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ART IN PROTEST DISCOURSES – ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE BELARUSIAN ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTEST MOVEMENT

ABSTRACT: In protest discourses the problem of using aesthetic and artistic elements lies in the centre of attention. The authors draw empirical material from the Belarusian protest movement, especially the anti-government protests of 2020. In the current study the problem of the use of aesthetic elements in protest discourses is considered in two aspects: 1) in the aspect of artistic activism, i.e. the involvement of artists in resistance activities; 2) in terms of the use of aesthetic speech acts in various forms of protest activity, i.e. as a special rhetorical tool with emphatic and persuasive function, but also as a means of expression with the satisfying function. As a result of this dichotomy, the article is divided into two parts. The authors point out that even though public art is not developed in Belarus (e.g. in the field of visual arts), aesthetic creativity is a very characteristic feature of both street poster discourses and forms of protest in the Internet.

KEYWORDS: pragmatics, discourse, protest, protest speech act, aesthetics, aesthetic speech act, art activism, carnivalization, Belarus

Introduction

A protest is a type of social activity which consists in expressing opposition to the actions of adversaries (officials, superiors, decision-makers, etc.) in symbolic forms (both verbal and non-verbal) and influencing them in order to force fair and socially accepted decisions. Pragmatically speaking, the essence of protest consists in determining adversaries' behaviour, so protest speech acts should be categorised as directives.

Consequently, it may seem unjustified (and perhaps even surprising) to raise the issue in question— after all, it is known that aesthetic speech acts have completely different pragmatic characteristics: their goal is to evoke an aesthetic experience in the addressee as a kind of emotional state (Kiklewicz | Przybyszewski 2021; 2022). Activities of the first type are interactive and assume conscious processing of pragmatic information and volitional, controlled decision-making by the recipient, while aesthetic speech acts are affective and largely self-directed. It explains the fact that acts of the first kind can be realised by means of lexical pragmatic exponents:

- (1) We strongly *protest* against Russian military attack against Ukraine and demand immediate withdrawal.

while acts of the second kind are usually realised without such exponents, and as a means of manifestation of the aesthetic intention are the (semantic and formal) characteristics of the locution and the characteristics of the context.

Despite the marked differences, contemporary protest discourses contain many aesthetic elements. Although they are not characteristic of written forms of protest in the relations “citizens – office” or “office – office”, i.e. various types of petitions,¹ they are widely present in mass street actions, as well as in the Internet. Artistic activism is a particularly noticeable phenomenon, and especially the use of the so-called street art by the protesters, which is extensively depicted in the literature (Pauwels 2009; Mitchel 2013; Werbner | Webb | Spellman-Poots 2014; Dulfano 2017; Favretto 2017; Veneti 2017; Hatuka 2018; Peters 2018; MacQuiston 2019; Reed 2019; Steciąg 2019; Dinerstein 2020; Jenzen | Erhart | Eslen-Zija 2020; Faulkner 2020; Morgan | McGarry 2020; Dibyokamal 2021; Gauffman 2021; Kryzhanoŭski 2021 et al.). M. Dragičević-Šešić (2013, 160) states that engaging artists in a culture of dissent fosters citizens’ critical reflection, but at the same time holds a lot of affirmative potential, especially in terms of promoting the idea of social justice and human rights. Moreover, S. Grotowska (2012, 15) adds that the direction of street art is created with ambitions to modify reality by the participation in the public debate.

The problem of the use of aesthetic elements in discourses of protest can be analysed from two perspectives: first, in the aspect of the above-mentioned artistic activism, i.e. the artists’ involvement in resistance activities; secondly, in terms of the use of aesthetic speech acts in various forms of protest activity – as a special rhetorical tool with the emphatic potential, but also as a means of expression. Taking these aspects into account, the article will be divided into two parts.

¹ The most popular website with online citizens’ petitions in Poland is <https://secure.avaaz.org>, established in the USA and available in 17 languages.

1. Artistic activism – public art – critical art

Social protests (especially mass anti-government protests), like other forms of social activity, are increasingly mediated. A. Usmanova (2006, 97) mentions that a characteristic feature of contemporary politics is the shift of the struggle for power into the area of the spiritual culture, which raises the importance of various types of media tools. As the researcher (2006) points out, no social campaign can succeed without the support of people with a significant cultural reputation. Usmanova (*ibidem*, 98) further argues that today the boundary between economic and cultural life is generally blurred. Between the first and the latter there is a set of mutual influences and dependencies: on the one hand, spiritual culture (including art) is an important factor in social practices (and it is defined as a way of acting, a way of life in this approach), as well as economic and political realities affect the way of life and the cultural tradition characteristic of a given society, on the other.

It means that the institution of artistic creators exists not only as a form of satisfying human hedonistic needs, but also that divisions arise regarding both the interpretation of these needs and the forms of their satisfaction depending on the social differentiation. Furthermore, Usmanova (*ibidem*, 99) points out that it is not only about the distinction between high and low culture, but also about the competition or struggle of various social groups conducted through culture. This fact justifies the notion of art as public space (see Kwon 2004, 5ff.), but also as concepts, such as social, public or participatory art (see Uchwanowicz-Rajecka 2015, 40).

On the one hand, culture is a means of legitimising social inequalities. It is expressed, among others, in the opposition of discourses and encratic and acratic languages (Barthes 1984). On the other hand, culture, as Usmanova emphasises, becomes a platform on which the forms of overcoming social inequalities are shaped: every revolution begins with a re-evaluation of social life. Works of art, regardless of the way they are used during protest discourses, play an important role in the creation of social awareness – awareness of the opposition, which is made possible due to the fact that artists, being most sensitive to social issues, articulate political, economic, demographic, existential problems, such as the problem of inequality or the problem of human rights violations.

The cultural factor is used by all sectors of the political system – both the ruling elites and the opposition. In totalitarian systems, the rulers do not limit themselves to repressive actions, but make every effort to perpetuate the values of the encratic culture. As a result, cultural sectors such as media, education and

the arts are involved for this purpose.² In this regard, Usmanova quotes Pierre Bourdieu's statement that the state has a monopoly on symbolic violence.

On the other hand, the opposition, not being able to use the tools of political struggle under the conditions of totalitarian repressive politics, more and more often reaches for symbolic tools – alternative (in relation to the discourses of power) cultural representations, which make up the concept of public art. Usmanova (ibidem, 103) uses the French term *détournement* to denote 'reinterpretation of aesthetic elements, their re-use in unusual contexts and functions'. In this way she shows the phenomenon of engaging artistic circles in political and resistance actions and undertakings.

In Poland, the concept of interpreting art from a socio-political perspective was developed by J. Zydorowicz (2005). The author distinguished between two concepts: engaged art and critical art. The first concept covers artistic circles that define themselves on the side of the system of power and cooperate with it, although, for example, T. Umerle (2011, 600) treats this concept more broadly: engaged literature is one that "increases our ability to sympathize with other people".³ Zydorowicz also discusses critical art focused on problematising socio-political reality (ibidem, 63). In turn, critical art (also referred to as public or reformist art) exists in various forms: both traditional (such as posters or murals)⁴ and new ones, created thanks to the Internet technologies. It is the Internet that gives the possibility of a wide presentation of alternative art, as well as art that is involved in social processes and confrontations, e.g. the portal 'Art in Protest',⁵ whose programmatic goal is to support artists who are victims of repression by totalitarian regimes. Dragičević-Šešić (2013, 160) points out that avant-garde forms of art, such as performance, are particularly useful in expressing political opposition – for many artists they are a way of showing civil disobedience, a protest against government policies and actions. The development of such forms of art is possible, e.g. thanks to the creation of independent, non-governmental cultural centres. In addition, S. Grotowska (2012, 14) observes that "street artists strive to function beyond the institutionalised world of culture, composed of galleries, museums, exhibitions, etc., which they treat as the antithesis of public space".

² In Belarus, one such tool of official propaganda is the International Festival of Arts (actually a pop music festival) "Slavic Bazaar in Vitebsk". This event is not only organised under the auspices of the state authorities, but its regular guest is also Alexander Lukashenko, who uses the event as an opportunity to improve his image and to promote Belarusian-Russian integration.

³ This would correspond to the notion of social art and inclusive art (see Niziołek 2015, 22).

⁴ The website The Art. Newspaper, for instance, contains information about a poster campaign in the US by the Chinese dissident artist Badiuca, whose work focuses on human rights violations in China. See: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/11/29/chinese-banksy-hits-miami-streets> (accessed: 7.01.2023).

⁵ <https://hrf.org/programs/art-in-protest/> (accessed: 7.01.2023).

Conversely, when art projects are state-funded, artists' freedom of political expression and creative freedom is generally limited. For example, on December 20, 2022, "Gazeta Polska Codziennie" published a critical review of *Smolensk Late Night Show* directed by Jakub Zalas at the Nowy Theatre in Łódź. The author of the review under the eloquent title *Theatrical beastliness in the performance about Smolensk* accuses the creators of the performance of mocking the victims of the Smolensk catastrophe even though the performance's budget is almost entirely subsidised by the City of Łódź.

The most radical form of artists' involvement in the discourse of protest is their direct participation in street actions. E. Sułek discusses the protests on the Ukrainian Maidan in 2013:⁶

Almost every day on the streets of Kiev there were happenings performed by artists and activists, including people [...] who for the first time showed this kind of creativity, provoked by an extreme socio-political situation (2021, 148).

[Prawie każdego dnia na ulicach Kijowa odbywały się happeningi w wykonaniu artystów i aktywistów, w tym osób, [...] które po raz pierwszy wykazały się tego rodzaju kreatywnością, sprowokowaną ekstremalną sytuacją społeczno-polityczną.]

However, the situation in Belarus differs from that in Ukraine. Usmanova (2006, 108ff.) states that public art does not exist in Belarus, and mentions the painter and performer Ales' Pushkin as the only "public" artist.⁷ The researcher explains this phenomenon by several factors, including: the pressure of censorship, preventing any innovative forms of art, as well as the striking immaturity of the Belarusian artistic community, the lack of social status of the artist and the lack of his communication with society. According to Usmanova, in Belarus art is understood primarily as a means of aesthetic expression, as well as a way of aesthetically ennobling the audience, but by no means as an instrument of cultural policy, or a method of communication capable of articulating the problems of violence, fear, discrimination, xenophobia, intolerance, etc.

The gloomy picture of the situation drawn by Usmanova reflects the reality before 2006, but in the following years the situation developed, and in the direction of intensifying artistic activism. One of the first acts of artistic opposition to Alexander Lukashenko's policy was the publication of a satirical poem in Belarusian, *Лука Мудзішчаў – прэзідэнт* 'Luka Mudzishchaŭ – president' written by Franciszek Vedz'mak-Lysahorski in the newspaper "Swaboda" in 1994.⁸ It was a variation

⁶ As K. Niziołek puts it, "the artist is completely dethroned and non-artists are allowed to work on equal terms" in the paradigm of inclusive art (2015, 51).

⁷ In 1999, Ales' Pushkin unloaded a wheelbarrow with fertilizer in front of the Presidential Administration building.

⁸ This is poet Nil Hilevich's pseudonym who revealed it in 2013.

on a frivolous poem from the second half of the 19th century, whose authorship is attributed to Ivan Barkov. The presentation of the president of Belarus as Luka Mudishchev was favoured by the convergence of the words *Luka* – *Lukashenko*, as well as the fact that Lukashenko was known for his numerous love affairs. Let's take the last stanza as an example:

(2) Над Беларусяй вецер сьвішча.
Пасохлі бульба і авёс.
Наш прэзыдэнт Лука Мудзішчаў
Садзіцца ў чорны членавоз.

[The wind whistles over Belarus.
Potatoes and oats dried up.
Our president Luka Mudzishchaŭ
Gets into a black vehicle to transport a member.]⁹

Starting from 1994, the “Lukashenkaŭskaya praŭda” and “Navinki” newspapers as well as other underground publications published satirical articles and poems about the first president of Belarus by authors such as Slavamir Adamovich, Valyancin Taras and Yaryla Pshanichny and others, although there were also many anonymous works.¹⁰ In November 1995 Slavamir Adamovich published the poem *Убей прэзідэнта!* ‘Kill the president!’, for which he spent ten months behind the bars of the KGB prison in Minsk. Moreover, in the article by A. Rasinski (2013), other testimonies of the resistance activity of Belarusian artists are also mentioned, for example the documentary *Ordinary President* directed by Yury Khashchavatsky, the animation *Multklub* by Aleh Minich, which is distributed in the Internet, or the satirical collection of songs *Народный прэзідэнт* ‘People’s President’. In addition, Lyavon Volski, a well-known rock musician and poet, one of the creators of the famous project *Народны альбом* ‘People’s Album’ (1997), publishes satirical anti-government poems in the Belarusian editorial office of Radio Svoboda, collected in the series *Saŭka and Hryshka* (Volski refers to the title of a Belarusian folk song). The texts are written in *trasianka*, which can be seen as a Lukashenko’s parody, who uses this form of a mixed language on a daily basis, also in official discourses. One of the examples is *Такіх не бяруць у касманаўты* ‘They are not fit to be astronauts’:

⁹ This publication contributed to the consolidation of this association in public opinion, and the nickname Лука ‘Luka’ became a generally used form of naming the president in colloquial communication.

¹⁰ For more on this see: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/787205.html> (accessed: 16.01.2023).

(3) Саўка:

Прыехаў да Пуціна друг Лукашэнка.
І па касмадруму хадзілі яны.
І хто-та сказаў із яго акружэньня:
– В ракету бы іх, хай ляцяць да Луны.

Грышка:

Такіх не бяруць у касманаўты.

Саўка:

І гродасьцьцю былі іх ліца заліты:
Мол, космас цяпер будзе нашым на раз!
І хто-та прамолвіў із Пуцінскай сьвіты:
– Уж лучшэ бы вы паляцелі на Марс!

Грышка:

Такіх не бяруць у касманаўты.

Саўка:

– Цяпер мы касьмічэскай будзем дзяржавай,
Адкрыты цяпер нам у космас пуці.
І хто-та сказаў із талпы праважатых:
– Давай, не трындзі, а скарэе ляці!

Разам:

Такіх не бяруць у касманаўты.

[Саўка:

Lukashenka came to visit his friend Putin.
They walked around the space centre.
Someone close to him said:
“Put them in a rocket, let them fly to the moon”.

Грышка:

They are not fit to be astronauts.

Саўка:

Their faces were full of pride:
From now on, space will be ours forever!
Suddenly, someone from Putin’s entourage spoke up:
“It would be better if you went to Mars!”

Грышка:

They are not fit to be astronauts.

Саўка:

“Now we’ll be a space nation,
The way to space is now open to us”.
And someone in the crowd said:
“Come on, don’t talk, fly faster!”

Together:

They are not fit to be astronauts.]



Fig. 1. Employees of the Yanka Kupala Theater in Minsk hand in their resignations to the Minister of Culture of Belarus, Yuriy Bondar ¹¹

Opposition to Lukashenko's regime was also expressed by members of the Union of Belarusian Writers – UBW (in Belarusian: *Саюз беларускіх пісьменнікаў*), which was abandoned by a group of members in 2005 to form an alternative *Саюз пісьменнікаў Беларусі*. It was an attempt to destroy the independent UBW which the authorities failed to tame. In 2020, during mass anti-government protests, the Union of Belarusian Writers issued an open appeal to the writing community *Enough violence, respect the will of the people!*, in which the Union condemned the brutal actions of the security forces against citizens. More than 200 Belarusian writers (Svyatlana Alexievich, Uladzimer Arloŭ, Lyavon Barshcheŭski, Henry Dalidovich, Andrei Khadanovich, Uladzimer Nekliaeŭ and others) signed the petition, which called for an end to mass repressions, a stop to ridiculing people who wanted change, and demanded that the authorities admit defeat. In October 2021, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus decided to liquidate UBW.

During the 2020 protests, other artistic circles also showed great public activity, and above all, the artists of the Yanka Kupala Theatre in Minsk. The director of the theatre, Pavel Latushka, supported by the actors, signed an open appeal to the residents, authorities and security forces, and the troupe suspended performances during the protests. In August 2020, Latushka was dismissed – as a sign of protest, 58 employees of the Theatre, including 36 actors, applied for dismissal. The Belarusian authorities banned actors from working in cultural institutions - the reason why the Independent Theatre Group Kupalaŭcy was founded in 2020, operating in the Internet and abroad. On October 8, 2022, the premiere of the Belarusian-language play *Рамантыка* 'Romanticism' (directed by Nikolai Pinigin) based on Adam Mickiewicz's *Ballades and Romances* took place on the stage of the Arnold Szyfman Polish Theatre in Warsaw.

¹¹ <https://culture.pl/ru/article/volga-babkova-beloruskiy-karnaval-pod-dulami-voennykh> (accessed: 16.01.2023).

During the 2020 Belarusian protests, artistic symbols were actively used, with one of the most recognized being the song by Russian rock musician Viktor Tsoi *Перемен!* ‘We demand Change!’, written in 1986. When it turned out that the authorities had banned Svyatlana Tsikhanouškaya’s pre-election rally in the People’s Friendship Park, the organizers decided to move the event to Kiev Square, where a family celebration Kaleidoscope of Creativity was held. It was decided to organize a flash mob there: at 19:00, Tsikhanouškaya’s supporters were supposed to raise their hands with white ribbons. Suddenly, DJs from the Youth Palace, who worked at the party, joined the action and instead of the program repertoire, they played the Tsoi’s song at exactly 19:00. As a result, the song began to be associated with the resistance against Lukashenko’s regime, and the words from the lyrics of the song:

(4) Перемен – требуют наши сердца!
‘Our hearts demand change!’

were later repeated many times by the protesters, they were also reproduced on posters. On one of the posters (Fig. 2) there is the slogan *Переменск*, created as a result of blend of two words: *Перемен* and *Менск* (the old name of Minsk, used until the 17th century), so it contains reminiscences to the Tsoi’s song.



Fig. 2. Slogan *Переменск* referring to the song by Viktor Tsoi¹²

Jacek Kaczmarski’s song *Mury* ‘Walls’, translated into Russian (*Стены рухнут*) and Belarusian (*Муры*), became another symbol of the protest. It was sung during the campaign of collecting signatures in support of Svyatlana Tsikhanouškaya. The candidate’s election rallies ended with a joint performance of this song, and during the singing, its recording performed by Tsikhanouškaya’s husband, who was

¹² <https://m.joyreactor.cc/post/4512718> (accessed: 16.01.2023).

in custody, was played. In the summer and fall of 2020, activists encouraged the playback of *Walls* at homes and in cars with a view to making both the authorities and the protesters themselves aware of the large percentage of the society that disagrees with the policy of the incumbent president.

Another song, considered an artistic symbol of the protest, was the song of the band Tor Bend *Мы не народец* ('We are not little things'). Its title refers to Lukashenka's ironic statement about Belarusians – he used the diminutive *народец*. The main theme of the song is the change that took place in the Belarusian society in 2020, when many people realised that they were creating a community that should fight for their rights.

- (5) Мы не быдло, стадо и трусы,
мы живой народ, мы белорусы!
С верой в сердцах, держим мы строй,
знамя свободы над головой!

[We are not cattle, herd or cowards,
We are a living nation – Belarusians!
With faith in our hearts, we stand in line.
The flag of freedom is flying overhead!]

Other songs of the band inspired by the protests of 2020 also gained popularity. Such songs as *Уходи* ('Leave'), referring to one of the slogans of the protest – an appeal addressed to the incumbent president, *Кто, если не Ты?* ('Who if not you?'), making everyone aware that everyone should join the fight, and *Жыве!* ('It is alive!'), using the revival slogan *Жыве Беларусь!* ('Belarus is alive') can be mentioned here. As a result, Tor Bend is currently banned in Belarus.

The protests of 2020 contributed not only to the activation of already active artists, but also to the emergence of new artistic initiatives. The most famous of them is *Вольны хор* ('Free Choir') which is a social movement launched in August 2020 by musicians of the Belarusian State Philharmonic, joined by other musicians and enthusiasts. They were united by the common idea of using music in the fight against terror. Members of the choir gained fame primarily due to flash mobs, during which they gathered in public places (e.g. in shopping malls, train stations, markets) and started singing at the agreed time. This created an illusion of people singing accidentally, and thus hindered the uniformed services the cancellation of such a "concert". The choir also performed in squares and backyards of blocks of flats. During concerts, the artists often covered their faces with masks and were dressed in national colours: white, red and white. The repertoire included both the above-mentioned protest songs as well as songs important to the Belarusian historical memory, such as *Магутны Божа* ('Almighty God') or *Пагоня* ('Pursuit').

The scale of this phenomenon is evidenced by the fact that 357 people sang in the choir throughout its existence, performing 58 songs during 103 performances.¹³

2. Carnivalization and aesthetic speech acts

The second aspect of the use of aesthetic elements in the discourses of protest concerns aesthetic speech acts occurring in various forms of protesters' activities. Their presence is explained by the fact that the protest discourse has a modular structure, i.e. it contains such modules as preconditions (participants, benefits, obligations, status relations, etc.), verbal and non-verbal actions, and experiences (see Kiklewicz 2022). In the protesters' environment, there are completely different emotions: on the one hand, frustration – due to the antagonist's resistance, as well as possible repressions by the authorities; on the other hand, elation, excitement due to the sense of solidarity and experiencing dignity, courage and overcoming embarrassing complexes. In the Belarusian anti-government protests of 2020, the conscious breaking of the stereotype of a Belarusian as a passive, cheerful and incapable of opposition was an important motivating factor (Kiklewicz | Mazurkiewicz-Sułkowska | Pocięcina 2021, 6).

One of the characteristics of many civil protests is carnivalization (see Hart 2007; Moss 1985; Dragićević-Šešić 1997; Rasinski 2013; Kowalewski 2014; 2016; Majbroda 2018). This phenomenon is understood after M. M. Bakhtin (1990, 15) as a type of social behaviour consisting in the temporary rejection of laws, customs and rules of the official culture, the abolition of hierarchical relations, privileges and prohibitions (see also the latest publications on the subject: Bełkot 2008; Braun 2005; Mrugalski | Pietrzak 2004). The political carnival performs not only a ludic and recreational function, but also an adversarial function (Schindler 2010, 419). Carnivalisation during a protest contributes to a kind of sublimation, i.e. a vicarious experience of satisfaction in conditions when the chances of meeting the protesters' demands are slim (see Skiperskikh 2014).

The aesthetic dimension of protests is reflected in numerous phenomena of language creativity, described, among others, in publications by: Kiklewicz | Pocięcina 2021; Kiklewicz | Mazurkiewicz-Sułkowska | Pocięcina 2021; Śładkiewicz 2022. Moreover, protesters created posters on a mass scale using, e.g. verse forms of slogans,¹⁴ for example:

¹³ <https://volnychor.com> (accessed: 24.01.2023).

¹⁴ See an example from the Polish reality: "I go to demonstrations – I once went with a banner Hej, biskupy, precz do dupy!, but I saw that young people have better ones, so I didn't take out my own" („Polityka”; 2021 | 52).

- (6) Кто стреляет в свой народ,
тот последний идиот.
[Who shoots his people,
this one is the last idiot.]
- (7) Дзеду з аўтаматам
не даверым мірны атам!
[Grandpa with a machine gun
must not be entrusted with a peaceful atom!]
- (8) Кровавы геноцид
страшнее, чем COVID.
[Bloody genocide
is scarier than COVID.]
- (9) Мы не боимся,
мы не сдадимся.
[We are not afraid
we will not give up.]
- (10) Розы гибнут на морозе,
Юность гибнет в лагерях.
[Roses are dying of cold
young people die in camps.]
- (11) Не февраль сейчас, не январь.
С днем рождения, тварь.
[Not February now, not January.
Happy birthday, monster.]
- (12) Верым. Можам. Пераможам.
[We believe. We can. We will win.]
- (13) Розы любят воду,
пацаны – свободу.
[Roses like water
guys – freedom.]
- (14) Пусть папа услышит,
пусть папа уйдет,
пусть папа ОМОН
с собой заберет.
[Let daddy hear
let daddy go
let daddy take your OMON
with him.]

One of the widely used tricks are paraphrases of fragments of popular songs:

- (15) Прощай и ничего не обещай,
И ничего не говори,
А чтоб унять мою печаль,
Ты трон скорей освободи.

- [Goodbye and promise nothing
And don't say anything,
And to ease my sadness,
Free the throne.]
- (16) Прошлое, Саша, не вернется
И не поможет слеза.
[The past, Sasha, will not return,
And tears won't help.]
- (17) Первая причина – это ты,
а вторая – все твои менты.
[The first reason is you,
and the other is all your cops.]
- (18) Уходи и дверь закрой,
у меня теперь... другая.
[Go away and close the door
I now have... another.]
- (19) Ты погасила свечи,
загадала желание,
чтоб в этот вечер
он ушел – ДО СВИДАНИЯ!
[You blew out the candles,
you dreamed,
that this evening
he would leave – GOODBYE!]

However, protesters less often resort to travesty or recalling fragments from belles-lettres and movies. Here are some examples:

- (20) Дед тронулся, присяжные 3%аседатели.
[Grandpa is crazy, ladies and gentlemen of the jury.]
- (21) У войны конституции не женское лицо?
[War's Constitution's Unwomanly Face?]
- (22) В бой идут STARiki.
[Only old people go to fight.]
- (23) Мы беларусы,
мы мірныя людзі.
[We are Belarusians,
peaceful people.]

The first slogan is based on a phrase from Ilya Ilf and Eugene Petrov's novel *The Twelve Chairs* (1927), except that the noun *лёд* 'ice' in the original text was replaced by the noun *дед* 'grandfather' as Lukashenko's nickname. There is also another play on words: the letter *з* was written in the form of 3%. It is a rhetorical and graphic device widely used by protesters, suggested by the results of an online

poll conducted in spring 2020: only 3% of respondents expressed a willingness to vote for the incumbent president.

The second slogan refers to Svyatlana Alexievich's novel *War's Unwomanly Face*. On the other hand, it is a reaction to Lukashenko's public statement:

(24) У нас Конституция не под женщину. И у нас общество не созрело для того, чтобы голосовать за женщину. Потому что у нас по Конституции президент обладает сильной властью.¹⁵

[Our Constitution is not for women. And our society is not mature enough to vote for a woman. Because according to the Constitution, the president has a lot of power.]

The third slogan is a paraphrase of the name of the feature film *В бой идут одни старики* 'Only old people are going to fight', but the noun is written in transliterated form, and the fragment *STAR-* in capital letters, so as to emphasise the active participation of older people in the protests, the real heroes of those events.

The last of the quoted slogans is the first line of the anthem of the Republic of Belarus. In the context of the protests, it took on a new meaning – associations with the peaceful nature of the Belarusian protests.

Additionally, Fig. 3 depicts a photo of a fragment of one of the protest actions, and the slogan on the young woman's poster reads:

(25) Галасы пад сярпом тваім.
[Voices under your sickle.]



Fig. 3. Slogan *Kłosy pod twoim sierpem*¹⁶

¹⁵ <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4363544> (accessed: 18.01.2023).

¹⁶ <https://www.the-village.me/village/city/zab/285141-sny-pro-omon> (accessed: 17.01.2023).

This is an allusion to the title of Uladzimir Karatkevich's novel *Галасы над сяром тваім* 'Ears under your sickle'. As it can be seen, a change of only one letter was sufficient (*каласы* | *галасы*) to obtain a very clear rhetorical effect: in the modified version this phrase suggests that the voters' votes were counted unfairly (as if they were mowed down by the authorities).

Some fragments of literary texts are quoted in their entirety, such as a stanza from Yanka Kupala's poem *Belarusians* on the poster shown in Fig. 4.



Fig. 4. A fragment of a poem by Yanka Kupala as a slogan¹⁷

The Belarusian protests 2020 were particularly expressive in terms of visual aesthetics, as described, for example, by Ź. Śładkiewicz (2022, 215). An exceptionally successful idea was the extensive use of white-red-white colours, symbolising the Belarusian identity and the Belarusian resistance movement: posters, flags, women's clothes, murals and even bouquets in flower shops or underwear dried on balconies were in this colour scheme.

We often deal with remixes, i.e. alterations of well-known works of graphic art – they were usually made available on Internet platforms. For example, Fig. 5 depicts a remix of a well-known painting by Fyodor Reshetnikov (1950). In the original version, there is an inscription *PAIX* on the wall, and the paraphrase shows the symbol *Sasha 3%*, which was mentioned above. We also see a drawing of a cockroach – another mocking symbol of Alexander Lukashenko. Other examples of this kind are analysed in the article by Ź. Śładkiewicz (2022, 218).

The Internet has enabled the presentations of many imaginative visual forms to the public. The case of Miss Belarus 2008 title holder and Miss World contestant Olga Khizhnikova may serve as an example. After she was arrested on November 8, 2020 following another protest action, a massive flash mob was organised. Pictures of women's legs in white-red-white tights and stockings against the background of Conte packaging appeared on the Internet (especially on Instagram), as Khizhnikova has been the face of this brand for many years.

¹⁷ <https://news.obozrevatel.com/society/belarus-plakaty-i-protesta.htm> (accessed: 16.01.2023).



Fig. 5. Remix of the image by Fyodor Reshetnikov¹⁸

Conclusion

Summing up all the considerations so far, it can be stated that the protests of 2020 were accompanied by a significant intensification of artistic activism. Artists were directly involved in protest activities, for which they were dismissed from work and often imprisoned. Many of them, fearing for their own safety, decided to emigrate. For example, the Free Choir continues its activities in Poland, the DJs from the Minsk Youth Palace in Lithuania, and Svyatlana Alexievich in Germany. The protesters actively used artistic symbols (e.g. songs), including both old and new songs, dedicated directly to the events of 2020. New artistic initiatives were also launched by the protesters. The artistic activities were primarily aimed at creating awareness of opposition and breaking the stereotype of a Belarusian as a passive person unable to fight for his rights.

Aesthetic elements were also reflected in speech acts appearing in various forms of protest activity. The phenomenon was manifested primarily in numerous examples of language creativity, including the use of verse form of slogans, paraphrases of well-known texts and references to texts from literature and film.

The protests of 2020 are also distinguished by their visual aesthetics, primarily the wide use of white, red and white colours, which were contrasted with the red and green colours of the supporters of power.

¹⁸ <https://charter97.org/ru/news/2020/6/5/381227/> (accessed: 17.01.2023).

The effectiveness of using aesthetic elements in the protest discourse is also evidenced by the fact that the rulers quickly realised the danger of such forms of opposition. This is confirmed by numerous arrests for the use of white-red-white symbolism, listening to music considered to be protest-related, as well as the fact that bands performing these songs were recognised as extremist and legally equating them with terrorists.

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