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**Fighting a different enemy. Anti-war protests in Russia through  
the lens of liminality**

**MA Thesis**

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## **Abstract**

This research thesis analysed how anti-Ukrainian war resistance in Russia manifested in repressive settings to allow protesters to avoid criminal punishment. It attempted to reveal how the citizens leverage loopholes in the legislation by adopting liminality in order to continue to subvert the Kremlin's pro-war discourse.

The study identified the main types of liminal protests and found the major themes occurring in Russia in 2022 (full scale military operation in Ukraine). The research thesis also offered a pilot framework to measure the Liminality Score (the level of risk avoidance) quantitatively and applied the suggested framework on the slogans from protest in 2022 and from 2014 (annexation of Crimea).

The results of quantitative assessment of liminality revealed that there was an increase in the usage of liminality in protests in 2022 compared to 2014 likely caused by the tightening of the Russian legislation related to protesting. The thematic analysis revealed the absence of alternative political forces in Russia in 2022 which could have become an alternative force to the ruling elite.

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I dedicate this Thesis to all those people who speak out against injustice and therefore choose to come through liminality experience in their lives.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

**Chapter 1 provides the reader with an introduction to the topic of research, then provides an overview and contextualises the research: research questions, research objectives, data described at high level, ethical aspects, research design, contributions to science and concludes with the structure of the thesis.**

### **1.1. Introduction to the topic**

‘The Gulag Archipelago’ by Solzhenitsyn had a profound impact on history by imparting a vital lesson: every individual's voice matters. Throughout his literary work Solzhenitsyn suggests that the easiest way to attain change is through overcoming personal conformity and disavowal of the state’s falsehoods (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p.189-191).

It can be argued that societal protest always begins at an individual level and in some cases may trigger a social upheaval, like it happened in 2010 in Tunisia when Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation sparked the Arab Spring. Yet, societal reactions have irrational and enigmatic nature and individual acts of resistance usually do not lead to societal shocks. For instance, journalist’s Irina Slavina's self-immolation protest against the dictatorship of Putin in front of the Russian Ministry of Interior Affairs did not lead to mass protests in 2021. Or the act by the actor of the Russian Buryat Drama Theater Arthur Shuvalov of cutting his veins on stage as a sign of protest against the war in Ukraine, also went unseen.

There is still a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the effectiveness of covert protest ‘manoeuvring acts’. This is the main stumbling block that instigates debates among the scientists on the issue of goals and outcomes of small-scale atomised resistance. Therefore, some scholars do not consider low-profile civil resistance as protests at all, referring to organised social movement as an example of how protest should be in order to push any social change and attract academia attention (Tilly 1979; Genovese 1974; Gutmann 1993). Green's scholarly interest primarily revolved around studying large-scale protest movements in Russia, leaving individual and sporadic acts of resistance beyond the scope of the academic focus.

At the same time other scholars (Baca 2017; Bloch 1970; Goldstein 2017) support an opposite view that favours the tactic of spatial contestation, suggesting that low-scale forms of protest has a potential for ‘political becoming’ and may trigger a mass movement in future (Jacobsson & Korolczuk, 2019, p.2). These small-scale acts of protest are atomised, spatial, individualised and matter, although they might be considered as not visible in comparison to social movements. Nevertheless, they also have a potential to disturb the imposed ideology and state orders. Hence, the authorities try to conceal small protests in order to prevent any publicity that may spark a bigger resistance (Scott 1989).

In non-democratic regimes like Russian, when citizens cannot address their claims to the authorities directly, the dissent acts that undermine the official discourse implicitly have become a major tool of civil resistance. This type of protest often rests on poorly regulated and therefore ambiguous zones of legislation, that exist on the *borderline* between legal and illegal and hence less risky for the protesters to be criminally punished afterwards. In other words, the protesters take advantage of some gaps in the legislation for their resistance ‘manoeuvres’. To put it differently: even in authoritarian regimes like Russia’s there are still some gaps in laws that could be used by the protesters for their advantage.

Referring to ‘a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak their own name’ (Scott, 1990, p.184), this thesis sides with James Scott, who pioneered the term ‘infrapolitics’ to describe the tactic of low-profile small protests to subvert state policies. According to Scott, small, non-organised protests that are attempting to undermine the state system must not be neglected by academia as they provide a useful insight into the formation of alternative political subjectivity that may result in mass social movement in the future (Scott, 1986, p. 25). After all, when a successful social protest occurs, it's hard to evaluate how many small-scale acts of citizens’ protests preceded it.

I believe that atomised acts of non visible protests are crucial to understanding the essence of forming alternative political agency in a particular civil society. This is especially true if, at first glance, it appears to be a society that remains silent and complacent like today’s Russia. In the eyes of the West it is often perceived as a homogeneous entity in terms of its social and political landscape. This perception is largely shaped by the image of unity and conformity projected by the Kremlin’s politics (Olimpieva & Galenko 2022). However, just as the notion

of a cohesive Russian elite is a fallacy, the idea of a homogenous and compliant Russian society is also a myth (Olimpieva & Galenko 2022).

## 1.2 Research Puzzle

This study aims to explore how anti-war resistance in Russia has been manifested in repressive settings at the level of infrapolitics to avoid criminal punishment (in 2022 more than 21,000 persons were arrested and at least 370 individuals were criminally charged for expressing anti-war positions). I attempt to discover how in the context of the tightening of Russian legislation against protesters, the citizens find loopholes in the legislation and continue to undermine the pro-war official discourse and call on society to take collective responsibility for the war in Ukraine.

To explore how Russian protesters use the legal loopholes and creativity in their protest language, I used the concept of liminality. Liminality allows the analysis of hidden, 'border-state' phenomena through the notion of a transitional '*in-between*' phase which is called 'liminal'. Covert resistance always exists in the liminal space - between legal and illegal actions that provide a space for dissenters to avoid direct conflict with the state (Fröhlich and Jacobsson 2018). Fröhlich and Jacobsson were the first who analysed stealth resistance in Russia through employing the theory of liminality. They demonstrated how protesters manage to avoid a direct violation of legal regulations and continue to subvert the Kremlin's discourse without openly contesting it (Fröhlich & Jacobsson 2018).

Given that in Russia low-profile covert anti-war protests occur 'betwixt and between the positions assigned by law' (Thomassen, 2009, p.5–28), on the threshold between 'legal' and 'illegal', in the 'boundary zones' of social reality to such an extent that they are not even visible to the outside world, I believe this area of research is important for understanding the processes taking place in today's Russian civil society. Considering that Russia is on the verge of establishing a neo-totalitarian regime, evaluating its infrapolitics can deepen our understanding of how alternative political subjectivity emerges under these conditions.

## 1.3 Research Objectives and questions

The research seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1. How Russian protesters employ liminality in their anti-war protests in 2022 to manoeuvre in order to avoid criminal punishment?**
- 2. How did the level of liminality in the visual language of protests change in 2022 compared to 2014?** The choice of years 2014 and 2022 is significant, because in 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, which marked the beginning of its military occupation of Ukraine, and in 2022 the Kremlin launched a full-scale invasion. In both cases, there were protests in Russia against its aggressive policies. Understanding how the level of liminality has changed allows a) to propose an explanation about how protesters adapt to repressions and the tightening of Russian legislation and b) demonstrate how the level of self-censorship is changing. Given that repressions also respond to the way citizens protest, liminality can elucidate how mundane things become political (for example, the use of certain words ‘war’, etc. ) and create interpretive ambiguity.

To answer the two research questions suggested above, three research objectives (‘RO(i)’) require consideration.

### **1.3.1 RO1: To determine how protests respond to repressions**

The research questions 1 and 2 require an understanding of the mechanics of how infrapolitics operate. This RO1 facilitates evaluating the individual responses to repression by making use of thematic analysis and a proposed Liminality Score composed of three features.

### **1.3.3 RO2: To identify the main narratives addressed by the protesters to the society**

The research question 1 requires an understanding about the themes being addressed in antiwar protest. By defining how themes are being addressed, it is then possible to assess the use of liminality on these themes.

### **1.3.3 RO3: Quantify the Liminality (a Liminality Score) of protest writings**

With regards to answering the specific mechanics of liminality (research questions 1 and 2), this RO3 is fundamental to make measurement (by using a proposed score). Liminality is hard to measure as it signifies a 'borderline' being or transition. However, this thesis has developed a pilot framework based on the notion of liminality as a stage of a transitional, *'in-between'* position of a social situation. Based on these notions of *'betwixt and between'* liminal space, I suggest to assess the liminality using three features (described in the methodology) which aim to define the different aspects of the liminality the protestors employ in their texts.

## **1.4 Data Overview and Data Collection**

For this research the term 'data' refers to the total amount of material which includes 900 protest texts (banners, posters, placards, leaflets, stickers) extracted from media websites, personal blogs, human rights organisations' websites, videos of events downloaded from YouTube for the period from February 2022 until 2023 and 102 for the fall of 2014. Each writing was categorised according to the type of protest and the protest text. More information on data will be presented in section 3.1

## **1.5 Ethical aspects**

This work adheres to ethical standards and principles of non-harm. All materials used for the research are secondary dataset and already circulating on the internet. Personal archive photos are not used in this work. The names of the protesters mentioned in this thesis in relation to their protests have already appeared in the media, so a reference to the source of the information is provided and, where possible, the author of the photo. So this work is conducted with respect to Intellectual property rights. Personal interviews were not used in this work, so there was no need to sign consent forms.

To achieve validity and credibility this research adhered to Patton's criteria. Namely: I tried to outline a clear research question and goal, build a research puzzle, formulate research questions that answer it, find a suitable research method, and systematically document information about slogans in a table to make it verifiable (Patton 2015). The conclusion of this research is the result of the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data collected by me which can be

verified and reproduced (Patton 2015). This work also discusses the limitations and drawbacks of the methodological approach and the pilot framework proposed for determining the level of liminality.

To ensure the validity of this research, several measures were taken: 1) collecting as many protest writings as possible and creating an abundant dataset; 2) engaging in self-reflection and examining contradictory evidence and theories that do not support the arguments of the author of this thesis; 3) receiving feedback and insights from colleagues (Hewson 2015; Kovyliava 2022).

To achieve credibility, the following steps were taken: 1) maintaining transparency and openness in research procedures; 2) ensuring the quality of primary data; and 4) avoiding any shifts in coding definitions (Kovyliava 2022).

To allow the reader of this thesis to assess the generalizability of the findings, following Maxwell I tried to explain the theory of liminality and the theory of everyday protest in broader contexts and provide a broader description of cases in Russia (Maxwell 2005).

## **1.6 Research Design**

The research design for this study is oriented to achieve an understanding of the dynamics of how individual protesters in contemporary Russia employ liminality (stealth resistance) to avoid being criminally prosecuted for defending anti-war positions. This work builds and expands the analysis of Frohlich & Jacobsson's on infrapolitics (section 2.3 Infrapolitics).

As it will be discussed in the Methodology Chapter (Section 3.2 Research Design), a combination of methods is used to answer the 2 research questions. The qualitative research uses thematic reflexive analysis to determine the most predominant themes that emerged and were expressed in protest language in 2022. The thematic reflexive (interpretative) analysis is useful to determine the main themes and the co-occurrence of sub-themes.

The quantitative research was designed to dissect the thematic aspects of slogans in the period 2014 and fall 2022 and to determine changes (if any occurred) in the use of liminality between both periods analysed. The quantitative analysis adopted Turner's approach to Liminality (see

Section 2.4 Liminality), to build a pilot Liminality Score framework to measure risk avoidance by the protesters in their individual act of resistance.

## **1.7 Contributions to Science**

1. This research study identifies and expands the existing knowledge of the use of liminality in analysing how protesters adapt to repressive settings.
2. This research thesis suggests a framework which allows to reduce the subjectivity when evaluating the liminality of a protest. This framework can be adapted and extended by other researchers in their own studies.
3. Collection of the data. There is a high chance that a lot of the information about the protests will be removed from the online sources by Russian authorities and become unavailable for evaluation (some of the data sources used in this thesis has already been blocked). The database of slogans (900 for 2022 and 102 for 2014) has historical value since it can be used in the future for studying the different aspects of protests in Russia by other researchers, even if it disappears from the original data source.
4. To my best knowledge this thesis presents the first quantitative assessment of the usage of liminality in protests using the case-study of anti-war protests in Russia. It elucidates how the level of liminality in protests has changed in 2022 in comparison to 2014 and how it correlates with new repressive legislation in Russia;
5. It broadens the understanding of dispersed and concealed civil resistance. To the best of my knowledge there has not been any substantial research on Russian infrapolitics after invasion yet;
6. It provides the main themes of protest narratives that form anti-war discourse and spread across Russia since the start of the war. The findings can be used for further research on various topics: social trends in Russian society during war periods, the evolution of power, censorship, legislation, the emergence of totalitarianism, the potential for the change of regime.

## **1.8 Structure of the Thesis**

The entire research paper consists of 5 major parts.



Chapter 1 (Introduction) provides a clear overview of the research motivation to study infrapolitics in Russia today, the data and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 (Background & Literature Review), presents the contextual information, including an in-depth exploration of relevant literature, further discussion of related works, and a review of pertinent material for this particular study.

Chapter 3 (Methodology) outlines the methodology used to answer the research questions and to achieve the research objectives. It encapsulates data collection and processing, research design, the description of qualitative and quantitative approaches used to evaluate the liminality.

Chapter 4 (Analysis of Results) provides results of both, the conducted Qualitative and Quantitative analysis. This includes analyses of liminal forms of anti war-protest and thematic analyses of slogans. It also includes the analyses of the calculated liminality scores of slogans in 2014 and 2022.

Chapter 5 (Conclusions and Discussion) This section encapsulates the research findings, provides information about the limitations of the work, and identifies the possibilities for future research.

## Chapter 2. Background & Literature Review

This Chapter 2 aims to acquaint with the concept of spatial individualised dissent in Russia, which exists independently from the organised anti-war protest movement that failed to materialise after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. By drawing on the notion of liminality and a social drama concept suggested by Turner, this chapter seeks to enhance the understanding of how individualised protest implicitly fosters alternative political agency in Russia's repressive settings.

### 2.1 Protests in Russia

After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, several mass protest movements were held in Russia. Up to 100,000 people took to the streets of Russian cities denouncing the war and the occupation of Crimea. However, these demonstrations did not lead to anything. Similarly, the mass protests against Putin's regime in 2022 and 2013 led to nothing.

The question of why protest movements in Russia failed to bring any changes has occupied the minds of researchers throughout Putin's reign (Robertson 2010; Siegert 2011; Gudkov 2011). This is particularly noteworthy considering that, at the outset of the country's shift towards personalist dictatorship, Russian people openly protested against the government, yet this did not lead them anywhere. What is more, the system has become more repressive and solidified. In this context, some scholars (Green 2011; Gudkov 2011) have argued that the problem lies not in the absence of a historical opportunity in Russia to change the state leadership, but in the civil society itself, which fails to understand the benefits of creating and utilising democratic mechanisms to transform the country. For instance, Green refers to Harkhordin, Afanasyev and Richard Pipes, who independently come to a similar conclusion that Russia's historical path is determined by the Orthodoxy and the absolutist and patrimonial model of social organisation (Green 2011). According to Green, Pipes notes that mainly this phenomenon has prevented Russia *'to develop from private to public institutions'* (Green 2011). Similarly, Merl portrays the system as paternalistic (Merl 2012). For Harkhordin, as a result, instead of consolidating the civil society, it has led to the *'diffusion of civil life'* in Russia. Kharkhordin argues that *'the dominance of the old is the result of a failure of the new'*. In a similar vein, Afanasyev argues that the new *'fails precisely because the old proves to be stronger and continues to dominate'* (Green 2011).

Most prominently, in his analysis of the protest movement, Greene highlighted the individualised opposition structures in Russia and the '*aggressively immobile*' nature of the Russian society, which he attributed to the inadequacy of social institutions and the lawlessness (Green, 2011 p.461-2). Drawing on Fligstein and McAdam's general theory of strategic action, Greene argued that the Russians' resistance to change stems from their reliance on individualised arrangements to cope with uncertainty (Green, 2011 p.462).

Some scholars, for instance, Gabowitsch argue that Russians did not aim to change the regime in Russia during mass protests in 2011 -2013 (Gabowitsch, 2017 p. 52). According to Gabowitsch, Russian citizens protested against corruption, election fraud, demanded the release of political prisoners, and simply wanted to communicate with each other during collective marches against the authorities.

Some think tanks, for example, *Atlantic Council*, *Open Democracy* (to name only two) argue that 'the majority of Russians support the war'. This opinion that is disseminated worldwide, is based on the data and research provided by the Levada Center. I believe the primary data from the Levada Center should be approached with a critical view to assess its validity and reliability. Firstly, the Kremlin and Putin's party, 'United Russia', have historically been the main clients of sociological surveys conducted by the Levada Center, as confirmed by former director Valery Fyodorov (Fyodorov 2013) . Secondly, independent sociological research is virtually impossible in Russia today. Since the start of the war all independent NGOs involved in research have been banned, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Aga Khan Foundation etc. All these NGOs have been involved in sociological surveying. Therefore, the fact that the Levada Center represents itself as the only independent centre allowed to conduct its research activities in Russia today, raises questions about its neutral opinion in different aspects.

An argument against passiveness of Russian society to consolidate for effective collective change was made by Ivanou, who challenged Crotty's statement that '*Russian grassroots actors have not been able to build a social movement proper and thus have failed to contribute to the development of civil society*' in his research of urban activism in Moscow (Crotty 2009). On the example of the 'Taganka- 3' protest group Ivanou provided an example of how the civil society can perform effectively together to navigate Moscow urban development (Ivanou, 2013, pp. 1–30.). Another example was brought by Osborn and Tetrault-Farber, who reported

about Russia's ruling party 'United Russia' losing a third of seats in the Moscow election after protests in 2019. After all, one may suggest, the assumption about the passivity of Russian civil society in order to 'consolidate for change' is debatable, especially when considering that Russia is a country whose historical path was tragically shaped by victorious mass protests in 1917 (Carr, 1966, p.103) . The October Revolution could be seen as evidence that Russian civil society is far from being passive or immobile.

Another question is why protests in the country have not brought any change for the last two decades. This problem was a research interest for Robertson (Robertson 2010) who explored the essence of the hybrid regime in Russia. He suggested that one of the reasons for the failure of protests in Russia is that Putin has created a system of elite verticals that not only benefits from maintaining the existing status quo but also risks criminal liability if the system changes. Hence, according to Robertson's argument, the competition among elites in Russia does not always lead to mass protests, as these elites vie for Putin's allegiance and their own personal power (Robertson 2010). He maintained that protest dissemination across Russia has more chances to succeed if national *and local political competition and elite cleavages coincide and national contests are repeated at the local level. By contrast, if they are divergent, protest will die* (Robertson 2010).

From 2014 to 2022, Russian legislation has adopted so many repressive laws that today's participation in a mass protest almost automatically threatens criminal liability and imprisonment. As a result, all the people who protested against the war on the streets in 2014 were afraid to do so in 2022, which indicates the fear permeating Russian society. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine till December 2022, there were more than 21,000 arrests and at least 370 individuals prosecuted for criminal offences related to anti-war statements. In this context, when activism threatens criminal liability, the only thing left for opponents of Putin's regime is to use the mechanisms of infrapolitics. This is what Scott called hidden resistance or 'everyday form of protest' that does not openly confront the state but can covertly undermine it.

## **2.2 Infrapolitics**

James Scott coined the term 'infrapolitics' to describe the tactic of spatial contestation that citizens use to subvert state policies. It encompasses a range of day-to-day resistance practices

such as delays, pretence, false compliance, defamation, sabotage, and many others (Scott, 1986 p.6). These practices operate below the legal radar of state regulations and are often too subtle to be recognized as acts of protest. In Russia, everyday resistance is typically uncoordinated and spontaneous, allowing protesters to avoid direct confrontation with the authorities. Examples of infrapolitics protest include tactics like sketching Hitler-esque moustaches on Putin's public portrait, juxtaposing funeral service ads alongside military recruitment ads in Ukraine, displaying photographs of ruined Ukrainian cities throughout the cities in Russia and many other tools.

Scott argues that the effectiveness of infrapolitics lies in the fact that officials try not to expose cases of rebellion publicly as it confirms the unpopularity of their own policies (Scott, 1986, p.8). According to Frohlich & Jacobsson '*everyday discreet protest activism*' has contributed to the emergence of a new political agency in Russia that adapts in response to repressions (Frohlich & Jacobsson 2018). More specifically, it is argued that politics of '*small things*' and low-visibility protests in Russia create a foundation for '*political becoming*' and future transformation (Jacobsson 2015; Baca 2017). Following Boudreau exploring infrapolitical tactics of protest may involve encountering political acts in unforeseen urban places, or as Neveu noted that covert activism may turn ordinary urban locations with common meaning into places that may become a new political agency (Neveu 2015, pp. 141–154; Jakobsson 2016; Boudreau, 2009, pp. 336–346.). For example, placing posters with messages of solidarity with Ukraine on key city monuments to the WW2 heroes serves as a reminder that descendants of Soviet soldiers who achieved victory over fascism are now facing a similar form of military ideology in their own country. Protesters may also create symbolic murals or leave crosses with the inscription 'Bucha' in public squares to commemorate people murdered in Ukraine. All of these signs of covert dissent create places of resistance in urban spaces.

As outlined by Scott, the greatest part of protests such as small scale or individual actions happen outside any standard definition of social movements (Scott, 1986, p.22). Over time, however, the number of unorganised individuals participating in this type of protests may significantly surpass the number of people involved in a specific social movement (Scott 1986). Thus, the restricted definition of social movements, which emphasises organisation and wide-ranging objectives, frequently overlooks the essential micro-political forms of civil disobedience that take place in everyday life and are deserving of academic attention (Scott 1986, p. 27).

Nevertheless, there is ongoing debate among scientists regarding Scott's theory of everyday protest and its effectiveness in changing the socio-political situation. Some argue, for example, that individualised and spatial resistance usually serves the personal goals of its participants and often is not aimed at changing the status quo, and therefore cannot be considered as protest (Mullin, 1972, p.35). Genovese cites protests against slave owners as an example, where slaves protest against living conditions but not the institution of slavery itself (Genovese, 1974, p.598). Hobsbawm also brings the example of peasants protesting against high taxes but not against the regime in power (Hobsbawm 1959). Scott's theory is uneasy with Charles Tilly ideas of resistance, for whom it is an *'organised, sustained, self-conscious challenge to existing authorities'* (Scott 1987). In his 'Social Movements and National Politics' Tilly says: *'Somehow a social movement should be more durable than a fleeting encounter . . . ; it should pursue broader aims than the blocking of a particular toll'* (Tilly, 1979, pp. 297-317 ). Mathew Gutmann sees the idea of everyday protest too reductionist as it assumes that solitary protesters simply aim to transform their life conditions (Gutmann 1993). Gutmann compares Scott's theory with Weber's rationalism: *'The status quo tends to be 'rational,' and radical change non-rational'* (Worsley, 1968, p. 270). He argues that in certain historic circumstances, a calculated quiet protest can make a situation worse, for example, by intensifying corruption. Gutmann refers to Roseberry, who states that quiet disobedience can actually strengthen the regime's stability (Roseberry 1989, p. 42).

It must be said, the long existence of Putin's regime supports Gutmann's claims that covert resistance brings risks of cementing protesters' subaltern position, which result in their *'political disarticulation' and 'atomization'* (Warman, 1980, p. 261). At the same time, it is important to note that the effect of the mass protest movements in Russia had a similar effect. The Snow Revolution 2011, 'Marches of millions' in 2014 and other anti-government rallies in Russia not only did not shake Putin's regime but made it more repressive. Therefore I argue that there is no proof of effectiveness of a social movement in comparison to everyday covert resistance. Moreover, in the conditions of a dictatorship, where any protest is punished with heavy fines or arrest, the tactic of daily protest is the only option left for dissenters. After all, everyday resistance may become a starting point to a mass social movement and there is evidence of that: the birth of the Intifada in Palestine in 1987, the Democratic Wall movement in China, mural movement in Northern Ireland, the revolutions in Eastern Europe. All these cases have a history of individualised and unnoticed 'small acts of resistance'.

Yet, there is another group of thinkers who support Scott's theory and the role of everyday resistance acts in shaping political agency (Goldstein 2017; Baca 2017, Bloch 1970 etc). For Goldstein, for instance, everyday activism is less radical but more lasting than engagement in any social movements (Goldstein 2017). Baca and Bloch view matters from a similar angle, highlighting the effectiveness of 'patient and silent resistance' that may help to achieve more than guerrilla movements (Baca 2017, Bloch 1970, p.170). Very detailed case of the effectiveness of spatial resistance was made by Chamberlin's study of revolutionary Russia during WW1. He maintains that in 1917 from January to February the manpower of the Russian armies in the field declined from 6,900,000 to 6,000,000 as a result of covert mass desertion (Chamberlin, 1987, pp. 223-241). The author cites the Commander of the Northern Front, Klembovsky, who reports: *'The Northern Front is in a condition of dissolution. Fraternizing goes on everywhere; if machine-guns are turned against the fraterniser mobs of soldiers throw themselves on the guns and make them useless. The Twelfth Army could not help the Fifth with an artillery demonstration because the soldiers refused to permit the opening of fire'* (Chamberlin, 1987, pp. 223-241).

For Chaffee, in certain conditions spatial resistance can push social change (Chaffee 1993). De Certeau, referring to Clausewitz' treatise On War, differentiates between resistance strategy, which he links to visibility and tactics as 'the art of the weak' (Certeau, 1988, p.6). Following Certeau, the logic of everyday anti-war resistance in today's Russia is more of a tactic and is against the grain of many traditional models of thought for defining resistance as such.

Today's Russia demonstrates the absence of mass anti-war movement, yet the atomised population is engaged in everyday forms of covert resistance to outsmart the repressive state. In order to be able to operate under the conditions of dictatorship, protests in Russia exist in a bordering space between the prohibited and permitted under Russian law. This border zone is called *liminal space* as it is the periphery of the Russian legislation (Frohlich & Jacobsson 2018). In other words, everyday covert resistance survives in those spaces that have not yet been reached by Russian legislators and therefore have not yet been regulated.

## **2.3 Liminality**

The concept of **liminality** developed by Arnold van Gennep for anthropological research of a ritual defines the 'threshold' or a transitional period characterised by ambiguity and

uncertainty, so called '*betwixt and between*' state (Gennep 1960). By *liminal* the scientists meant so called '*units of a harmonious or disharmonious social process that arise in conflict situations*' (Turner, 1987, p.4).

Turner has added to the theory of liminality his own term of a 'social drama' that can be applied to any crisis including social protest, revolution or war. It encompasses four phases- breach (separation from the norm), crisis (transition period or liminality), redress of action, reintegration or schism (Turner 1987, pp. 5-10). As Turner defined it: '*liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial*' (Turner, 1977 p.95).

For instance, in Russia, numerous activists who protest against the war in Ukraine do not align with any opposition groups. Nevertheless, they denounce the regime and the official discourse. While they have disassociated themselves from the state ideology, they have not yet established themselves in the new reality as there is no anti-war protest movement in Russia for them to join. Therefore, these individual protesters operate in a *transitional or liminal* zone of reality. This state involves experiencing uncertainty when the established structures are shaken, where rigid systems are questioned, hierarchies are challenged, and the status quo is threatened (Szokolczai, 2000 pp. 215-227) In similar spirit, Eisenstadt stressed a crucial role of crisis in societal transformation and building new structures (Eisenstadt 1998).

The aesthetic or rhetorical devices shape the 'social drama' and vice versa. As Schechner noted, they are not in a mimetic space, they're not imitating each other but they're in a very dynamic Mobius-like infinity loop (Schechner 2013). Applying Schechner's argument to Russia, it can be argued that repression influences how people protest and vice versa. That is, how society protests can affect the nature of the repression. For example, the authorities may prohibit previously allowed things, such as using the word 'war' or arrest people on the street for wearing yellow-blue symbols, because it reminds them of the colours of the Ukrainian flag etc.

Given that the term of liminality is broad and can define many transitional forms and events, I will narrow the concept. This study employs the notion of liminality to explain a performative tactic to protest without blatantly going against the law. By liminal tactics I mean the following: **a type of a protest that occurs in poorly regulated and therefore ambiguous zones of Russian legislation, on the *borderline* between legal and illegal and hence less risky for the protesters to be criminally punished.** Therefore, by liminality this work



understands how Russian protesters adapt to repressions in order to be able to continue their everyday anti-war resistance.

The theory of liminality supports Scotts concept of everyday spatial protests, suggesting that in order to exist any dissent has to adapt to certain conditions, most safe and favourable for the participants (Scott, 1986, p.30). These conditions are what this research calls a *liminal space*.

For example, *solitary pickets* throughout Russia is a form of a protest that exists in a liminal legal space of Russian regulations (Fröhlich and Jacobsson 2018). The issue of solitary picketing presents a challenge for regional authorities as it remains officially permitted under Russian legislation, leaving them uncertain of how to handle it, as any form of anti-war resistance is strictly forbidden. This is a clear situation of legal ambiguity '*betwixt and between*', Mobius-like loop. Hence, the authorities devise *ad hoc* solutions to address the situation locally. As a result, in some cases picketers are released without a protocol, while others, for addressing similar anti-war claims are being fined with administrative charges or even imprisoned. The resolution of the situation appears to depend on a combination of factors, including the level of loyalty of local authorities and the individual circumstances and luck of the protester.

In solitary picketing the protesters also actively employ the liminality of a language (metaphors, irony, etc) to camouflage direct criticism and at the same time break the silence about war. For example, slogans like '*The 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment -Thou shalt not kill*', '*No to Vobla!*' or '*War and Peace*' (Tolstoy) are liminal.

Another group of liminal forms of a protest comprises the camouflaged anti-war writings left anonymously on transient urban surfaces such as theatre billboards, advertising posters, public transport etc. This method was coined by Fröhlich and Jacobsson as *adbusting* (Fröhlich and Jacobsson 2018). As long as this form of resistance remains anonymous, it does not pose direct risks to the protesters. This group also includes **nano-meetings**, when activists anonymously use non-human objects, such as toys, stripes, balloons etc to delegate them contesting claims and protesting rights. These items are intentionally placed in public areas to incite curiosity and inquiry among the public. Nano-meetings are not part of this investigation, due to the restrictions of time, further work is suggested to understand their dynamics.

The **third group** comprises anti-war performances that convey ambivalent messages through protesters' bodies. It must be said that this type of resistance is similar to solitary picketing as it also exists in a space of legal ambiguity. However, it's more visually expressive, provoking and risky.

According to Turner's notion of a 'social drama', a liminal transition or crisis can be understood also as a *state of being*, a personal change (Turner 1967). Applying this concept to performance, we can assert that a performer undergoes a personal transformation during their presentation. The process of transformation could entail overcoming pain, discomfort, and uncertainty as the performances may involve self-inflicted harm and are often staged in busy public locations. In this sense, performance is a manifestation of liminality in its most vivid form for a protester. It could be seen as an act of a symbolic 'sacrifice' for the society and a 'ritual' of individual transition from one state of being (conformity, fear, comfort) to another (challenging the regime, uncertainty, high personal costs) (Turner 1967).

Thus, to answer the research question of **how Russian protesters employ liminality in order to be able to protest against war in Ukraine in 2022**, this study borrows the above mentioned framework of types of liminal protests developed by Fröhlich and Jacobsson based on De Certeau's (1988) and Scott's (1990) theorization of everyday resistance. This framework includes- **solitary picketing and adbusting**. I have also added to it **solitary performance** as the third form of a protest that exists in a space of a liminality and is liminal itself.

Stealth resistance always exists in the liminal sphere- between overt forms of protest and areas between legal and illegal actions that provide a space for dissenters to avoid direct conflict with the state (Fröhlich and Jacobsson 2018).

Frohlich and Jacobsson who were the first who analysed covert protests in Russia through employing the theory of liminality, however, they focused on a period before the full scale invasion of Ukraine (Frohlich & Jacobsson 2018). Therefore, a reassessment of infrapolitics in 2022 can shed more light on the existing scholarship of how protesters in Russia adopt the grey zones of liminality. This will enable a comparison of how the repertoire of stealth resistance has changed in relation to the repressions.

## 2.4 Protest Writings

Any protest is shaped by a visual language that conveys a political message and constructs new meanings. Great attention to the subject of protest writings has been devoted by Taylor-Leech (2020), Sebastian (2019), Raish (2019), political graffiti in urban settings was explored by Chmielewska (2007) and Miklavcic (2008). The extensive studies have been made by Polletta (2006), Wood (2012), Doerr & Mattoni (2014), Adams (2002).

Dieter Rucht and his colleagues at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin created the largest manually curated dataset of protest events in the world called the German Prodat. It covers the period from 1950 to 2002 and utilises two national newspapers as primary sources (Gabowitsch 2013). Similarly, Mark Beissinger's 'Mass Demonstrations and Mass Violent Events in the Former USSR' represents the most all-encompassing protest event dataset available for the Soviet and post-Soviet region that covers 6,663 protest events and 2,177 instances of mass violence that occurred from 1987 to 1992. Beissinger personally collated the data from 150 Soviet and post-Soviet news sources (Gabowitsch 2013). An attempt to document and create a comprehensive database of slogans, photos, and protest events (PEPS) that took place in Putin's Russia between 2011-2013 was undertaken by Mischa Gabowitsch and his team. His research of protest slogans has been so far the biggest depository of protest information for the pre-war period.

Most studies on protest events focus on a general understanding of resistance as a social movement. In other words, scholars do not specifically focus on the protest writings that appear in hidden 'everyday' protests. Thus, I believe narrowing the area of study can crystallise some aspects of dissent and reveal civil society narratives that otherwise would have remained unnoticed by researchers.

Liminality of a language manifests in its ambiguity (metaphor, metonymy, rebus etc) which is being actively employed by protesters to avoid a direct contestation of a state. Also many anti-war slogans refer to 'precedent' texts such as direct quotes from Putin's speeches or Russian legislation. This is done on purpose because when protesters quote the authorities in their posters and signs, it makes it difficult to accuse them of either insulting or criticising the government. At the same time, the context in which these slogans are used allows the public to understand that it is still a protest. For example, a poster *'The Constitution of the Russian Federation. Everyone is guaranteed freedom of thought and speech. No one can be forced to*

*express their opinions and beliefs or renounce them*’ has high liminality to avoid risk as a protester claims the reconstitution of status quo implicitly.

‘Precedent’ texts exist within intertextuality, a space *in-between*, which is liminal by nature as it is transitional. According to the concepts of Kristeva and Barth, intertextuality is understood as a ‘dialogue’ between overlapping texts: *‘Any text is built as a mosaic of citations, any text is a product of absorption and transformation of some other text’* (Kristeva, 1995, p.99). Kuzmina defines intertextuality as a ‘rollcall’ of texts marked with certain language signals (Kuzmina, 2004, p.20).

According to another approach, intertextuality is a consciously used technique. Thus, *‘intertextuality means not a random and obscure accumulation of various influences, but the work of transforming and assimilating a multitude of texts, which is carried out by a text-centerer, who retains the role of semantic leadership’* (Pieguet-Gros, 2008, p.75).

The idea to utilise linguistic and visual grammar systems to interpret elements of visual language belongs to Roland Barthes, who tried to find the keys to read the images. According to Barth, any text is, in fact, ‘an unquoted quotation’ (Barthes, 1989, p.428). His work of the evaluation of ambiguous, liminal images and texts provides broad context for meaning interpretation and dismantling propaganda myths (Barthes 1972; Eco 1968). Barthes identifies two ways of conveying meaning through signs – denotation and connotation (Barthes 1985). Denotation involves decoding the sign at a basic level, which is the literal meaning of the message (e.g., specially coloured fabric – flag), and connotation involves associating the sign with broader concepts (e.g., flag – national identity) (Barthes, 1972, 1985; Eco, 1968). Barthes’ approach is based on the notion of de Saussure method of structural linguistics, which distinguishes between two aspects of signs – signifier and signified. The former describes the idea or concept (e.g., flag) and the latter, its expression (e.g., coloured fabric). Although there is no universal connection between the two aspects, we can understand signs but we cannot be sure of the meaning the creator intended to convey with the image and what meaning the viewer perceives (Daphi 2013).

As Daphi argues, culture acts as a filter that separates the signifier and signified, denotation and hidden meanings (Daphi 2013). Thus, differences in interpreting texts by many people draw attention to the fine line between the author’s actual intention and its interpretation by the readers (Daphi 2013). For this reason, interpreting slogans carries a certain level of subjectivity.

At the same time, the sociocultural and political context in which the slogan was created allows us to decipher its hidden meaning.

## **2.5 Changes of Legislation in Russia**

In 2022 the Russian parliament enacted an unprecedented number of repressive laws and amendments to criminal and administrative codes exceeding 600, setting a new record in the history of Putin's Russia. Therefore, the war has had a profound impact on the legal landscape of the state, expanding the range of repressions.

Several days after the invasion, the legislators enacted a bill that imposes penalties for spreading 'falsehoods, discrediting the Russian Armed Forces, and advocating for sanctions'. This legislation targets any anti-war sentiment, including the usage of the term 'war' instead of the officially sanctioned 'special military operation' term. Initially, protesters who are detained for the first time mostly receive administrative fines. However, repeat offenders can face a prison term of 15 years for 'disseminating false information about the Russian Armed Forces' and up to 5 years for 'discrediting the Russian army'.

In September 2022, the State Duma passed a law, stating that 'opting for voluntary surrender and refusing to combat in Ukraine' could result in a 10-year prison sentence. Furthermore, the Russian lawmakers passed a separate bill that classifies fighting on the side of Ukraine as 'an act of high treason', carrying a potential sentence of up to 20 years in prison. Echoing WW2, the state also adopted a new bill that imposed liability for 'equating the actions of the USSR with Nazi Germany and criticising Stalin and comparing him to Hitler'.

In July 2022 Putin signed the law 'On the Control of Activities of Persons Under Foreign Influence' that entails the creation of a registry of 'foreign agents'. Failure to submit reports repeatedly or failure to comply with the requirements for foreign agents can result in fines or imprisonment for up to two years.

The changes in the legislation led to over 21,000 protesters in Russia being arrested for expressing their opposition to the war.

## 2.6 Gaps in the Literature

1. The theoretical significance of this thesis lies in the expansion of Frohlich & Jacobsson's scholarship through attempting to measure and compare the level of liminality of protests in 2014 and 2022 to understand how the protesters in Russia manage to establish a safe space for anti-war resistance in conditions of intensifying repressions. Frohlich & Jacobsson study only discussed types of protests before 2015 and suggested a classification of liminal forms of protest without collecting the empirical data and quantifying it. This thesis aims to fill this gap.
2. There is a gap in research of infrapolitics in Russia. The subject of covert protests remains an area that has received limited attention. Prominent scholars like Green, Robertson, Afanasyev, Harkhordin, and other scientists have primarily focused on studying large-scale organised protest movements. This thesis fills this gap by studying the types of covert protests and their themes and performs the analysis of liminality.
3. There is a gap in literature on how to measure the liminality of an individualised protest. This thesis proposes a pilot framework for measuring the scale of liminality of resistance, taking into account the risks protesters face during their acts of dissent.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

Chapter 3 first explains the particularities of the data, the process of data collection, and data processing. It then describes the methods for qualitative analysis: mechanics of reflexive thematic analysis, coding, identification of themes, synthesising and contextualising. The chapter also describes the process of quantitative analysis: random selection of slogans, coding slogans into theme categories, estimating the proposed liminality score and quantitative analysis output.

### 3.1 Data

One of the contributions of this thesis is a collection of the slogans from the anti-war protests that occurred in 2014 and 2022: slogans from pictures of individual pickets and performances, graffiti, posters, placards, banners, leaflets and protest slogans left on urban surfaces throughout Russia. In my research this collection was used to analyse the visual and thematic language of protests in 2022 and the change in their liminality level between year 2014 and year 2022. The data collection was described in the Section 1.4 of the Introduction (Data Overview and Data Collection).

The search of the information about protests was performed to the best of my abilities using the varying online and Telegram channels of human rights organisations and non-state media outlets specialising in covering the war in Ukraine (the list of the main data sources can be found in the appendix “Data Sources“).

The period 2014 and fall 2022 is taken for the analyses as the annexation of Crimea occurred in 2014 while the full scale invasion happened in 2022. The anti-war protests manifested differently in both cases. While in 2014 there were protest rallies in Moscow, in 2022 there was spatial atomised civil resistance throughout Russia. Therefore, the ‘liminality’ of protest in 2014 and 2022 was distinctive.

I believe that the slogans dataset created by me has high research value since it can be used by fellow researchers to analyse multiple aspects of anti-war protests in Russia (I am happy to share the dataset upon request). Some of the resources I used to extract the data have now been blocked by the Russian authorities (i.e., *remap-ru.com*) and, therefore, the information about the protests previously contained in them would have been lost.

### 3.1.1 Data Description

In total, I collected 900 slogans for 2022 and 102 for 2014. Since slogans were written in Russian I translated each of them into English for the purpose of this analysis. For each slogan I also did a background research and identified, where possible:

- the location of the protest
- the type of the protest
- the author if known
- the date
- online link

The slogans and the related information mentioned above were saved as an Excel file which was submitted along with this thesis. Some of the photos were also saved on my computer in case the links stop working.

The example of the data representation of slogans for 2014:

SLOGAN	location	link
No war in Ukraine	graffiti on a wall	<a href="https://primamedia.ru/news/371327/?from=37">https://primamedia.ru/news/371327/?from=37</a>
"Demons trying to pit brotherly peoples, calm down!", "Putin, hands off Crimea!", "1939 Poland, 1940 Baltic states, 1956 Budapest, 1968 Prague, 2014 Ukraine? No"	collective posters holding, individual protest	<a href="https://hro.org/node/18974">https://hro.org/node/18974</a>
Hands off Ukraine	banner, collective holding all-Russian March for Peace	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/21/protest-moscow-russia-ukraine">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/21/protest-moscow-russia-ukraine</a>

Table 3.1 Example of the data representation of the Slogans



## 3.2 Research Design

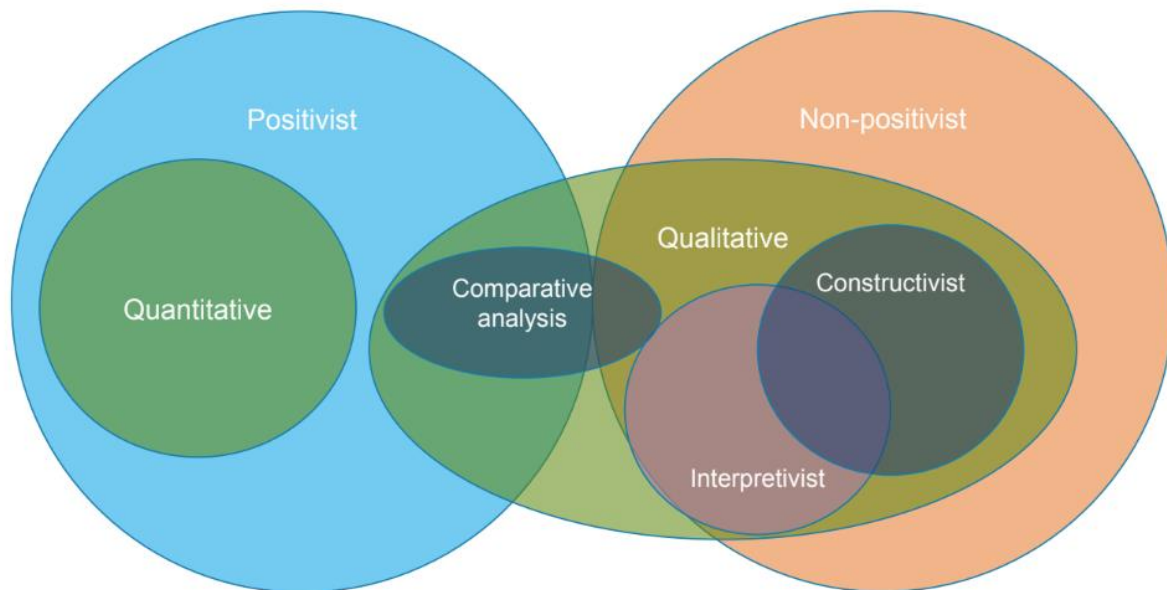


Figure 2.1 from lecture 'Designing Qualitative and Interpretive Research Methods' by Kursani. S. Tartu University

This work adopts a case-centric design, a single-case analysis of Russia, and uses a combination of qualitative analysis (non-positivist) and quantitative analysis (positivist) approaches (see Figure 2.1):

- **The qualitative analysis** is performed on the data from 2022 and aims to discover the substantive nature of the protest messages, what narratives were addressed and how the ambiguity of a language was employed. The methodology included the following steps: the coding of data to reveal sub-themes, conducting thematic reflexive analyses of protest slogans to determine the key themes; and then completing the process by synthesising and contextualising.
- **The quantitative analysis** was performed in order to deepen the quantitative analysis and give us the understanding of whether the liminality in Russian protests increased in 2022 as a response to toughening of the legislation. For this purpose the liminality in 2022 was compared to the liminality of slogans in 2014. The methodology for quantitative included the following steps: a) applying pilot framework to determine 'Liminality Score' LS of 102 random slogans for 2014 and 2022 year each; b) Comparison of liminality level of 2014 vs 2022; c) Analysing the results.

This combined approach to analysing the data (qualitative and quantitative) allowed to achieve a more complete interpretive basis for evaluating the repertoire of infrapolitics, its liminal features, and follow the evolution of liminality through time.

### **3.3 Qualitative Analysis**

To answer the research question 1, of how liminality manifested in the visual language of protest in 2022, both in terms of protest methods and the language used by protestors, I categorised the slogans collected for 2022 into groups according to the form of resistance protesters employed and also performed a reflexive thematic analysis.

#### **3.3.1 Categorising types of protest**

As mentioned in the literature review, this study has as foundation the work of Fröhlich and Jacobsson et al, and progresses on the investigation of infra-politics in Russia after the full scale invasion of Ukraine (Fröhlich and Jacobsson 2018).

Following the above study, I aimed to divide types of anti-war protests into the main groups, according to the liminal tactics protesters used to address their claims. By liminal tactics I mean the following: a type of a protest that occurs in weakly regulated and therefore ambiguous zones of Russian legislation, on the borderline between legal and illegal and hence less risky for the protesters as it reduces their chances of being criminally punished.

#### **3.3.2 Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

The qualitative analysis adopted Gofman's framing theory (1974) to categorise slogans according to their denotation (literal meaning). For reflexive thematic analyses this study employed Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis RTA (Braun and Clarke 2019). The reflexive approach to TA stresses the researcher's active role in interpretation of themes across the dataset (Braun and Clarke 2019). Reflexive thematic analysis is considered a reflection of the researcher's interpretive analysis of the data conducted at the intersection of: (1) the dataset; (2) the theoretical assumptions of the analysis, and; (3) the analytical skills/resources of the researcher (Braun and Clarke 2019).

### **3.3.2.1 Coding**

Using Brown and Clark's six stages of Reflexive thematic analysis, I collected protest writing data for 2022 and coded 900 slogans to generate code categories (Braun & Clarke 2019). The codes were not predetermined before the coding process as my aim was to identify self-sufficient codes that could offer new insights and broaden my theoretical assumptions about protests in Russia. Yet, the coding was supposed to remain relevant to help me to answer the research question of how liminality manifested in a visual language of protests. I was also interested in determining whether all the themes were equally prevalent across different types of liminal protests or not. The reflexive thematic approach does not predetermined themes to discover codes. Instead, themes are created by organising open-codes around a central unifying concept.

The codes should be purely derived from the data content, without any pre-existing theoretical or conceptual frameworks influencing their creation (Braun & Clarke 2019).

### **3.3.2.2 Reviewing, Defining and Generating Themes**

After the coding stage I reviewed the material to decide which distinctive and isolated themes could be constructed on the bases of the coded dataset. Following Braun and Clarke methodology, I examined how different codes could have been linked based on shared meanings to create sub-themes and themes.

To determine themes I applied Patton's 'dual criteria for judging categories', that include 2 stages: 1) evaluation of the degree of consistency within themes; 2) assessment of the degree of difference between themes (Patton 1990; Byrne 2021)). As a consequence, these two levels of review allowed me to define the main themes of the protest writings.

Thematic analysis was chosen for this study as it allows to identify the key themes that compel people to take risks and protest, and whether there are common narratives that could potentially indicate the presence of opposition forces capable of uniting Russians in a mass protest. The reflexive thematic analysis also allows one to determine which forms of protest express specific themes, and which ones avoid them due to the inability to convey certain messages even through linguistic ambiguity.

### 3.3.3 Synthesising and Making Conclusions

Deriving conclusions from the qualitative analysis aiming to determine clear commonalities and differences, whilst making considerations about the different contextual theatres.

## 3.4 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis aims to answer the second research question of this Masters Thesis. The quantitative analysis is complementary to the qualitative analysis described in the previous section. The purpose of the quantitative analysis was to quantitatively assess whether the liminality is a general characteristic of the anti-war protests in Russia or the cases observed in the qualitative analysis are rare and it cannot be concluded with confidence that liminality is a feature of protests in Russia. I also used quantitative analysis to evaluate whether there was a change in the level of liminality of anti-war slogans in Russia between the years 2014 (the start of the war in Crimea) and 2022 (full scale military operation of Russian in Ukraine). **My hypothesis is:** “*The toughening of the legislation in 2022 results in the adoption of more liminal anti-war protests tactics as a measure to avoid risk of being prosecuted*”. To understand how the expression of liminality changed in 2022 compared to 2014 and test my hypothesis I took the following steps:

1. Random selection of 102 slogans from each group.
2. Coding slogans into thematic categories.
3. Estimating the liminality score using my proposed framework.
4. Quantitative analysis.

### 3.4.1 Random selection of slogans

Due to a very high effort involved in collecting and annotating the data (need to understand the context in which each protest appeared), as well as substantially lower volume of protests in 2014, I managed to collect only 102 slogans for 2014 vs 900 slogans in 2022.

To make the samples for both years comparable for quantitative analysis, I performed a random selection of 102 slogans for 2022 using a Randomise tool in Excel. As a result, the datasets for both, 2014 and 2022 contained 102 slogans each.

### 3.4.2 Coding slogans into theme categories

The process of coding and generating themes was described in section 3.3.2.1 Coding. The data was represented in the form of 0s and 1s. If the slogan fell into a thematic category, it had the value of 1 in the Excel table, if it did not fall into a specific thematic category, it had the value of 0 for that category.

### 3.4.3 Estimating the liminality score

The liminality score measures the level of liminality as a proxy to generalise connotational characteristics of slogans in contrast to the denotational categories tagged for each slogan. One can argue that the assessment of whether a particular text contains liminality or not is a subjective process. In order to reduce the level of subjectivity involved in scoring the level of liminality of slogans in this research I suggest my own framework for estimating the liminality score.

My framework draws from van Gennep's and Turner's definition of liminality as a stage of a transitional, "*in-between*" position of a social situation. Thus, based on these notions of '*betwixt and between*' liminal space, I suggest to assess the liminality using three features which aim to describe the different aspects of the liminality the protestors use during the war times. Each feature has a value of 0 (low liminality) or 1 (high liminality) and each slogan is evaluated against each of three features described below:

1. **Key feature 1 (kf1), LEGAL RISK (kf1): Between legal and illegal action (known consequences (0) -vs- unknown legal consequences of the action (1))**

Since the liminality definition we used in this analysis indicates being in-between different states, this feature represents whether the person participating in the protest (Frohlich & Jacobsson 2018):

- Has a known risk of being prosecuted. This risk can be high (participating in unapproved protest marches) or low (participating in the organised and

approved by the authorities protests). Known risk does not indicate that the person is being “in-between” spaces/states and, therefore, has a low liminality which is represented by the value 0.

- Has an unknown risk of being prosecuted. Some types of protests lie in between legal and illegal actions. Protestors use this form of protests when they want to avoid the risk of being prosecuted. I.e., when a protester leaves a writing on a wall with an anti-war slogan, he doesn't know if the authorities will ever identify the writing as his and prosecute him (there is an unknown risk), therefore, the author is in the “in-between” space which is considered liminal and represented by the value 1 of the feature.

It should be noted that solitary pickets are not officially prohibited in Russia, so this type of protest has a comparatively lower risk of criminal prosecution. However, in 2022 many solitary protesters were prosecuted nevertheless. Therefore, people participating in solitary pickets in 2022 felt being in between legal and illegal and their protests were classified as 1, having high liminality. Similar protests in 2014 were classified as 0, having low liminality, because in 2014 individual protesters were not generally prosecuted and the protesters knew they had a low risk (unless, direct criticism of the authorities in their posters and banners was present. For example, a solitary picket with a poster *'Putler kaput!'*).

**2. Key feature 2 (kf2), AMBIGUITY (kf2): ambiguity of a meaning of a writing (direct claim(0) -vs- ambivalent (double meaning(1))**

Ambiguity of language in protest slogans, veiled criticism of the authorities. Protest slogans on posters and banners that do not directly criticise the government but leave room for interpretation have a liminality of - (1). If a protester calls for Putin's impeachment, the liminality is (0) because it is a direct message.

For instance, *'No to Putin, no to swastika!'* is a direct claim and therefore it carries zero liminality (0) and has high risks for a protester. Meanwhile, a banner with 'Z' and 'V', has high liminality to avoid risk (1) as it denounces the ideology implicitly.

**3. Key feature 3 (kf3), EXPRESSING DEMANDS (kf3): avoiding expressing concrete demands: (direct expression of demands or stating facts (0)-vs-hidden demands(1))**

This category signifies absence or presence of direct claims and appeals. In the context of high risk of being prosecuted the protesters tend to stop expressing their demands directly. Instead, they express hidden demands by using liminal language (being in-between expressing demands and not expressing demands).

Key Feature 3 with high liminality (1) avoids progressive demands (such as *'Putin to Hague!'* etc.) while conveying them covertly. For instance, *'I'm very scared, but I came out to say that I'm against'*. The protester does not command to stop war. He says that *he is against* but does not state *against what*. The phrase is ambiguous as we understand that the protester is against war and it does not contain a direct demand. Thus, this case has high liminality (1). At the same time, not all slogans in this group are ambiguous. Some messages are straightforward and still convey covert demand. For example, slogan *'I am against war. Ukraine is flooded with blood'*. This message is direct, yet, it makes no implicit request. The protester says he is *against the war*. He does not demand *to stop the war*.

To define the final liminality score (LS) of each slogan I used a linear combination of three features:

$$LS = kf1 + kf2 + kf3, \quad (3.1)$$

where:

**kf1** represents whether the legal risk of participating in the protest is known or not,

**kf2** indicated whether the ambiguity is present,

**kf3** indicates whether the slogan expresses demands directly or not

The LS measurement was done on 102 slogans from 2014 (dataset 1) and on 102 slogans from 2022 (dataset 2).

### 3.4.4 Quantitative Analysis Output, Liminality Score

After categorising the slogans into thematic groups and estimating the level of liminality for each slogan for both years, 2014 and 2022, the data was presented in the form of the Excel table (file submitted with this thesis). The snapshot of the table looks as follows (Table 4.1 *Output data table for Liminality Score*):

SLOGAN	location	link	Key feature 1, RISK (kf1): Between legal and illegal action (0,1)	Key feature 2, AMBIGUITY (kf2): (0,1)	Key feature 3 EXPRESS DEMANDS (kf3): (0,1)	"Liminality Score" (LS): LS=kf1+kf2+kf3	Cat 1: Fascism, Nazism	Cat 2: Putin/"Impeachment"	Cat 3: Deaths	Cat 4: "Ukraine"/Ukraine affiliations	Cat 5: Silence/Incitement "to act" against regime	Cat 6: "1984" quotes/Propaganda	Cat 7: Russian Constitution/ Legislation	Cat 8: Z/V symbols	Cat 9: "War"/Renunciation of War/Occupation	Cat 10: Proclamation of Peace and freedom	Cat 11: Other
"Demons trying to pit brotherly peoples, calm down!", "Putin, hands off Crimea!", "1939 Poland, 1940 Baltic states, 1956 Budapest, 1968 Prague, 2014 Ukraine? No"	collective posters holding, individual protest	<a href="https://hro.org/node/18974">https://hro.org/node/18974</a>	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Hands off Ukraine	banner, collective holding all-Russian March for	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/21/protest-">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/21/protest-</a>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0



	Peace	<a href="#">moscow-russia-ukraine</a>																
Propaganda fuels hatred	a poster, all - Russian March for Peace	<a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_anti-war_protests_in_Russia#/media/File:%D0%9C%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%88%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%9C%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B2%D0%B0_21%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82_2014.L1460522.jpg">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_anti-war_protests_in_Russia#/media/File:%D0%9C%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%88%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%9C%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B2%D0%B0_21%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82_2014.L1460522.jpg</a>	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Chekist rats - in a rat trap	a poster, all - Russian March for Peace	<a href="https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/photo/marsh_mira.shtml?p=main&amp;photo_num=4">https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/photo/marsh_mira.shtml?p=main&amp;photo_num=4</a>	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
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Table 3.1 *Output data table for Liminality Score*

As the final step I used the data from the Excel table to assess whether the liminality level had changed in 2022 compared to 2014 across different thematic categories. I employed the following quantitative indicators:

- total counts of slogans in each thematic category
- liminality scores for each category and total liminality score in 2014 vs 2022
- distributions of counts and scores

I would like to acknowledge Dr Rodrigo Mazorra Blanco for his help in producing visual graphs in Excel used in this thesis based on the data produced by me.

## Chapter 4. Analysis of Results

Chapter 4 has two sections of analysis of results. The first delves into qualitative analysis by selecting protest writings that exhibit ambiguous linguistic characteristics, vividly illustrating how protesters utilise the liminality of language manifested in different types of protests. The second section is a quantitative analysis to assess if there is a change in liminality between 2014 and 2022.

### 4.1 Qualitative analysis of Types of Protests

The previous sections of the literature review have covered the various types of protests that can be considered liminal within the current Russian legal framework. For the purpose of this study, liminality refers to the absence of direct criminal consequences for protesters.

The following three main types of anti-war protests in Russia in 2022 were identified:

1. **Solitary pickets** (a one-person protest)
2. **Adbusting** (camouflaged anti-war writings). This type of protest implies slogans left anonymously on transient urban surfaces such as theatre billboards, advertising posters, public transport etc. This method was called by Fröhlich and Jacobsson as adbusting (Fröhlich and Jacobsson 2018). This group also includes **nano-meetings**, when activists anonymously use non-human objects, such as toys, stripes, balloons etc to delegate them contesting claims and protesting rights.
3. Anti-war solitary **performances** in public spaces.

This section will delve into the three main types of liminal protests identified above and explore how protesters leveraged the liminality of language in their protest messages. It's worth noting that some activists incorporate both liminal and non-liminal elements in their banners and posters, such as direct accusations against the authorities.

#### 4.1.1 Solitary picketing

Amidst the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, solitary picketing stands as the sole form of public protest in Russia that is officially allowed by law. Despite not necessitating prior notice or approval from authorities, the state frequently flouts this law, illustrating its disregard for legal

frameworks altogether. The picketers are commonly being punished with administrative and in some cases criminal charges. Nevertheless, protesters take risks and actively employ solitary picketing as an adapted legally ambiguous resistance strategy to relay their anti-war arguments counting on to get off with a fine. To evade apprehension, protestors firstly, 1) utilise Aesopian language in their posters to avoid direct accusations of disrespect towards the government. Secondly, 2) they employ various forms of signage, incorporating catchy texts and imagery that may appear crude but serve to implicitly critique official discourse and construct new meanings.

In a bid to capture the attention of the public, picketers craft their messages and visuals onto handmade placards, posters, and banners fashioned from various materials, including paper, plastic, and fabric. They employ typographical techniques, such as bold, uppercase letters, and stark black and red hues, to effectively convey their claims.

Machin argues that typography serves as a crucial semiotic tool, capable of engendering metaphors and influencing thought processes through the use of specific letter shapes and sizes that resonate with human emotions (Machin 2007). Similarly, Gould posited that emotional imperatives play a pivotal role in the expansion and triumph of protests (Gould 2009). Thus, typography serves as a covert means of perpetuating anti-war rhetoric, without directly confronting the authorities.

#### **4.1.1.1 Main findings on Solitary Picketing:**

The solitary picketers do not explicitly urge for a change in government or a revolution against the regime. Instead, they subtly call for collective accountability for dictatorship, unjust war and devaluation of human lives in Russia. The posters and placards from this type of protest employ mostly symbolic and figurative language, which requires the viewers to contemplate and interpret the meaning of texts and images.

The picketers employ liminality in four ways. Firstly, they use attention-grabbing signs and symbols, such as acronyms and visual puzzles, to camouflage their anti-war message. Secondly, they utilise linguistic figures, metaphors, and a technique called *subversive affirmation or over-identification* to subvert official discourse. Thirdly, picketers use their location (monuments area, places of fame, cemetery etc) to employ the context of these places

to help make the protest message liminal. Fourthly, picketers actively use both direct quotes from the Constitution and Putin's speeches, as well as modified ones.

All of the main thematic groups: *Unjust war; New military-tinged ideology; Denouncing of Putin's Dictatorship* are present in the type of individual picketing.

#### 4.1.1.2 Analysis of Specific Solitary Picketing Cases:

The poster with a bold letter 'P' held by a protester Alexey Kononov (See Figure 4.1) denounces Putin's Dictatorship. It expresses extreme liminality, as the letter 'P' not only begins



the surnames 'Putin' and 'Prigozhin' (the owner of private Russian paramilitary group Wagner) but also many obscene words in the Russian language. Thus, the offence is implicit and unverifiable, yet commonly acknowledged. The red colour symbolises that the key persons responsible for the war, whose surnames start with the letter 'P', are guilty of the bloodshed in Ukraine.

(photo by [Sota](#)) Figure 4.1 'P' Alexey Kononov, 1 May 2022, Moscow

The next case demonstrates how figurative language was employed to convey a message with subtlety. In light of the Kremlin's ban on the use of the term 'war' in relation to invasion, many protest signs across Russia employed large, bold dots to encrypt the word 'war', forming the slogan 'No to war.' (See Figures 4.2, 4.3) The number of dots corresponds to the number of letters .



Figure 4.2 'No to \*ar' 18 December 2022, Kazan (photo by [Activatica.org](#))



Figure 4.3 The \*\*\* is going on 10 December 2022, St. Petersburg (photo by [https://twitter.com/k\\_sonin/status/1601645882528923650/photo/1](https://twitter.com/k_sonin/status/1601645882528923650/photo/1))

The abovementioned example not only showcases an anti-war sentiment but also underscores the predicament of Russian society, where the freedom to articulate one's thoughts can be stifled, and naming reality as it is becomes a daunting challenge. Hence, posters without any text exist *'betwixt and between'*, in the unregulated and therefore ambiguous space of the Russian legislation. Moreover, such silent posters elucidate not only the self-censorship, but a lack of a dialogue, a one-sided nature of 'power - society' relationship in Russia.

The act of encrypting the censored word 'war' with dots had repercussions for Alisa Klimentova, a resident of Tyumen, who was apprehended for chalking the phrase *'No to \* ar'* ("No to war") onto a pavement. As a consequence, the girl was arrested and brought to trial. During her court hearing, Klimentova contended that her message was intended to read *'No to Vobla'* (which means Caspian roach). Despite her explanation that she harboured a disdain for the fish, the court deemed her guilty of discrediting the Russian army and issued a fine.

Since then the slogan *'No to Vobla'* has become a euphemism for the banned phrase *'No to war'* in Russia. It has turned into an icon of the absurdity of censorship, giving birth to various memes in Russian social networks. For example, Tolstoy's novel 'War and peace' has been renamed to *'Vobla and the World'*, Wells's book 'The War of the Worlds' to *'Vobla of the Worlds'*, a film by George Lucas has become *'Starfish'*, to name but three. Thus, the authorities themselves have inadvertently generated an anti-war slogan that they cannot forbid. Ironically, the officials cannot feasibly criminalise the term 'vobla' without appearing absurd. Additionally to a slogan, *'No to Vobla'* has emerged as a novel anti-war symbol, featuring an image of a crossed-out fish (See Figures 4.4, 4.5).



Figure 4.4 'No to \* ar'.

Figure 4.5 Funerary [stele](#) with the inscription *IXΘΥC ZΩNTΩN* ('fish of the living'), early 3rd century, National Roman Museum.

The repetition of slogans whether stencilled or hand-written across Russia has made it a part of anti-war discourse. Yet, the anthropologist Alexandra Arkhipova has recalled an allegory with early Christians for whom fish was also a symbol of resistance against the repressive state and its abbreviation IXΘΥΣ signified protest.

By employing the liminality of language, activists employ a subversive strategy known as the *'tactic of affirmation'*. Initially emerging from Moscow conceptual art, this method involves subversive affirmation and hyper-identification that manifest through the mimicking and excessively agreeing with one's opponent to undermine their position (Sasse & Arns 2006). By using hyperbolic praise, the author aims to prompt critical reflection from the public, who must question whether the praised person or phenomenon is deserving that. Through this technique, protesters engage with the Kremlin's discourses, while simultaneously undermining them. Although not a conventional protest strategy, the *'tactic of affirmation'* remains situational and spontaneous. Sasse & Arns refer to this as a tactic rather than a strategy because the protest's modus operandi is carried out entirely within the enemy's line of sight - a region entirely under their control (Sasse & Arns 2006). This protest method is capable of remaining heterogeneous or alien in relation to the system into which it denounces and, once inside these systems, they can cleverly unfold and formulate other claims (Sasse & Schramm 1997).

Hence, these equivocal protest texts that exist in the space of *'betwixt and between'* and provoke their re-contextualization and re-interpretation by the public. It allows protesters to achieve two goals: 1) to balance *'on the border of overt and covert forms of dissent'* and therefore avoid criminal charges (Frohlich & Jacobsson 2018), 2) to cause reflection and wandering among the public. For example, the following anti-war poster authored by a protester Maria Revzina: ***'My mother said that I can't be detained for these words, because Russia is a free country and Putin is the most worthy president. No to war!'*** (See Figure 4.6)



Figure 4.6. Maria Revzina. *'My mother said that I can't be detained for these words, because Russia is a free country and Putin is the most worthy president. No to war!'* 30 April 2022, Saint Petersburg (photo by [Moscow Times](#))



The slogan surreptitiously ridicules Putin, his rule and emotionally charged propaganda narratives about justice in Russia. It confronts repressions, self-censorship and other civil struggles of the society. Thus, the concealed statement makes it clear who is the picketer's major enemy and addressee.

According to Žižek, over-identification with the system, where the opponent fully assimilates with the power structure instead of keeping an obligatory distance, is more effective than open criticism with the state (Žižek 1993). Žižek points out that this soft power approach reveals the hidden and exposes the concealed ideological wrongdoings to the public, making them open to public scrutiny (Žižek 1993, Sasse & Arns 2006).

This *'tactic affirmation'*, however, is not exactly what Leiderman described as *'shimmering'* technique in Moscow conceptual arts that similarly aimed to subvert the official Soviet discourse. In contrast to *'shimmering'*, *'tactic of frank agreement'* is dialectical, it *'juxtaposes contradictory discourses to find their synthesis'* (Leiderman 2018). It covertly provokes the clash of the opposing discourses by offering a false endorsement of the propaganda narrative like in the poster held by another picketer Bastrygina from Yekaterinburg: *'Police, do not leave for Ukraine, we are nothing here without you'*. (See Figure 4.7)



Figure 4.7 Halina Bastrygina. *'Police, do not leave for Ukraine, we are nothing here without you'*. 22 September 2022, Yekaterinburg, (photo by [itsmycity.ru](http://itsmycity.ru))

Another tactic solitary picketers employ is using direct quotes from the Russian legislation and Putin's speech, so called *'precedent'* texts. These quotes enable the protesters to lend credibility to their statements and implicitly expose the fallacy of the Kremlin's rhetoric. These

slogans serve as proof of the disparity between the government's official discourse, legal norms, and actual political practices.

For instance, the texts based on Putin's speech, which he gave at the military parade in Moscow on the [9<sup>th</sup> of May 2021](#) : *'The war brought about so many unbearable ordeals, grief and tears that this cannot be forgotten. And there is no forgiveness and excuse for those who are again nurturing aggressive plans'*. Another one: *'The war brought so much grief that it can't be forgotten, there's no forgiveness for those who again conceive aggressive plans'* (See Figure 4.8).

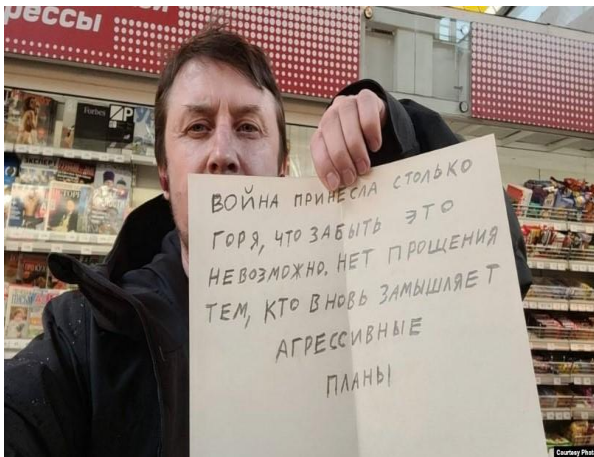


Figure 4.8 Artur Dmitriev. 9 April 2022, Saint Petersburg ([photo](#) by Radio Liberty)

*'The war brought about so many unbearable ordeals, grief and tears that this cannot be forgotten. And there is no forgiveness and excuse for those who are again nurturing aggressive plans'*

This poster addresses *unjust war*. Although it references Putin and affirms his statement, it covertly challenges Putin's aggressive and inconsistent politics. This slogan exists in an area between complacency and outright rebellion, as it avoids directly subverting Putin. Instead, the protester draws connections between current events and the Kremlin's manipulative use of history.

Frequently, slogans incorporate a 'precedent' text, which they then alter by removing it from its original context and tweaking it, resulting in a distinct, and at times contradictory, message (Gudkov 1997). For example, *unjust war* theme phrase *'they didn't defend, but they cleared out'* recalls Putin's assertions about the need to defend the Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine. Therefore, *'cleanse'* is a synonym of a destruction of Ukraine and the phrase *'they did not defend, but cleared out'* speaks about military aggression under the camouflage of the Kremlin's 'protection'. Hence, a new associative colouring that changes the original quotes can bring difficulties in understanding the connotation for the audience not familiar with the precedent phenomenon or quote. In this sense, 'precedence' indicates 'the interaction of texts

and/or their fragments both in terms of content and in terms of expression; the way in which one text actualizes another in its internal space' (Chernyavskaya, 2007, p. 49).

The slogan '*Zinc is ours*', which alludes to fallen soldiers repatriated in zinc coffins, is linked to the neologism '*Krym nash*' (Crimea is ours), which has become a novel linguistic unit in light of the annexation of Crimea. It has emerged as a marker of shifting geopolitical dynamics in Eurasia and a potent emblem of the ongoing strife over the sovereignty of Crimea. Symbolically, the conflict is also reflected in the different ways of writing. Proponents of the Russian annexation break orthographic rules by writing '*Krymnash*' (Crimeaisours) as a single word, while the opposition uses the separate form 'Crimea is ours'. Therefore, holding up a poster with the phrase '*Crimea is ours*' implicitly denounces the annexation of Crimea.



Figure 4.9 Andrey Pustovalov. '*Everything is according to plan. We are on the way to heaven*' 30 January 2023, Voronezh, (photo by <https://t.me/smirusnews/26264>)

The slogan '*Everything is according to plan. We are on the way to heaven*' denounces the *new military ideology of Russia* and refers to Putin's quote: '*We will go to heaven as martyrs, and they will just drop dead. They will not even have time to repent for this*'. (See Figure 4.9).

Taken separately, phrases '*Everything is according to plan*' and '*We are on the way to heaven*' do not carry the same message as they do together. However, the picketer changed the context of Putin's 'precedent' text. Therefore, this particular example showcases how a language can exist in a state of transition or *in-betweenness*. It illustrates how a protest text can assimilate elements from another text into its own internal framework to generate a new interpretation (Chernyavskaya, 2007, p. 49). The phrase also alludes to a borderline situation, a transition phase between life and death. It employs the metaphor of '*heaven*' to reject the notion of war as a means to achieve '*rebirth*'. The poster caricatures Putin's words of '*afterlife*', which serves as a political myth of heroism and self-sacrifice for the state. Putin hints that at turning

points in history, Russia needs its own heroes who, like Christ, will save it from the world 'evil'. By 'evil' he obviously means the West. In a satirical manner, the protester mocks Putin's teleological claims that Russia is a 'good' force.

Solitary picketers occasionally utilise their location to create a liminal slogan.. For example, an activist holding a poster that reads *'I am against fascism'* standing next to a monument dedicated to the heroes who defeated fascism during WW2. While it may seem obvious that the picketer is accusing Russian ideology of fascism, it is not so clear from a legislative perspective, as the Kremlin accuses Ukraine of fascism. Consequently, the protester cannot be directly accused of discrediting the authorities. The posters featuring war veterans' photos and slogans like *'My grandfather fought against fascism'* bear a similar liminality, as they could signify support for both Ukraine and Russia. However, it is evident to all that the picket is anti-war in nature.

#### **4.1.2 Adbusting**

Employing adbusting as a protest tactic allows critical assertions to be expressed in direct and unfiltered manner, given that it is executed anonymously (Fröhlich & Jacobsson 2018). This form of protest, unlike individual pickets, relies less on language, as anything can be said in anonymous messages, and more on the liminality of the geographical area, particularly transit locations in the city- transport, bridges, metro stations, parking lots, road signs, transport windows, doors, arches, stores, bus stops etc.

Often the anti-war writings are made with one colour, quickly, in transient public places where they are camouflaged and mixed with the original advertisements. For instance, adding the word *'Russia'* to the sign *'danger zone, move away from the building when icicles fall'* creates a simple counter-message - *'danger zone – Russia'* (Arkhipova 2023). Another popular example could be seen in addition of letters *'P'* and *'C'* to the widely -known symbol of war support - the letter *'Z'*, resulting in a vulgar counter-message *'П...Z...Ц'* (Arkhipova 2023). Other types of adbusting- graffiti and stickers, leaving symbolic items in public places (toys, balloons etc)

On the one hand, these messages claim for restoration of the right to challenge Putin's system 'from below', on the other, they demonstrate that civilians can act as anonymous atomised power. It gives the protesters a temporal satisfaction and symbolic rights to express their anger and grief that they can not address overtly. Anthropologist Arkhipova uses the term 'semiotic guerrillas' to describe the authors of these slogans as they clandestinely subvert the official discourse by sending counter-messages across Russian cities (Arkhipova 2023).

#### **4.1.2.1 Main findings on Adbusing:**

Adbusting, as a mode of protest, may exhibit less linguistic liminality than individual pickets due to its anonymity, but it actively leverages the liminality of urban spaces and conspicuous objects and signs like city banners, bus stop ads, theatre posters, train arrival boards, streetlights, pedestrian crossing buttons, and more. It is rich in terms of visual expression because it wages war against the Kremlin using all the repertoire of signs, symbols, and drawings. This allows authors to recreate an accurate picture of reality, call things by their names, and undermine the official discourse promoted by the propaganda. Protesters employ adbusting tactics in two ways: 1). leaving stickers, leaflets, or toys, or 2) crafting their protest messages to blend with the original ad or announcement as much as possible.

Unlike posters in solitary pickets, these writings tend to be concise, direct, and pointed, with little use of epic messaging, tropes and direct quotes from Putin. The direct language is accessible and often includes profanity, with many satirical symbolic signs like 'V', 'Z', '1981' and portraits of Putin and Hitler. Adbusting enables the addressing of any critical issue, directly accusing the government of wrongdoing and calling for the removal of Putin.

However, given that in the urban spaces there are a lot of surveillance cameras, this form of protest carries the risk of criminal liability, not just for discrediting the army but also for insulting authorities and vandalism. Therefore, those who utilise this tactic of daily protest are taking on greater risks than those detained for individual pickets.

#### **4.1.2.2 Analysis of Specific Adbusing Cases:**

For example, the daubed on the advertising boards surface slogans such as '*What is for dinner? Putin*', '*What can be better than tasty water? Peace in Ukraine*'; etc. (See Figure 4.10) reflect

the hatred at the government of Russia and Putin, which many Russians do not express openly due to the self-censorship.

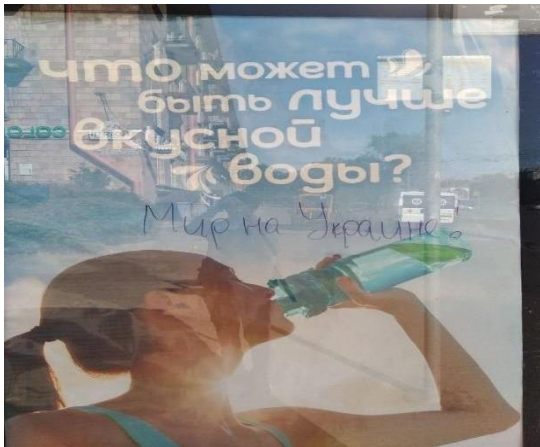


Figure 4.10 Bus stop advertisement 'What can be better than tasty water? Peace in Ukraine'; 2022 Saint Petersburg (photo by [nowarmetro](#))

In contrast to solitary picketing, the use of 'mimicry' in adbusting mostly relates to typography tools that open up the space for re-contextualisation and helps to camouflage ads with anti-war messages. These counter-messages are usually brief, clear, emotionally touching and memorable. For instance, 'No smoking- No smoking war' or 'Do not lean against doors. Putin' (See Figures 4.11, 4.12)

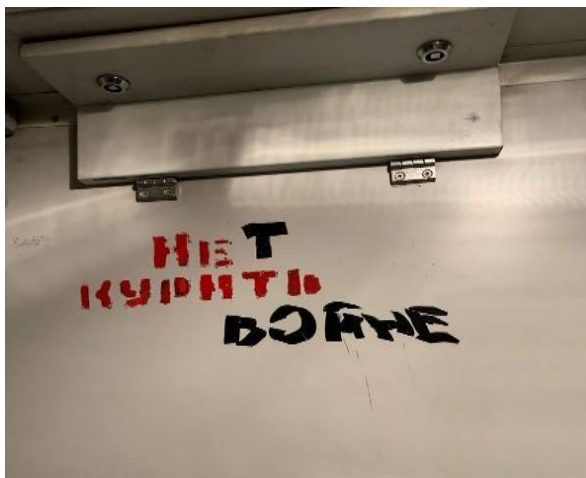


Figure 4.11 'No smoking war', 6 August 2022, Moscow photo by [nowarmetro](#))



Figure 4.12 'Do not lean against doors Putin', 6 August 2022, Moscow (photo by [nowarmetro](#))

The experiments with the fake-ad posters create new meanings and cause public awareness especially left on the top of the advertising billboards promoting state propaganda. For example, the red-paint marking of the image of a Russian soldier can be quickly spotted and understood along with the words 'murder', 'lie', 'Bucha' as anti-war moral imperatives. (See Figures 4.13, 4.14).

The adusting is often considered as vandalism by street artists themselves (Costa 2007) and according to Russian legislation, if caught for it, protesters face criminal charges.



Figure 4.13 A banner in honour of a Russian soldier in Ukraine being doused with red paint, 'Glory to heroes of Russia' 15 November, 2022, Voronezh (photo by [https://t.me/horizontal\\_russia/17038](https://t.me/horizontal_russia/17038))



Figure 4.14 A banner in honour of Russian soldier in Ukraine . 'Killers', Kazan 2022 (photo by [khpg.org](http://khpg.org))

It is not by accident the inscriptions appear on transient urban objects. The protest messages themselves call for a personal transition. In the context of liminality it alludes to a state of a being, a symbolic *threshold* that has to be crossed by passers-by in order to move from one state of consciousness to another, from a political alienation to breaking silence about war and self-censorship. Most of the writings draw a clear distinction between 'Z'- ideology and free Russia decoupled from the Kremlin's politics. The allusion to a symbolic mental border that divides the society along propaganda lines is a manifestation of liminality, when every Russian citizen has to take a side in relation to war. Arguably, to *speak out* about the crimes of one's society is difficult not only because of the threat of reprisals from the state. Pliskin argues that any given community, much like an individual, has a tendency to safeguard its

collective identity and self-esteem against unfavourable assessments (Pliskin 2017). This mechanism is linked to self-preservation of a national identity. For this reason, people who dare to speak openly about the crimes of their society undermine the identity and positive image of their group from within (Pliskin 2017).

As per Weiner's argument, the sentiment of guilt is intertwined with an individual's acknowledgement of personal responsibility for transgressing moral standards and individual convictions (Weiner 1995). It could come from a personal behaviour or a group-based to which an individual belongs (Branscombe & Doosje 2004). Consequently, the aspiration to '*overcome the unease*' brought on by shame and guilt can serve as a driving force for a person to break free from conformity and speak out (Wohl & Branscombe 2008; Ruthie Pliskin 2017).

This is precisely what adbusting seeks to accomplish.

This decentralised form of everyday protest in Russia creates a widely dispersed network of like-minded individuals who are fighting against war in urban spaces and may not even know each other but whose collective actions generate spatial resistance and draw public attention. For instance, the word '*Peace*' written on a pedestrian crossing button below the word '*Wait*', conveys a new meaning '*Wait for peace*', inviting for collective reflection about war See figure 4.15).

Figure 4.15 '*Wait for peace*' 27 September 2022, Moscow (photo by [nowarmetro](#))



Given that most signs (road signs, banners, etc) are not polysemantic, bringing playfulness to them in order to reconstruct their meanings pushes society to self-awareness and critical thinking.

Another type of adbusting is '*sticker bombing*'. It involves distributing small stickers in public places, particularly at bus stops, metro, trains etc. Due to their diminutive size, they do not immediately attract notice, but those waiting for transportation are sure to spot them (See



Figure 4.16). Consequently, anti-war messages in the form of small stickers have a longer lifespan than graffiti, which is quickly removed by municipal authorities.



Figure 4.16 'If you hear, we are among those who want to end war' 30 June 2022, Moscow (photo by [nowarmetro](https://www.nowarmetro.com))

In contrast to solitary picketing, adbusting writings employ less liminality of a language and address claims of *Unjust War* straightforwardly. For instance, slogans such as *'Crimea is not yours'*, *'Mariupol is Ukraine'*, *'Attention! Kherson is not ours!'*, *'Are Ukrainian children also Nazis? Wake up!'*, *'Russian pilots bomb residential buildings in Kharkiv'*, *'Which blockade was worse: Leningrad or Mariupol?'*, *'Today you celebrate the deaths of Ukrainians'*, *'Party of Victory - day of trouble'*, etc. talk about war crimes committed by the Russian authorities on behalf of the Russian citizens. Numerous slogans urge people to search for the term *'Bucha'* on the internet and comprehend the harsh reality that the entire nation will pay for Putin's politics in future. The messages are often commands : *'Wake up, Russia'*, *'When will you ask them directly?'*, *'What are we fighting for?'*, *'100 days of Russia destroying Ukraine'*, *'Russian soldiers in Ukraine kill people. And you, justifying the war, kill the person inside you '*. The texts convey the idea that the enemies are not in Ukraine, but in the Kremlin. They raise a question of whether Russians should choose to engage in a criminal war against Ukraine or to participate in a peaceful protest.

To examine how Putin is portrayed in the visual language of protest writings, I will utilise the appraisal approach proposed by Martin & White (2005). It entails analysing attitudes, including emotions such as happiness, security, and satisfaction, evaluations of behaviour in terms of social esteem or sanction, and aesthetic qualities such as impact, worthiness, and balance (Martin & White, 2005, p.35). Using this framework will enable a better understanding of how Putin is perceived by the protesters.

The adusting tactic brings together texts that call for the release of political prisoners held in Russian prisons, assert that Russia itself is imprisoned, urge people to stop watching television, and accuse state media of lying and hiding the truth about what is really happening. People are also actively quoting the constitution, but unlike the articles that appear in solitary pickets, here they are citing articles of the constitution that discuss criminal liability for incitement to war and genocide. Among the slogans are quotes from dissidents - Politkovskaya *'The years of Putin's rule are the years of silence about the main thing'*, Solzhenitsyn's *'Live not by lies'* and Orwell's *'1981'*.

Therefore, denouncing Putin's regime slogans mostly include texts that make a moral argument, demanding a response to crimes of state apparatus.

### **Categorising**

Putin himself was named more than 70 times in a collection of 900 samples for 2022. By embracing a grim prognosis for Russia's future, texts attempt to ward off the anxiety over consequences of war. Besides naming Putin, slogans evaluate him using derogatory qualifiers related to his politics. The iconography points accusing fingers at Putin as a *tyrant*, an unremarkable man of remarkable power, who is responsible for the *unjust war* and establishing a personalist regime. Social esteem and sanction are both manifested, evaluating Putin through employing demonology metaphors and dehumanising language (*'Putin is acarid'*, *'Putin has eaten the Sun'*, *'Putin is Satan'* etc), depicting him as a criminal who must face accountability for his actions. He becomes a symbol of the loss of both spirituality and sanity, responsible for Russia's socio-political limbo. Figures bring examples for reference to Putin as *'war criminal'*, *'killer'*, *'thief'*, *'rat'* etc. (See Figures 4.17, Figures Appendix 3.12- 3.21)

Figure 4.17 *'Murderer'* 9 May 2022, Omsk (photo by [nowarmetro](#))



The general message is straightforward: Russia is being governed by a killer. The metaphors being used are strong and repetitive- *scum, tsar, crazy old man* etc.

Another type of slogans that illustrate how language can subvert the traditional order of power hierarchies is a group of texts where Putin is portrayed as a *'naughty child'*. (See Figure 4.18). Through applying satire protesters denounce and ridicule the dictator (Sedakova 2011). The following figure represents a poster left on Putin's parents grave: *'Dear parents, Your son is behaving very badly. He bunks off history lessons, fights with his classroom neighbours and has threatened to blow up the school. Do something!'* Other examples of Little Johnny metaphors- *'Vova, bring back our kids!'*, *'No to terrible Vova's mistake!'*, *'Without Volodya, the world will become brighter. Without Volodya, a rainbow will wake up in the sky'* etc.



Figure 4.18 *'Dear parents, Your son is behaving very badly. He bunks off history lessons, fights with his classroom neighbours and has threatened to blow up the school. Do something!'* 27 September 2022, Saint Petersburg (photo by [khp.org](http://khp.org))

The use of classifiers is also present when Putin is visually depicted instead of named. The imaginary represents him behind bars that symbolically hints to a grim future of a tyrant. His representation is notably linked with Hitler's images and accompanied with phraseology such as *'Putler Kaput!'*, *'No to war. Putler to The Hague'*, *'No to Putler'*, *'No to swastika* etc.

Therefore, the language that relies on imagery without naming can evoke certain associations. Nonetheless, despite employing an icon such as 'Z,' swastikas, or Hitler's moustache, most posters still incorporate Putin's distinctive attributes.

The following slogan *'Thanks to Putler for war'* is worth mentioning as it comprises the most common and repeating motif of nameless adusting messages (See Figure 4.19). Due to the close phonetic and morphological resemblance of *Putin-Putler-Hitler* the slogan creates a web of associations with the war crimes of fascism, suggesting that the Kremlin is following a

similar path. According to Jiang's assertion in 2007, the deliberate use of improperly written or selectively reduced characters is a strategy employed to denigrate the subject of the poster (Jiang 2007). Thus, in the case of writing Putin's name, certain characters are substituted to convey additional connotations with the word 'Putler'. Therefore, by altering the meaning of the original text, the slogan 'Thanks to Putler for war' can now be interpreted as a cautionary message, suggesting that Russia should avoid reliving the dark history of Germany under Hitler's regime.



Figure 4.19 'Thanks to Putler for war' 13 October 2022, Moscow (photo by [nowarmetro](#))

However, this message has a long history notable to mention. It borrows an old theme of the October 2011 protests posters that parodied the initiative of Vladimir Burnatov, an activist from the 'United Russia' party, who suggested to congratulate Putin on his birthday by adding the hashtag #thankstoPutinforthis. Burnatov's idea to thank Putin has become a long-running meme when Putin started 'to be thanked' for everything, including crises and repressions. Another famous motif suggests an allegory to a Soviet slogan 'Thank you Comrade Stalin for our happy childhood'. The author of 'Thanks to Putler for war' has reduced the original Soviet slogan to a narrative scheme, and has changed the composition of the quote which has transformed its meaning.

The phrase has a historical connotation linked to the Soviet myth of a 'unique Soviet childhood' that ought to be inherently happy, with the state assuming a responsibility to guarantee it (Kelly 2008). In addition, all Soviet rulers' on Soviet posters were portrayed with children in their arms. Panchenko's 'Mythic Formulae of Soviet History' makes an intriguing observation about the Kremlin's portrayal of a joyous Soviet childhood, drawing a symbolic parallel to the Christian concept of paradise where Christ imparts his teachings to his followers

*'Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein'*  
(Panchenko 2005)

The history of the slogan *'Thank you Comrade Stalin for our happy childhood'* has become a symbol of the tragedy of a girl from Buryatia, Gelya Markizova, with whom Stalin was photographed in 1936. A few years after Gelya appeared on Soviet propaganda posters with Stalin and became a celebrity in the USSR, her father was shot as an enemy of the people, and her mother committed suicide. As a result, a 9-year-old girl turned out to be an orphan, adopted by her father's relatives. Meanwhile, in the USSR Gelya continued to remain an icon of a happy child. After the collapse of the regime that ruined her childhood, Gelya's story became a metaphor for Soviet hypocrisy.

Therefore, the slogan *'Thanks to Putler for war'* creates a satirical effect associated with evoking 'Stalin times' lies. It exposes the fallacy of Putin's symbolic 'appropriation' as a formidable father-leader protecting the Russian-speaking population worldwide.

As shown in the previous paragraphs, Putin has been linked to Stalin and Hitler, and has been depicted as a war criminal and tyrant who deserves to be punished. Numerous texts advocate for collective responsibility to oust Putin, who is dragging Russia down to his own demise, condemning all facets of his regime including repression, corruption, and war. As he is associated with Hitler, his fate should be comparable: either suicide in a bunker or standing trial in The Hague. Others suggest sending Putin to the battlefield as a soldier. Many texts contain a direct or implicit imperative to remove him. Ideas that are prevalent within slogans of this category are: beating, hitting, kicking Putin out of the Kremlin.

### **4.1.3 Performance**

A performance serves as a symbolic process for the participant, a ritual of *'transition'* from one state to another (Schechner 1990). Thus, as a mode of expression, it is inherently liminal, necessitating the crossing of a symbolised personal *'threshold'*.

The focus of a performance is primarily on the form of expressing the problem, rather than the problem itself. The very act of performance, such as *'sewing one's mouth shut'*, *'dying in'* or

cutting open veins on stage as a sign of protest against the war in Ukraine, already carries a powerful protest message.

On one hand, the participant acts as a '*scapegoat*', taking on the symbolic role of a collective *sacrifice* (Girard 1979). On the other hand, he/she seeks to evoke a *shock* that will prompt the viewers to reflect on what they have witnessed (Schechner 1990). Therefore performance is transformative for the audience too as it elicits emotional responses from them.

The word '*sacrifice*' in case of a body performance means that an individual symbolically relinquishes their desire to continue living by prioritising the greater good of the community. According to Cocks, there have been two distinct concepts behind the idea of '*sacrifice*' translated from Greek to English. The first, *thyein*, was a verb used to describe the act of offering a victim in a ritualistic manner. The second, *askesis*, was a noun that denoted the deliberate renunciation of something beloved or valued for the sake of a greater cause or objective (Cocks 2020). The act of sacrificing as such, derived from the Latin noun *sacer* means '*something connected with ceremonial violence*' (Cocks 2020). Drawing on Agamben's notion of *homo sacer*, I argue that during the act of anti-war performances the protesters symbolically put themselves into ritualised conditions of a *homo sacer's* realm of existence. This is precisely what triggers a state of astonishment and shock among the audience.

Drawing on the Freudian model, which posits that an individual's personality is composed of three levels of awareness- the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious, Turner asserts that nonverbal signals can be employed to fulfil the sender's unconscious desires and needs. The recipient of such signals will process them both consciously and unconsciously, guided by their internal criteria (Turner 1987, pp.10-15). When interpreting these nonverbal signals, the viewer may face a dilemma between their conscious structures, which may lead them to critically reflect on what they have observed (Turner, 1987, p.10 ).

Echoing Turner's argument it could be stated that to reach this end of societal reflection, the protesters employ their bodies to create anti-structuralist metaphors that subvert the Kremlin's pro-war discourse. The use of body language to construct alternative meanings which are then translated into verbal language in the viewer's consciousness is the most universal form of resistance, as it does not rely on verbal means and can be understood across different societies. As Schechner puts it, according to Turner's notion of ritual, performance is a

subversive act capable of producing anti- structural metaphors from ritual to theatre and back and this is how it manifests the notion of the liminal (Schechner 1990).

#### **4.1.3.1 Main findings on Performance**

The protesters implicitly are calling for termination of the war and regime change in Russia so there they are existing in a liminal phase: they are neither continuing as ordinary citizens nor have they emerged into opposition force. They act within Scott's 'everyday form of resistance' concept which is similar to *solitary picketing* and *adbusting* forms of protest.

The performances' authors translated the ideas of parrhesia as a condition of ethical behaviour and pointed to the need for every Russian citizen to face the ethical dilemma of prioritising truth over self-preservation.

The protesters created an alternative political subjectivity through their own bodies while also forming a 'transformative' space for those Russians who are reluctant to break their silence on matters of war.

The protesters employed mostly techniques that raised the problems of '*voicelessness*' and propaganda '*falsehood*', so called semiotic '*war*' in Russian society.

Performances, such as '*dying in*', '*sewing up one's mouth*', *mimicking* the language of the deaf, smearing the body with red paint symbolising blood employed by the authors in Russia were borrowed from the past American and European protest movements (Occupy movement in NY in 2011, anti-Vietnam war protests in sixties, Anti- Milosevic rallies in Serbia).

#### **4.1.3.2 Analysis of Performance :**

One performance is analysed in this section, given the relevance and impact of this individualised protest. Additional performances have been included in Appendix 4 Performance Protests and Slogans.

In the photograph we can see a solitary picketer woman Nadezhda Sayfutdinova, who in 4 May 2022 sewed her mouth shut with red thread while holding up a poster that read '*Be silent!*', '*Its*

*forbidden! 'You cannot be silent! War is NOT peace! Freedom is NOT slavery! Ignorance is NOT power' (See Figure 4.20) . The protester's face with a defiant red-stitched mouth devoid of any glamorous gloss, from where the threads entered the skin hung droplets of blood. Black and red letters on white background of the placard are filling all the space, while in the middle there is a small yellow sticker advertising: 'The price is our consciousness'. 'If you pay by card, the price is even lower' .*



Figures 4.20 a) and b) *'Be silent!', 'Its forbidden! 'You cannot be silent! War is NOT peace! Freedom is NOT slavery! Ignorance is NOT power'* Performance by Nadezhda Sayfutdinova, 4 May 2022, Yekaterinburg (photo by [Radio Liberty](#))

Sayfutdinova's lip-sewing ritual recalls Foucault's ideas of parrhesia as a condition of ethical behaviour (Foucault, 1981, p.366). For him, parrhesia is a spectacular *'way of telling the truth'* and is equivalent to an individual's truthful acts that constitute a *'true life'* (Foucault, 1981, p.68). Foucault argues: *'For someone who is both the victim of an injustice and completely weak, the only means of combat is a discourse, which is agonistic but constructed around this unequal structure'* (Foucault, 1981, p.133).

In a similar vein, Sayfutdinova's performance serves as a symbol for the audacious dynamics of agency in Russian society, marked by the exploitation of state authority. By embodying *'voicelessness'*, she articulates a political imperative for conventional means of protest. The choice of red threads used to sew the mouth and the red clothing is not accidental. This colour of blood symbolises life. Turner, when speaking of the triad of colours, points to the ambivalence of the red, which symbolises not only life, but also the danger of its loss. Red is endowed with properties of boundaries; in the universal triad of colours, it is central, transitional, and can form oppositions (Turner, 1983, p.80).



The protester's decision to use the red colour could be interpreted as a symbol of the Russian government's policies resulting in numerous deaths in Ukraine, but also in the suppression of free speech on the issue in Russia.

The performance elicits a visceral reaction from onlookers, as it is immersive in its portrayal of Sayfutdinova's physical anguish, while also creating a transformative space for those Russians who are reluctant to break their silence on matters of war. One could contend that the act of self-injury in Sayfutdinova's protest bolsters the ethical weight of her assertions, by engaging with the nonverbal corporeality that dares to 'speak without voice' (Fiske, 2015, p. 123). Drawing on Gündoğdu's ideas of rightlessness, Sayfutdinova's decision to sew her lips shut serves as a powerful representation of speechlessness, highlighting how the denial of one's participation in the political community can also entail exclusion from the broader human community, and the shared realm of communicative beings ( Gündoğdu, 2015, p. 21).

This 'rightlessness' elucidates speech which is hollowed out from its true meaning and has no relation to truth. In this sense, Sayfutdinova re-constituted herself as an autonomous subject through demonstrating a commitment to truth in performing a public *silence act*. In other words, she pointed to the need for every Russian citizen to face the ethical dilemma of prioritising truth over self-preservation.

Following Foucault, Sayfutdinova's self-mutilation translates to the audience a corporeal *grid of intelligibility* through which an alternative political reality is emanating (Bargu, 2017, pp. 290–317). Hence, lip- sewing not only eliminates the boundaries between body and speech, violence and nonviolence, it re-establishes a *new political subjectivity*. To phrase it differently, when control over one's body is the only liberty left, the protester dares to transform it into an instrument of political agency (Bargu, 2017, pp. 290–317). Unsurprisingly, Sayfutdinova was institutionalised in a psychiatric hospital, as any act of self-sacrifice aimed at reclaiming personal agency can be deemed a form of mental illness in Russia.

As a reflection on the theme of war, an image of a sewed mouth shut symbolises preventive sacrifice. By implementing an act of a symbolic self-punishment and submission to accept suffering, by taking a scapegoat's role, Sayfutdinova metaphorically takes violence for others who potentially could be arrested and beaten by the police. According to Turner, '*there is a structural relationship between cognitive, affective, and conative components of what Dilthey called lived experience*' (Turner, 1988, p. 90). Therefore, any transient situation, including

physical pain is the basis for the acquisition of transformative experiences (Turner 1988). He argues that stages of recovery after the liminal phase of a crisis involve reflection, in order for it to make sense (Turner 1988).

In the same vein, Sayfutdinova has come through reflection and personal transformation after her performance (denouncing war and censorship- self-harm and protest- arrest- mental hospital- administrative charges- release). In subsequent interviews, Sayfutdinova recounted instances of individuals breaking down in tears at the sight of her protest, offering her financial assistance following her arrest, and so on.

Turner calls such experience *'feeling a belonging and assimilation'* and compares it with Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence (Turner 1988). This transformative encounter can be both an individual and collective experience, disrupting the banality of everyday life and instilling a sense of bewilderment and shock, which must be reconciled by connecting the past and the present (Turner, 1979).

**Connoted message of the slogan (Coded): *'Be silent!', 'It's forbidden! 'You cannot be silent! War is NOT peace! Freedom is NOT slavery! Ignorance is NOT power'***

The saying *'You cannot be silent! War is NOT peace! Freedom is NOT slavery! Ignorance is NOT power'* is a sort of parody of the style of the Kremlin's propaganda and refers to George Orwell's '1984' phrase *'War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength'*.

Sayfutdinova made the Orwellian metaphor a 'meaning transfer' (Musolff, 2007, p.:23) that allowed her to compare Putin's Russia with dystopian super state Oceania. The '1984' depicts a ubiquitous perversion of truth through the *'Newspeak'* language designed by the ruling party to replace Standard English. The *'Newspeak'* demonstrates how dictatorship employs techniques, such as circumlocution, euphemisms or contradictions to twist the truth and confuse the population.

Similarly, the slogan *'You cannot be silent! War is NOT peace! Freedom is NOT slavery! Ignorance is NOT power'* denounces the Russian version of a *'Newspeak'* language in which 'good' and 'bad' exist in inverted form and the state forbids using some words in order to prevent certain ways of thinking. It refers to linguistic determinism that rests on the assumption that language is indispensable for thoughts to exist. Whorf contended that the fundamental differences in the structures of languages lead to distinct ways in which individuals perceive

and understand reality (Whorf 1956). In Orwellian Oceania, the authorities restrict using certain vocabulary to ensure that citizens will be incapable of particular forms of thoughts (Orwell 2016). As Orwell states: *'Newspeak was designed not to extend but to diminish the range of thought, and this purpose was indirectly assisted by cutting the choice of words down to a minimum'* (Orwell 2016).

By drawing parallels with Orwellian novel, Sayfutdinova supports the claim that the Kremlin twists the meaning of words, forbidding sayings *'war'*, *'occupation'*, *'aggression'* and propagating its own vocabulary: *'freed territories'* (occupied territories), *'liberation'*(invasion), *'decolourization'* (bringing Russian three colour symbolic to Ukraine), *'filtration of information'* (censorship), *'denazification'*, *'parallel import'* (illegal trade), *'fake'* (non-official information), *'act of terror'* (attacking on a Russian military target), *'extremism'* (opposition activity), *'reunion'* (occupation and attempted annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol), *'clicking'* (destruction of the Crimean bridge as a result of an explosion), *'dramatic reduction of military activity'* (the withdrawal of Russian troops) etc. to conceal the facts.

Sayfutdinova reminds that when employing this state-sanctioned language, Russian individuals unconsciously conform, merely grappling with the repercussions of events without delving into their underlying origins.

Therefore, historically propaganda utilises a range of tactics such as double standards, name substitution, falsehoods, delineation of enemies, censorship, and stereotypes to disseminate its ideology in order to achieve this conformity among the populace (Bajomi-Lazar & Corvinus, 2013, p. 223).

Russia's version of the *'Newspeak'* becomes a weapon to subjugate the minds of those social groups for whom the state media remain the only source of information. As anthropologist Alexandra Arkhipova argued, semiotic tools have always been a part of the Kremlin's operational manual. For instance, in 1930-ies, Soviet newspapers acting on government orders avoided the word *'famine'* writing about hunger that perished at least 5 million people; instead, they employed the word *'food shortages'* (Arkhipova 2023).

It can be argued that our language reflects our way of thinking and the opposite is also true. By restricting the linguistic choices of the population, the Kremlin reinforces its power and creates new myths through the resulting conflict. For instance, the implied meaning behind the slogan

*'You cannot be silent! War is NOT peace! Freedom is NOT slavery! Ignorance is NOT power'* implies the dismantling of the myth of Faustian sacrifices for a better future.

Nadezhda Sayfutdinova parodied the official narrative of a war peace-making. The slogan highlights an absurd logic of advocating for a preventive aggression in order to maintain peace. These ideas about war peace-making put into the minds of the society incite aggression and help the Kremlin to justify the war in the name of *'security'*. To reach this end, the propaganda produces another myth of a *'common enemy'* and the need for solidarity in order to withstand it. Therefore the word *'brothers'* in relation to Ukrainians is often coupled with phrases such as *'Ukrainian-Nazi government'*, a *'responsibility to protect Russians in Ukraine'*.

According to René Girard, such tactics employed by the state translates *'a genuine and troubling exhaustion of all other sources of authority and legitimacy. This points to the real problem with the ideological regime: beneath its benevolent rhetoric, its implications are apocalyptic, accelerating the collapse of any sustainable order'* (Shullenberger 2013).

It is worth recalling that a community of glorification of similarity and ostracism of *'otherness'* is often based on hatred to a common enemy in order to achieve solidarity and subjugation. An example of this effect is being manifested in ideological indoctrination of the Russian state institutions that are expected to promote pro-war values and take upon themselves the task of casting a *'new Russian patriot'*. The state stresses antagonisms to build a sharp distinction between *'Z-patriots'* and the *'foreign agents'*. Foreseeable, civil *'patriots'* are engaged in voluntary denunciations of those Russians who denounce the war. Tragically, since the start of the war in Ukraine, Russians have written more than 300,000 denunciations. It signifies that neo-totalitarian features are returning to Russian society.

To conclude, the performance demonstrated the issues of modern Russia, which were exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. First and foremost, it is the establishment of a personalist dictatorship and the destruction of reflection in society about what is happening. Through experiencing her own liminality in the ritual of sewing her mouth shut and enduring pain, Sayfutdinova wanted to draw the attention of passers-by to the need to reflect and prevent the tragedy of recreating an Orwellian dystopia in Russia.

#### 4.1.4 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The semantic codes were generated through a descriptive analysis of the data that represented the respondent's literal, denotative communicated content (Braun and Clarke, 2014). Through multiple iterations of coding and generating groupings of codes that appear to be connected by common topic. As a result, the slogans for 2022 and 2014 were categorised into the following 10 main semantic codes: *Fascism/ Nazism; Deaths; Ukraine affiliations; Silence/ Incitement to act against regime; 1984 quotes/Propaganda; Russian Constitution/ Legislation; Z/V symbols; War/ Renunciation of War/Occupation; Proclamation of Peace and freedom; Other*. Those slogans that carried high ambiguity and required connotative understanding as went beyond the descriptive level of data, did not fall into any of the above mentioned categories, were coded as 'others'. (*'My Motherland is like a pig. It eats its own children', 'Goolag', 'For what?'* etc.).

After the coding stage I reviewed the material and following Braun and Clarke methodology, I examined how different codes could have been linked based on shared meanings to create sub-themes and themes. This involved combining multiple codes related to a frequent principal concept of *'War in Ukraine'* data into a single code (Braun and Clarke 2012). For example, *'Unjust war'* encompasses sub-codes such as *'war crimes', 'Russian territorial ambitions', 'violation of History'; 'semiotic wars'* and others. On the other hand, a singular code can encapsulate a broader context in the data and therefore can become a theme. For example, *'New military tinged ideology'* is a code that has constituted a theme because it is capable of communicating its own comprehensive narrative.

The final codes suggested the existence of the three main themes (grouped codes) that manifested in protest language -*Unjust war; New military-tinged ideology; Denouncing Putin's Dictatorship*. As I will show in the next subsection, they were massively used by the protesters in evaluation of Russian social reality.

##### 4.1.4.1 'Denouncing Putin's Dictatorship'

This section centres on the portrayal and assessment of Putin's regime through analysing the protest texts. The slogans from this group comprise the following key sub-themes, connected by the common subject of dictatorship: **Putin vs Hitler metaphor** (*'No to Putin no to*

*swastika*'; *'Putler Kaput!'*; *'Putin=Fascism'* etc.), **Putin must face accountability** (*'Putin to The Hague'*; *'Stop the crimes of the Russian government'*; *'Tribunal for Putin'* etc.), **Russia is a dictatorship** (*'Death to dictatorship'*; *'Do you know that fascism is in Russia?'* etc), **Dehumanising metaphors** (*'Home for a bunker rat'*; *'Putin - a crazy degenerate'*; *'Putin scumbag'* etc.) (See Figures Appendix 3).

The slogans from this thematic group condemn the establishment of a personalist dictatorship in Russia. The theme was predominantly represented through stickers, leaflets, and graffiti in the form of *adbusting* due to its anonymity, while in the individual pickets and performances the protesters could not openly criticize the regime.

The theme encloses Putin's rule by highlighting that the war in Ukraine is a consequence of Russia's civil society's political alienation and its historical habit of turning a blind eye towards wrongdoings of the country's first leaders.

This manifests in statements that draw attention to the fact that Russians pay taxes that are used for aggression in Ukraine, or that they send their sons to the front to fight for Putin's ambitions, or that Russians should search the internet for the word 'Bucha' and read about what Russian troops are doing in Ukraine. The theme of civic alienation calls for a critical understanding of what is happening and a refusal to blindly believe everything that propaganda says.

The dictatorship in Russia did not happen overnight. According to Turner, a meaning signifies retrospection, the way in which the constituent parts and the whole unit relate to each other and manifest life (Turner 1987). In other words, it is an outcome of all the previous experience. Therefore, to give a meaning to what is happening in today's Russia is impossible without assessing the significance of the past events that led to the war. Consequently, if we consider the war in Ukraine as a tragic outcome and look at the events of ten- fifteen years ago, we will see how the consistent policy of the Kremlin made it possible to turn Russia into a country where people are deprived of fundamental legal rights.

After the collapse of the USSR, one of the main problems of Russia was the crisis of collective identity, when the new elites could not offer anything to replace the destroyed Soviet ideology. Drawing on Turner's theory of 'social drama' (Turner 1987), it can be argued that Russia, in the early years of Putin's reign, was in a phase of an identity crisis, so called transitional or *liminal phase*, when the society separated from the former Soviet identity and did not form a new one (Turner 1987). In other words, the country was indulged into a liminal period of a

'social drama', when the hidden conflicts in the society became uncontrollable. Riding this wave, Putin came to power, conveying the narrative of *consolidating* Russia and getting it out of the state of *uncertainty* (Malinova 2013, p. 115). In other words, Putin tried to abruptly terminate *the liminal* or transitional phase in Russia and start the new phase of *restoration*.

Reflecting on the mythology the leaders create, Cassirer used Dutta's definition who maintained that '*The craving for a strong leader arises when the collective desire reaches unprecedented strength and when, on the other hand, all the hopes of satisfying this desire by habitual, normal means do not work. At such moments, aspirations are not only acutely being experienced, but are also personified*' (Cassirer 1990). Consequently, when a collective hope is being embodied in a leader, it serves as the basis for a mystical power and authority for the state itself, the scientist concludes (Cassirer 1990).

Fossato observed that from the beginning Putin actively employed the official media to establish a national policy of unity and pride, which had been lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union (Fossato, 2006, p.16; Malinova 2013). To achieve this goal, the Kremlin gradually marginalised and moved to a periphery all the oppositional voices that threatened the unity of the official discourse (Malinova 2013, p. 120). By the second term in office, Putin's government already gained control over all the key state media in Russia. As Kaspé argues, his repeated calls for 'consolidation' through television broadcasters were coupled with a fear of 'any divisions that might undermine this artificial consensus' (Kaspé 2006, Malinova 2013, pp. 120-125). At the same time, he started dismantling the power of the regional governors and establishing a vertical power structure to prevent any opposing initiatives from emerging that could jeopardise the constructed unity.

In other words, Putin's policies disrupted the natural evolution of the post-soviet society by prematurely ending the *liminal phase* in its development.

It could be argued, this prevented Russia from reflecting on the Soviet totalitarian past and forming a new Russian identity that could have been aligned with the new time and agenda. Furthermore, since the regime had nothing to offer as an alternative to the Soviet ideology, it failed to compensate for the abrupt termination of the *liminal* transition.

While this thesis does not focus on the Putin regime's evolution, it is worth noting that one factor that contributed to the Ukrainian war is the regime's inability to offer anything new to Russia beyond consolidating and strengthening state apparatus. The regime's failure to fill this

ideological vacuum compelled it to seek alternative ways to create a collective identity and maintain the unity of the state. To this end, the regime resorted to resurrecting familiar Soviet narratives of heroism and victory, promoting traditional values, Orthodoxy, crafting myths of the 'Russian world' and a 'special Russian path', and manufacturing an external enemy to unite the nation. Some may argue, the situation in Russia reminds Milosevic's Yugoslavia case, who similarly tried to consolidate the country by resurrecting old Tito's myths of Great Serbia.

Thus, in line with Turner's theory, the war in Ukraine served as yet another attempt by the Kremlin to consolidate and solidify Russia. However, unlike in the 2000ies, this time the outcome has been different - the country is being plunged into a turmoil that the regime had sought to avoid. Arguably, the consequences of not fully processing the totalitarian past after the fall of the USSR have returned with a vengeance in the form of a prospect of potential restoration of the neo-totalitarian regime in Russia.

#### **4.1.4.2 'New military-tinged ideology'**

In order to explain how the *New military-tinged ideology* theme is reflected in three different forms of protest, I will first distinguish subthemes that constitute the theme. There are the following: 1) Sacrificing lives in the name of the state. Debunking the myth of the necessity of creating a cult of country heroes; 2) New patriotic symbolism: Z-floating signifier; 3) Propaganda lies. Taking them into account, we can assess the theme better.

##### **Self-sacrifice**

Most of the protest texts are mocking the notion of biopolitical patriotism, which propagates the idea of *Pyrrhic* victory that comes at the expense of immeasurable costs. Since the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill announced Russia a 'God-chosen country' in 2022, Russian military casualties have surpassed 130,000. The texts shed light on the problem of conformity of Russians who become tools for achieving the personal goals of the state elite and being reduced to mere cannon fodder. Many slogans address the issue of mobilisation and encourage individuals not to show up at the military enlistment offices or evade army service.



The inscriptions frequently discuss the sub-themes of death, calling for collective responsibility and recognition that 'Russia is sinking in blood and unaware of it'.

Yet, the authorities actively propagate the war in Ukraine as a duty to sacrifice one's life in order to defend Russia from the external 'enemies' and achieve individual *afterlife* praise.

The romanticised idea of 'collective rebirth', which promotes military heroism in service to the state, is reintroduced by the Kremlin through the perspective of Jung's ideas of individual '*awakening to a new afterlife*'. In his work on the existence of the '*Archetype of transformation*' Jung explored the resurrection and rebirth (Jung, 1997, pp. 170-175). He argues that in subjective transformation, the allegory of 'rebirth' assumes paramount importance, as the protagonist gets immortality and is '*reborn, awakened to a new life*' (Jung, 1997, p. 175). This scheme most accurately formulates the principle of the 'collective rebirth' of a society in totalitarian settings (Shcherbinina, 1998, p.38).

It partly explains Putin's decision to award the title of Hero of Russia to those who died in Ukraine and the adoption of stricter penalties for those who discredit the Russian armed forces. This way the Kremlin defends the path to symbolic 'immortality' of its soldiers, promotes sacrifice, cultivates loyalty and strengthens the myth of Russia as the 'country of heroes'. Evidently, Russian propaganda is leaving no stone unturned in depicting the deceased soldiers as martyrs, who are destined to be immortalised in the memories of the descendants. To do so, the regime promotes the veneration of fallen soldiers with memorial lists, city billboards, memorial plaques, 'hero desks' in Russian schools. In Jung's terms, these soldiers are protected by the Russian state to '*reborn to a new life*' (Jung 1997, pp. 170-175). One may suggest, it is done to make the *dead* serve as an ideological instrument for the regime to justify repressions against those who disagree with the war in Ukraine.

As the founder of the Russian 'Party of the Dead' Maxim Evstropov noted, such commemorative procedures aim to make it difficult for the Russians to condemn the war crimes in Ukraine in the future, since it will mean the recognition of the futility of the deaths of their loved ones (Evstropov 2022).

The mythological metamorphosis of heroic sacrifice as a projection of a 'revival of a society in times of crisis' was also analysed by Toynbee in his theory of civilizations (Shcherbinina 1998). It explains the collapse of a civilization by the cessation of its growth (Toynbee 1947). As he puts it, transformation is '*a two-cycle move, where the first part is a departure and the*

*second is a return*' (Toynbee, 1991, pp. 448-449). Thus, the goal of 'Leave-and-Return' movement is a transformation (Toynbee, 1991, pp. 448-449). He concludes, however: *'Futurism and archaism are direct denials of growth, and this is the essence of their tragedy'* (Toynbee 1991).

Echoing Toynbee, Putin's efforts to revive the heroic narratives of WW2 and infuse patriotism with a militar sacrifice signifies Russia's turn to archaism. In pursuit of this goal, the Kremlin actively tries to evoke collective memories of WW2 to foster a sense of unity in the society. Ironically, the professor of the Russian and European Academies of Natural Sciences Alexander Ageev proposed giving the right to vote to 27 millions of Soviet people who died in WW2. He suggested that their descendants could cast proxy votes for the dead. The project has not started yet, however it aims to help to achieve a new *'point of consolidation of the society'* in Russia (Ageev 2016).

### **Z-floating signifier**

This group employs words *'rashiZm'*, *'Zlo'* with the Latin *'Z'* crossed out as a new sign of Russian fascism. Many slogans denounce the *'Z'* letter, by replacing the Russian character with the Latin *-Z* equivalent. Initially, the use of *'Z'* originated from Russian commanders marking their military vehicles with it to differentiate them from similar looking Ukrainian equipment. Therefore, the letter *'Z'* devoid of a particular meaning and required the Kremlin to *'create this meaning'* as propaganda required symbols.

Consequently, *'Z'* is an incidental character that Moscow has contrived to artificially impose as a new emblem of patriotism to bring Russians together and imbue them with a shared sense of purpose, unity and identity. According to Cohen's definition, the natural ambiguity associated with symbols renders them highly adaptable for the purpose of building a nation (Cohen 2007). Similarly, Kolstø contends that the ultimate gauge of a national symbol's efficacy lies in its ability to bring people together and fortify their allegiance to the state (Kolstø, 2016, pp. 660-701). From this standpoint, *'Z'* functions as a floating signifier, as it conveys opposed connotations for distinct social factions (for some, it signifies patriotism, while for others, it represents fascism). As Laclau argued, the signifier becomes empty when it generates various meanings assigned to it (Laclau, 1996, pp.201–220).

Epstein, for example, characterised 'Z' as a manifestation of schizo-fascism, which he described as *'fascism disguised as anti-fascism'* (Epstein 2022). According to Pertsev, 'Z' is a failure of Russian propaganda (Petrov 2022). Not only does the letter 'Z' not exist in the Russian alphabet, but it also bears a resemblance to the surname of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (Petrov)..

Henceforth anti-war slogans that contain 'Z' denounce the war and ridicule the senselessness of this sign.

Fredrik Barth argued, the process of identity formation among social groups is contingent upon their mutual differentiation (Kolstø 2016). This means that the boundary separating these groups is a vital prerequisite for the manifestation of their respective collective identities (Kolstø, 2016, pp. 660-701). Barth referred to these boundaries as markers that define interactions between groups. According to him, they exist in people's thoughts and minds (Cohen 2007, Kolstø 2016). This perspective sheds light on the importance of the 'Z' symbol in Russian society as a means of dividing people into different groups. It is not only used by Putin's regime to achieve consolidation, but also by his opponents who use 'Z' to decouple from the official ideology that they disapprove of.

#### **4.1.4.3 'Unjust War'**

In the next subsection, I will explore in more detail the anti-war messages that constitute Unjust war theme, taking into account the subthemes that are the following: 1).A no-reason war. Denouncing the myth that it is a *'special military operation'* rather than an offensive; 2).Condemning the belief in external 'enemies'; 3).Violence and mass casualties among civilians in Ukraine; 4).Debunking the myth of the 'Russian special path'; 5) The assertion of Ukraine's territorial integrity.

#### **Questioning of meaning of war**

The language employed in posters reveal the authors' lack of clarity regarding Russia's intentions for engaging in the conflict, as well as *whom* the Kremlin is trying to defend in Ukraine and *who* is this external enemy that threatens Russia. The protesters express their own

apprehensions that they don't want to fight against their own relatives in Ukraine. The war has caused significant strains in the relationships between Russian and Ukrainian families, yet no logical justifications have been offered to explain the reasons behind the conflict (Yampolsky 2022; Medvedev 2022).

### **Semiotic 'warfare' against population**

One could argue that our way of thinking is reflected in the language we use, and vice versa. Arguably, the Russian propaganda simulates the absence of war in Ukraine, replacing it with the terms *'liberation'*, *'special mission'*, *'special military operation'* to downplay the scale of a tragedy and keep the war at arm's length for the society. The Kremlin asserts that there is 'no war', but rather a *'special military operation'*. By controlling the linguistic options available to the people, the state strengthens its power and creates a distorted version of reality. By using the euphemism *'special military operation'* the regime intentionally obscures the need to justify the war by perpetuating the myth that Russia has a monopoly on the use of force in the region, as stated by Gorobets (Gorobets 2022). This political camouflage reinforces the official narrative that Ukraine is a colonial part of Russia rather than an equal adversary (Gorobets 2022). In a similar spirit, Ukhonova argues that assertions by the Kremlin that Ukraine lacks statehood and the Ukrainian people lack nationhood are 'oversimplifications' that reject the value of complexity and distinctiveness as signs of a societal evolution (Ukhanova 2022). An empire represents a coerced union through simplification, rather than a voluntary association, attempting to equalise and standardise the complexity and diversity of its constituents (Ukhanova 2022).

As a consequence of policies of 'simplification', the use of state sanctioned euphemisms create 'pluralistic ignorance' and 'desensitisation' within Russian society, making it difficult for the population to discern the truth. For instance, the abbreviation *'SMO'* ('special military operation') has become popular in Russian social networks due to its rapidity and meaninglessness. While using this *'doublespeak'* language, the speakers dissociate themselves from the actual meaning of war, as the word itself is a linguistic camouflage, an automated stock phrase (Fowler 1995). In this sense, *'SMO'* is a jargon that manifests the separation of thinking from the subject of speech. Therefore, it implicitly propagates conformity and avoids critical thinking as speakers stay emotionally detached from the image of war. It should not come as a surprise that the war in Ukraine does not exist for many Russians, as it is seen as

'SMO' (Arkhipova 2023). Similarly, in the official discourse the word '*sanctions*' has been also replaced by a cliché '*external restrictions*', in order to eradicate the fact that '*Russia has been punished*' but an '*external enemy*' restrains it from greatness (Arkhipova 2023).

Similar strategy of marginalising population through the transfer of meanings of words was preceded in Nazi Germany, which was described by linguist Victor Klemperer in his memoirs *The Language of the Third Reich: Lingua Tertii Imperii: A Philologist's Notebook* (Wegner 2004). He provides examples of how the state abused the connotation of words by using them in unusual contexts and how metaphors were turned into '*tiny doses of arsenic*' (Wegner, 2004, pp.106–108). For example, according to Klemperer's observations, the language of Hitler's propaganda referred to WW2 as- a '*crusade*', a '*holy war*', a '*holy people's war*' (Wegner, 2004, pp.106-108).

In this context, the protesters are utilising their complete linguistic arsenal to communicate to the Russian public the notion that Putin is engaged in a dual-front battle: one against Ukraine and another one, a semiotic war, against the Russian nation.

### **Russia's unique path**

Protest texts convey the message that the war has pushed Russia into the backwaters of world civilization. In the eyes of the world, Russia has become a barbarian, the *Other*, an exemplar of fundamental deviance (Yamplosky 2022).

The context in which the protest slogans against the 'Russian special path' are used aims to challenge the myth that the invasion of Ukraine as a means to restore a Slavic Orthodox community, united under the concept of 'Holy Russia'. As Baumeister puts it, lacking a unifying Russian national idea, Putin has devised his own Eurasian philosophy by making a mixture of Slavophiles, Orthodoxy and Soviet narratives (Baumeister 2022)

According to Dugin, this approach would allow for the development of a distinct Russian culture, rooted in native principles that differ from those of the West (Dugin 2002). However, it remains unclear what prevented Russia from pursuing this special path since 1999 and what constitutes the new national idea that would form the basis of a new Russian civilization. While Slavophiles and Kireevsky argued that everything that made Russia civilised was learned from Europe, Baumeister notes that the dawn of Russian science coincided with the rise of European

science, and that Russian literature and music were shaped by European tradition. The only original idea, he says, was Solovyov's idea of a Universal Orthodox Church (Baumeister 2022).

Thus, the protesters bring to light the hollowness of the 'Russian exceptionalism' concept and underscore the issue of the lack of a unique national ideology that drives the Kremlin to expand territorially to fill the ideological gap.

#### 4.1.5 Synthesising and Making Conclusions

As a result of the analysis of the three types of protest (*Solitary Picketing*, *Adbusting* and *Performance*) it is possible to summarise that, although there are expressions of liminality in each type of protest, it is not feasible to consolidate a common *modus operandi*, given the nature and the dimensions of expressions characteristic of each type of protests. Each type of protest has its own characteristic:

1. *Solitary Picketing*, uses intertextuality, hyper-affirmation and figurative language to recontextualise common language
2. *Adbusting* is anonymous and appears in transit areas
3. *Performances* are characterised by making use of body language and *scapegoating*, worth to mention that *silence* is a central expression of *Performances*

There are three main themes that emerged from the qualitative thematic analysis: '*Denouncing Putin's Dictatorship*', '*New military-tinged ideology*', '*Unjust war*'. These three themes are the relevant outcome of the thematic investigation because they express the formation of ideas and arguments at the individual level, that are being structured into language and everyday culture; although there is a context of repression on protests in Russia today. These ideas, although isolated, manifest individual concerns that have collective meaning, regardless of the fact that they come from separate single parties, without a structured interest of propaganda.

It can also be concluded that the motive of uniting Russians to change the regime in Russia and engaging in active collective actions against the Russian leadership was not the main theme of anti-war protests in Russia in 2022. It can be explained by the nature of atomised protests. Among the main demands of the protesters were the theme of ending the war and accusing the government of establishing a dictatorship in Russia and committing military crimes in Ukraine. However, calls for protests and disobedience to the regime were occasionally seen in the form

of *adbusting*, which can be explained by the anonymity of this type of protest. In individual pickets and performances, protesters could not directly call for the overthrow of the regime.

Typically, slogans were limited to comparing Putin to Hitler, acknowledging the injustice of the war, and the Kremlin's crimes for which the Russian people would be held responsible. It is also significant that there were hardly any calls in support of the Navalny team or other political figures, indicating the absence of a figure in the Russian political space who could have weight for the Russian electorate and unite those who oppose Putin's regime. Thus, the thematic analysis revealed the absence of alternative political forces in Russia that could have become an alternative force to the ruling elite.

## **4.2 Quantitative Analysis**

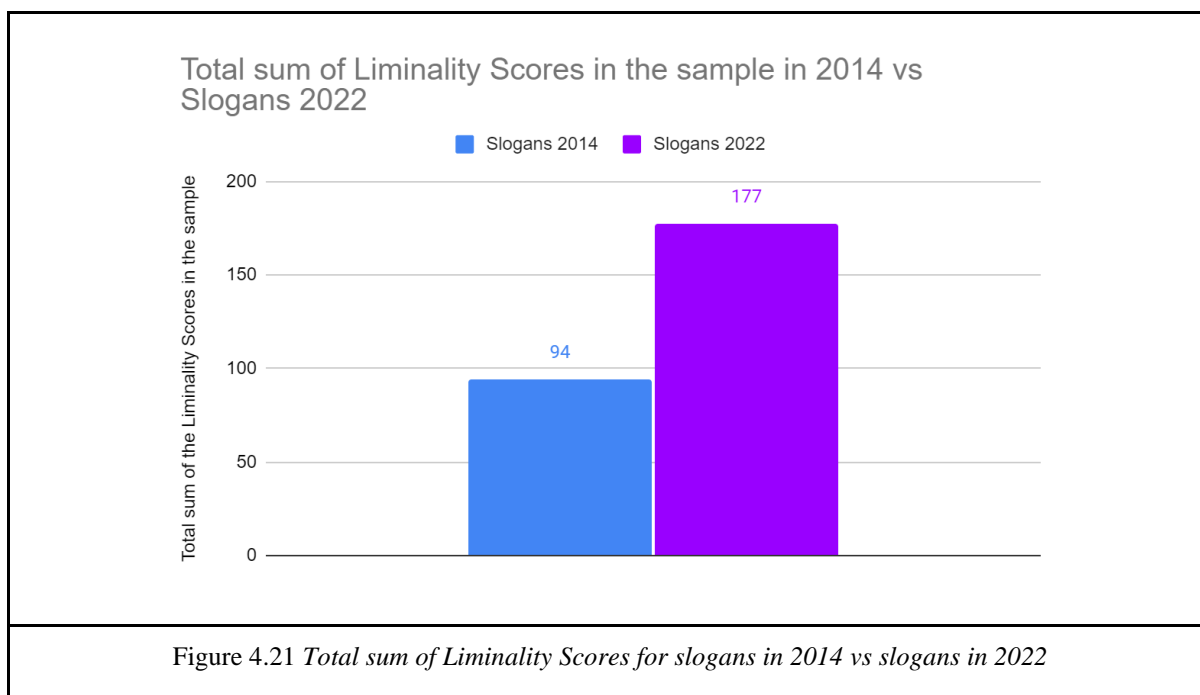
As discussed in the Methodology section, the quantitative analysis answers the second research question of this Masters Thesis and allows to quantify the level of liminality used in Russian protests, how it changes in response to modifications in the legislation (2014 vs 2022) and across different thematic categories of the protests (testing my hypothesis formulated in section 3.4). The analysis has been performed on a random sample of 102 slogans from 2014 and 102 slogans from 2022. The process of the slogans database creation, sampling, categorisation, and liminality score calculation framework is described in section 3.4. All graphs and diagrams related to the quantitative analysis are presented in the Appendix 1.

### **4.2.1 Liminality Score Analysis**

Following the methodology described in section 3.4 each slogan for 2014 and 2022 was assigned a score (0 or 1) for each of the three key liminality features:

1. Legal Risk
2. Ambiguity
3. Expression of demands

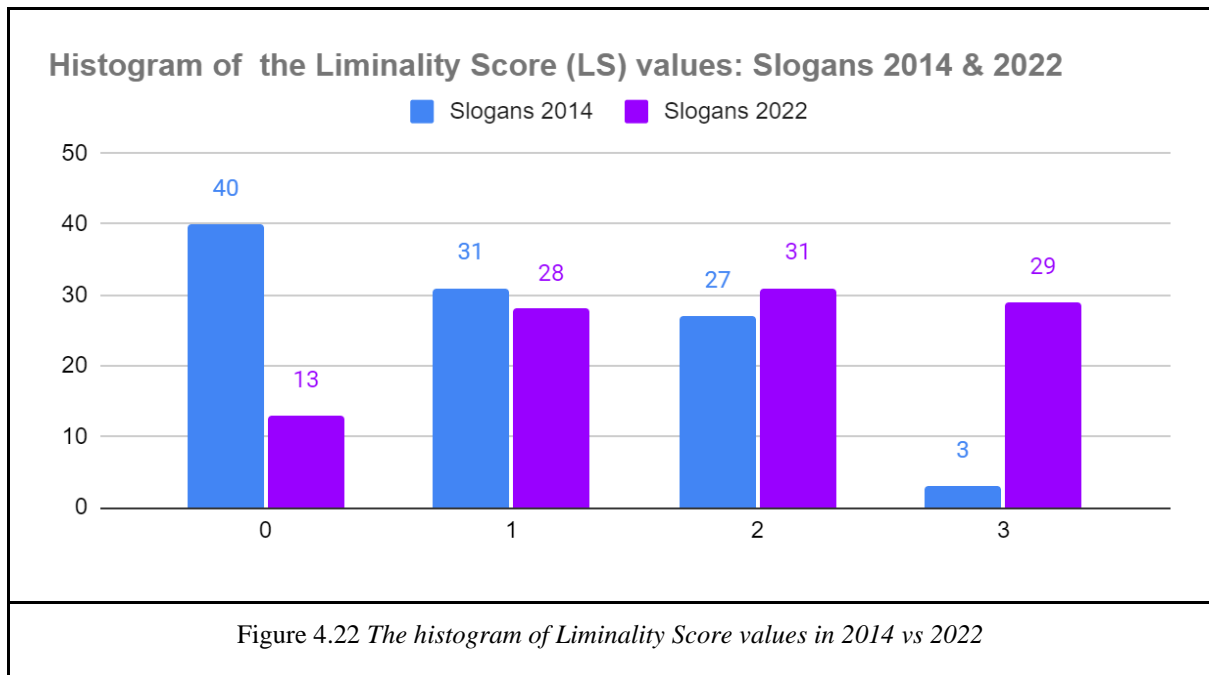
To produce a final Liminality Score of a slogan, the linear sum of the three scores was calculated as described in Formula 3.1 in the Methodology section.



To understand whether the liminality of slogans changed between the years 2014 and 2022 I calculated the total sum of the liminality scores of all slogans in the group for 2014 and the total sum of the liminality scores of all slogans in the group for 2022. The results are presented in Figure 4.21.

We can see from Figure 4.21 that the total sum of liminality scores indeed changed from 94 in 2014 to 177 in 2022, increasing by almost 100% in 2022. One explanation for the increase in the usage of liminality is the changes in the Russian legislation which resulted in much higher level of prosecution for people who express their political and social views by 2022. The phenomenon of increase in liminality in war times demonstrates that when people feel endangered by the state, they find creative ways of expressing their views with the lower level of risk to be prosecuted by making use of language (ambiguity, avoiding expressing direct demands) and by using grey areas in the legislation (using the forms of protest which lie between legal and illegal) (Frohlich & Jacobsson 2018). Further research will be needed to analyse even more slogans and perform a statistical test to evaluate the statistical significance of the difference in the liminality scores between the two years.





The histogram in Figure 4.22 represents the distribution of the aggregated liminality score. We can see the counts of slogans with values 0, 1, 2 and 3 for 2014 and 2022. The liminality score of value 3 means the highest level of liminality, while value 0 means the absence of liminality. From the figure we can see that:

1. 40 of 102 slogans in 2014 had liminality 0, which means all three features describing the liminality were zeros:
  - a. KF1 = 0: the authors did not take strong precautions to avoid legal risk when participating in the protests
  - b. KF2 = 0: slogans had no ambiguity in their meaning
  - c. KF3 = 1: slogans expressed direct demands

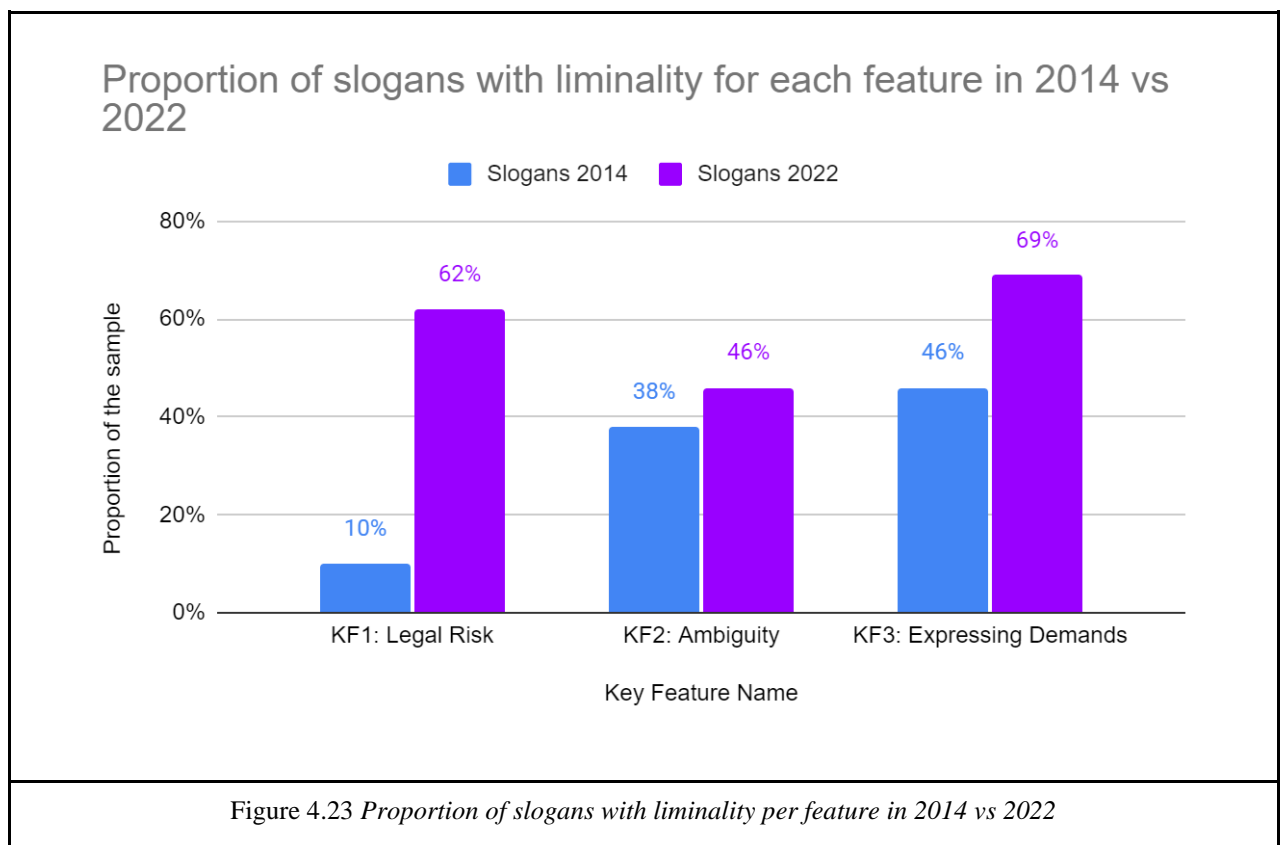
In 2022 the number of slogans from the sample which had the liminality score equal to zero reduced to 13. This means that protestors started using more liminality in their expression of anti-war views in order to avoid prosecution by the authorities and only rarely had expressed their views directly.

2. In 2014 of those slogans which had liminality the majority, 31 slogans, had the low score of 1; 27 slogans had the score of 2; only a few (3 slogans) had the highest level of liminality equal to 3. This again highlights that in 2014 people were not very afraid to express their views openly and did not expect to be prosecuted for participating in legal protests. They predominantly choose to be open in the expression of their views.

In 2022, however, almost two thirds of all slogans had the liminality with a higher score of 2 (31 slogans) and 3 (29 slogans). This means the liminality was expressed in 2 or even 3 dimensions (features of liminality). This high level of liminality highlights the need for the protests to defend themselves in the court in case of the prosecution. For example:

- “Don't die for yachts and palaces” (written on a bus stop wall). 2 dimensions of liminality were used in this example slogan (KF1 and KF2). The protester chose city spaces instead of taking part in a protest with a known risk of prosecution (KF1) and by not mentioning dying at war with Ukraine, specifically, the author used ambiguity in their slogan (KF2).
- “A Life for the Tsar” (written on a pole). All 3 dimensions of liminality were used in this example. KF1: the protester chose city spaces to write their slogan on. KF2: Putin is not mentioned explicitly to be the new Tsar, the meaning of the message is ambiguous. KF3: no direct demand is expressed, instead, there is a hidden invitation to the public not to do everything Putin tells them and even give their lives for him.

To further assess how the liminality was expressed via each of the 3 features, I calculated the proportion of slogans with liminality in each feature in 2014 and 2022. Please, see Figure 4.23.



We can see that the usage of KF2, ambiguity, almost has not changed between year 2014 (38% of slogans had it) and year 2022 (46% of slogans had it), however, we can see a substantial increase in the adaption of liminality for the other two features: KF1, legal risk (increase from 10% in 2014 to 62% in 2022), and FK2, expressing demands (an increase from 46% in 2014 to 69% in 2022).

The potential reason for such changes was due to the fact that in both years the level of using ambiguity was already relatively high as it is the most common way of using the liminality in language. But in the landscape of increased consequences for expressing their views people searched for additional ways to protect themselves. Hence, the increase of liminality for:

- KF1: people adapted types of protests which are not clearly defined to be legal or illegal, for example, a solitary picket. The other form of protest people adapted widely in 2022 is the writings on city spaces. This type of protest also has a high level of liminality as people leave the messages anonymously often in the dark part of the day to reduce the risk of being captured, but they still don't know if they will be identified and prosecuted as there could be cameras or witnesses, which means they appear to be in the liminal space.
- KF3: in 2022 people avoided directly expressing demands (such as requesting to stop the war) more than they did in 2014 in order to have extra protection for themselves. In 2022 people preferred to use figurative language which would be understood as the request in the context of war by everyone, but at the same time it could be argued in case of the prosecution that the person did not have anti-war requests. Also, people used predominantly non personal statements. This KF3 might seem to be similar to the KF2, ambiguity, but they are not the same, but complimentary. There were many slogans which did not have the ambiguity in them, but they also did not have a direct demand, thus, still had a level of liminality.

For example: *"We are not celebrating today. In a separate manifesto those behind the protest declared: "We shall soon mark our own Independence Day, a day of independence from imperial ambitions""* ( a poster in the embankment next to the Ministry of Defence). This slogan has no ambiguity of the meaning; however, it does not have a concrete demand. There is a hidden request to the public to take action to get rid of the existing regime in Russia. The statement is also non personal, it speaks on behalf of all people. Therefore, the statement has a certain level of liminality in it.

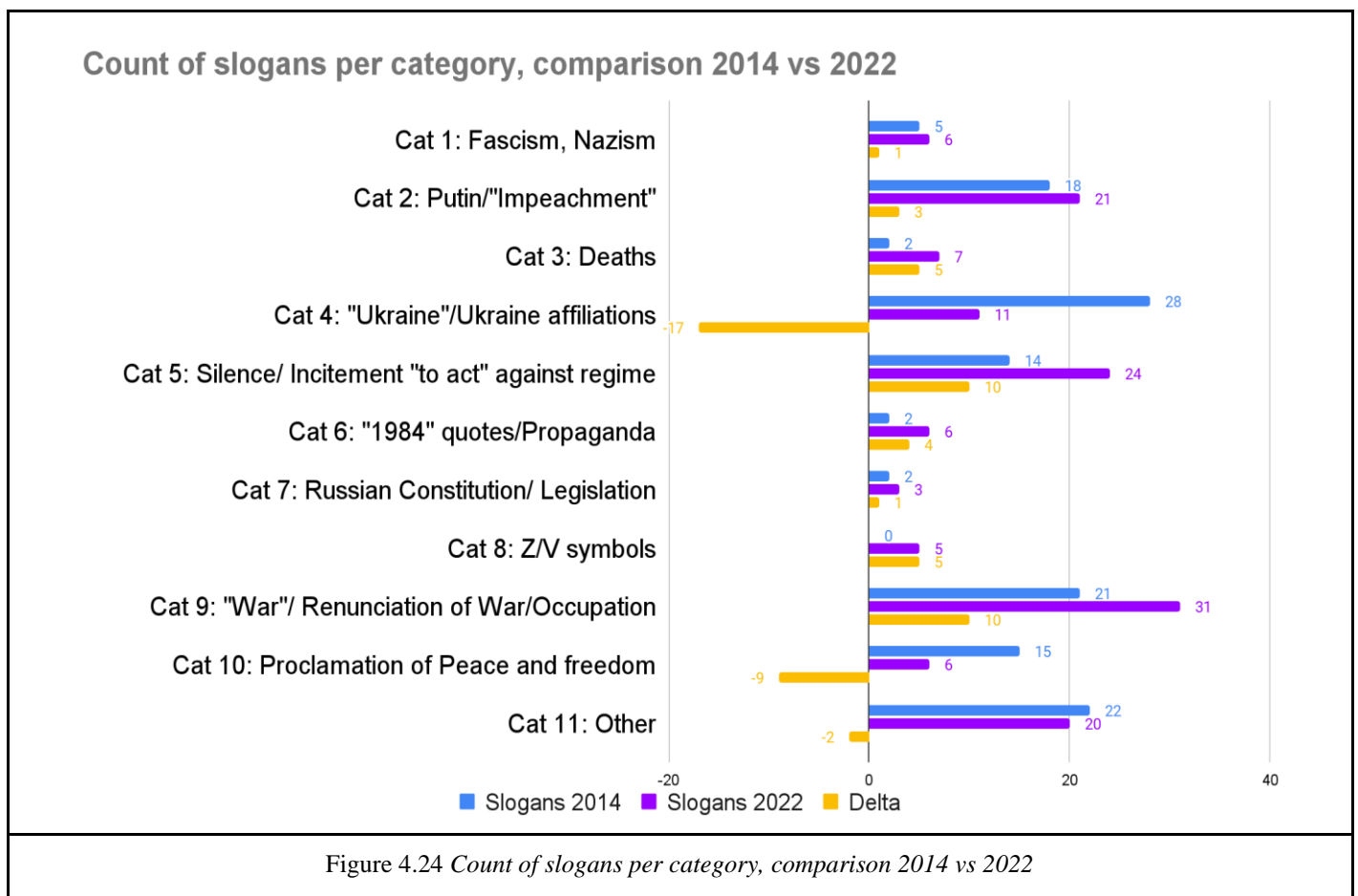
In 2022 most of the slogans had hidden demands towards:

- the authorities: *“To be against the war and express your opinion = to commit an administrative offence?”* (hidden request to stop the war),
- to their civil peers: *“Does our government tell us the truth? Why are all independent media banned?”* (hidden request to the public by raising questions to analyse the situation and not blindly accept what the authorities say).

### 4.2.2 Categories and Their Liminality Scores Analysis

I also analysed the liminality score for each thematic category of slogans. The thematic classification of the samples from 2014 and 2022 was done using the approach discussed in the methodology section 3.4.

Figure 4.24. represents the counts of slogans in each category for the year 2014 (blue bar) and the year 2022 (purple bar), and the delta between 2022 and 2014 (yellow bar) (please, note, each slogan can belong not to only one, but a few categories) .



From the figure we can see that the number of slogans on the topic of “Ukraine/Ukraine affiliations” reduced in 2022 by 17 slogans compared to 2014, and the number of slogans related to “Proclamation of Peace and freedom” reduced by 9 in 2022 compared to 2014. While it would be expected that more people would talk about Ukraine and request peace for their anti-war people in 2022 when the full-scale military operation against Ukraine begun in 2022, in reality we see the opposite. This is a very strong indication that in 2022 the legislation forbidding the expression of anti-war moods already took place and people had to completely avoid mentioning the topics of Ukraine and Peace in order to protect themselves. Instead, they expressed their views via different topics and even invented the new symbols which are represented by the new category 8. There were no slogans with symbols Z/V in the protests in 2014. This phenomenon of completely avoiding mentioning the sensitive topic and instead using new symbols represents the highest level of liminality, and we can clearly see its expression in Russia in 2022.

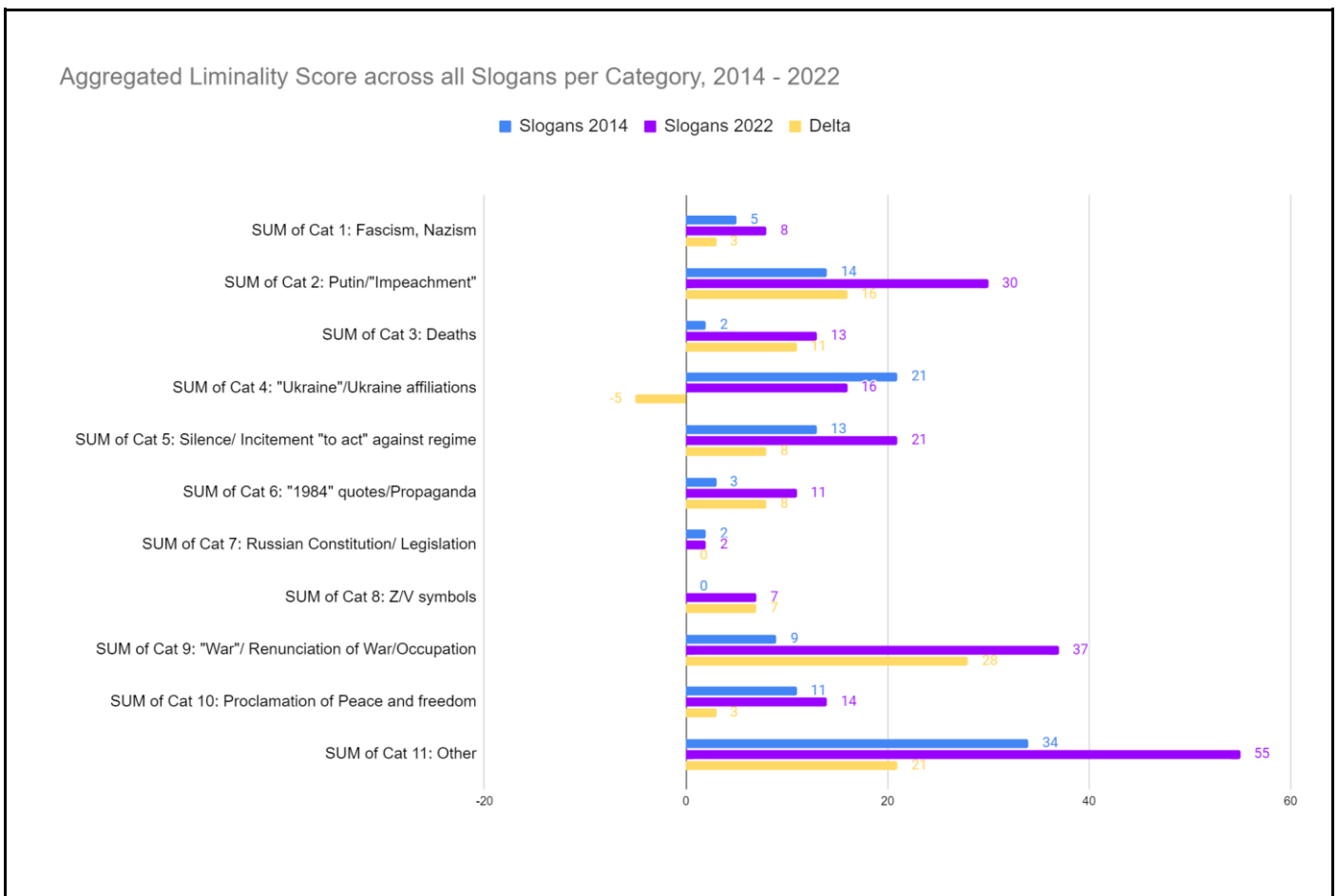


Figure 4.25 Aggregated Liminality Score across all Slogans per Category, 2014 - 2022

In Figure 4.25 I looked at the aggregated liminality score for all slogans in each category. We can observe that:

1. The total liminality score for category 4, “Ukraine/Ukraine affiliations”, has actually decreased by 5 points (yellow bar represents the difference between 2022 and 2014) in 2022. However, as we saw in the previous Figure 4.2.2.1, the number of slogans in that category reduced significantly (to avoid risk) in 2022 compared to 2014. This demonstrates that in 2022 two groups of protesters emerged:
  - a group of protesters that uses all three features of liminality to avoid risk or avoiding mentioning at all the most sensitive topic of Ukraine (the highest liminality expression)
  - a group of protesters who reached their red line and can no longer be silent or hide their views by using liminality in their slogans or ways of protesting. These people chose to talk about Ukraine directly in their slogans in 2022 at a known very high risk of being prosecuted. Those are the individual cases of people risking their freedom and lives to stand for their truth and encourage the others to do the same. Some examples of such protests and slogans are:
    - i. *“I am against war. Ukraine is flooded with blood”* (near the administration building of the Russian President's representative office)
    - ii. *“Russian invaders systematically raped 25 Ukrainian women aged 14 to 24 in Bucha. 9 of them are pregnant. This is not a war. These are crimes. We have the right to peaceful protest acc. from Art. 31 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation”* (Red Square, Kremlin)
    - iii. *“I ask the Ministry of Justice to recognize me as a foreign agent of my country! I am against Putin, who is killing tens of thousands of Russians and Ukrainians!”* (Kremlin and Red Square, hand holding poster)
    - iv. *“Putin withdraw troops from Ukraine”* (Central square, hand holding poster)
2. The usage of liminality increased across all other thematic categories (except the category 4). The change in liminality is represented by the yellow bars in each category which have positive values (a difference in liminality between 2022 and 2014). We can see the largest increase in the use of liminality appeared in categories 9, “War, Renunciation of War/Occupation ” and 2, “Putin/Impeachment”. Talking about these

topics directly would not be allowed legally in Russia in 2022, therefore, people used liminality to demand the stopping of the war and impeachment of Putin.

### **4.2.3 Conclusions of the Quantitative Analysis**

The analysis of the results presented in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 demonstrates that we can accept the hypothesis: “*The toughening of the legislation in 2022 results in the adoption of more liminality by anti-war protesters as a measure to avoid risk of being prosecuted*”. It has been shown via quantitative analysis that the liminality in 2022 increased compared to 2014, and it appended across all thematic categories. The limitations and future work will be discussed in the next section.

## Chapter 5. Conclusion and Discussion

Chapter 5 summarises the conclusions of the study, discusses its limitations and suggests the future work which can be done to address the limitations and take this research further. Also, it summarises the main points representing the value of this research work.

### 5.1 Conclusion

Both, qualitative and quantitative analysis, demonstrated that usage of liminality is a defining characteristic of anti-war protests in Russia. While the qualitative analysis studied the use of language, hidden meanings and types of protests to avoid risks, the quantitative analysis allowed to quantify the penetration of the liminality and to follow the evolution of the liminality adoption between different periods in time (2014 vs 2022).

#### 5.1.1. Conclusions of the Qualitative Analysis (1st research question)

The analysis of protest messages in 2022 has revealed the following trends:

1. The main forms of anti-war protest are: *solitary pickets*, *adbusting* (and *nano meetings*), *performances*. They have become more atomized in 2022, when compared to previous years.
2. In *solitary pickets*, protesters actively employ figurative language, the absence of direct demands, accusations and appeals. They adopt subversive affirmations, intertextuality (quotes from Putin's speeches, the Constitution, the Criminal Code, and the Bible), abbreviations and symbols.
3. In *adbusting*, protesters utilise the liminality of urban spaces by leaving anonymous anti-war messages in transit urban areas.
4. In *performances*, protesters use body language and the method of *scapegoating*, with the main theme of performances revolving around the subtheme of *silence*.

Thematic reflexive analyses of slogans allowed to determine the main three themes employed in protest messages: *Unjust war*; *New military-tinged ideology*; *Denouncing Putin's Dictatorship*.



It can be assumed that the theme of uniting Russians to topple Putin's regime and engaging in collective actions of protest was not the main theme circulating in all anti-war protest texts. It can be explained by the atomised and spatial nature of civil resistance.

The protesters voiced a call to end the war and castigated the Kremlin for forging a dictatorship within Russia, as well as for perpetrating military atrocities in Ukraine. However, calls for protests or sabotage of the state were rare. Notably, there was also a conspicuous absence of support for Navalny and other alternative political forces in Russia, which could have potentially emerged as a viable counterforce to the ruling elite.

**During my analyses I also discovered that:**

1. There were fewer liminal gaps for stealth resistance in 2022 compared to 2014. For example, protesters can no longer gather under the pretext of urban events as they did in 2014. This hinders the formation of new collective solidarity and obstructs the creation of alternative temporary communities based on the collective action experience.
2. The anti-war protest writings bring evidence that in 2022 there was no potential opposition leadership capable to unite the society against Putin and lead any protest movement;
3. High level of liminality may signify the rise of totalitarianism when certain themes disappear from the narratives. Even though paternalist dictatorships (which is currently the case of Putin's regime) do not evolve to totalitarian regimes, the current system in Russia is evidently preparing the grounds that can make totalitarianism possible after Putin;
4. In response to stealth resistance, the Russian government legalises state violence and shuts down liminal loopholes in legislation that existed in 2014. For example, solitary picketing does not require permission from the authorities. The protesters, however, are being detained and fined, as the authorities equate a single picket with a mass event. Other examples- adopting a bill that criminalises certain words ('war', 'Russian aggression', etc), or crafting a bill that prosecutes for 'equating the actions of the USSR with Nazi Germany and criticising Stalin and comparing him to Hitler' etc.
5. The high level of liminality also indicates that the protesters are not willing to take the risk of open confrontation and put themselves at risk. This means that stakes are too

high and the protesters act relying solely on themselves, which confirms the absence of a united opposition force that could unite and protect them.

### **5.1.2. Conclusions of the Quantitative Analysis (2nd research question)**

The quantitative analysis complemented the qualitative analysis by demonstrating that the usage of liminality has increased in 2022 compared to 2014 across all thematic categories in response to the tightening of the legislation in Russia following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022. This conclusion was derived from the following findings:

- The total liminality score across all slogans increased by almost 100% in 2022 compared to 2014 (Figure 4.21)
- The number of slogans which contained liminality increased in 2022 compared to 2014
- In 2022 87% of slogans had liminality while in 2014 this number was 60%. The majority of slogans had the higher level of liminality of 2 and 3 in 2022, while in 2014 the majority of slogans with liminality had the value of 1 (Figure 4.22).
- We can see the increase in liminality across all 3 features of liminality in 2022 (Figure 4.23) and across all thematic categories apart from the theme of Ukraine (Figure 4.24)

## **5.2 Limitations**

Due to limited resources, I only used a small sample of slogans - 102 for each year - to analyse the liminality of 2014 and 2022. Even though I have 900 slogans for 2022, I categorised them but was unable to analyse them all according to the scale of liminality. With a larger volume of data, the results could be more comprehensive and tests of statistical significance could be performed. Furthermore, to analyse how liminality has changed, it is necessary to examine the period before the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the start of the war, as well as the period after the start of the war, and compare the liminality of protests during these different stages. This will lead to a more accurate assessment of how the liminality of protest language has changed.

Another issue is the coding of slogans. Although slogans were coded based on their literal denotative meaning, there remains an element of subjectivity in categorising them. Another limitation of this study is that I assessed liminality on a scale of (1)-(0), meaning whether liminality is present or not. This is a very simplified way of measuring it, given that liminality has different levels, and the scale of liminality could be expanded to three units or more.

Yet the theory of liminality itself poses the most serious challenge. Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a situation or text is liminal or not. Some opponents of the theory argue that we live in a permanent crisis, and therefore, everything that happens to us is liminal and part of our personal transformation.

After all, the crux of the issue with liminality research lies in the disconnect between theory and practical application, as observation is typically the extent of the research due to external interference that may be disrupting the liminal state. Moreover, social scientists lack a shared set of parameters for investigating and defining the liminal experience (Söderlund & Borg 2018), and disputes and contradictions abound within the theory (Cross et al., 2015; Wright & Hibbert 2015), causing uncertainty about how to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Davies 2006). Yet, the utilisation of theory presents new avenues for exploring liminal and infrapolitical processes in politics. As Malksoo argued, the absence of liminality from most theoretical elaborations may signify the limits of *'the contemporary political imagination'* and underestimated potential of exploring *'the states of enduring societal transformation'* through the angle of a transition (betwixt and between space) (Malksoo 2012).

### **5.3 Further Work**

- Analyse more slogans and perform statistical test to evaluate the significance of changes in the liminality score in collaboration with a statistician
- Study the liminality of protests in the period before the war and compare to 2014 and 2022
- Explore if the use of liminality actually helped the protesters to avoid risk. If data collection is possible, calculate whether less people were prosecuted who used liminality in their slogans compared to those who did not use any liminality at all.
- Study the new anti-war symbols which emerged as the result of using liminality as a technique to avoid risk (Vobla, etc)

- Study the *nano-meetings* as a sub-category of *adbusting*, there is space for further work to to determine the unique characteristics of this type of protests
- Explore answers to the following questions:
  - study causality: how the liminality of protests shapes the legislation itself? In other words, how the repressive state apparatus adapts and makes mundane things political to close the loophole for any resistance?
  - the interrelation between the increase of liminality and emerging totalitarian features. To what extent the liminality could be an indicator of the development of totalitarianism

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# Appendix 1: Data Analysis

## Liminality Score (LS)

	Slogans 2014	Slogans 2022	Delta
LS 0	<b>40</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>-27</b>
LS 1	<b>31</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>-3</b>
LS 2	<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>5</b>
LS 3	<b>3</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>25</b>

Histogram of the Liminality Score (LS) values: Slogans 2014 & 2022

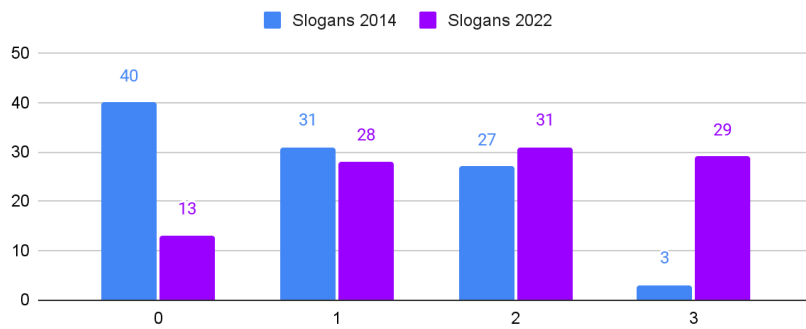


Figure & Table Appendix 1.1



## LS, Feature 1: Legal Risk (High, Low)

	Slogans 2014	Slogans 2022	Delta
Legal 0, Low risk	<b>91</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>-51</b>
Legal 1, High Risk	<b>10</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>51</b>

Histogram Legal Risk (High, Low): Slogans 2014 & 2022

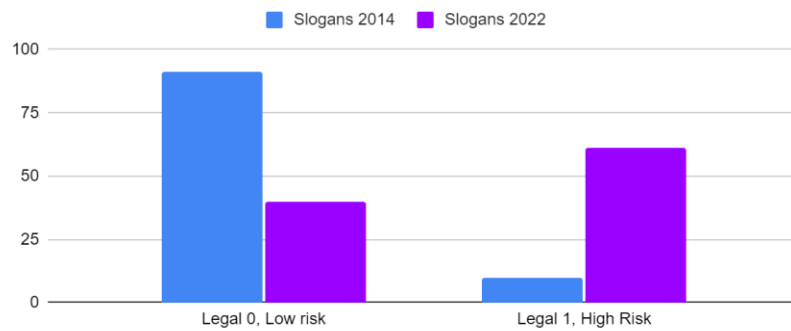


Figure & Table Appendix 1.2

## Change in Legal risk, per categories, from 2014 to 2022

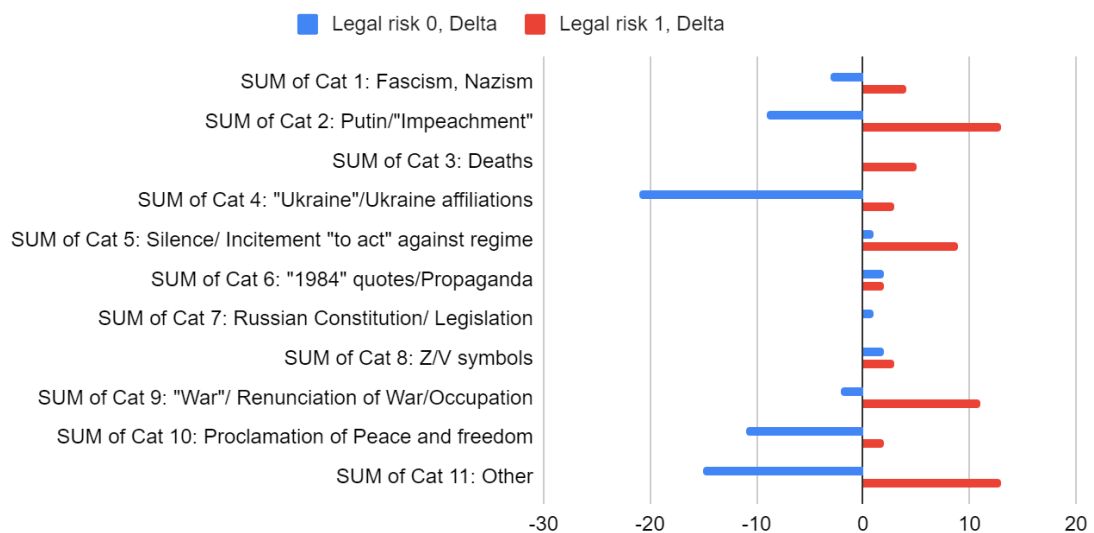


Figure Appendix 1.3

## LS, Feature 2: Ambiguity (Direct Claim, Ambivalent)

	Slogans 2014	Slogans 2022	Delta
Ambiguity 0, Direct Claim	63	55	-8
Ambiguity 1, Ambivalent	38	46	8

Histogram Ambiguity (Direct Claim, Ambivalent): Slogans 2014 & 2022

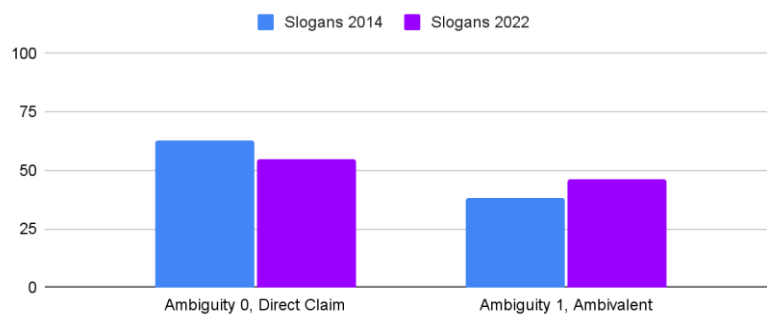


Figure & Table Appendix 1. 4

## Change in Ambiguity, per categories, from 2014 to 2022

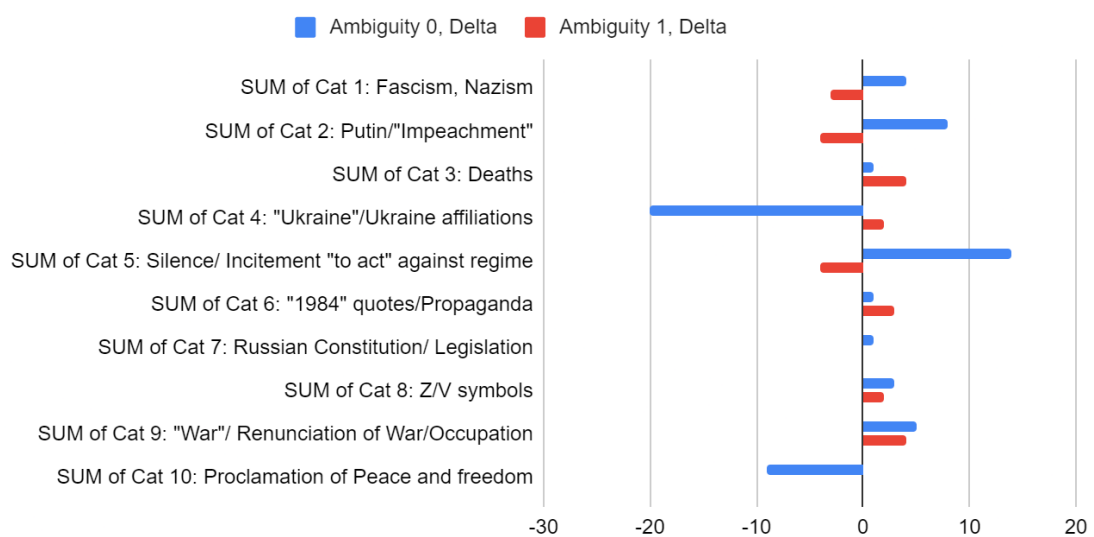


Figure Appendix 1. 5

### LS, Feature 3: Expressing Demands (Concrete, Hidden)

	Slogans 2014	Slogans 2022	Delta
Expressing Demands 0, Concrete	55	32	-23
Expressing Demands 1, Hidden	46	69	23

Histogram Expressing Demands (Concrete, Hidden): Slogans 2014 & 2022

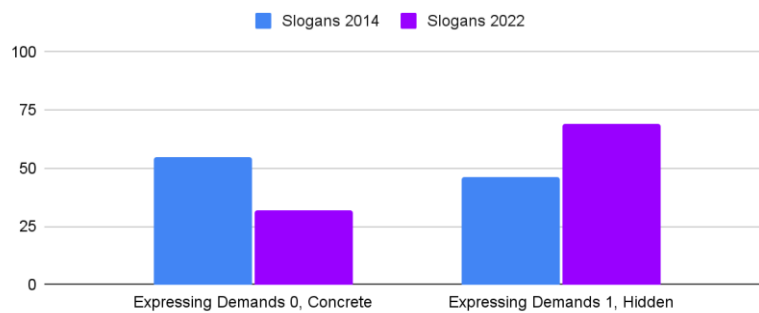


Figure & Table Appendix 1. 6

### Change in Expressing Demands, per categories, from 2014 to 2022

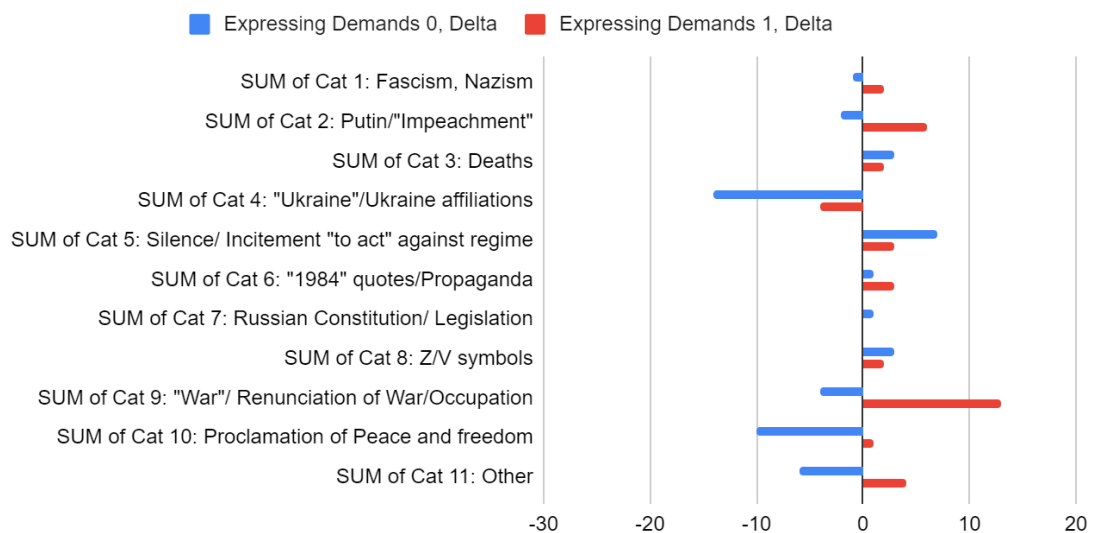


Figure Appendix 1.7

## Denotational Categories in Slogans, Comparison: 2014, 2022

	Slogans 2014	Slogans 2022	Delta
Cat 1: Fascism, Nazism	5	6	1
Cat 2: Putin/"Impeachment"	18	21	3
Cat 3: Deaths	2	7	5
Cat 4: "Ukraine"/Ukraine affiliations	28	11	-17
Cat 5: Silence/ Incitement "to act" against regime	14	24	10
Cat 6: "1984" quotes/Propaganda	2	6	4
Cat 7: Russian Constitution/ Legislation	2	3	1
Cat 8: Z/V symbols	0	5	5
Cat 9: "War"/ Renunciation of War/Occupation	21	31	10
Cat 10: Proclamation of Peace and freedom	15	6	-9
Cat 11: Other	22	20	-2

Denotational Categories in Slogans, Comparison 2014 - 2022

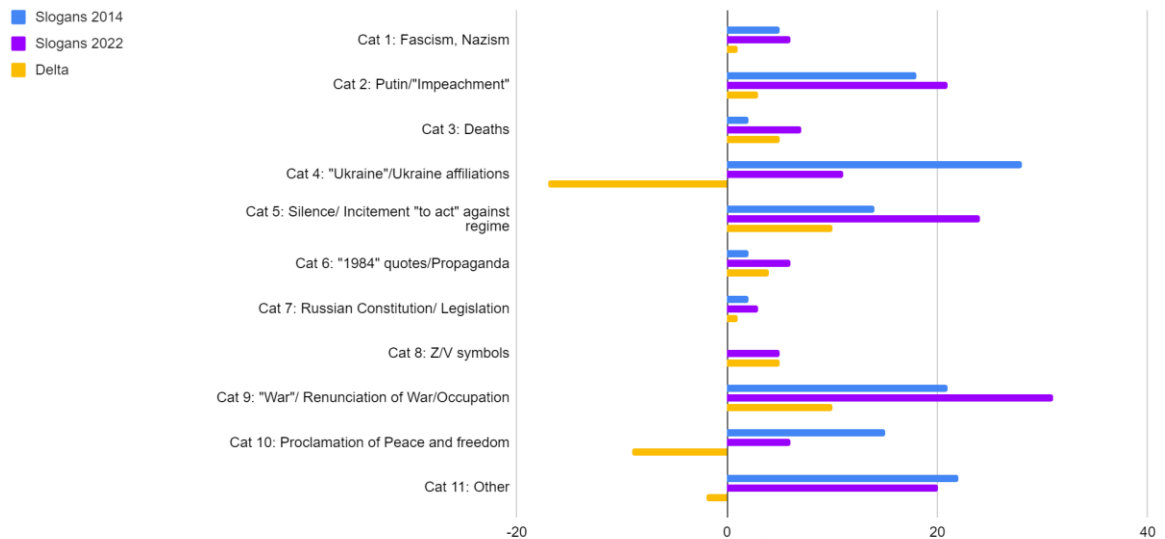


Figure & Table Appendix 1. 8

## Liminality Score (LS) Change, per Category: 2014, 2022

	LS Score 0, Delta	LS Score 1, Delta	LS Score 2, Delta	LS Score 3, Delta
SUM of Cat 1: Fascism, Nazism	0	-1	2	0
SUM of Cat 2: Putin/"Impeachment"	-5	3	6	0
SUM of Cat 3: Deaths	1	0	1	3
SUM of Cat 4: "Ukraine"/Ukraine affiliations	-13	-8	0	1
SUM of Cat 5: Silence/ Incitement "to act" against regime	2	7	2	-1
SUM of Cat 6: "1984" quotes/Propaganda	0	1	2	1
SUM of Cat 7: Russian Constitution/ Legislation	0	2	-1	0
SUM of Cat 8: Z/V symbols	1	2	1	1
SUM of Cat 9: "War"/ Renunciation of War/Occupation	-9	10	6	2
SUM of Cat 10: Proclamation of Peace and freedom	-9	-1	-1	2
SUM of Cat 11: Other	-4	-4	-7	13

Delta "Liminality Score" (LS), per Category, 2014-2022

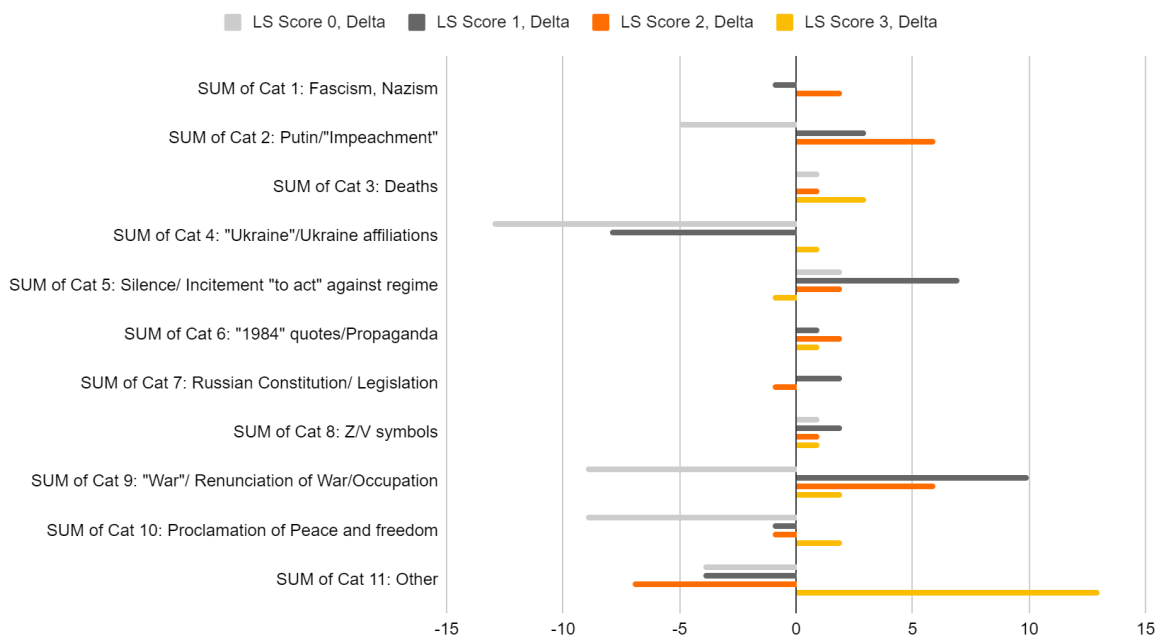


Figure & Table Appendix 1.9

## Aggregated Liminality Score, per Category: 2014, 2022

	Slogans 2014	Slogans 2022	Delta
SUM of Cat 1: Fascism, Nazism	5	8	3
SUM of Cat 2: Putin/"Impeachment"	14	29	15
SUM of Cat 3: Deaths	2	13	11
SUM of Cat 4: "Ukraine"/Ukraine affiliations	21	16	-5
SUM of Cat 5: Silence/ Incitement "to act" against regime	13	21	8
SUM of Cat 6: "1984" quotes/Propaganda	3	11	8
SUM of Cat 7: Russian Constitution/ Legislation	2	2	0
SUM of Cat 8: Z/V symbols	0	7	7
SUM of Cat 9: "War"/ Renunciation of War/Occupation	9	37	28
SUM of Cat 10: Proclamation of Peace and freedom	11	14	3
SUM of Cat 11: Other	34	55	21

Delta Aggregated "Liminality Score" (LS), per Category, 2014 - 2022

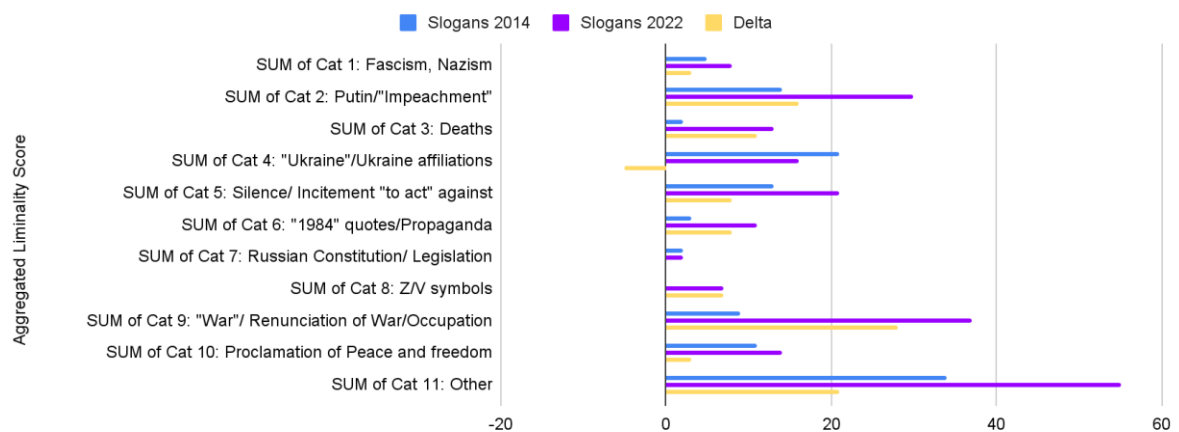


Figure & Table Appendix 1.10

## Appendix 2: Solitary Picketing



Figure Appendix 2.1 \*\*\*\*\* 30 May 2022, St. Petersburg (photo by <https://twitter.com/ovdinfo/status/1531342078894022658>)

Figure Appendix 2.2 \*\*\*\*\* 27 April 2022, Moscow (photo by [Doxa](#))



Figure Appendix 2.3 'No to Vobla', 20 January 2023, Moscow (photo by [nowarmetro](#))

Figure Appendix 2.4 'No to Vobla' in a student dormitory, 22 October 2022, Novosibirsk (photo by <https://t.me/akademnen/2164>)



Figure Appendix 2.5 Ramil Khizmatullin. *The easier way to cover up economic failures is through war. V. Putin* 27 April 2022, Kazan (photo by [activatica](#)).

In the example *'The Constitution of the Russian Federation. Everyone is guaranteed freedom of thought and speech. No one can be forced to express their opinions and beliefs or renounce them'*, *'I ask you to keep a social distance with the picketer'*, or *'Stop the crimes. Our silence makes us accomplices. Article 29 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation'* liminality is manifested in the fact that the author calls to stop crimes and refers to the constitution. However, he does not specify which crimes need to be stopped, although everyone understands that these are war crimes sanctioned by Putin. In this regard, the slogan subtly calls for a change of a *status quo*.



FigureAppendix 2.6 Konstantyn Fokyn, *'You shall not kill'*, 5 September 2022, Moscow (Photo by [Sota](#))

Protesters often quote the Bible, which covertly accuses the Russian Orthodox Church of lying and violating the commandments of Christianity. Moreover, such slogans aim to make those Russians who support Putin's policy in Ukraine think about what is happening. Popular slogans include *'Christ for peace'*, *'Thou shalt not kill'*, *'What would Jesus say about this?'*, and *'Icons*



*weep myrrh, and you try it!* etc. These texts have a strong emotional charge as they covertly condemn the policy of the Russian Orthodox Church, which convinces believers that death in the war in Ukraine will *'wash away'* all sins of Russians and calls on believers to pray for Vladimir Putin (...). From the new Russian patriotic perspective, one can sacrifice their present life when it comes to the victory of light over darkness and attain the Kingdom of Heaven. It comes as no surprise that the Russian Orthodox Church has become a strong proponent of the idea of sacrificial heroism and the use of war in Ukraine as a means to achieve salvation. It is known that the Church distributes special prayers to soldiers, where Putin is referred to as the archistrategos - the supreme commander of God's army ( ). The same status in Orthodoxy is held by the Archangel Michael. Accidentally, Christianity views human life as a liminal or transitional phase of being, separated from its divine source and seeking reunification. Van Gennep's liminality theory, encompassing the three phases of separation, crisis-transformation, and reunion, corresponds well with Christianity's triadic composition, as noted by Turner in 1967.

## Appendix 3: Adbusting



Figure Appendix 3.1 'Z' being doused with red paint, 2022 (photo by [ghall.com](https://ghall.com))

Figure Appendix 3.2 'Figure '40,000 killed, 100,000 wounded. What for? NO TO THE WAR! 150 days of the 'special' operation have cost 1 trillion dollars' September 2022, Angarsk (photo by <https://khpg.org/en/1608811184>)



Figure Appendix 3.3 Z 'Fascists' 14 August 2022, Izhevsk (photo by [Nexta](https://nexta.com))

Figure Appendix 3.4 'Fuck to war' 1 May 2022, Tver (photo by [activatica](https://activatica.com))



Figure Appendix 3.5 Advertising a lost pet. 'Lost Peace!', 11 May 2022, Moscow (photo by <https://t.me/nowarmetro/2246>)



Figure Appendix 3.6 Road sign Entry, 'No to War' 2022



Figure Appendix 3.7 Subway train. 'Seats for disabled recruits, who've returned from Ukraine and for mothers of Zhukov's soldiers' (photo by <https://khpq.org/en/1608810596>)

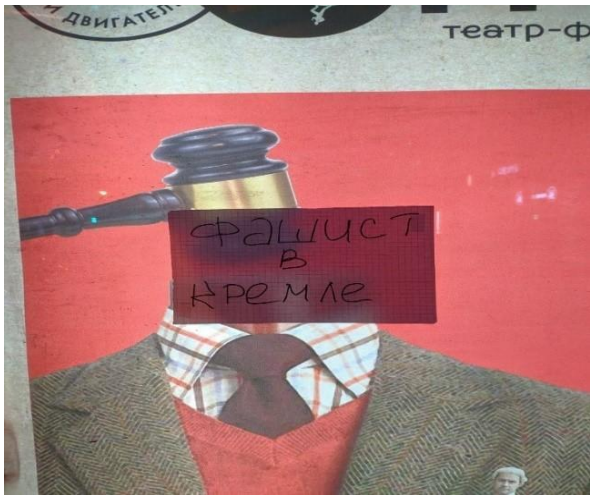


Figure Appendix 3.8 Theatre advertisement '*Fascist is in Kremlin*'; 21 May 2022 Smolensk (photo by [nowarmetro](#))



Figure Appendix 3.9 Food shop '*Putin kills*' 2022



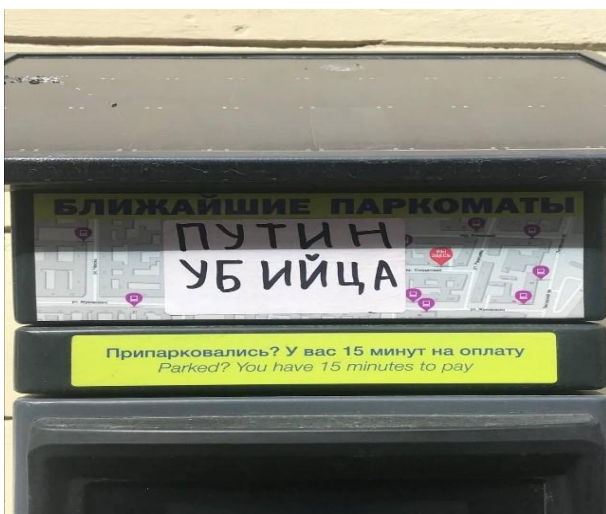
Figure Appendix 3.10 6 August 2022, Khabarovsk (photo by [nowarmetro](#))



Figure Appendix 3.11 'Zevil has revived. No War. No Putin' 6 June 2022, Voronezh (photo by [vesna](#))



Figure Appendix 3.12 'A life for the tsar' 2022 (photo by [theins.ru](#))



Appendix Figure 3.13 Parking meter. 'Putin is murderer' 3 May 2022, Saint Petersburg (photo by [novarmetro](#));



Appendix Figure 3.14 'Putin is war criminal' 4 October 2022, Yekaterinburg (photo by [nowarmetro](#))



Appendix Figure 3.15 'Putin is scum' 27 April 2022, Krasnodar (photo by [Doxa](#))



Appendix Figure 3.16 *'Putin behind bars'*. 2 July 2022, Yekaterinburg (photo by [kommersant.ru](https://kommersant.ru))



Appendix Figure 3.17 *'FasciZm is already here. No to the War'* 15 August 2022, Moscow (photo by [khp.org](https://khp.org))



Figure Appendix 3.18 *'It did not seem to me'* 11 June 2022, Moscow (photo by [yesna](https://yesna.com))



Figure Appendix 3.19 Figure Gelya Markizova with Stalin 1936 (photo by [bessmertnybarak.ru](https://www.bessmertnybarak.ru))



Figure Appendix 3.20 'Drive the killer off the throne' 6 May 2022, Bryansk (photo by [nowarmetro](https://www.nowarmetro.com))



Figure Appendix 3.21 'Shall we tear off Putin's head' 2 August 2022, Togliatti (photo by [nowarmetro](https://www.nowarmetro.com))



Another type of adusting which is beyond the scope of this work involves creating spatial symbolic memorials across Russia to honour the Ukrainian victims of war. At sites the activists display the photos of the destruction caused by Russia in Ukraine, leave behind children's clothing with the number of kids being killed, Orthodox crosses, toys soaked in red paint symbolising death. After the Bucha massacre, crosses inscribed with 'Bucha' and toys with severed limbs and red paint representing the blood of the victims were installed in residential areas and maternity hospitals. These objects aim to encourage reflection on the ongoing events in Ukraine. However, they also challenge the resurgence of false notions of duty among Russians towards the state by emphasising that Russia is not equivalent to Putin and that the entire country is responsible for the war crimes committed in the name of the Russian people who are even afraid to utter the word 'war'.



Figure Appendix 3.21

6 September 2022 Saint Petersburg (photo by [paperpaper](#))



Figure Appendix 3.22

15 May 2022 Russia, city unknown (photo by [globalvoices.org](#)) The installation of a baby bodysuit states the date of death of a three-month-old girl, her mother, and her grandmother during the bombing of Odesa, Ukraine, by the Russian military

## Appendix 4: Performance Protests



Figure Appendix 4.1 Performance by Anna Anisimova, 2 May 2022, Saint Petersburg (photo by [Radio Liberty](#))

Another performance related to the loudness of silence was made by a protester in Saint-Petersburg Anna Anisimova (Appendix Figure 4.1). The girl bounded her arms and chained herself near the subway entrance in front of a TV set, broadcasting the main propaganda program hosted by the Kremlin's voice- Vladimir Solovyov. The chaining symbolises omnipresent propaganda brainwashing forced upon Russians by the regime. A gag in the protester's mouth manifests limits of her self-expression as a human being.

The liminality of this form of resistance has manifested in its legal, behavioural and discursive ambiguity due to a visual apparent absurdity. For example, as a reflection on the theme of censorship and war, a performance with a sign language, made by Tatyana Sukhareva on a Red Square in Moscow (Appendix Figure 4.2 ) demonstrated an act of a preventive sacrifice of a voice. By symbolically submitting to accept silence as the only way of communication, the protester tried on a scapegoat role of a deaf person. In her sign performance, Sukhareva said: 'My voice has been taken away, but I have to scream. No war'.



Figure Appendix 4.2 Performance Expression. Tatyana Sukhareva, Moscow 2022 ( photo by [syg.ma](https://www.syg.ma))

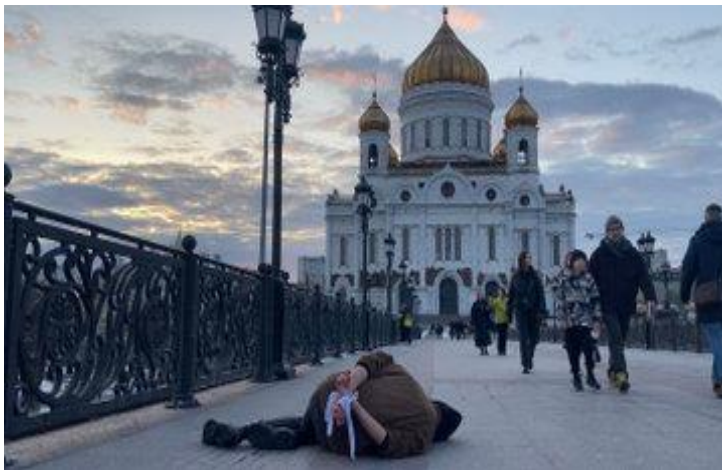


Figure Appendix 4.3 Performance Bucha-Moscow 5 April 2022, Moscow (photo by [apostrophe.ua](https://www.apostrophe.ua))

The theme of Bucha massacre and bare life has been the key for the most protesters. In memory of those killed in Ukraine, an anonymous activist in Moscow put a black bag over his head and lied down on the ground with his hands tied with a white ribbon, like dead people in Bucha. The dying-in performance aimed to raise the awareness among Russian people about war crimes committed by the Russian troops in Ukraine. The activist repeated the performance in several landmark places in Moscow. The performance recalls the idea of Agamben's homo sacer', when a person is being exposed to bare life and dehumanisation.

## Appendix 5: Theme “Unjust War”

The slogans from this group comprise the following key sub-themes:

**A no-reason war. Denouncing the myth that it is a ‘special military operation’ rather than an offensive.**

**Slogans:** *"Wake up, Russia!", "When will you ask them directly 'What are we fighting for?', 'For whom are we fighting?', 'Wives and Mothers, Stop the War!'", "We are all hostages of an imperialist, violent and provocative policy", "A no-reason war", "A small victorious prick", "They fought for their country. And we?", "You cannot prettify war", "40,000 killed, 100,000 wounded. What for?", "Don't die for yachts and palaces", "What are you willing to turn into nuclear ash for?", "Z - for the murders of children, V - we are fighting for Putin's palace" etc.*

**Condemning the belief in external enemies and the notion that peace in Russia can only be maintained through the war in Ukraine. Debunking the myth of Nazism in Ukraine and the need to defend the Russian population.**

**Slogans:** *"Fighting for peace is like screwing for virginity", "I do not believe this will help to Children of Donbass", "FasciZm is already here. No to the War", "Are you aware that fascism exists in the Russian Federation?", "We ourselves are the fascists", "Bombing for peace is not acceptable", "My country, you've lost your mind. Ukraine, forgive me for our aggression", "Russians standing up against war", "Begin the process of denazification with yourself" etc.*

**Violence and mass casualties among civilians in Ukraine, while countering the myth of Russia being on the side of ‘goodness’.**

**Slogans:** *"Thousands of innocent civilians killed in Bucha, Mariupol, Kherson. No to war!", "In Mariupol, there is a humanitarian catastrophe. Stop the war", "Russian soldiers are raping and killing Ukrainian women right now. Stop this war!", "During the 33 days of the special operation to save Donbass, more civilians have died than in the 1150 days before the start of this operation. Do you want to continue?", "Hero cities: Kiev, Odessa, Sevastopol, Kerch. Stop turning cities into ruins!" etc.*

**Deadlock for Russia. Debunking the myth of the 'Russian special path' and the 'Russian world'.**

**Slogans:** *“Peter the Great opened a window on Europe. Is Putin nailing it shut?”*, *“The Russia’s presence in Ukraine represents an assault on humanity and compassion. Our offspring will bear the cost of the Ukrainian conflict”*, *“Reject the invasive, delusional war, the covert mission that brought dishonour to my motherland”*, *“Conflict affects all. Bereavement, bleak prospects, Russia - a nation of pariahs”*, *“Is shedding blood and chaos in exchange for one's own existence the epitome of the Russian ideal?”* etc.

**The assertion of Ukraine's territorial integrity. The dispelling of the myth that Ukraine is a part of Russia.**

**Slogans:** *"Ukraine is sovereign. No to war"*, *"Russian occupation forces - get out of Ukraine"*, *"Attention! Kherson is not ours! No to war"*, *"War with Ukraine = ordinary fascism"*, *"And when you give your last penny for passage, remember how good it is that Crimea is still ours!"*, *"Crimea is not ours!"*, *"MARIUPOL IS UKRAINE"*.

## **Appendix 6: Theme “New Military-tinged Ideology”**

The slogans from this group comprise the following key sub-themes:

**Sacrificing lives in the name of the state. Debunking the myth of the necessity of creating a cult of country heroes.**

*“Everything is according to plan. We are on the way to heaven”, “It's better for the youth to love, not to fight, not to kill / Not a gun, but to hold maiden hands”, “The Zinc is Ours”, “And did you stand up to defend the ugly Motherland?”, “The Motherland is not the president's backside”, “I demand to stop imperial militarism”, “15,000 dead soldiers is more than in two Chechen wars”, “No to mobilisation”, ‘Demanding Russia's de-communicization’, ‘We are Fascists’, ‘Putinism is Fascism’, ‘3 signs of fascism - rallying against designated common enemies’, ‘imposed propaganda of patriotism’ etc.*

**New patriotic symbolism: Z-floating signifier.**

*‘FrenZZZy’, ‘Leningrad does not ZZieg heil’, ‘Zevil’, “In the kindergarten today, they drew the letter Z”, “Goryachy Klyuch does not do the Zieg heil”, “Z - Evil!”, “We are against Evil/Z”, ‘FasciZm will perish’ etc.*

**Propaganda lies.**

*“TeleVVZhion tells you lies”, “The Ministry of Lies”, “60 minutes of lies”, “Turn off the TV! Turn on your brain”, “Stop hating, turn off the television”, “Take a piece of independence. Read independent media”, “Lies 24”, “Wake up! They're fooling you!”, “The television is lying” etc.*

## Appendix 7: Theme “Denouncing Putin’s Dictatorship”

The slogans from this group comprise the following key sub-themes:

### **Putin vs Hitler metaphor:**

*'No to Putin no to swastika'; 'Putler Kaput!'; 'Putin=Fascism'; 'Beat fascism and putinism'; 'Putin Z Hitler shame' etc.*

### **Putin must face accountability:**

*'Putin to The Hague'; 'Stop the crimes of the Russian government'; 'Tribunal for Putin'; 'Putin's gang to Nuremberg'; 'KGB officer to resign'; 'It won't be possible to erase military crimes'; 'Putin called the military operation a war. I demand to hold him accountable'; 'We demand the de Putinization of Russia!'; 'Putin's War Crime.'; etc.*

### **Russia is a dictatorship:**

*'Death to dictatorship'; 'Do you know that fascism is in Russia?'; 'Putin's regime is a war. It is death. It is pain. It is torture'; 'The country of Putin's times is the years of silence about the most important things'; 'In Russia, there is a dictatorship!!! Isn't it time to take action??' etc;*

### **Dehumanising metaphors:**

*'Home for a bunker rat'; 'Putin - a crazy degenerate'; 'Putin scumbag'; 'You drag us to hell'; 'Russia is ruled by Satan'; 'Putin gobbled up the sun'; 'Putin eats children'; 'Demons trying to sow discord between brotherly peoples, stop it!' 'Putin, hands off Crimea!' '1939 Poland, 1940 the Baltic states, 1956 Budapest, 1968 Prague, 2014 Ukraine? No; 'Putin is dragging us to the bottom.'; 'Peace to Ukraine. Sanity, horror, shame, repentance to Russia'. Hell to Putin.'; 'Bloodthirsty Putin kills people! This blood is on our hands too. We are responsible for every killed person. Fuck war'.etc..*

## Appendix 8: Data Sources

For 2014 there were used the following web sites:

<https://foto-programmer.livejournal.com/11497.html>

<https://www.forbes.ru/sobytiya-photogallery/obshchestvo/268243-antivoennyi-marshrut-v-moskve-proshel-marsh-mira>

[https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/photo/marsh\\_mira.shtml?p=main&photo\\_num=13](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/photo/marsh_mira.shtml?p=main&photo_num=13)

<https://ed-glezin.livejournal.com/725436.html>

<https://public.fotki.com/Ed-Glezin/84124/2014-03-15---/dscn0399.html#media>

For 2022 there were used mostly Telegram channels:

<https://t.me/nowarmetro>; [@vesna\\_democrat](https://t.me/@vesna_democrat); [@OvdInfoLive](https://t.me/@OvdInfoLive); <https://activatica.org/>;  
<https://t.me/s/sotaproject>; [t.me/fontankaspb](https://t.me/t.me/fontankaspb); [t.me/holodmedia](https://t.me/t.me/holodmedia); [t.me/wakeup\\_russia](https://t.me/t.me/wakeup_russia);  
[t.me/femagainstwar](https://t.me/t.me/femagainstwar); [t.me/moskvaprotiv11](https://t.me/t.me/moskvaprotiv11); [svoboda.org](https://svoboda.org); [remap- ru. com](https://remap-ru.com) (has been recently blocked); [medusa.io](https://medusa.io); [khpg.org](https://khpg.org);