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► **To cite this version:**

Ronan Hervouet, Alexandre Kurilo. The Heritage of Soviet Paternalism in the Belarusian Countryside: The Moralization and Folklorization of the Social World. *Mir Rossii*, 2016, 25 (4), pp.30-51. <halshs-02549194>

**HAL Id: halshs-02549194**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02549194v1>**

Submitted on 26 Sep 2024

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## The Heritage of Soviet Paternalism in the Belarusian Countryside: The Moralization and Folklorization of the Social World

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**Citation:** Hervouet R., Kurilo A. (2016) The Heritage of Soviet Paternalism in the Belarusian Countryside: The Moralization and Folklorization of the Social World. *Mir Rossii*, vol. 25, no 4, pp. 30–51

*In order to improve results in the agricultural sector, the Belarusian authorities have adopted different types of policies—which can be qualified as “paternalistic”—aiming to reform the behaviours of individuals. This article documents the way paternalist practices targeting Belarusian rural areas are not only a heritage from the Soviet past but also introduce forms of innovation, folklorization and nationalization of this Soviet legacy. The article is based on ethnographic evidence (observations and around forty interviews) gathered in rural Belarusian areas during visits undertaken over two periods (2006–2009 and 2012–2013) and on statistics and news articles. Recognising exemplary workers, raising the moral standards of professional and social life, and folklorizing the rural world can be seen at local level. An ethnographic approach in the Belarusian countryside allowed the authors to draw a picture of various meaningful practices: the promotion of tradition, a civilizing guardianship, the disciplining of the body, reputation, exemplariness and penalties. The paternalist practices implemented on the kolkhozes (collective farms) are not only a continuation of Soviet-era conditions but have also introduced a number of innovations. The promotion of traditional rural culture and the theatrical appearances of Belarusian folklore, seen as manifesting skills and know-how from a long national history, are novelties. Still another type of innovation in rural paternalism was set up by religious leaders, in close collaboration with the local*

administration. Then the authors analyse the paternalism at a national level. They focus on the history, the organization and the functions of Dozhinki, the national agrarian festival developed under the President Lukashenko's regime. These festivals derive their characteristics from three different modes of politics. First, they are used to modernize infrastructure and channel investment towards rural areas in difficulty. Next, they evidence a shift in the way power is staged and put on show by the authorities. Stress is laid on the regime's roots in farming, displaying its successes in rural areas. Lukashenko has given them the dimensions of a full-blown national festival, one emblematic of the ideology of the newly-independent republic. Finally, Dozhinki are also a public, media-driven manifestation of paternalist practices encouraged by the regime. Awarding prizes to the best workers is a continuation of the awards of labour medals, certificates and other rewards from the Soviet period.

**Keywords:** paternalism, Belarusian model, kolkhoz, folklore, fight against alcoholism, national festival, *Dozhinki*

Belarus has a special place in public and academic debate in Russia. The country sometimes appears to provide an inverted mirror image of the reforms carried out in Russia and is presented by some commentators as a system which has been able to transform itself, preserve the benefits of the Soviet century and protect the population from the consequences of introducing a market economy. A number of Russian experts opposed to liberalization such as Sergei Kara-Murza, Alexander Cipko and Roi Medvedev claim that the Belarusian model has enabled 'a gradual exit from communism, at the same time treating the population gently' [Karbalévitch 2012, pp. 407–408]. The example of rural areas is particularly significant here. While it has been said that the price of the recovery of Russian agriculture has been the 'proletarianization' [Allina-Pisano 2008, p. 189] of those living in the countryside, the 'Belarusian model' [Medvedev 2010] is said to show that the recovery of this economic sector is possible if rural populations continue to be supervised and protected. This article documents the way that paternalist practices targeting Belarusian rural areas not only reflect the heritage from the Soviet past but also introduce forms of innovation, folklorization and nationalization of this Soviet legacy.

By way of introduction, it is important to clarify the situation of Belarusian agriculture and to situate their paternalist practices within the overall system of policies targeting the Belarusian countryside. In the last days of the Soviet Union, agriculture was a major economic sector in Belarus, but it has seen its importance decline considerably over the last 25 years. Agriculture's share of GNP has been in decline since the Soviet era. It was 22.7% in 1990 and 7.9% in 2012<sup>1</sup>. This has also been shown by a decline in the rural population. In 1990 it represented one third of the total population (34%); today

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<sup>1</sup> Sel'skoe khozyaistvo Respubliki Belarus' [Agriculture in Belarus]. *Natsional'nyi statisticheskii komitet Respubliki Belarus'* [National Economic Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus]. Available at: [http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/realny-sector-ekonomiki/selskoe-hozyaistvo/osnovnye-pokazateli-za-period-s-\\_\\_-po-\\_\\_\\_gody\\_6/struktura-produktsii-selskogo-hozyaistva-po-kategoriyam-hozyaistv/](http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/realny-sector-ekonomiki/selskoe-hozyaistvo/osnovnye-pokazateli-za-period-s-__-po-___gody_6/struktura-produktsii-selskogo-hozyaistva-po-kategoriyam-hozyaistv/), accessed 31 August 2016.

it represents less than a quarter (23%)<sup>2</sup>. This relative shrinking of the agricultural sector in the structure of the Belarusian economy should not distract attention from its recent growth. According to official statistics, Belarusian agriculture has experienced a recovery which began just before independence. If we take the agricultural production index to have been 100 in 1990, it fell to 77 in 1994 but reached 118 in 2011 [Sokolov 2012].

This success was based on a productivist economic model. In 2014, an agricultural business on an average farm is 5134 hectares. In 1995, this figure was only 3037 hectares. Following the Soviet model [Maurel 1980], the authorities opted for industrialization across the whole of the agricultural sector. In 2014, 76.4% of agricultural production came from public agricultural enterprises, 1.5 % from tenant farmers and 22.1% from private gardens. In 2005, the distribution was 61.3% public agricultural enterprises, 0.7% tenant farmers, and 38% private gardens<sup>3</sup>. If collectivized agriculture has managed to recover since the mid 1990s, this has been in part due to significant public investment. The authorities have been spending 12% of the state budget on rural development<sup>4</sup>. Recently, however, a gradual fall in public subsidies has been evident [Lukashenko 2015].

While the Soviet-type industrial model has remained the point of reference for public policy in the Belarusian countryside, the problems inherent in the collectivized agricultural of the 1970s and 1980s [Maurel 1980, p. 17] also continue today [Richard 2002, p. 168], as recent interviews carried out in Belarus attest<sup>5</sup>. There is recurrent talk of the problems encountered with tractors and combine harvesters, of the questionable competence of managers as regards agronomy and logistics, of a shortage of manpower and even of the need to get inefficient ‘alcoholics’ to work. In addition, wages remain low. The average wage in agricultural enterprises was 68,7% of the national average wages in 2009 and 74.8% in 2012<sup>6</sup>. Thus the countryside is unattractive and struggles to retain qualified workers. According to a survey carried out in 2007 by the Academy of Science, only 20.3% of the young people questioned wanted to stay and work in the countryside at the end of their studies and 46.1% wanted to leave their village. The same survey highlighted the main reasons behind young people’s desire to leave the countryside: 51.4% cited low wages; 37.6% spoke of the excessively limited choice of professions and careers available in the rural environment; 26.3% highlighted the lack of diverse, interesting leisure activities; 25.3% stressed the poor working conditions [Smirnova 2009, p. 149].

The authorities did not attribute these difficulties to the workings of the economic system, but to the behaviour of the men and women working in rural areas. Lukashenko

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Sel’skoe khozyaistvo Respubliki Belarus’ [Agriculture in Belarus]. *Natsional’nyi statisticheskii komitet Respubliki Belarus’* [National Economic Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus]. Available at: [http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/realny-sector-ekonomiki/selskoe-hozyaistvo/osnovnye-pokazateli-za-period-s-\\_\\_po-\\_\\_\\_gody\\_6/struktura-produktsii-selskogo-hozyaistva-po-kategoriyam-hozyaistv/](http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/realny-sector-ekonomiki/selskoe-hozyaistvo/osnovnye-pokazateli-za-period-s-__po-___gody_6/struktura-produktsii-selskogo-hozyaistva-po-kategoriyam-hozyaistv/), accessed 31 August 2016.

<sup>4</sup> According to Karbalévitch, in developed countries, this figure does not rise above 3% to 4% [Karbalévitch 2012, p. 276].

<sup>5</sup> The present article is based on ethnographic evidence (observations and around forty interviews) gathered in rural Belarusian areas during visits undertaken over two periods (2006–2009 and 2012–2013) as well as on statistics and news articles. The research was partly funded by the Aquitaine Regional Council.

<sup>6</sup> Sel’skoe khozyaistvo Respubliki Belarus’ [Agriculture in Belarus]. *Natsional’nyi statisticheskii komitet Respubliki Belarus’* [National Economic Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus]. Available at: [http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/realny-sector-ekonomiki/selskoe-hozyaistvo/osnovnye-pokazateli-za-period-s-\\_\\_po-\\_\\_\\_gody\\_6/struktura-produktsii-selskogo-hozyaistva-po-kategoriyam-hozyaistv/](http://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/realny-sector-ekonomiki/selskoe-hozyaistvo/osnovnye-pokazateli-za-period-s-__po-___gody_6/struktura-produktsii-selskogo-hozyaistva-po-kategoriyam-hozyaistv/), accessed 31 August 2016.

stated in 1995 that: ‘The destiny of the state depends on the level of discipline, on the personal responsibility of each individual, on renewing management personnel, on strict control of all structures, on each person’s skill at working honestly’ [Karbalévitch 2012, p. 163]. In order to improve the results in the agricultural sector, the authorities have adopted three types of policies aiming to reform the behaviours of individuals.

First, disciplinary measures were adopted to reform behaviour by means of constraints and punishment. In order to improve the situation, there was a need to monitor, supervise and threaten workers and those managing them. Modernizing the country would depend on the president’s capacity to maintain sufficient ‘administrative pressure’. This expression was repeated on numerous occasions during the interviews. These measures have been based in particular on the threat directed at the managers of kolkhozes, or collective farms. If results are unsatisfactory, managers are held directly responsible for the deficiencies of their kolkhoz. In order to motivate these managers, the authorities threaten them. Managers risk being appointed to difficult posts. They are denounced publicly as inefficient. Finally, they might be pursued in the courts. The last twenty years have been marked by various different trials of former kolkhoz managers found to be too independent in their public declarations and their practices [Karbalévitch 2012, pp. 246, 263].

Second, economic and social measures have been adopted to reform behaviour in return for meeting the population’s needs. Since 2000, several five-year plans for the countryside have been implemented, such as that between 2005 and 2010 with the title ‘The Renaissance and Development of the Rural World’. As part of this programme, 1481 agro-towns were set up. They were distributed between the Vitebsk (254), Grodno (239), Brest (222), Gomel (238), Mogilev (203) and Minsk (325) regions. Nearly 128.2 trillion Belarusian roubles were invested in the transformation of rural centres and agro-towns [Rusyi 2011]. Signs of this have been the construction of roads, new houses with the conveniences of city dwellings (in particular, running water and indoor bathrooms and toilets), and the preservation of public services in villages (post offices, libraries, community arts centres, etc.).

Third, paternalist measures have been adopted to reform behaviour in return for the distribution of symbolic goods (recognition and reputation) and by upholding the dignity of those who work the land. Worker behaviour was not only appraised in economic terms, linking efficiency to remuneration, but was also judged from a moral standpoint. Behaviour is not only appraised during working hours, but in terms of the worker’s way of life as a whole. A good worker should be disciplined, grateful to the hierarchy above, be satisfied with his lot, be of good character, be sober, and show respect for culture. The behaviour of a worker is assessed here in its totality and it is the whole way of life of the collective farm worker which the authorities have been seeking to reform. This is why we can talk of paternalism understood as ‘a system regulating relations between an employer and the employees of a business in their totality’ [Gueslin 1992, p. 201]. The focus of this article is on this last aspect. Public policies targeting the countryside and local mechanisms for managing the workforce aim to raise the moral standards of the population by promoting traditional rural ways of life. These paternalist practices are not only a continuation of Soviet-era conditions but have also introduced a number of innovations. We analyse these practices firstly at the local level, then at the national level.

## Paternalism at the local level

### *Paternalist supervision of kolkhozes*

Recognising exemplary workers, raising the moral standards of professional and social life, and folklorizing the rural world can be seen at local level, in the kolkhozes we visited. We might for example draw a picture of the various different practices noted in 2007 in a kolkhoz in the Minsk region. Several mechanisms intended to raise moral standards can be distinguished: the promotion of tradition, a civilizing guardianship, the disciplining of the body, reputation, exemplariness and penalties.

Managers consider the collective farm worker to be the inheritor of tradition and a repository of centuries-old know-how. When speaking of those working in the business, the director did not use the term 'kolkhozian', which is often synonymous in the Russian language inherited from the century of sovietization with a moron uninterested in his work. He talked of 'peasants' in order to emphasize their skills, and to evoke the previous culture in which they would have benefited from greater dignity and autonomy. Management deplore the loss of the traditional skills denigrated by the kolkhoz workers themselves and attempt to remedy this by promoting their transmission. One agricultural enterprise manager referred to an old woman who was the only person in the village still capable of putting together an old-style haycock. She was asked to construct a dome of hay of this sort in her own fashion, in order to transmit her skills. This kolkhoz manager explained that, in general, people discard everything connected with the older ways of life. For example, today nobody is capable of weaving or working with flax, although mastery of this skill was previously widespread in Belarus. Collective farm management take measures to preserve and ensure the continued existence of traditional Belarusian rural culture. This form of promotion can be seen for example at receptions for delegations. Young women are obliged to wear traditional dress to receive guests. But they are ill at ease and feel embarrassed. Management lecture them and threaten them with financial penalties—non-payment of bonuses—if they refuse to take part.

The kolkhoz next tries to work on the workers' behavioural tendencies, diverting them away from the consumption of alcohol, through sport or promoting various leisure activities seen as healthy, such as gardening or access to culture. Efforts are made to keep the workers busy during their free time. An initial measure taken was to allow them to make use of sporting facilities originally intended for passing tourists. Next, as part of the agro-town development plan, there was a plan to develop cultural activities in rural areas. In the kolkhoz visited in 2007, a Palace of Culture was about to be built. Finally, excursions are also organized. For example, in the decade after 2000, workers were invited to the Logoisk ski resort. Irina Rodnina, three times Olympic figure skating champion and ten times World Champion, was present. The president himself attended on the day. According to a kolkhoz manager, these excursions make the workers feel more included in society. The activities also serve to keep people busy enough so there is no thought of drinking. The kolkhoz manager said explicitly: 'When you ski, you have the same adrenaline as when you down 150 grams of vodka'. Kolkhoz workers are even

obliged to take part in these activities outside working hours. The kolkhoz director had ordered all workers to enrol in the new National Library set up in 2006, sending a student delegation to visit it.

The collective farm introduced new forms of collectivity valuing certain attributes such as drive and skill, which were manifest in the beautiful formal gardens and kitchen gardens which are also ways of deprecating idleness and laziness. On the kolkhoz, competitions are organized and prizes given for the ‘best kitchen garden’, the ‘best flower garden’, the ‘best home interior’, the ‘best entrance hall’, the ‘best fence’, the ‘best house’ and so on. Prize winners received 200,000 roubles, or around 60 euros, at a time when the average monthly wage in Belarus was 250 euros. The kolkhoz sets up a certain number of local figures with solid reputations as models to be imitated. The director himself must be irreproachable, humble and devoted to his task. During recent *Dozhinki* the director received two prizes from President Lukashenko. Once back at the kolkhoz, he donated one of the prizes to the development of sports. Other managers then followed his example. One worker even donated his bonus in order to fund the maintenance of the sports complex because he did not want to see any of his three children take up drinking.

Finally, the kolkhoz may use various forms of constraint or even sanctions to force its employees to work, especially those designated as ‘alcoholics’. These employees are laid off for a number of days, though the manpower shortage means they have to be taken back on; their bonuses are withheld; they are excluded from all the benefits to be had from joining local interdependence networks, such as access to a tractor, or the various free gifts distributed by the kolkhoz. Local stores are forbidden to sell them alcohol; they are threatened with expulsion from the flat which the kolkhoz has provided almost free of charge; police raids are organized on workplaces for the purpose of monitoring employees’ blood alcohol levels. Children are taken away from the homes of alcoholic parents; employees may also be forced seek treatment, being steered towards doctors able to cure them of their pathology using ‘coding’ therapy.

The overall result, according to the collective farm managers surveyed, is that their particular kolkhoz has recorded an increase in productivity. People are said to be more motivated than previously. In addition, the Russian governor of an administrative district heard about the practices introduced to raise moral standards in this kolkhoz through an article published in the magazine *Sel'skaya zhizn'* (*Rural Life*), sent a delegation and hopes to institute similar practices in his region, where 7,000 former collective farm workers found themselves without work and turning to the bottle. The people interviewed do however concede that younger people are not always enthusiastic. These often take correspondence courses in the hope of one day leaving the countryside.

### *The paternalist practices of religious institutions*

The paternalist practices implemented on the kolkhoz are not only a continuation of Soviet-era conditions but have been accompanied by a number of innovations. The promotion of traditional rural culture and the theatrical appearances of Belarusian folklore, seen as manifesting skills and know-how from the long national history, are novelties which have found an echo at the national level (as we shall see in the second part of this paper).

Another type of innovation was set up by religious leaders, in close collaboration with the local administration. A monograph on a village in northern Belarus [Hervouet 2014] speaks volumes about it.

In the Catholic village of Mossar, an old priest called Ūsaf Bul'ka<sup>7</sup>, who died in 2010, instituted a policy of combating alcoholism and laid out a vast park to attract tourists and the faithful. Father Bul'ka arrived in Mossar in 1986. The story of his arrival in the parish has been told by the press [Ulitenok 2003]. At that time, in the surrounding areas, graves had been left abandoned. Father Bul'ka tidied up the cemeteries, moved gardens, installed sculptures and cut down old trees in order to brighten up the sites. His projects did not stop at the cemetery gates. Church property extended over 24 hectares: he drained the swamplands around the church, planted silver birches, dug out two symmetrical ponds connected by a 'lovers' bridge', erected small kurgans (tumuli) around their edges, and laid out a road leading to a spring and a sports field behind the presbytery. Several hundred metres from the church there is a hill at the top of which Father Bul'ka erected a 23 metre-high cross weighing 10 tons and visible 25 kilometres away [Bogdanov 2010]. Father Bul'ka constructed a domain whose symbolic topography and manifest order are intended to reflect the moral conversion of the village's inhabitants. The carefully-tended cemeteries convey respect for the dead; the road leading to the spring, marked out along its length by representations from the Bible, indicate the work one has to do to oneself in order to achieve purity; the ponds and flower beds are manifestations of the beauty of Divine Creation, provided that men, by tilling the land, agree to unveil it. These earthly manifestations of the Beautiful are intended to mirror the moral attributes of the parishioners. Those who have sinned are redeemed in the eyes of the community by the beauties which they have helped to reveal. Father Bul'ka here displayed a 'theodicy of happiness' where virtue is rewarded by the contemplation of the work accomplished collectively [Weber 2001, p. 187]. The space is patrolled by imposing plaster statues representing major biblical figures. The beauty of the site is immediately connected to the sacred text. Contemplating nature, the eye cannot avoid the reminders conveyed by these monuments methodically dispersed around the estate: the Virgin, a monumental Christ in the middle of the cemetery, Moses and the tablets of the Ten Commandments, John the Baptist, King David, and others. This landscape is systematically described in newspapers as exceptional. Pilgrims, tourists and people passing through express the emotions they feel in this site, describing the place as a 'Little Versailles'. Journalists, particularly in the official press, hail the site and its 'oases of flowers which delight the eyes and the soul by their beauty' [Ulitenok 2003].

The priest not only sought to produce a balanced example of nature but also sanitized bodies, rescued from alcoholic disorders. From the moment he arrived in the district, he began a long campaign against alcoholism. Similar to the 'prototypical rule creator' defined by Howard Becker, he embarked on a 'moral crusade' [Becker 1985, p. 148]. He explained how he suggested that people give up drinking. Traditions had to be changed and the ritual of the vodka toast banned. He also set up what he called a 'Museum of Alcoholism'. Located in a small building near the church, it was about 15 square metres. On the walls of the main room, various texts figure on wooden signs (a quotation from

<sup>7</sup> R. Hervouet transcribes the priest's name as it appears on his visiting card during their first meeting on 6 March 2008. Born in Lithuania, his original name Juozas Bulka was later written, depending on the context, as Ūozas Byl'ka or Ūzif Bul'ko.

Saint Mark, another from Jack London, extracts from alcohol prevention handbooks) and paintings representing Christ, the Devil and the Alcoholic. In the room there is an old still, a low table on which there is an empty bottle, a full ashtray and a dirty tin of food, all displayed to denounce the alcoholic's lifestyle. Near a samovar, the alcoholics or those close to them place written-out wishes and ex-votos whose contents ('Help us to be cured', 'Save my son', 'Thank you Lord') are unsurprising. The successes of Father Bul'ka's crusade against alcoholism are also on display in the landscape. Around forty Alcoholics Anonymous groups from various towns in Belarus and from Russia and Lithuania went to Mossar to attend a Mass for their benefit. Following the service, each group planted a tree along the 'Temperance Path'. A notice saying where the AA group came from was placed at the foot of each tree. The site thus displays the successes of the initiative instigated by Father Bul'ka. He even sought to influence children. Near the church, a number of ostriches live in an enclosure. They were given by a friend of the priest who rears them locally. On the wooden fences which mark out the park, maxims denouncing tobacco and alcohol are written in capitals. The priest explained that children like to come and see the animals and become more aware of nature and of the ravages of tobacco and alcohol.

Father Bul'ka's activities were based on certain forms of constraint. The priest had a monopoly of 'salvation goods' in the region and monetarized them. In one of the very rare newspaper reader comments critical of the work done at Mossar, an internet user wrote that 'in the morning, Father Bul'ka turns up at somebody's house and chants: "today you will go and weed over there and over there". If the man refuses, he runs the risk that the priest will refuse the sacrament at an important ritual. As a result, according to a local administration officer, 'People are ready, even at night if necessary, to tidy up the cemetery' [Zenina 2003]. However, Father Bul'ka's activity was also based on distributing psychological rewards of various kinds. These rewards were linked to obtaining 'salvation goods', such as religious experience and healing, in the case of repentant alcoholics, and to pride in being members of a parish which had acquired a national reputation. Rewards were also material, as for example when he allowed a repentant alcoholic to keep his place on the kolkhoz. He thus increased the material and symbolic resources which could be put to work in the area. More broadly, in a 1990s world characterized by a certain anomie, by helplessness and the challenges to the living environment gradually built up by Soviet power, Father Bul'ka's work brought back a sense of coherence and constructed, in his own way, 'a cosmos endowed with meaningful relations' [Weber 1996, p. 350].

Father Bul'ka's activity was also based on support from the local bureaucracy and police. He got the authorities to designate the area of Mossar as an alcohol-free zone. Following a proposal by Father Bul'ka, alcohol was initially banned from sale in stores located within the rural council of Udelovskij until 31 December 2009 [V regionakh poyavlyautsya zony trezvosti 2009]. This measure was then extended for a further period. A description of the Mossar region highlights the tight networking which criss-crosses this part of rural Belarus. It shows how religious, professional and bureaucratic institutions work together to ensure the stability of the social order in the rural world. Through his activity, Father Bul'ka promoted virtues—temperance and disciplined work within the area—which are well appreciated in the world of work, which in this area for the most part consists of kolkhozes. Employees, inclined towards greater docility and self-

control thanks to the partial conversion achieved by Father Bul'ka, would become more productive. The various actors concerned were clearly aware of their common interests and worked closely together in the governance of the area. Father Bul'ka cooperated with the heads of neighbouring kolkhozes who in turn provided him with material support for various works. For example, local authorities took over responsibility for the infrastructure which partly explained the influence exerted by the parish, 'Of course there are more difficult works, such as draining marshes and macadamizing the roads, which people cannot carry out without the help of local government. We give help because we see that our strengths and our resources actually change things,' declared the head of the information unit of the *rajispolkom* (district administration) of Glubokoe [V regionakh poyavlyautsya zony trezvosti 2009]. This interweaving of the religious, political and economic worlds within the region appeared strongly during Father Bul'ka's convalescence, in December 2009. Česlava Lavrinovič, who served in the church at Mossar, recounted at the time: 'In hospital, everyone comes to see him. Three weeks ago, his blood pressure was very high. Everybody: the police, the *raispolkom* [executive committee] representative, and the *sel'soviet* [rural council] representative. Everybody comes to him for advice, everybody respects him' [Strizhak 2009].

Father Bul'ka's successes were such that his reputation was felt at national level. In 2006, he was awarded the Francisk Skoriny Medal for, according to the President's press department, 'his sustained activity over many years to strengthen spiritual values and propaganda promoting a healthy way of life' [Prezident podpisal ryad ukazov 2006]. The previous year, he was the first Catholic priest to receive the 'Spiritual Renaissance' Prize. By awarding a prize for Father Bul'ka's virtue, Lukashenko also established the importance of his own ideology and his governmental practices, and through his 'honorary management of the state' [Ihl 2004, p. 5], rewarded those who recognized its legitimacy.

This case, while not representative, is not an isolated one either, and overall represents in a condensed form a number of different practices observed in Belarusian country areas during our investigation, each of which finds a resonance with Mossar: paternalism, powers of guardianship and philanthropic statements intermingle, in various configurations, with measures which might be described as dignifying, or which are at least experienced as such.

## **Paternalism at national level: *Dozhinki***

### *The invention of post-Soviet Dozhinki*

*Dozhinki* are the nationally important agricultural festivals organized by the public authorities under the control of and with the participation of Lukashenko. In its current form the festival has existed since 1996 but its history has roots both in traditional peasant culture and in Soviet traditions.

*Dozhinki* were originally the traditional agricultural festivals of the Slavs. In Belarus the festival has existed since the Middle Ages. At the end of the wheat harvest, the most respected woman in the village made the last symbolic sheaf to be harvested into

a wreath. All the villagers then prepared a meal eaten in common using products from the new harvest. While celebrating *Dozhinki*, they sang traditional songs and carried out a number of popular and Christian rites. In the Soviet era, *Dozhinki* were adapted to fit the current ideology and recognized by the communist authorities. In 1984, Stolin, a city in the south of Belarus close to the Ukrainian border, organized an agricultural festival called the ‘Poles’e Fair’ (*Polesskii kirmash*). Workers from Ukrainian collective farms also took part. The aim of the festival was not only to celebrate the work of Soviet farm workers but also to present the economic results of farming in the border regions of Belarus and the Ukraine. This annual festival continued until the end of the 1980s. At the start of the 1990s nobody thought of continuing the event as it was perceived to be too costly and too Soviet.

In 1994 the first presidential elections held in independent Belarus were won by Lukashenko. Born in a small village a long way from the major urban centres, this former chairman of a state farm (*sovkhوزه*) who did not hide his admiration for the Soviet Union, won 80% of the votes in the second round of the elections. In two years, through a series of institutional and economic reforms, he introduced an authoritarian regime to the country [Wilson 2011]. The new state ideology was to a great extent a reflection of the new president’s political culture. It was based on Soviet practices which fitted well with traditional popular values and the ‘good sense’ attributed to those from rural areas. The existence of a powerful and personalized political authority was perceived as a guarantee of social peace. Cultural conservatism became dogma. Work was held to represent an absolute value. In this context, agricultural workers and those living in rural areas were presented as the most faithful upholders of this political culture. They were held to be those least affected by the moral degradation and individualism disseminated by western modernity. From this ideological perspective, society should recognize the special status of the countryside and distance itself from the claims made by the demanding, independent inhabitants of the big cities [Machekin, Gladkaya 2012]. This was a shift from the Soviet past. In this new ideological system, it was believed that those living in the countryside had not taken on during the Soviet era the role which they should have assumed. In accordance with Marxist doctrine, the dominant place was occupied by the working class. In Lukashenko’s Belarus, the time had come to repair this historical error and to transform the rural population into the real masters of the independent nation. In various speeches, Lukashenko described agricultural workers as ‘authentic heroes’ achieving ‘genuine exploits’ for which ‘the Belarusian people owes them its gratitude’. According to Lukashenko, a good harvest indicates better than any other measure the effectiveness of state policy<sup>8</sup>.

In the Soviet era, the role of the working class was stage-managed by the government by setting up monuments, ceremonies and festivals. Thus the First of May represented an annual occasion to demonstrate the primordial strength of the workers in Bolshevik society [Lane 1981]. In the era of Lukashenko, the First of May was left to the Communist Party, which was only a minor ally of the new political regime. In the eyes of the authorities, there was a need to create an alternative festival which could more

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<sup>8</sup> See especially the speech given by President Lukashenko at the 2012 *Dozhinki* in Gorki // <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyLK53gm4J4>.

clearly indicate the new ideological reference points to society. *Dozhinki* held in Stolin, until then a local initiative, fitted well with this objective.

Following the spirit of this new state ideology, on 7 and 8 September 1996 the national radio and TV company *Belteleradiokompaniâ* organized the first *Dozhinki* festival of folklore, resuming the scenario of the Poles'e Fair. The public authorities gave prizes to the winners of the Republican Competition for Combine Harvester Drivers. Festivities then began, including a concert with the participation of amateur and professional artists and an agricultural fair. According to accounts by organizers and participants, the first *Dozhinki* in 1996 was a real success with collective farm employees and the region's inhabitants. The authorities therefore decided to organize *Dozhinki* each September in one of the country's 118 districts. In 2007, the objectives of *Dozhinki* were officially set out in governmental Decree № 712 of 30 May 2007 [*Galinovskii* 2012]. The festival's function was to promote the results of Belarusian agriculture; to assess the Republican Agricultural Production Competition; and to contribute towards the organization of farmers' leisure activities and aesthetic education. Originally local and sector level festivals, *Dozhinki* was thus rapidly transformed into a phenomenon of national importance.

### *The organizational principles of Dozhinki*

From 1997 the organization of the festival was put under the direct control of the president. Governmental Decree № 868 of 11 July 1997 'Concerning additional measures for organizing the harvest campaign' noted that it was 'useful to organize 'Dozhinki-1997' Republican Agricultural Workers' Festival-Fair in one of the districts of the Grodno region. A further Governmental Decree, № 1017 of 4 August 1997, regulated the awarding of prizes for the Republican Competition for Combine Harvester Drivers. The purchase of these prizes (such as cars, computers and TVs.) would be funded by a Special State Fund to support agricultural producers. In reality, following an informal request by the government, local authorities and Minsk City Hall also contributed towards the purchase of these prizes [*Galinovskii* 2012]. *Dozhinki* thus became the shop window for the success of Belarusian agriculture and also displayed the regime's capacity to transform society by modernizing its territory. As might be expected, the town hosting the festival was carefully prepared and laid out. Public investments, which were increasing each year, were used to carry out major public works.

Each year, *Dozhinki* is organized in a new region of Belarus<sup>9</sup>. The festival is hosted by a town chosen by the government as soon as the previous one closes. The procedure for choosing the host town is not transparent. A study of legal instruments leads one to suppose that the Ministry of Agriculture proposes to the Cabinet a number of candidate towns in the region where *Dozhinki* is due to be held. The Cabinet then takes its decision and establishes the budget and the list of works to be carried out. Preference is given to a district capital whose population exceeds 12,500 inhabitants.

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<sup>9</sup> In Belarus, there are six administrative regions divided into districts.

In his speech opening *Dozhinki-2012*, Lukashenko declared that the choice of town is influenced by the economic results of the district to which it belongs. In fact, the authorities often opt for a town which needs vast modernization works. Thus the festival budget is also used to remedy delays in the development of a number of provincial towns [Galinovskii 2012]. In 1997, development work was limited to preparing the main square and a few central streets as the venue. In the years immediately following 2000, growing public investment in *Dozhinki* was used to carry out vast programmes for the reconstruction and restoration of historic buildings and monuments. For example, for *Dozhinki-2013* organized at Žlobin (80,000 inhabitants), 100 million euros were invested, almost 300 sites and buildings were reconstructed and 196 restored, with the costs borne by their proprietors, at the request of the public authorities [Proleskovskij 2015]. Thus *Dozhinki* has often been identified by those living in the locality where they take place as a ‘third birth’ of the town, after its foundation and reconstruction following the destruction wrought in World War II [Sturejko 2012].

A special government decree specifies the works which must be carried out in the festival town and the sources of funding (local or national or Special Fund) These works present a number of characteristics [Stureiko 2012; Vodolazhskaya 2012]. They are organized in accordance with a standardized programme which includes the modernization of infrastructure, the reconstruction of the railway station and hotels, the construction of stadiums (often ice rinks), the creation of pedestrianized streets in the town centre, and finally, the restoration of historic buildings together with the creation or reconstruction of monuments. The completion of these works is presented as urgent and having to be finished in the year preceding the festival. The time limits imposed often preclude any chance of the finished works being of high quality. A town is well regarded by the authorities and the population when it is clean and when town centre districts are well maintained. For this reason most of the works aim to improve the visible parts of the urban landscape (roads, façades of buildings, and parks). Anything which might clash with this positive image must be remade or destroyed, even in the case of historic buildings. Thus the issue of the architectural and urban identity of the town hosting the festival does not have a high priority and projects often have no connection with the town’s identity. Statues unrelated to local history can be erected. The restoration of historic buildings is not based on scientific study. The official press mentions corruption and crime linked to the completion of these public works [Kedrik 2012]. Such large-scale public works gradually came to be a burden on the state budget. For this reason, in March 2014, during the economic crisis, Lukashenko announced his decision to reform *Dozhinki*. The festival was now to be organized at the local level.

The festival scenario was to be identical from one year to the next, with *Dozhinki* now being held over a weekend. Everything happens on an open-air stage installed in the main square of the town. Festivities commence with the opening speech by Lukashenko, who provides a reminder of agriculture’s importance for the national economy and reports on the harvest that year. He then gives out prizes to the best workers. Paying homage to their achievements in his opening speech, he also highlights the new ‘victories’ that year in ‘combat for the harvest’ and sets out the economic objectives for the future. This promotion of economic results is fundamental in the staging of these festivals. So when in 1990, for climatic reasons, the harvest was very poor, Lukashenko took the decision to not organize *Dozhinki*. Following his speech,

the President awards prizes to the best farmers and agricultural enterprises as part of the Republican Agricultural Production Competition. The tradition of holding this competition began in the USSR during the Stalin era. In the absence of competitive mechanisms characteristic of market economies, socialist economic competitions between industrial and farm workers were invented to encourage productivity [Werth 2012, pp. 243–244]. This practice of ‘socialist emulation’ remains exactly the same in contemporary Belarus where the agricultural sector remains largely dependent on state subsidies. The ceremony ends with a grand concert given in honour of the guests. For the rest of the weekend, the festival is given over to an all-Belarus craft fair and to various cultural events for the public such as concerts, tasting of traditional dishes, beauty contests. This is a time when popular customs are staged. A number of guest artists wear traditional costumes and sing folk songs. Some craftsmen—often retirees from collective farms—sell traditional peasant crockery or tools. These practices echo the Presidential speech with its reminders each year of the truly ancient origins of the festival, in order to highlight the continuity of age-old Belarusian history and assert the national identity of the recently independent state.

### *The functions and meanings of Dozhinki*

These festivals derive their characteristics from three different modes of politics. First, like the agro-town programme, they are used to modernize infrastructure and channel investment towards rural areas in difficulty. They are a sign of the regime’s capacity, in spite of its neo-patrimonial tendencies, to successfully implement policies aimed at enhancing public assets such as public buildings, roads, infrastructure [Hervouet 2013]. Next, they evidence a shift in the way power is staged and put on show by the authorities [Lapatniova 2013]. Stress is laid on the regime’s roots in farming, displaying its successes in rural areas. In 2003, Lukashenko made the following declaration: ‘We (Belarusians) are all from the villages. Our Belarus is a peasant country’ [Zadora 2015, p. 183]. These festivals are thus part of a political calendar which came out of the Soviet tradition but has taken on a number of innovations. Soviet society, like the communist world in general [Krakovsky 2014], was actually regulated by a calendar of specific festivals which aimed to produce social integration and the emergence of a specific society. Like the French republican festivals analysed by Ihl, these manifestations constituted ‘rituals of representation’ whose aim was to manifest consent, and legitimize political authority [Ihl 1996, p. 259]. *Dozhinki* was directly inspired by Soviet-type festivals in which the regime’s performance was put on stage and exemplary workers rewarded. By resuscitating rituals such as *Dozhinki* or the days of ‘voluntary’ work called *subbotniki*, as in Lenin’s time [Hervouet, Kurilo 2010], the regime portrays national history as an extension of the Soviet past. At the same time, these *Dozhinki*, in contrast to the *subbotniki*, did not exist as such before 1991. Lukashenko has given them the dimensions of a full-blown national festival, one emblematic of the ideology of the newly-independent republic. The festival is based on asserting the value of local skills, costumes, farming techniques and customs, in short, Belarusian folklore, which is used to promote a new national imaginary and thus

help legitimate the newborn nation. *Dozhinki* precisely match the criteria of ‘invented tradition’ described by the British historian Hobsbawm [*Hobsbawm, Ranger* 1983]. This promotion of traditional peasant folklore through diplomacy is nowadays a constitutive part of promoting Belarusian authoritarianism abroad [*Vanderhill* 2013]. When Gérard Depardieu met Lukashenko, the president was in a field cutting hay, following tradition [*Depardieu Joue au Paysan en Biélorussie* 2015]. Finally, *Dozhinki* are also a public, media-driven manifestation of paternalist practices encouraged by the regime. Awarding prizes to the best workers is a continuation of the awards of labour medals, certificates and other rewards from that period.

## Conclusion

Since his election in 1994, Lukashenko has laid claim to the Soviet heritage. Following a period (1991–1994) when the political elites sought a more or less radical break with the past, Lukashenko offered a form of ‘conservative revolution’ within the country. For example, the authorities adopted the banner and coat of arms used in the Soviet era and in 1997 re-established the tradition of *subbotniki*. The Bolshevik revolution continues to be celebrated on 7 November. The KGB has kept its name. Its founder, Felix Dzerzhinski, the author of a number of dark pages during the formation of the Soviet system, is respected and glorified. His bust is visible in the heart of the cities. In 2004 a new museum dedicated to him was opened in Belarus.

This Soviet heritage can also be seen in the way rural areas are governed. The societal paradigm promoted is that of ‘socialist paternalism’ as defined by Verdery. ‘Subjects were presumed [...] to be grateful recipients—like small children in a family—of benefits their rulers decided upon for them’ [*Verdery* 1996, p. 63]. The state defines the needs of rural populations (such as the types of housing, and leisure activities), provides for their satisfaction, and intends to reform their behaviour when it does not conform to the rules expected by the state: sobriety, hard work, docility towards the hierarchy, loyalty to the regime. The state behaves like a father with his children, or an adult dealing with minors. It cares about everyone, displays its good nature and generosity, and rewards those whose attitudes conform to what is expected of them. However, the Belarusian authorities have shifted their ground from the paternalist practices inherited from the 20th century, and by introducing elements of folklore into the social world, seek to produce a form of Belarusian exceptionality. ‘Market socialism’ is thus claimed to incarnate the traits of the Belarusian national character based on egalitarianism and collectivism, and opposed to western values of materialism, individualism and egocentrism [*Leschenko* 2008, pp. 1421–1423]. This exceptionality is said to explain the successes of what is presented by the president himself as a ‘Belarusian model’. The president himself promotes this idea and claims that ‘the Belarusian model is among the post-Soviet states an exemplary model of economic development’ [*Karbalévitch* 2012, p. 348].

Does a ‘Belarusian model’ exist in the post-Soviet space? For a number of analysts, Russia may in fact be taking the lead from paternalist practices which have proven their worth in Belarus. Belarus is said to have protected its inhabitants against the devastating effects of the market [*Medvedev* 2010]. A number of Russian delegations

have come on visits to rural Belarusian areas in order to draw inspiration from the measures put in place to make the countryside attractive and to combat alcoholism, as mentioned in the first part of this article. For others, the 'Belarusian model' is a mirage. From this perspective, the idea of a 'Belarusian model' is subjected to two types of critiques. Firstly, the social advantages remain very fragile. It has been noted for example that although the level of unemployment is low, this is in part because unemployment benefits are derisory and the constraints on qualifying for them are very restrictive [Vankovich 2012], and that in the area of public health, 30% of services are now paying [Mandel 2004, p. 220]. Lallemand and Symaniec speak of an untraceable 'social state' [Lallemand, Symaniec 2007, pp. 113–143] and Karbalévitch denounces the 'myth' of an 'egalitarian society' [Karbalévitch 2012, p. 266]. Criticism is also directed at the way the Belarusian economy functions. Several analyses converge in saying that the operations of industrial and agricultural enterprises most often appear to be inefficient [Bennett 2011, p. 146]. Official data also shows that the proportion of businesses making a loss is between 20% and 30% [Karbalévitch 2012, p. 293]. While it is possible that the effort to modernize is real, it appears that most of the growth is linked, not to the fundamentals of the Belarusian economy, which remain very fragile, but to the advantages the country obtains from its favoured relations with Russia. Rakova estimates that between 2004 and 2009, Belarus saved nearly 37.7 billion dollars thanks to the preferential conditions granted by the Russians as regards hydrocarbons [Karbalévitch 2012, p. 299]. Ambrosio considers that 'Without Russia's help, the Belarusian economy would most likely collapse' [Ambrosio 2006, p. 422]. These analyses are united in concluding that 'the "Belarusian economic miracle" is a 'myth' [Wilson 2011, p. 237–260]. From this view, paternalism in the countryside is not a desirable method of protecting rural populations but one of political domestication, masking the incoherence of the collectivist economic system and intended to ensure the stability of the regime.

How do the actors involved themselves react to this rural governance specific to Belarus? How do they judge the collectivist system? Their statements collected in the field emphasize the great mistrust of the reforms which took place in other former USSR countries. The frequency in the countryside of negative comments about the transformations of the rural world in Russia and Lithuania, where 'some land is left abandoned' and where 'rubbish is part of the landscape' is notable. Fingers are pointed at the drawbacks of the Belarusian collectivist system—low wages, the incoherence of decisions made 'on high'—but there is a clear attachment to this economic system which ensures stability and predictability. These opinions are seconded by various surveys carried out by Belarusian researchers since the early 2000s which record an attachment to kolkhozes and a rejection of the free market [Zlotnikov 2006, pp. 86–87] and strong reservations about the benefits of privatizing land—in 2009, 61.6% of those living in rural areas were said to be against private ownership of land [Smirnova 2009, pp. 343–349]. These ideas corroborate the conclusions reached in political science analyses which describe the rural population as conservative [Goujon 2009, p. 178; Karbalévitch 2012, p. 264; Zadora 2015, p. 187]. Proof of this is the fact that the regime is widely supported by the rural population. An independent enquiry has indicated that after 14 years at the head of the regime, in 2010 Lukashenko still had 50% support in rural areas, compared, for example, with 32.1% in Minsk [Wilson 2011, p. 257].

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## **Наследие советского патернализма в белорусской деревне: морализация и фольклоризация социального мира**

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**Цитирование:** Hervouet R., Kurilo A. (2016) The Heritage of Soviet Paternalism in the Belarusian Countryside: The Moralization and Folklorization of the Social World. *Mir Rossii*, vol. 25, no 4, pp. 30–51

**Ключевые слова:** патернализм, белорусская модель, колхоз, фольклор, борьба с алкоголизмом, национальные праздники, «Дожинки»

Беларусь занимает особое место на постсоветском пространстве в силу того, что после обретения независимости экономическая трансформация на пути к открытому рынку строилась лишь на частичном отрицании советского наследия. В сфере сельского хозяйства белорусские власти во многом сохранили знакомое с советского времени экономическое устройство. Колхозы были превращены в сельскохозяйственные производственные кооперативы, действующие под контролем местных властей. Неслучайно, что вместе со старыми формами организации сельскохозяйственного производства новая белорусская экономика унаследовала и многие осложнения, возникшие в аграрной сфере во времена СССР: старение населения, недостаток квалифицированных кадров, низкую производственную дисциплину, алкоголизм. И чтобы решить проблемы сельскохозяйственного сектора, белорусские власти начали предпринимать шаги патерналистского характера.

Целью этой статьи является попытка показать, что существующие в Беларуси патерналистские практики не сводятся к простому заимствованию традиций советского прошлого. Более того, в современных белорусских реалиях эти тради-

ции обновляются, национализируются и смешиваются с элементами крестьянской народной культуры. Статья основывается на собранных этнографических материалах: речь идет о наблюдениях авторов и о 40 интервью, проведенных в сельской местности в течение двух временных периодов: 2006–2009 и 2012–2013 гг. Кроме того, выводы, сделанные в статье, опираются на статистические данные и публикации белорусских средств массовой информации.

Следует подчеркнуть, что белорусские власти прибегают к патерналистским методам как на местном, так и на национальном уровне. Наблюдая за жизнью в сельской местности, авторы обратили внимание на стремление местных властей и руководителей сельхозпредприятий поддержать достойное поведение простых работников, создавая им условия для занятий спортом и участия в различных культурных мероприятиях. Все это рассматривается как способ борьбы с алкоголизмом, бытовыми преступлениями и нарушениями дисциплины на рабочих местах. При поддержке властей лучшие работники получают различные поощрения и становятся официальным примером для подражания. Те, кто не смог отказаться от пагубных привычек, подвергаются санкциям, целью которых является не только наказание провинившегося, но и стремление вернуть его к нормальной жизни. По мнению местных руководителей, контролирование образа жизни работников сельхозпредприятий необходимо не только для личного блага этих работников, но и для повышения производительности труда и улучшения экономических показателей в колхозах.

Несмотря на то, что используемые в белорусских колхозах патерналистские методы управления во многом заимствованы из советского прошлого, в них заметны и новые оригинальные черты: обращение к традиционной сельской культуре и использование белорусского фольклора призваны показать, что современные навыки и умения белорусских крестьян связаны с историческим опытом многих поколений досоветского периода. Тесное взаимодействие местных властей с представителями церкви также эффективно дополняет и развивает советские формы патернализма. Борьба с алкоголизмом, укрепление института семьи, поддержание порядка и чистоты в общественных местах отвечают интересам как государства, так и церкви. Как показывает представленный в настоящей статье пример католического священника Йозаса Бульки, моральный авторитет религиозных институтов в сочетании с согласованными административными решениями государственных органов власти могут привести к существенным изменениям в повседневной жизни отдельного региона.

На общенациональном уровне патернализм проявляется в воссоздании и переосмыслении народного сельскохозяйственного праздника «Дожинки». У древних славян этот праздник знаменовал собой окончание сбора урожая. В 1980-е гг. он стал проводиться при поддержке местных властей в Столине, маленьком городке на юге Беларуси. В то время в рамках этого праздника украинские и белорусские колхозники из приграничных районов двух республик встречались для того, чтобы устраивать конкурсы, направленные на демонстрацию трудовых достижений. Столинский сельскохозяйственный фестиваль совмещал в себе элементы профессионального праздника и традиционного для Советского Союза социалистического соревнования. В 1996 г. праздник «Дожинки» был возрожден и быстро превратился в одно из самых значительных событий в жизни страны. Он проводится каждый год как общенациональный фестиваль в одном из районных центров республики.

Это произошло не случайно: придя к власти в 1994 г., первый президент независимой Беларуси А.Г. Лукашенко коренным образом изменил государственную идеологию: ориентация на демократические ценности, связанные с западной культурой, уступила место опоре на советское наследие. В силу личного опыта Лукашенко, а также благодаря экономической специфики Беларуси доминирующей темой в белорусской политике стали развитие сельского хозяйства и поддержка сельского населения с его патриархальным жизненным укладом и культурой. Воссоздание «Дожинок» в полной мере отразило в себе новые приоритеты белорусских властей. Этот ежегодный фестиваль, проводящийся под эгидой президента и правительства, выполняет три основные функции. Во-первых, в городе, в котором проводятся «Дожинки», на протяжении целого года идет работа по модернизации инфраструктуры, что позволяет властям сделать существенные вложения в развитие малых городов. Во-вторых, «Дожинки» как самый яркий и масштабный профессиональный праздник в Беларуси подчеркивают, что основные ценности государственной идеологии связаны с сельской патриархальной культурой. Каждый год в рамках «Дожинок» проводится концерт, который обязательно включает в себя номера с исполнением народных песен и танцев. Кроме того, праздник всегда сопровождается ярмаркой ремесленников, приезжающих из всех концов республики. В-третьих, во время «Дожинок» наиболее отличившиеся в последнюю уборочную кампанию работники агрохозяйств получают за свои трудовые достижения ценные призы из рук главы государства. Таким образом, этот праздник, проводимый в форме фестиваля, пропагандирует эффективность экономической политики властей и восстанавливает советскую традицию социалистического соревнования.

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