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RUSSIAN ANTI-WAR RAP MUSIC IN RESPONSE TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE: CREATIVITY MEETS JOURNALISM

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian rap music has become one of the most powerful tools of artistic resistance, with anti-war songs emerging as both cultural protest and a new form of non-fiction narrative. Among the most notable voices is the Kasta band and one of its members, Vladi, acting also as an independent artist, whose works blend elements of satire, lyrical self-expression, and journalistic testimony. These songs not only articulate personal perspectives on the war but also document war crimes committed by Putin's regime, turning rap lyrics into vehicles of cultural memory and protest journalism. The purpose of this study is to examine Russian anti-war rap after 2022 as a hybrid phenomenon at the intersection of art and reportage. The research addresses key questions: How do artists, like the members of Kasta, use satire and lyrical innovation to oppose the war? In what ways do their songs function as non-fiction, documenting social reality under conditions of censorship? How does their work influence public perception of the war in both Russia and abroad? The analysis will focus on the lyrics of Kasta's album "Новинки зарубежного рэпа" (2024) and Vladi's "Длится февраль" (2022), supplemented by critical reviews. The method of close reading will be combined with discourse analysis of media reactions and social networks. By analyzing the case of Russian rap music, this research sheds light on the potential of music to serve simultaneously as art and as a form of political journalism. It also highlights the broader role of cultural resistance in times of war and repression.

Keywords: Russian rap music, Kasta, satire, Vladi, cultural resistance

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a considerable number of Russian musicians, singers, and songwriters have taken a clear anti-war stance, openly criticizing Putin's authoritarian regime. Many faced immediate consequences: their concerts and festival appearances were cancelled, they were branded "traitors," blacklisted by government agencies, and subjected to coordinated online harassment by bots and self-styled "patriots." As a result, many artists have chosen to leave Russia as soon as possible, seeking the freedom to voice their anti-war and anti-regime views without the threat of censorship or legal persecution. This decision has often come in contrast to their peers who, under pressure, have been compelled to change their position, publicly repent, and even perform in the occupied territories of Ukraine.

It is no coincidence that Russian musicians have come to play a central role for anti-war Russians and those opposing Putinism, acting as prominent and influential voices of dissent. Since February 2022, a substantial body of musical and lyrical work has emerged — texts and compositions that document the war with striking journalistic clarity and an explicitly critical stance. These works seek not only to record current events but also to shape public perception and inspire reflection on the war. Collectively, they constitute a unique phenomenon: a broad, genuinely popular pacifist narrative that may be unprecedented in Russian-speaking culture. In many ways, it recalls the American protest songs of the Vietnam War era,¹ as well as other traditions of “singing resistance” and revolutionary music from the 20th and 21st centuries across various countries.² While this movement has only recently begun to attract scholarly attention, some analyses of the phenomenon are already available.³

Russian anti-war songs represent both creative re-imagining of tragic events and unique form of journalism. These musical and lyrical works not only reflect the personal experiences of their creators but also document war crimes committed by Putin’s regime and spread protest sentiments in popular and accessible forms. However, many music critics view this blending of genres with scepticism, claiming that overly journalistic content kills musical creativity.⁴

The goal of this paper is to analyze Russian anti-war rap texts that emerged in response to the war in Ukraine, focusing on their role as both a creative and journalistic phenomenon. Rap music has traditionally addressed social injustice. This study aims to reveal how

¹ N. Clegg, *Anti-Vietnam War Protest Music*, in: E. Rojas, Eunice, L. Michie (eds.), *Sounds of Resistance: The Role of Music in Multicultural Activism*, Praeger, Westport 2013, pp. 145–161.

² See: A. Brokaw, M. Brokaw, *Identity Marketing: The Case of the Singing Revolution*, “Journal of Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing” 2001, no. 8/4, pp. 17–29; M. Payerhin, *This Rocks Will Roll. Songs and Resistance in Communist Poland*, in: E. Rojas, Eunice, L. Michie (eds.), *Sounds of Resistance: The Role of Music in Multicultural Activism*, Praeger, Westport 2013, pp. 291–310.

³ See: K. Vorontsova, *Русская песенная лирика как антивоенный манифест: образный и тематический инструментарий “Года войны 22/23”*, “Przegląd Rusycystyczny” 2025, no. 1 (189), pp. 215–232; M. Заговора, А. Виленская, *Антивоенная музыка*, <https://antivoennaya-muzyka.simplecast.com> (27.12.2025).

⁴ Н. Овчинников, *Новый альбом “Касты” — это не музыка, а публицистика*, 10.09.2024, <https://holod.media/2024/09/10/u-gruppy-kasta-vyshel-novyi-albom/> (01.09.2025).

Russian anti-war rappers deform genres and manifest the journalistic aspect in their songs. The main focus will be on the texts written and performed by the group Kasta from Rostov-on-Don, one of the longest-running and most recognizable projects on the Russian-language hip-hop scene. The material for analysis will include the lyrics from their newest album *Новинки зарубежного рэпа* (2024, Foreign Rap Novelties) and the solo project *Длится февраль* (2022, February Lasts) of one of its members, Vladi. The context of their creation and reception will also be considered.

**RAP AS THE SOUNDTRACK OF STRUGGLE:
ADDRESSING SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND GIVING VOICE TO THE MARGINALIZED**

Since its inception, hip-hop culture has occupied the position of the voice of minorities and lower classes. Born in the United States, within the African American community of the South, rap expressed the emotions of those facing poverty, drugs, crime, social insecurity, and the loss of loved ones.⁵ It often served as the only socially acceptable way for black cisgender men to express their pain.⁶ In other cultures, countries, and languages, rap remained a way to verbalize the common problems of marginalized and oppressed communities (for example, immigrants and women in Germany⁷ or opposition-minded youth in Arab countries⁸).

Interestingly, when directly asked about politics in their music, many rappers strongly reject the idea of linking their lyrics with political agendas although, as Zbigniew Kowalewski argues, the rap cre-

⁵ C. Young, N.B. Price, *Anthem of Perseverance: How Southern Rap Sustains Me*, "Southern Cultures" 2025, vol. 31/2, p. 36–45.

⁶ See: R.F. Jamison, *The Relationship between African Self-Consciousness, Cultural Misorientation, Hypermasculinity, and Rap Music Preference*, "Journal of African American Studies" 2006, no. 9 (4), pp. 45–60; D. Herd, *Conflicting Paradigms on Gender and Sexuality in Rap Music: A Systematic Review*, "Sexuality and Culture" 2014, no. 19 (3), pp. 577–89; J.A.Y. Dei-Sharpe, M. Lafrance, "Say You'll Never Ever Leave from Beside Me": *Black Masculinity and Emotional Expression in Mainstream Rap*, in: *The Forgotten Realities of Men. Critical Reflections on Masculinity in Contemporary Society*, UBC Press, Vancouver 2025, pp. 297–314.

⁷ F.D. Yesilbas, M.D. Witte, *German Female Rap: Crisis Management of Socially Disadvantaged Female Adolescents*, "American Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities" 2025, no. 10/1, pp. 76–89.

⁸ R. El Zein, *Filling the Head: Listening to Rap in Arabic*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2025.

ated by Black youth from urban ghettos has always accompanied the Black liberation movement. Rappers sparked political storms in the media and drew upon themselves the wrath of candidates competing for the presidential office.⁹

In Russia, however, this situation is specific, and one may even argue that almost from the beginning of Russian hip-hop its performers drew heavily on journalism and on the tradition of satirical Russian literature, often addressing sharp political themes. Some scholars interpret Russian rap stage as “the culture of mass verbal self-expression,” with “the sharpness of social awareness, the response to current events and public sentiments, and a critical attitude.”¹⁰ After a relatively brief period in the 1990s and early 2000s when humorous genres and lyrics about hedonism and parties were predominant (by such bands as Diskoteka Avariya, Detsl, and others), Russophone rappers shifted to depict the social outskirts and provincial pathology. Hip-hop artists vocally responded to the transformation of the Russian Federation into a militarized authoritarian state, the curtailing of freedom of speech, the discrediting of elections, and the events of 2014.¹¹ At the same time, there was always a relatively large group of pro-Kremlin rappers (Basta, Husky) supporting the official policy of Putinism. February 24, 2022, did not change this dynamic on a global scale; it only deepened the divide between the two camps. Anti-war rappers continue to tour abroad, raising funds for Ukrainian refugees and creating albums that, according to music critics, “don’t just experience the trauma but chew it up, killing the music in favor of journalistic appeal.”¹²

In their view, the Russian-language anti-war music scene—like the pro-war scene within Russia—is going through a period of stagnation and the most severe crisis in its history. There is a growing

⁹ See: Z. Kowalewski, *Między Malcolmem X a subkulturą gangową. Naród Islamu w czarnej Ameryce*, Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, Warszawa 2020, pp. 17–184.

¹⁰ See: В. Карпушкин, Т. Шмелева, *Не путай комическое и каноническое: креатив на ровном месте*, in: *Лингвистика креатива–4*, Уральский государственный педагогический университет, Екатеринбург 2018, p. 106. All Russian-language quotations have been translated into English by the author of the article, unless otherwise indicated.

¹¹ See: A. Denisova, A. Herasimenka, *How Russian Rap on YouTube Advances Alternative Political Deliberation: Hegemony, Counter-Hegemony, and Emerging Resistant Publics*, “Social Media + Society” 2019, no. 5/2.

¹² Н. Овчинников, *Новый альбом “Касты”...*

tendency to focus on documenting events and war crimes rather than engaging in a creative processing of collective trauma or exploring possible ways out of it. Increasingly often, musicians—especially rappers, due to the text-centered nature of their work—take on the role of journalists or public commentators. As a result, the original genre structures and artistic tools are being distorted or even eliminated altogether.

RAP AS EMERGING JOURNALISM: A THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The growing recognition of rap as a form of civic communication, political commentary, and social testimony can be productively situated within several complementary methodological traditions: media linguistics, discourse analysis, digital media studies, and the sociology of news production. Together, these approaches allow to conceptualize rap not merely as a musical genre but as a media practice and a journalistic mode of reporting lived realities which is extremely important after 2022.

A useful starting point is the field of media linguistics, which provides tools for analyzing linguistic forms, stylistic features, and discursive strategies within media environments. For instance, Martin Montgomery's *Language, Media and Culture* (2018) offers a comprehensive mapping of key concepts, such as "authenticity," "voice," and "mediatization," that are essential for understanding how rap operates within contemporary communication.¹³ Similarly, *Language and Media* (Jones et al. 2020) situate media texts within digital cultures, emphasizing multimodality, audience interaction, platform-specific forms and thus adopting an analytical perspective particularly relevant for rap circulating via streaming services, YouTube and social media.¹⁴

Rap's political potency may be particularly studied through the prism of critical discourse analysis. Norman Fairclough's foundational works (1989, 1995) articulate the ways in which discourse functions as a social practice that constructs power relations and challenges he-

¹³ M. Montgomery, *Language, Media and Culture. The Key Concepts*, Routledge, London 2018.

¹⁴ R. Jones, S. Jaworska, E. Aslan, *Language and Media. A Resource Book for Students*, Routledge, London 2020.

gemonic narratives.¹⁵ Applied to rap lyrics, this framework highlights how artists assume journalistic roles by documenting structural violence, racial inequalities, police brutality, and the lived experience of marginalized communities.

Research on music as journalism has emerged more recently and shows how rap functions as a communicative practice shaped by digital platforms and participatory audiences. *The Hip Hop & Obama Reader* by Travis L. Gosa and Erik Nielson (2015) demonstrates that rap often performs functions similar to political journalism—framing public debates, offering policy critique, and shaping civic identities.¹⁶ Murray Forman’s *The ‘Hood Comes First* (2002) and Jeff Chang’s *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* (2005) provide historical context for rap as a narrative medium rooted in social reportage.¹⁷

Finally, scholarship on linguistic creativity and oral narrative, including Adam Bradley’s *Book of Rhymes* (2017) and sociolinguistic studies of hip-hop, highlights rap’s complex interplay of rhetoric, storytelling, and real-time sociopolitical observation, reinforcing its ties to investigative and testimonial genres.¹⁸

Collectively, these works demonstrate that rap can be interpreted as a form of grassroots journalism, offering narrative depth, social critique, and first-person testimony often absent from mainstream media. They also provide the conceptual apparatus necessary for analyzing rap within the broader field of media communication, discourse practices, and contemporary digital cultures.

KASTA

Kasta is one of the most significant and influential phenomena in the history of Russian-language rap, and the first such band from

¹⁵ N. Fairclough, *Language and Power*, Longman, London 1989; N. Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, Edward Arnold Publishers, London 1995.

¹⁶ T. L. Gosa, E. Nielson, *The Hip Hop & Obama Reader*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015.

¹⁷ M. Forman, *The ‘Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop*, Wesleyan University Press, Wesleyan 2002; J. Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, St. Martin’s Press, New York 2006.

¹⁸ A. Bradley, *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop*, Basic Books, New York 2017; H. Samy Alim, A. Ibrahim, A. Pennycook (eds.), *Global Linguistic Flows. Hip-Hop Cultures, Youth Identities and the Politics of Language*, Routledge, New York 2009.

the provincial areas of the Russian Federation which successfully broke into the mainstream.¹⁹ Founded in Rostov-on-Don in the mid-1990s, it became a key representative of the so-called “Southern school” or “Southern style” of Russian hip-hop (the analogy for American Southern school), characterized by its distinctive rhythm, accent, and themes closely connected to non-metropolitan and “real” Russia.²⁰ The group consists of Vladi (Vladislav Leshkevich), Shym (Mikhail Epifanov), Khamil (Andrey Pasechny), and Zmey (Andrey Mishenin). Vladi is responsible for the music, while each member writes their own lyrics. The members have also released solo projects but have maintained active participation in the group, which is why Kasta remains one of the longest-lasting musical collectives in contemporary Russia.

From the very beginning, the group stood out for its text-centered approach: their work emphasizes meaning, wordplay, precise rhymes, and irony. Critics have argued that the Kasta was the first collective showing Russian-language rap as a social phenomenon far beyond teenage culture,²¹ because, drawing on the heritage of the original American rap culture, the band always focused on serious social issues and, at the same time, used artistic devices which are typical of “high poetry,” such as intertexts,²² lyrical masks or bricolages.

Over more than two decades, Kasta has earned a cult status: their albums, especially their debut *Громче воды, выше травы* (2002, Noisier than Water, Taller than Grass), are considered classics of Russian rap.²³ They have repeatedly won music awards and received recognition from both audiences and critics. Kasta’s music serves an important cultural function. It is not only entertaining but also

¹⁹ 50 главных событий в русском рэпе: Каста, 11.11.2015, <https://the-flow.ru/beatsnvibes/50-sobitij-10> (01.09.2025).

²⁰ С. Четверухин, *Субкультура. Не грози южному центру*, “ОМ” 2002, no. 62, pp. 94–98, 139; *Интервью Касты для Southrap.ru (Урбания 2005, Ростов)*, 13.08.2005. http://southrap.ru/page.php?al=interview_kasta_su05 (01.09.2025).

²¹ Б. Барабанов, *Говорит улица*, 2.03.2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/2022-07-25/https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1878895> (01.09.2025).

²² М. Крылова, *Древнерусская литература как источник для рэп-культуры: анализ одной песни группы ‘Каста’*, “Русская рок-поэзия: текст и контекст” 2017, no. 17, pp. 295–301.

²³ А. Никитин, Р. Муннибаев, *Русский рэп: главное*, 16.01.2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200516213554/>; http://os.colta.ru/music_modern/projects/95/details/1040/ (01.09.2025).

shapes a critical attitude towards reality, allowing people from different social layers to see their own experiences reflected. Even before the members began openly addressing political topics, Kasta was perceived as a voice of social protest, the voice of those who feel deceived, ignored, or oppressed by the system.

After the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the group members openly took an anti-war stance. Vladi released a solo anti-war album, described by Lev Galkin as the most uncompromising album about the war,²⁴ titled *Длится февраль* (2022), in which he condemned aggression and spoke about the war plainly and directly. Even the title was symbolic and embodies the concept of “frozen time,” liminal period between the old world before and the new one after the beginning of the full-scale military actions in Ukraine. This motive of never-ending February appears repeatedly in the lyrics of anti-war Russian musicians as a representation of trauma;²⁵ Vladi just uses the common cultural code understood by people with the same political views. The striking simplicity of the texts, even at the expense of artistic flourish, was a conscious choice by the author, reflecting the bluntness and cynicism of war and the directness of questions it poses to society.

All the members of Kasta supported the anti-war stance and the increased pressure from authorities, censorship and threats from pro-government groups, forced them to leave Russia to continue their creative work in exile (Vladi lives in Cyprus, Shym and Khamil in Portugal, and Zmey in Turkey) sharing and describing the destiny of Russian migrants after 2022.

Abroad, Kasta has maintained its influence and continued to work on musical and social projects, becoming an important voice of the Russian-speaking anti-war cultural resistance. Their recent work reflects the pain of loss, internal conflicts, and resilience of spirit, becoming a form of expressing civic stance and cultural mobilization.

²⁴ Л. Ганкин, “Длится февраль” Влади — самый бескомпромиссный альбом о войне, 6.01.2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230115173249/>; <https://meduza.io/feature/2023/01/06/dlitsya-fevral-vladi-samy-beskompromissnyy-albom-o-voyne-v-nem-dostalos-vsem-i-horoshim-russkim-i-patriotam> (01.09.2025).

²⁵ See: K. Vorontsova, *Русская песенная лирика...*

НОВИНКИ ЗАРУБЕЖНОГО РЭПА AS A JOURNALISTIC ALBUM IN EXILE

The album *Новинки зарубежного рэпа* (2024) is a poignant and self-ironic artistic gesture by artists in exile. Comprising fifteen tracks, it offers a powerful commentary on the post-2022 geopolitical landscape and the traumatic experience of being a Russian citizen during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Kasta's rapping as well as journalistic texts stand at the intersection of opinion writing, literature, and social commentary. It aims not only to inform but to influence public opinion, analyze social phenomena, and shape attitudes toward contemporary events. Like journalism, it is no doubt anchored in the present moment, directly responding to urgent issues in politics, society, and culture.²⁶

When analyzed through the lens of traditional journalistic genres, *Новинки зарубежного рэпа* demonstrates a rich intertextual dialogue with commentary and the following essayistic genres :

1) The opinion column: its traces are evident in tracks like *Владимирская Русь* (Vladimir's Rus'), *Этого больше не будет* (This Will Not Happen Again), and *По-разному* (It Depends), where the lyrical subject articulates a clear civic position and addresses the audience directly.

2) The political essay: present in *Кровопровод "Дружба"* (The "Druzhba" Blood-Conducting Pipeline) and *Космос и говно* (Space and Shit), which blends metaphor with a biting critique of Russia's imperial and militaristic ideology, and propaganda discourse.

3) Analytical articles: songs like *Степень ватности* (Degree of vatnost') reflect a sociological tone, attempting to diagnose and measure ideologically induced conformity.

4) Social commentary: present in tracks such as *Священный мясокомбинат* (Venerable Slaughter Facility), *Ссылка Вконтакте* (A link to VK.com), *ОбманУтый* (DeceivEd), and *Зима снится* (Dreaming of Winter) offer sometimes ironic, sometimes bitter reflections on post-Soviet society, the propaganda state, and everyday violence.

5) Reportage with a subjective tone: especially visible in *Эмигрант эмигранту* (An Emigrant to an Emigrant), *Зима снится*, and *Владимирская Русь*, which document life in exile with emotional and autobiographical depth.

²⁶ N. Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, Edward Arnold Publishers, London 1995, pp. 44–52.

6) Reflective or personal essays (with civic focus): these emerge in *Эмигрант эмигранту*, *Созвон* (Call), *Пионерская правда* (Pioneer's Truth), *Этого больше не будет*, *По-разному*, and *Багаж* (Baggage), where the artists grapple with personal transformation, responsibility, and belonging.

A significant portion of the album revolves around the philosophical and ideological rift between those who have left Russia (уехавшие) and those who have stayed (оставшиеся). In this context, an especially compelling device in Kasta's latest album is the self-quotation of their early track *На порядок выше* (2001, A Notch Higher) and its conceptual rethinking as a leitmotif: "Не забывай свои корни, помни / Есть вещи на порядок выше, слышишь?"²⁷ The original 2001 song carried no explicit political message and focused instead on nostalgia for one's hometown and the irreplaceable sensations tied to familiar places. At the time, the lyrics made a firm and emotional claim: that a difficult life in Russia was preferable to a comfortable life "in the soulless abroad," away from home.

In contrast, the 2024 tracks *Владимирская Русь* and *Багаж* reintroduce the same iconic line from the early 2000s, but with the insertion of the adversative conjunction но/but — a subtle shift that dramatically alters the message: "Не забывай свои корни, но помни: / Есть вещи на порядок выше, стань хоть бездомным"²⁸; "Не забывай свои корни, но помни: / Есть вещи на порядок выше, слышишь?"²⁹ The refrain now suggests a more nuanced and conflicted position, prioritizing ethical clarity over loyalty to a place. The matured members of Kasta in 2024 adopt a resolute stance: to walk away from toxic ties with the homeland when they become morally destructive. This is a journalistic message, serving as a call to action. The lyrics assert that human decency and sanity are more important than blind attachment to a homeland engaged in bloody colonial wars and performative patriotism. In this way, the band repurposes their own cultural past to express a new, principled posi-

²⁷ Каста, *На порядок выше*, <https://genius.com/Kasta-higher-by-an-order-lyrics> (27.12.2025); "Don't forget your roots, remember: / There are things that are way more important, you hear?"

²⁸ Каста, *Владимирская Русь*, <https://genius.com/Kasta-vladimirskaya-rus-lyrics> (01.07.2025); "Don't forget your roots, but remember: There are things far above it all — even if you end up homeless."

²⁹ Каста, *Багаж*, <https://genius.com/Kasta-luggage-lyrics> (01.07.2025); "Don't forget your roots, but remember: / There are things that are way more important, you hear?"

tion—one that resonates with the trauma and moral urgency of the current moment.

However, the dominant perspective is that of migrants, combining homesickness for their native city of Rostov-on-Don (for instance, *Этого больше не будет* is entirely built on this feeling of nostalgia) with a moral commitment to distancing themselves from a toxic political and social environment.

In tracks depicting the stream-of-consciousness of the “average” pro-war Russian (*Ссылка Вконтакте, ОбманУтый, Космос и говно*), satire becomes a pronounced device. Here, humor serves not to humiliate those who stayed behind, but to offer therapeutic relief. It allows the lyrical subject to adopt the “mask” of the so-called *vatnik* (a derogatory term for staunch Kremlin loyalists) as a psychological coping mechanism in the face of propaganda and mass delusion. The album closes with *Сказка “Черная краска”* (A Tale of Black Paint), which departs from the journalistic discourse and ventures into the domain of the grotesque and the folklore. Modeled after traditional Slavic horror tales, its allegorical narrative becomes even more haunting when contextualized within the current sociopolitical reality.

In all Kasta’s recent texts one can observe a deliberate fusion of informative and expressive registers, characteristic of contemporary journalistic discourse. The structure of many tracks follows a consciously clear rhetorical progression from problem identification to analysis, and finally to a conclusion or implicit/explicit call to action (“Здравый смысл не уродуй ты / Несогласие храни чистым и нетронутым / Молчишь — молчи, но взамен протест копи в уме,”³⁰ “Друг, не слушай ты его — он херню несет / Старичье зовет на смерть тебя, и все / Заклинание и бред — плюнь на этот зов / У тебя есть жизнь, планы, цели, горизонт,”³¹ etc.). This mirrors the compositional logic of journalistic op-eds or civic essays.³²

³⁰ Каста, *Степень ватности*, <https://genius.com/Kasta-degree-of-wadding-lyrics> (01.07.2025); “Do not distort your common sense; / Keep your dissent pure and untouched. / If you stay silent — stay silent, but instead, keep your protest in mind, storing it within.”

³¹ Каста, *Кровопровод “Дружба”*, <https://genius.com/Kasta-blood-pipeline-friendship-lyrics> (01.07.2025); “Friend, don’t listen to him — he’s talking nonsense. / The old folk are calling you toward death, that’s all. / Their spell and rambling — spit on that call. / You have life, plans, goals, a horizon ahead.”

³² See: B. McNair, Brian, *News and Journalism in the UK*, Routledge, London 2009, pp. 15–34.

Like true journalists, the members of Kasta document reality, turning life itself into raw material for artistic interpretation. In this sense, their lyrics become a form of documentary poetics, capturing the atmosphere of an era shaped by trauma, propaganda, and resistance.

A striking example is found in the third verse of *Владимирская Русь*, written by Khamil, one of the members of the group. The very title of the track is intertextual: it simultaneously mocks Putin's Russia and references the figure of Vladimir the Baptizer³³—an image heavily instrumentalized by state propaganda. The song's refrain—"Дьявол вселился в мой дом / все поросло крестом"³⁴—suggests a disturbing inversion: graves instead of Christianity, the Devil instead of God.

Khamil's verse is constructed as an ironical collage of official messages from "Gosuslugi," the Russian state portal used for citizen-government communication. These mass-distributed bureaucratic notifications—sent to every registered citizen—become poetic material. They starkly juxtapose water and electricity meter readings with war updates and government projects in the occupied territories:

Заглянул в спам — ооо, Госуслуги
 Из земли тянутся ко мне костяные руки:
 "Служба по контракту: стрелок", двести четыре штуки
 Что-то мне мешает. Может, предрассудки?
 "День наступательных действий", восемь тыщ
 Дальше: "С днём рождения! Пусть ваша жизнь
 Будет полна любви и позитивных эмоций"
 "Сообщайте о террористической угрозе"
 "Волонтёрские программы в Новороссии"
 Так... показания счётчиков... о, ничёсе!
 "Предложить идею для развития России"
 Прикинь? Прямо у меня спросили
 "Поддержка рождаемости", "Диктант Победы"
 "Бесплатно: Z-поэзия русского лета"
 "Поздравьте бойцов СВО с 9 мая!"
 Ну, я вас поздравляю³⁵.

³³ Vladimir the Baptizer (Vladimir the Great) was the ruler of Kievan Rus who converted his people to Christianity in the 10th century.

³⁴ Каста, *Владимирская Русь*, <https://genius.com/Kasta-vladimirskaya-rus-lyrics> (01.07.2025); "The devil has entered my home / — everything is overgrown with the cross."

³⁵ Ibid. "I checked my spam — оооh, Gosuslugi. / From the ground bone hands are reaching out to me: / 'Contracted military service: rifleman,' two hundred and four of them. / Something is stopping me. Maybe prejudice? / 'Offensive Day,' eight thousand. / Next: 'Happy birthday! May your life / be full of love and positive

In doing so, Kasta lays bare the cognitive dissonance of daily life in authoritarian Russia, where banal administrative language coexists with violence, repression, and empire-building. The verse is both hyperrealistic and deeply ironic, exposing the absurdity and horror embedded in the state's normalization of war.

While it is not possible to analyze all Kasta's political lyrics within the scope of a single paper, certain conclusions can nevertheless be drawn about the journalistic nature of their 2024 album. Typical features of journalistic language, which are emblematic of both journalistic writing and Kasta's lyrical style, include the frequent use of rhetorical questions, cultural and political allusions, intertextual references (including mentioned self-quotations), and emotionally charged vocabulary (i.e. inhuman metaphors and neologisms for the war like "Кровопрод Дружба"³⁶ or "я разумный полуфабрикат / мы священный мясокомбинат"³⁷). Undeniably, the persuasive intent outweighs any aspiration toward neutrality. What emerges is a powerful emphasis on narrative framing and the use of cultural codes, positioning Kasta's rap not merely as musical expression, but as a form of civic commentary—a journalistic voice in a poetic form.

CONCLUSIONS

Periods of major global upheaval inevitably bring about tectonic shifts in culture, and mass culture often serves as the most sensitive mirror of these transformations. In contemporary Russia, especially after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, musicians with anti-war and opposing views have emerged as the dissidents of the Putin era. They articulate the emotional and ideological outlook

emotions.' / 'Report a terrorist threat.' / 'Volunteer programs in Novorossiia.' / 'Alright... meter readings... oh, wow!' / 'Submit an idea for the development of Russia.' / Can you imagine? They asked me directly. / 'Support for birth rates,' 'Victory Quiz,' / 'Free: Z-poetry of the Russian summer.' / 'Congratulate the servicemen of the Special Military Operation on May 9!' Well... congratulations from me to you."

³⁶ Каста, *Кровопрод Дружба*, <https://genius.com/Kasta-blood-pipeline-friendship-lyrics> (01.07.2025); "The "Druzhba" Blood-Conducting Pipeline."

³⁷ Каста, *Священный мясокомбинат*, <https://genius.com/Kasta-holy-meat-processing-lyrics> (01.07.2025); "I am a sentient piece of meat / we are a sacred slaughterhouse."

of an entire generation of anti-war Russians, speaking directly to large audiences in a shared language and collectively processing the trauma of witnessing the war.

In this context, rap — arguably the most literature-and text-driven musical genre — proves to be both a powerful tool for expression and a medium undergoing significant transformation. It increasingly departs from the conventions of lyrical poetry and shifts toward a journalistic agenda. The latest album by the Rostov-based group Kasta illustrates how journalistic techniques, such as satire, political metaphors, and direct calls to action, are actively employed to document a reality marked by violence, war crimes, and provincial decay.

Thematically, the album focuses almost entirely on urgent social and political issues, with only brief references to nostalgia for the artists' abandoned hometown. Yet even this nostalgic thread is re-framed as a starting point for social critique and moral reflection on the Putin's era, articulated through the rhetorical structures of journalistic writing.

The publication has been supported by a grant from the Philological Faculty under the Strategic Programme Excellence Initiative at Jagiellonian University.

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