

Behind the “Failed Revolution”: Becoming Patriots, or the Work of Shame in Belarusian Protests¹

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Abstract: *This article looks at the politics of shame in relation to the suppressed protests of December 2010 that challenged the re-election of Aliaksandr Lukashenka as president of Belarus (1994–present). It draws upon empirical data consisting of independent media publications, blog posts, and interviews that speak of “shame” as an emotional response to the protest, its aftermath, and its general context. The article investigates what lines of social differentiation are animated in the circulation of shame discourse, how ashamed subjects are constructed and positioned in this process, and what shame does in relation to protest and its community. Theoretically it engages with discussions on the ambivalence of shame in constructing national narratives and in social movement struggles. The findings suggest that shame, employed as a marker of a patriot of a “non-existent Belarusian nation” and “failed democracy,” creates multiple divisions along the lines of class, civic engagement, and political views. This in turn curtails social mobilization, and ultimately contributes to making social change unimaginable in the present.*

Key words: Belarus, failure, national belonging, politics of emotion, protests, shame.

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