

**CULTURAL PRACTICES  
AS A FIELD AND TOOL  
OF DECOLONIZATION:  
BELARUSIAN CASE**

The definition of the Belarusian situation as post-colonial has been present in Belarusian thinking since the mid-1990s. Then the future was seen as the coexistence and play of post-communist and post-modern, post-colonial and post-imperial forms, their hybridization.

Everything has changed radically since 2008/2014. Russian neo-imperialism, aggression and violence against neighbours, full-scale invasion of Ukraine have put under question the possibility of such a future. It became clear that the aggression and violence of neo-imperialism is not only a geopolitical approach, but also a characteristic of culture, thinking and identity.

Today's situation is seen as decolonial. Decolonization of post-imperial space is seen as the main trend and a basic task. Democracy and peaceful coexistence are impossible without decolonization of social and political institutions, cultural and social practices. And first of all – it's not possible without decolonization of thinking and identity.

The aim of the research is to study the transformations of the basic messages and narratives of the Belarusian cultural field in the context of the political crisis and Russia's aggressive policy.

It is divided into the following four objectives:

1. Create tools for working and understanding decolonization (dictionary of concepts, map of events and objects).
2. Identify the main problems (problem situations).
3. Describe existing practices of decolonization in various sectors of culture and arts.
4. Provide recommendations on strategies for working with the theory of decolonization for the main stakeholders in the country and beyond.

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<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THE HISTORY OF AN IDEA</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>BELARUS: COLONIAL CLASH / GESTALTS OF POWER</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>BELARUSIAN POST-IMPERIAL/POST-COLONIAL STUDIES: HISTORY, BASIC CONCEPTS AND PROBLEMATIZATIONS</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>16</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Belarus is the country most affected by the colonial policy of its neighbours. Already at the very beginning of the Belarusian project, colonization (Polonization and Russification) was identified as the main factor that influenced and continues to influence the Belarusian identity.

Polonization of the 16th-18th centuries created a country in which the elites and the majority of the population speak different languages - Polish and Belarusian. The division of the Commonwealth of Nations and the incorporation of the territories of Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine into the Russian Empire led to a war between the two colonizers, in which the territory of Belarus was an object and a battlefield. The period of formation of European modernity in the 19th century complicated the picture: for the West, both colonizers acted as a semi-periphery, a shadow, a raw material supplement. In the same 19th century, as a result of the penetration of new modern ideas against the background of the clash between the Russian government and the Polish-speaking elites, the Belarusian national project - populist and liberating - was born. In the 20th century, this project became the main and then the only legitimate political force in these areas, but Russification/Polonization continued, from top to bottom and vice versa.

In the first half of the 20th century, Belarus was split into two parts: Western, which is part of the revived Poland, and Eastern, Soviet, which is part of the USSR. In the second half, after "reunification", the Belarusian Soviet nation begins to form, both liberated and subordinated. Towards the end of the 20th century, we have local elites, bilingual and bicultural, conscious and culturally defined, but divided into Eastern and Western, and Russified people who, at the same time, never considered themselves Russian, hanging in the space between, in their locality. Post-Soviet Belarusian culture fused this mixture into a strange (post) colonial symbiosis of national and ideological, Belarusian and Russian.

Independence blew up the situation in 1991, forcing a radical revision of the already established balance. After a short period of euphoria, the country faced the need to adapt to a different role in a different reality. This required not only new political institutions, a new economy, but also

a new identity, new cultural codes. A new language was needed, in which you can talk about yourself.

The old Soviet elites clearly could not cope with new challenges. After the electoral revolutions of 1989/1994, a new Belarusian socio-political matrix began to take shape: both post-Soviet and post-colonial. In its midst, we have a complex symbiosis/competition of two Belarusian projects: the project of the elites, pro-western and (national) democratic, and the project of the masses, populist, pro-eastern and “also Belarusian”. Belarusian authoritarianism as a political phenomenon arose as a response to this bipolarity and at the same time as its result. This bipolarity – paradoxically – ensured the stability of the Belarusian situation for all 30 years of post-communism. During the last decade, it gradually began to be stitched together by the third factor: the Belarusian middle class, which was rapidly born and gained weight. And that class was interested in internal consensus, clear rules of the game, in ending the “war of all against all.” By 2019, the outlines of such a consensus began to emerge.

This consensus was destroyed by three simultaneous events: the pandemic crisis, the Belarusian electoral explosion of 2020 and the hybrid neocolonization of the country by Russia, which began in the same 2020, but fully developed from 2022. The pandemic crisis and the electoral explosion broke the uncertain symbiosis of the state bureaucracy, the newly emerging middle class and the national-democratic intelligentsia. The new Russian policy sought to deepen the arisen splits as much as possible, to isolate and separate the “pro-western” and “pro-eastern” political/cultural elites in different directions. This strategy was successful, and today we observe two kinds of Belarus, practically unrelated to each other ideologically and culturally, on different sides of Huntington’s clash of civilizations.

What can decolonization mean for such a country? To answer this question, we are forced to go in two directions at the same time: to define the idea and to define the context.

To an outside observer, the picture inside looks tragic. The inside observer captures differences and inconsistencies, the dynamics of change. Altogether it can be called **the Belarusian post-colonial situation**.

Post-communism happened from the middle – suddenly and in many ways unexpectedly, post-modernity came from the West – along with the end of history. Postcoloniality closed the gestalt, gathered everything into one. All this was boiled in the common pot of the pres-

The definition of one's own situation as post-colonial has been present in Belarusian thinking since the mid-1990s. Postcoloniality was the third "post-" in that decade: in addition to postcommunism and postmodernity.

ent, forming strange alliances, overlays and transitions. The future was seen as the coexistence and play of post-communist and post-modern, post-colonial and post-imperial forms, their hybridization.

Everything started to change in 2008. What we called globalization, and considered its systemicity to be almost indestructible, was disintegrating before our eyes. Along with all the theories and models that seemed monumental. The common future of humanity began to diverge into separate zones, fragments, each with its own interests and its own separate destiny.

The reasons for this were different. The triumphalism of the West, which decided that the job is done, and everything will now happen "by itself". Financial capitalism, aggressive and socially irresponsible, within three decades managed to economically and politically marginalize its own middle class, launching populist trends in the societies of the centre. There is also a fact that China began to win in globalization, and not the West, as planned. All this was discussed and researched, and more than once.

At this historical moment Russian neo-imperialism is born. With aggression and resentment against the West, violence and war against neighbours. It is born not as a temporary political campaign, but as a new socio-political project of the "Russian world", which strives to radically reimagine/rewrite reality for itself, with the aim of becoming this reality itself.

Gradually came the understanding that this is for a long time. That neo-imperialism is not only geopolitics, but also culture, thinking and identity. And that its roots are not only in the imperial legacy, or the (semi)mythical Russian mentality, but also in the situation of total chaos and war of all against all, which since 2008 is striving to become a new global paradigm.

For the Eastern European border (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova), the new paradigm meant the transition from Fukuyama to Huntington. As well as the disintegration of all those hybrid forms and practices characteristic of Eastern Europe in the previous decades, antagonism of components, closing bridges and crossings between civilizations and cultures. And from 2014/2022 we found ourselves in the middle of a war. Not only a war of signs or a war of ideas. But in the middle of the real war.

One of the spontaneous responses to this disaster was the idea of decolonization. Decolonization emerged as a Ukrainian response in the cultural sphere to the challenges of the war and was associated with practices of limiting the sphere of use of the Russian language

and culture as a tool of “soft power”. Gradually, the idea expanded and transformed, becoming part of the regional (and even global) agenda, an ideological cliché, just a buzzword. It is seen as the main trend and a basic task of (regional, European, global) cultural policy. Some fight against it and others promote it.

At the same time, the concept is applied rather intuitively. It is filled with a variety of content. Very often it functions as an empty concept that can be used by anyone for temporary purposes.

The first thing that becomes clear: it is not as simple as it seems. The empire worked for centuries, binding to itself, rewriting the landscape, thinking and identities. And just to remove everything mechanically is painful and traumatic. And it often means being left without a part of your history.

Secondly, we are not alone in this situation. Similar work has already taken place in different parts of the world, and its results are conceptualized, present in journalism, analytics and social theory. This situation (colonial clash and entry into the post-imperial/post-colonial state) gave birth to post-colonial studies. And even the concept of decolonization is already present in post-colonial thinking, filled with content and effectively working – though in other contexts.

If there is something common in these diverse attempts, it is the desire to hide from the empire, to remove – from consciousness, or even physical space – its signs and markers, monuments and artifacts.

In such a situation, the first steps should be to try to clarify the content. In our case – placing the idea of decolonization in a wider context: as part of decolonization movements in different parts of the world. And at the same time concretization: linking it to the region, to other attempts at self-understanding. As one of the self-conceptualizations, as a tool and practice, as a certain fragment of the intellectual history of post-communism.

## THE HISTORY OF AN IDEA

The term and concept of “decolonization” first appeared as a Latin American response to the challenge of postcolonial theory in the American academy. The postcolonial theory was born in American universities as a result of the work of Indian intellectuals: Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha are among the most famous. Subsequently, the project seriously expanded: the attention of researchers naturally shifted to Africa and the Arab East, and Frantz Fanon and Edward Said were regarded as founding fathers. Nevertheless, the Indian experience remained the basis of conceptualization and a generic sign.

In the 1980s, the Irish unexpectedly joined the project. They formulated the concept of “internal colonialism” and considered the British colonization of Ireland as an exemplary case. The Irish also formulated the concept of “anti-colonial nationalism” and showed how imperialism in its practices of colonization demonizes and discredits the anti-colonial resistance of enslaved peoples.

In the 1990s, the first texts appeared that considered the (post)Soviet space as a field and an object of colonial practices. The pioneers in this were Ukrainian intellectuals of the diaspora: Marko Pavlyshyn and Oksana Grabovych. In the second half of the 1990s, the ideas and schemes of the post-colonial theory became the topic of intellectual discussions in the Ukrainian and Belarusian context, and the diagnosis of the situation as post-colonial (and not only post-communist) was generally accepted. In the Ukrainian context, the main promoters of ideas were Oksana Zabuzhka and Mykola Rabchuk, in the Belarusian context - Ihar Babkoŭ and Aliaksiej Lalo.

In the mid-1990s, we see the emergence of the theme of Eastern Europe. After the release of books of Larry Wolff (“Inventing Eastern Europe”) and Marina Todorova (“Imagining the Balkans”), it becomes clear that Eastern Europe as a whole can be considered as an object of colonization (European periphery).

In the end, what we can call the **Russian post-imperial context** emerges: Ewa Thompson publishes the book “Imperial Knowledge” in America,

dedicated to the connections between classical Russian literature and the imperial power, Alexander Etkind starts the Oxford project, the result of which is his “Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience”, in Kazan there is a group “Ab Imperio”, which tries to study the history of the Russian Empire from a post-colonial perspective. And the series is completed by Madina Tlostanova and Sergei Ushakin, who in a series of important works connect the post-imperial, post-colonial and post-communist into one concept.

In all of this, the only thing that was surprising was the absence of a strong Latin American voice in the post-colonial symphony. After all, it was Latin America that was de facto the first post-colonial continent, and the philosophy (and theology) of liberation could be considered the intellectual equivalent of post-colonial thinking.

This situation changed in the 2000s. The first Latin American who combined these two lines (Latin American philosophy of liberation and postcolonial theory) was Walter Mignolo. The result was the idea (and theory) of decolonization. In the future, the idea acquired the dimension of genealogy (Albert Kihon as the author of the concept of (de)coloniality, Leopold Seo as the initiator of the discourse) and its own, associated subject matter and optics.

In the 2000s and 2010s, postcolonial theory reached the peak of its conceptual power and was seen as an alternative theory of globalization that describes the modern world in its essential imbalances, conflicts and fractures between the centre and the periphery. But it is also regarded as a project to overcome this rift, a project to stitch the world together on new principles and foundations.

This model is founded on three basic schemes, directions of intellectual work. **The first is global and historical, associated with European modernity as a historical era and a civilizational turn.** Latin American thinkers were perhaps the first to pay attention to the shadow side of modernity: the historical and civilizational leap of the West was largely connected with the emergence of a system of unequal economic exchange after the so-called discovery of America. It was this concept that later became the basis of colonialism of the 19th century and globalization of the following century. Decolonization here is connected with the return of oneself to modern history, no longer as silent objects of foreign influences, but as an important and essential part of it, capable of testifying and speaking with its own voice.

**The second direction is epistemological.** Western schemes and models of thinking during this historical advance (modernity) are seen as progressive and universal, as a model for the peripheries and provinces,

whose fate is local inheritance of the Western model. At the same time, formal, mechanical borrowing of other people's patterns and schemes, which arose in other times and other contexts, rarely leads to success. And what is more important, this inheritance and borrowing from someone else takes away subjectivity, freedom, the right to use one's own mind. Decolonization of thinking means, first of all, a project of criticism of knowledge, an epistemology of resistance – an attempt to think for oneself, independently, conceptualizing and universalizing one's own experience, and not simply imposing other people's patterns on it.

**The third approach is contextual.** Walter D. Mignolo drew attention to the fact that postcolonial theory as a phenomenon of the Western academy gives birth to a certain illusion: the possibility of resolving all the oppositions and conflicts of the modern world within the limits of thinking, in the university audience. But no matter how important and valuable it is to work together with ideas and models, in the end we still come to our localities. In addition, on the peripheries of the global world, their own configurations of meanings are created and their own unresolved problems (social, intellectual and cultural) arise. Recognition of these problems is possible only when we return from Western university classrooms to local stories: to our languages, communities and local cultures.

In a sense, decolonial schematism is revealed in Mignolo's book "Local Histories/Global Designs", where he examined all three components.

Since 2010, we have been witnessing the decline of the post-colonial paradigm. But this silencing was not connected with the cancellation or overcoming of the idea, but with the transfer of the centre of thinking to the locality (local histories).

## BELARUS: COLONIAL CLASH / GESTALTS OF POWER

If we look from the perspective of the events which happened in the Belarus/Mediterranean region after 1991, in the post-communist era, we see that the Belarusian (and Eastern European) intellectual gestalt was defined by three big debates.

**The first is the debate about place.** The country's place in the modern European and global world. Here the discussion went from the general to the more specific: moving away from communism, we found first the West as a civilization – then Europe – Central-Eastern Europe as a historical region – Central Europe (Kunderi) as an idea and paradigm – then the Intermarium (the Mediterranean region) – and finally, the Eastern European border (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova) as a region of fracture/connection of civilizations. It should be noted that each of these locations is not just an indication of a place, but above all a discourse, an idea, a programme of actions. Moreover, all that remains in culture and works together in a complex interweaving.

**The second is the debate about subjectivity, identity and the national project.** Here, the discussion began with the statement that the national project was delayed and incomplete, and there were certain problems with identity, which in many respects remains local (pre- or even non-national). It continued with processing the historical roots of this situation: the 200-year stay in the empire, the practices of Russification and the state of the historical semi-periphery in the era of modernity. And it finalized with an analysis of strategies and tactics for getting out of the deadlock: either we try to form a civil Belarusian nation according to the (Latin) American model based on Russian-Belarusian bilingualism and biculturalism, Belarusian history and the Belarusian way, or we still start Belarusianization mechanisms (in different meanings).

**The third debate concerns the discussions about time - in which moment of human history we find ourselves.** This discussion started from the analysis of post-communism as an actual historical moment and as a certain formation (economic, political, intellectual), but gradually moved to global issues and to the perspectives of humanity. The main problem was the mismatch between expectations and reality. The post-

communist societies of the 1990s hoped to enter the situation of the “common European home” or the common future of all humanity, but ended up in the situation of the periphery: economic bankruptcy, war of all against all, intellectual and cultural dependence.

The 2000s can be called a period of stabilization. The vast majority integrated into the world economy in one way or another: either through the European Union, or by joining resource alliances, or by using transit opportunities. At the same time, at the level of symbolic and political representation, they remained in the image of the poor periphery, without their own subjectivity. The rise of China has radically changed not only the world economy, but also thinking. The situation of three “posts” (post-communism, post-colonialism, post-modernity) has become a situation of “four”: post-accidentalism has become the fourth component, and the most important.

And all three discussions brought us to the topic of postcoloniality/ decolonization. Postcoloniality as a feature of the region, as a state of Belarusian subjectivity, as a global context. At the end of the post-communist era, we found ourselves, on a twice (or even thrice) colonized Eastern European frontier, with a damaged, traumatized identity and an unfinished national project, in the midst of the war, and in a global situation of post-accidentalism.

## BELARUSIAN POST-IMPERIAL/POST-COLONIAL STUDIES: HISTORY, BASIC CONCEPTS AND PROBLEMATIZATIONS

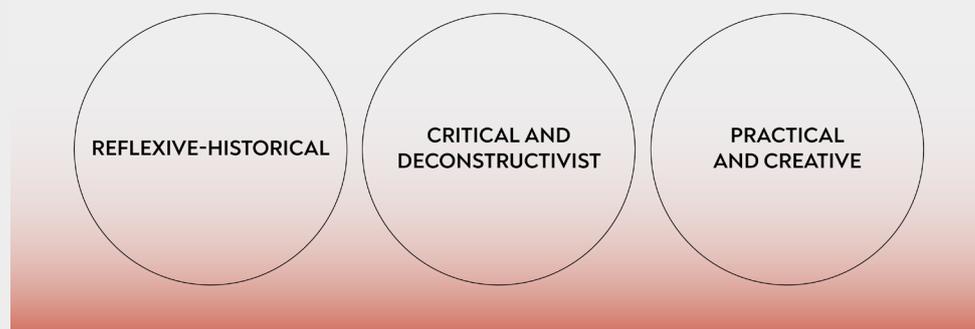
Speaking of the Belarusian context, post-colonial thinking/theory appears in the mid/second half of the 1990s. The first sign here was the artistic representation project “Kingdom of Belarus. Belarusian Postcolonial Culture” (1997) with the catalogue of the same name. At the end of the 1990s, the first translations of post-colonial classics into Belarusian were made, and the academic course at the Belarusian Collegium started as well. Within the projects of the Centre for European Studies “Euroforum”, special issues, round tables and discussions of the Fragments magazine («Фрагменты» - in Russian), we have several thematic issues of the magazine, with translations and author’s texts. At the same time, at EHU (European Humanities University), postcolonialism began to appear as part of the American studies programme, and later as a tool for working with the context. At the beginning of the 2000s the regional (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova) Centre for Social and Economic Research (CASE) was established in Minsk with the Crossroads magazine (“Перекрестки” - in Russian) and the programme of studying the region “from the perspective of the border”. The region itself has been defined as the “Eastern European frontier”, and its feature has become a complex overlay of post-colonial, post-modern and post-communist.

All that together led to the fact that in the 2000s, the ideas and concepts of postcolonial studies crossed the western border and became part of the local academic culture.

In 2010–2014, we observed a conceptual pause. As a result of the financial crisis of 2008, many academic programmes were closed or reduced. After 2014–2022, Belarusian thinking was forced to respond to the new situation in one way or another. And one of the reactions is the return of Belarusian post-imperial/post-colonial studies. At first, as a spontaneous response of intellectuals, researchers, creators, later – as attempts to systematically think through a new paradigm.

Today we have three thematic areas in which such thinking is taking place or could take place.

Superimposing these three circles/directions one on top of the other, we can say: decoloniality is when you go through the empire – consciously and reflexively – and one day you “wake up in the morning in your own country”. Such decolonization does not promise miracles and gifts and does not guarantee anything. This is the way to discover yourself as subjects of history – creative and free.



Picture 1. Thematic areas of creating a paradigm for Belarusian post-imperial and postcolonial studies

**Reflexive-historical: a genealogy of imperial challenges/local responses in the region.** We are unable to understand ourselves, the architectonics and content of our forms, the logic and direction of history if we are unable to trace their genealogy. Moreover, it is the historical tradition that provides us with the material for identity, and our actual present is determined by what parts of it we see and how we deal with them.

**Critical and deconstructivist: a critique of knowledge / an epistemology of resistance.** The fact that the production of knowledge is a social process, and that knowledge itself is not culturally and politically neutral, but always embedded in certain configurations of power, after Michel Foucault, appears as an axiom, and not as a topic of discussion. Nevertheless, the identification and analysis of these connections require a certain awareness of the context, as well as a reflexive and critical position of the researcher (in the Kantian sense).

**Practical and Creative: Cultural Politics / Cultural Practices.** This step is the most important. In Hegel’s coordinate system, it could be described as a transition from the abstract to the concrete.

In the European tradition, such work has its own meaning - culture. In contrast to ideology, which works with the local, but works aggressively, imposing the correct or necessary schemes, ideas, models of thinking on the locality. In contrast to academic universalism, which sees the local exclusively as singular, as an example of general laws and global trends.

Culture always works in place. Contextually. Cultivating and nurturing meanings here and now, not forcibly imposing them from unseen heights.

To live our lives. Freely. Creatively. In kindness and compassion for all living things and all around us.

Prepare to die, and sow rye, says a Belarusian proverb.

Cultural Practices 2023: even in the midst of war and death, we cast our seeds into the sky.

## CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Today's Belarusian (regional) situation is characterized by a complex overlay of post-colonial and post-communist, national and post-imperial, global and local forms and trends. Recognizing their specific configurations and determining adequate tools for working with them is the analyst's priority task. Major mistakes and failures come from superimposing abstract/other people's schemes and models on one's situation. In this sense, neither Ukrainian-style decolonization nor Latin American or Indian recipes work in the Belarusian situation.

Speaking about the configuration of post-coloniality/post-imperialism in Belarus during the last centuries, we first of all note the double colonization from the West and the East, which, superimposed on the situation of the ethno-religious and civilizational border, leads to conflict diversity and internal antagonisms. In the post-communist era, the structural pressure of globalization, for which the region acts as an Eastern European periphery, was added to this. As well as the neo-imperialism of Russia, which, losing its position in the global order, is trying to compensate for this by returning to archaic forms of dominance in the region. As a result, the region is torn apart, and is increasingly immersed in aggression, mutual intolerance, war and violence.

The main conceptual response of the Belarusian wholeness has traditionally been the strategy of deactivation of aggressive impulses, the ability to stitch together supposedly "incompatible" elements into complex "wholes".

The winner on the frontier is not the one who seeks to displace or destroy the opponent, but the one who is able to include the alternative as a component of their own project. In this sense, the key element of the Belarusian postcolonial project must be the search for a metaposition, a metalanguage for describing the situation. Avoiding a head-on collision, especially with a more powerful opponent.

Decolonization in the Belarusian way is not a bulldozer that clears the space to clinical cleanliness, after which a bright future must come. And not a new planetary agenda that must be passively assimilated and

implemented on the periphery. It is something that has been happening here for centuries, and has been developed by life as an adequate response to the practices of (alien) power.

It is attention to the nearest surrounding, taking care of the space and watching the context. It's working with the signs and meanings around us. Their enlightenment and elevation. Stitching together antagonistic elements into a complex whole. It is a concern about identity and cultural canon: revisions and replacements, modernizations and renewals. It is a daily "return to your country".

The Belarusian decolonial project is based on traditional practices of resistance to colonization, born of tradition itself, strengthened by new technical possibilities, inscribed in modern civilizational trends.

The place and tool of strategic activity is culture: cultural policy, to be precise. In this case, culture is considered not as "heights of the spirit", but as a daily anthropological constant of any human activity, giving this activity meaning and perspective.

In this way, national culture is not just one of the elements of reality, but also the "firmware of the whole" of this reality which is updated with meanings, ideas, narratives, plans and projects. By correcting them, we change people's consciousness and, as a result, influence reality.

Two basic strategies, or directions of activity:

- working with ideas and narratives;
- working with infrastructural elements, with specific ecosystems in culture.

**The point of entry and at the same time the result of collection for the first strategy is cultural identity.** Working with cultural identity is primarily a correction of ideas and narratives that are preserved in the current memory of the community. Contributing to these or other trends, correcting or revising myths of origin, images of the future, political ideas or cultural codes, we sew the fragments into a complex whole.

Paul Ricoeur in his text “Narrative identity” proposes to distinguish between two aspects of identity: the basic aspect, the basis of self-identity, and identification, the identification of oneself with something that must be considered as an expression or representation of this basic aspect of identity.

If we apply this model to the Belarusian reality, we must note the extremely strong first aspect, which is realized in the feeling of “localness” or in other versions of “autochthony”. At the same time, the plan of representation is characterized not so much by weakness, but by the “multiplicity” of potential versions of the Belarusian identity. This multiplicity creates a situation of conflicting diversity, when different versions of the Belarusian identity mutually exclude each other.

This situation of the “war of representations”, in the epicentre of which the Belarusian identity cannot take shape in any way, is generated by two factors: existence in the zone of civilizational fault (in the zone of Byzantine-Latin clash, on the border of Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia) and the second, but not less essential – existence in the clash zone of two intensive processes of colonization of the “periphery”, Polonization and Russification. Modern Belarusian culture is a natural result of this rift, it carries within itself this rift and these clashes. And if the influences of the first factor – civilizational – are usually taken into account, then the “colonial” aspect is considered within ideological, not scientific, boundaries.

In the conditions of today’s civilizational gap, which has led to the situation of “two kinds of Belarus”, conflict diversity leads to the need for different strategies for working with ideas and narratives in the West and in the East.

For Belarusians in the West, the main strategy is to ensure the permanent presence of the “Belarusian theme” in culture / public space in Europe and North America. At the same time, it’s a presence that does not depend on any changes in the agenda, such as media attention to extreme events and circumstances, and would rely on the infrastructural elements of Western cultures.

Maintaining/creating/paying attention to such bridgeheads allows influencing the image of Belarus in the West and implementing the policy of knowledge/culture.



Picture 2. The bridgeheads Belarusian topics' presence in the international context

For Belarusians in the East, the main strategy is seen in moving away from the idea of a war between the West and the East and “our” victories/defeats in this war. It should be based on the search for various ideas and narratives based on the idea of “mutual” victory, a win/win situation. The ways and specific ideas of reflective action in this situation cannot and should not be in “open access”. But what should be in plain sight is the following: to be present as much as possible in “neutral”, non-public places of creation of knowledge/work with images and ideas: science, culture, art. **Zones of Belarusian traditional culture, Belarusian-Chinese cultural and intellectual exchanges are considered extremely productive. Efforts to influence “Belarusian and Ukrainian research” in Russian humanitarian science are seen as equally effective (although much more risky and unpredictable).**

**Talking about the second strategy, we define three main ecosystems of culture, working with which and influencing which, we strategically change the situation in culture/identity: Belarusian book, Belarusian school, Belarusian thinking.**

“**Belarusian book**” does not mean simply supporting book publishing in the Belarusian language. It is the design and creation of an ecosystem for the creation, storage and dissemination of Belarusian texts. Such an ecosystem actually exists, it is created every day, it appears as the sum of activity of various cultural/economic actors. At the same time, it requires more than ever a reflexive and project attitude, identification of problem areas and dysfunctions.

**Belarusian school.** It's not only national pedagogy, transmission of tradition or just the support of specific projects. But it's also the creation of the "Belarusian school archive": a system of places where meaningful elements of the Belarusian school are created and preserved.

And finally, **Belarusian thinking.** This ecosystem consists of various places/platforms – reflective, analytical, creative, on which the values, goals and tasks of the individual/community are formulated, the perspective is defined, the future is projected. All together it can be called **the National University.** The university "collects the fruits" of the first two ecosystems, processes and reflexively returns them to reality as cultural codes and algorithms of action.