hosting the *European Café*'s public lectures, at least two-three times. Thus, for three years the *European Café* has discovered about twenty new places (cafés, restaurants, bars, lofts, clubs—*Art Siadziba*, café *Chekhov*, café *Dom Fishera*, café *Kaljannaja*, café *Zerno*, cafe *Loft*, loft-café *Balki*, etc.), and it contributed to the integration of the cafés into the visible public space of the city. More

than that, the *European Café* organizes public lectures in Belarusian provinces, therefore giving a chance to the provincial public to listen to writers, curators, and researchers from Western Europe. Migrating from one café to another, the *European Café* manages to protect the public sphere of open discussions. Besides, this also helps to attract a new audience. According to the organizers, it happens very often when a person who initially drops in to buy a coffee then joins the lecture (Shparaga and Artimovich 2012).

In 2014 the *New Europe* and a group of intellectuals gathered around the magazine launched a new project—an informal educational institution, the European College of Liberal Arts. They advertized it as an "informal alternative to the system of higher education existing in Belarus." It is informal because it does not provide diplomas or certificates, and it is not registered by the Ministry of Education. Lecturers there develop semester-long courses in humanities connected in a coherent "concentrations", and the students are supposed to visit evening classes several times per week after their work or main studies at state universities. This intellectual "offer" revealed the demand for alternative knowledge in Belarus—the organizers planned to enroll just 15 students, but around 500 people applied to study there in the fall of 2014.

In a sense, the European College of Liberal Arts tries to repeat the success of the Flying University founded in 2009 as a private initiative "aimed at developing the Belarusian intellectual and cultural space and at performing the role of the National University in Belarus" (http://fly-uni.org/). The key specificity of the Flying University is that it predominantly gives the floor to Belarusian intellectuals, particularly for those who have something to share but never had a chance to speak publicly before. The activities include courses, seminars, summers schools, and lectures. However, the university does not issue diplomas or certificates and it does not have a

coherent curriculum. Instead, it is possible to sign up for a course with the lecturer you are interested in. For example, the university offers more than twenty courses; each of them includes about ten class sessions; and the topics vary: Applied semiotics, oral history, philosophy, philosophy of history, political history of Europe. One of the key topics the Flying University persistently explores throughout all its educational and research activities is the idea of the university—the role of the university in the society, an ideal model of university in the Belarusian context, the university as a community, the responsibility of the university in elite formation, the university and contemporary education, etc. Taking into account the fact that under the current political regime the state universities can hardly be the platforms of critical thinking and academic freedom, the Flying University strives to "save" the very idea of the university.

Most of my informants mentioned the Flying University's lectures as an integral part of their informal education. Tacciana Vadalazhskaja, a program coordinator of the Flying University, remembers the first public lecture organized in 2011 within the framework of *Urbi et Orbi* series. The lecture entitled *Some Nuances to Understanding Minsk* was delivered by Siarhei Chareuski, an art historian and lecturer at the European Humanities University. She said:

> It was in winter or late autumn at Shchamialiou's Art Gallery. The gallery was overcrowded. I couldn't come in, so I just stood at the entrance. You almost couldn't breathe because of the flood of people. Chareuski talked and talked for about three hours. Almost all people were standing, as the gallery didn't have many chairs. Some teenagers were sitting on the floor. But most people were standing for three hours. There was not enough fresh air. I could barely survive inside, but they were standing. Some came with small children. We didn't restrict the lecture to a specific group of professionals; it was open to everyone… We just put an announcement on the Internet and a short interview with Chareuski at tut.by[1]. We didn't have a target group. So different people came—from the elderly to the youth, and even some very strange folks.

The Flying University experiments a lot with the venues. It organized intellectual public events even in such unusual places as Princess Hall at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Minsk. However, these experiments are risky to a certain degree. It happened several times when the

[1] Tut.by is one of the most popular Belarusian online resources.

venue owner suddenly refused to host a lecture, a day before the event, and the university was forced either to cancel the lecture or to change the location (which usually means to lose part of the audience). That is why the *Gallery Ў* and *ЦЭХ* remain the principle venues for most events of the Flying University.

3.3 Artes Liberales Festival

During the *Artes Liberales* festival in Minsk in 2015, public lectures took place at the *Gallery Ў* every evening for three weeks. Part of the festival was also a research exhibition *People and Atoms* exploring everyday life of the Russian scientists who worked for Obnisk nuclear power plant in the 1950s and 60s. The walls and decorative sepia cubes were covered with archival photographs and excerpts from interviews with scientists. Right in the center of the gallery's exhibition hall there were chairs for visitors and lecturers.

I attended the lecture on philosophy given by Natalia, my former colleague at the European Humanities University. Natalia graduated from a Belarusian university, tried to continue her doctoral studies abroad though unsuccessfully. She received some teaching experience while working at various universities in Minsk, then got her MA at EHU in Vilnius and was immediately invited to teach there. Natalia spent several years teaching at EHU. Her lecture at the *Gallery Ў* was fascinating, she made multiple references to contemporary philosophers, provided a plethora of examples and explanations. There were just ten people who showed up to listen, but all seemed to be engaged, asked questions, and shared their personal experiences. The atmosphere was very pleasant, friendly, and intellectually stimulating. After the lecture, Natalia approached some of her colleagues and me to say hello and share the news. The news, however, was not good. Since the previous summer, when Natalia was fired from EHU, she could not find a job in Minsk. She applied for a position at a state university, with several professors backing

her candidacy, but the head of the department refused. The main reason of the rejection was the fact that Natalia had been affiliated with EHU. “He put it openly: you know, we have a presidential election soon, we don’t need people like you, we don’t need problems,” Natalia recalled. Unfortunately, Natalia was not the only one from my former EHU colleagues who found themselves in desperate situations after they were fired. Attending public lectures in Minsk, I met a lot of scholars who experienced scandalous transformations of EHU differently—some are happy to continue their work at EHU as an alternative center of higher education, some are forced to start a new life outside EHU, thus, being professionally marginalized even on the margins of academia.

After its closure in Minsk in 2004, EHU was soon reopened in Vilnius as a regular Lithuanian university (included into the Bologna process) and a Belarusian university in exile (almost all of its 1,500 students and 160 members of academic staff are Belarusian). The university was growing, opening new programs, inviting more students and more intellectuals from Belarus who could take part in the development of civil society in Belarus through education and research. That is why the new intellectuals turned out to be in demand. They were an ideal type of lecturers—pro-Western, enthusiastic, idealistic, and creative. They enjoyed the chance to adopt the educational tradition they experienced in Western Europe, to promote evidence-based research, independent inquiry and freedom of speech, which were so unwelcome in the official academia in Belarus. Usually not having permanent jobs in Belarus, they were fully dedicated to EHU, called it, as the university’s official history says, “their own project” and treated the EHU community as their family (“15-Year History of EHU European Humanities University. New History” 2009).

The situation, however, started to change when EHU's Rector, Governing Board, and a bunch of newly hired effective managers launched painful transformations aiming to make the university financially self-sustainable. In order to cut unnecessary expenses, they closed some programs such as Philosophy and Belarusian Studies. The next step was to get rid of the lecturers who did not have enough teaching load, necessary qualifications, and loyalty to the new management. In the summer of 2014, a big wave of dismissals followed when EHU's administration kicked out a great number of the Belarussian faculty. Natalia was one of them. Without getting clear explanations, many of the new intellectuals, who still strongly believed in the mission of the university, suddenly lost their jobs. The scandal between the faculty and the new administration received large media coverage, including the article in *The New York Times* (Hockenos 2014).

Faculty members organized themselves in a trade union to protect the rights of the lecturers and to sue the EHU administration for illegal dismissals. Nonetheless, it did not help anybody get their jobs back. The new intellectuals found themselves on the margins of the margins—outside the state Belarusian academia and even outside the alternative academia of EHU. Meanwhile, EHU's transformations turned out to be much more profound than anyone expected. The new administration together with the new American rector elected in 2015 have reconsidered EHU's future—it is going to be an international institution, while a special role of EHU for Belarusian scientific community and civil society is no longer regarded as important. Even the word "Belarus" has been removed from the university statute and mission statement.

At the time of writing this thesis, the scandal is still happening. In May 2015, when it became known that EHU's new rector will be a U.S. citizen, a group of 57 Belarusian intellectuals, artists, activists, and politicians wrote an open letter accusing EHU of being

Americanized and commercialized and its new administration of being colonial and authoritarian. It said: "…[W]e consider it necessary to state that in its current state, the EHU can no longer be considered a Belarusian project. Support for such a university cannot be perceived as support for democracy and human rights in Belarus, since the activities of the EHU management discredit those values" ("Over 50 Famous Belarusians Call for New National University" 2015). The letter was intended to address the Western donors and invite them to reconsider their attitude toward EHU and to start financing "more democratic" educational projects.

Since the very beginning of its existence, EHU was not just the biggest center of alternative Belarusian education; it was also the biggest employer of the Belarusian new intellectuals. After its relocation from Minsk to Vilnius, the university started to provide the lecturers with salaries much higher than that paid to teachers at state universities in Belarus. That is why EHU was an attractive place to work for both "ideological" and financial reasons. The truth, however, is that there is no other Belarusian university in exile, there is no other significant alternative to EHU. This fact makes the Belarusian academic job market so specific. For new intellectuals not welcomed at the state universities, there are not many options to be employed. To look for an academic job in Russia or in Western Europe means to adapt oneself to new requirements and the rules of the game. For example, to work at a university in Western Europe, the fluency in English is a must. But at EHU the lecturers always enjoyed an opportunity to teach in their native language—Belarusian or Russian—and thus turned out to be unprepared to work in another language environment. Some people worked at EHU for 10–15 years, and now it is difficult for them to not only switch to another job but also abandon the very idea of a Western-style Belarusian university.

Artes Liberales festival of arts and humanities is one of EHU's projects. The festival has been organized in Minsk for the fourth time this year. Entitled *Time Code*, it included 46 events: Public lectures roundtables, book launches, workshops, performances, video-screenings, projects presentations, concerts, and the exhibition —with the participation of EHU's lecturers, alumni, and partners. Almira Ousmanova, professor of EHU's Department of Media and director of *Artes Liberales* festival, argues that the festival is an attempt to bring EHU from exile back home in Minsk at least for three weeks. It aims to show intellectual freedom, creativity, critical thinking, free knowledge, and the spirit of cooperation which are typical for the EHU community. She says:

> Academia is not an ivory tower any more, and institutional autonomy does not mean that the society is not interested to know what kind of knowledge the university produces. It is important for us to make visible and public what is happening inside the classrooms or discussed only in professional space of conferences and scientific seminars." (Ousmanova 2015)

Besides, taking into account that EHU cannot organize official recruitment campaigns in Belarus, the festival also plays the role of informal promotion of the university for the prospective students. Tacitly the festival has even a more ambitious goal to address the whole intellectual community of Minsk and to show EHU's leadership in knowledge production, its vibrant intellectual and creative activities that are lacking in the Belarusian academic milieu.

However, this year *Artes Liberales* did not attract attention from the public. On April 15, the gallery hosted two lectures by the scholars from Lithuania. I arrived at the gallery at 6 p.m. sharp, but there was nobody in the hall. I approached the lecturer and asked him if the time of the lecture had been changed. The lecturer was nervous and upset; he could not understand what was happening—why there were no people. A single listener came only 15 minutes later. We decided to start. The festival's crew—curators, coordinators, and the director—occupied chairs in the front row. There were nine people altogether including my colleague, the crew, and myself.

The same happened again and again during this year's event. There were usually just 10–15 people in the audience. Exceptions were rare, and these were the lectures on gender and urban issues and the screening of no-budget films, which attracted more than 50 people. I was asking persistently all my friends, colleagues, and informants if there was a conscious boycott of EHU events in Minsk. Nobody called it a boycott, but after the scandal with the faculty dismissals the attitude towards EHU has changed drastically. If four years ago *Artes Liberales* attracted dozens of visitors, now it was not clear who was the audience of that demonstration of intellectual achievements. The fired faculty, particularly the most known public intellectuals, did not show up at *Artes Liberales*, did not share the information on Facebook, and did not comment on the festival's events. This silence was very loud.

However, the conflict around EHU explains only partially the empty chairs at *Artes Liberales* public lectures. The context of public life in Minsk is changing. The public activities are burgeoning. At the same time as *Artes Liberales* was showing its intensive program, a lot of other public events took place—the *European Café*'s public lecture at *ЦЭХ*, the *Urban Platform*'s public lecture at loft-café *Balki*, several book launches, free walking tours festival, book fair, international conference on Chaim Soutine. The marathon goes on. On May 29, a colleague posted a comment on Facebook which said:

> Today in Minsk there are the international congress of Belarusian studies, the international conference Minsk–Riga, the seminar dedicated to the 100th anniversary of Roland Barthes, a public lecture by Per Anders Rudling on the history of Belarusian nationalism. It is a kind of intellectual explosion!

The events are organized correspondingly by the Belarusian Academy of Sciences (the state institution), the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (an independent research center), the European Humanities University (university in exile), and the European Café (informal educational initiative).

CONCLUSION

Public lectures in Minsk have become so widespread that it is impossible to trace all of them. Popular internet portal *Citydog.by* announces public lectures the same way as exhibitions, or cinema and theater performances. Although a public lecture can be arranged as a single act or as an accompaniment to an exhibition or workshop, some organizers build long-term programs of public lectures. *Artes Liberales* festival, the *European Café*'s, and *Urbi et Orbi*'s series have set up about 200 public lectures since 2012. The key specificity of public lectures in Minsk is that they are usually held by independent educational platforms and are not related to any state-run institution. There is not any competition between public lectures performed by independent researchers and academics affiliated with the state universities, as the latter almost never go public.

Why do new intellectuals participate in public lectures? Firstly, new intellectuals occupy a very specific position in the university field in Belarus—they are marginalized or excluded. The cultural capital they accumulated in the West is not recognized, and perceived as heretic and even dangerous for the official academia. New intellectuals use the opportunity of going public and exposing their expertise to the general public and the community of colleagues as a way to prove their belonging to the field of academia and to legitimize themselves as scholars. It is particularly important for those who cannot or do not want to work at state universities and publish at state academic journals. The new intellectuals who remain outside the official educational establishment and who do not emigrate have to explore structural opportunities for alternative professional trajectories and practices in Belarus. Going public is one of these opportunities.

Secondly, the intellectual public events constitute a certain reaction to the current political regime in Belarus. When radical public confrontations and challenges to the monolithic official

discourse are severely (and preemptively) suppressed, there is a tendency to deploy creative strategies to voice political claims. Many scholars express their doubts that the notion of public sphere can be applicable to the authoritarian state. Indeed, the context imposes constraints. One can hardly find free independent discussions in the official public sphere in Belarus. In a sense, the state universities resemble the central avenues and squares which meticulously get rid of any form of heretic subversions. However, the alternative public spheres are mushrooming despite the fact they are forced to the margins. One would think that a public lecture at an art gallery has nothing to do with a "serious" science practiced by official institutions. But what if we deal with dozens of public lectures, seminars, schools, and roundtables? Since lectures are not usually delivered in empty rooms, it is possible to talk about the formation of the counterpublic—a public opposing itself to the dominant public sphere of the official state discourse and the university orthodoxy.

The practice of public lectures is like the top of the iceberg—it gave access to broader topics and problems. The coexistence of two academias definitely demands further investigation, particularly now when Belarus has been accepted to the Bologna process. Furthermore, a special attention should be give to the analysis of professional trajectories of new intellectuals. Within the framework of the given research I designed the interview guide around the practice of going public, while the life story interview will be invaluable for the further analysis of Belarusian university system. And finally, one of the first readers of my thesis drew my attention to the gender dimension of the research—most of the public intellectuals and active participants of the alternative educational field in Belarus are women. This fascinating discovery is yet another reason to continue the investigation.

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