

Music And Media In Contemporary Conflict: The Dutch State

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of music and media in contemporary conflict. In contemporary conflict, interstate war has given way to intrastate war, in which a state combats a group within its own territory. Because of the widespread accessibility of media such as the internet, and their undeniable role in contemporary conflict this thesis explores the role of music in media in contemporary conflict. First, this thesis dissects the nature of contemporary conflict and its main actors: the state, the international organisation and the armed group. Following this, I have given an analytical framework based on processes of framing, naming and identification, and the concept of propaganda. These processes are explained from the perspective of conflict studies. This framework has then been applied to two case studies that focus on the state level, leaving the other remaining actors for further study. In these case studies, the Dutch state and its videos concerning the armed forces are the main subject. In these case studies, two videos have been analysed using the analytical framework given, combined with a musical analysis. Through this, I have been able to determine that the role and functions of music in the media produced by the Dutch state rely on the use of musical tropes from western music history and film music and the audience's connotations with these musical genres to strengthen the message found in the videos. With the analytical framework given, this paper is meant to serve as a start for further research onto the topic of music in media in contemporary conflict.

Introduction

In February 2013, North Korea published a propaganda video showing U.S. Soldiers and former president Barack Obama engulfed in flames. Not long after being published, the propaganda video lost its credibility after people who watched the video found out that the music played in the background was, in fact, the theme to the 2005 game ‘The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion’, a fantasy game set in a Tolkienesque world (The Telegraph 2013). This is an example of the effect music can have on the credibility and interpretation of the content of a video. With the growing role of social media in conflict, videos such as these can be viewed by millions with ease (Farwell 2014, 50). Examples of this modern day propaganda are videos by armed groups in conflicts such as in Syria and Mali (Fernandez 2015, 8). Added to this, many of the videos by organisations (such as the United Nations) or states (such as North Korea or the USA) can be seen in the same way (Snow and Taylor 2006, 391). All of these videos try to convey messages and influence the people that watch them, and almost all of them use music to emphasise their point. In this thesis, I will analyse the way music is being used in these types of videos and determine its functions and meanings in context of these videos.

Research Question

The research question that will be the core of this thesis is: *what are the functions of music in propaganda by the state in the context of contemporary conflict?* To answer this question, I will first determine an analytical framework, which I will then use to conduct an analysis of several videos and their use of music as mentioned before as our case study. By applying an analytical framework to the videos produced at the state level I will be able to determine the functions of music in these videos, and create a starting point for further research on other actors. Choosing clear examples that represent a plethora of videos, I will be able to draw conclusions on the use of music in propaganda by the state.

Analytical Framework And Method

The key words in my analytical framework will be *framing* and *naming*. To start off with framing, framing processes are explained by David A. Snow and Scott C. Byrd in their 2007 article as a key factor in movements to be able to successfully overcome internal struggles and align goals. They distinguish three core framing tasks: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational

framing (Snow and Byrd 2007, 123-130). In my research, I will be focussing on motivational framing. Motivational framing is the process of mobilising people for your cause through constructing an image of said cause in such a way that people will overcome the 'fear of risks'. Snow and Byrd explain motivational framing as providing 'prods to action' (Snow and Byrd 2007, 128). An example of this motivational framing mentioned by the authors is the declaration by Osama bin Laden in his 1998 fatwa that 'the ruling to kill Americans and their allies... is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it' (bin Laden 1998). This is an example of an appeal to moral or religious duty, the 'prod to action' being a moral obligation within Islam to fight back against the perceived invaders.

To continue, naming is explained by Michael V Bhatia as the process of identifying an object. Naming can be seen as the construction of an image of an object, a person or a group, and adding one's own connotations to it (Bhatia 2005, 8-9). To name something is to assign a certain meaning to it. An example of naming is the decision in media whether to label an armed group 'terrorists' or 'rebels' (Bhatia 2005, 12). The main functions of naming according to Bhatia are to gather supporters and justify one's acts. Bhatia focusses his research on and definitions of naming around the use of naming in conflict. His article analyses the way naming is used in conflict to create images of armed groups of being rebels or terrorists, and the importance of this process. Naming thus becomes incredibly important when it comes to the use of propaganda.

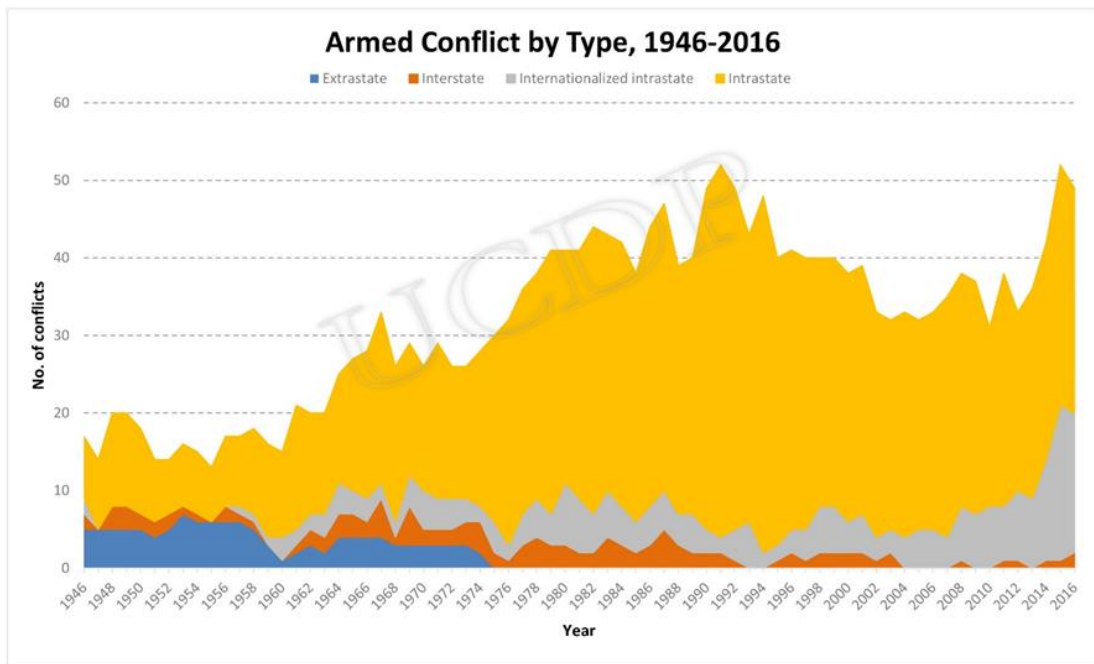
These two processes can be seen as a part of the concepts of *identity* and *identification*. Jolle Demmers states in her 2012 article, 'Identity, Boundaries and Violence', that identity both implies sameness and uniqueness. She explains that these two dimensions of identity have become integrated in the way identity is defined in the social sciences (Demmers 2012, 22). In social psychology, this can be seen in the distinction between the individual and the social identity. Demmers explains the individual identity as the answer to the question 'who am I?' The individual identity is the total set of ideas a person has about who he or she is. The social identity is the part of the individual identity which comes from the perceived membership of a social group, or groups, together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Demmers 2012, 23-24). Thus, sameness allows us to identify our membership to a social group, while uniqueness allows us to identify ourselves and distinguish ourselves from others. In her article, Demmers places identity and identification in the light of the processes of boundary drawing and distancing the self from the other. This makes this article important for this thesis. By taking a look at these processes in the light of conflict and the

drawing of boundaries, the functions of music in this can clearly be distinguished.

The processes of framing and naming are the core of these identifying processes. Through framing and naming groups and movements do not only identify and construct an image of the perceived other, but also create an image of the self. This is why in this analytical framework I have combined these processes, in order to be able to precisely analyse the functions and meanings of the music through these processes of identification.

Furthermore, in this introduction I have been naming the type of videos that will be analysed 'propaganda'. I have done this to create a sense of a parallel between the videos. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines propaganda as: 'the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people's beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols (words, gestures, banners, monuments, music, clothing, insignia, hairstyles, designs on coins and postage stamps, and so forth)' (Smith 1999). This definition stresses the importance of intent when it comes to propaganda. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines propaganda as the spreading of ideas and *facts* to damage or further a cause. In this definition the emphasis lies on the information being spread (Merriam-Webster 2018). Finally, Snow and Taylor stress in their 2006 article that propaganda used by democracies generally is not the feeding of dis- and misinformation, but rather the spreading of true facts. This must be seen as spreading the truth, yet not always the whole truth (Snow and Taylor 2006, 390). This idea of using facts must be kept into mind when taking a look at varying case studies. With these explanations of propaganda, I will define propaganda in this thesis as: 'the systematic effort to further or harm a cause through the spreading of ideas and facts, through actions or by means of symbols.' In this definition, ideas and facts are general information being spread. Actions can be interpreted as 'propaganda of the deed' where when taking a look at terrorist attacks, the deed in itself contains the message to the victims and the spectators. Symbols encompass the same broad variety of symbols as defined by the Encyclopaedia Britannica, but in this thesis, I focus on music as symbols. This is a broad definition that allows me to compare videos by different parties more easily. Even though the term propaganda has negative connotations, I aim to apply the term as objective as possible through the use of my own definition.

Finally, I have used the term contemporary conflict several times now. When taking a look at the following graph by the Department of Peace and Conflict Research of Uppsala University, it is clear that presently the prevailing type of armed conflict is (internationalised) intrastate conflict.



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Intrastate conflict is a type of conflict where the state fights a non-state group within its borders. Internationalised intrastate conflict means that there is an ongoing international intervention in this conflict (Uppsala University 2017). As mentioned before, in this type of conflict, we can find three different types of actors: the state, the international organisation (i.e. the UN) and non-state armed groups (i.e. ISIS). These three different types of actors are different in their use of video material and the music used in them. By focussing on the state in this thesis, I will be able to analyse the use of music by the state more fully, and lay a basis for further research.

As mentioned before, this analytical framework will be used in an analysis of case studies on music in media in contemporary conflict. This analytical framework will thus also be applied to the music itself. I will apply the necessary musical theory in each of the case studies accordingly, to give a clear idea of what is happening in the music. The case studies will be analysed one by one, after which my findings will be presented, followed up by a conclusion.

Justification Of Research

In their 2006 article on the revival of the propaganda state, Snow and Taylor analyse the role of propaganda in national and global communication by the US after the events of 9/11, as a means of managing the media when it came to the war on terror and the conflict in Iraq (Snow and Taylor 2006, 390-391). This article shows the importance of state manipulation of information, and the framing and naming processes of the state in the media. This can be

compared with the use of media and propaganda by ISIS as described by Farwell and Fernandez in their respective articles. As seen in Fernandez' article on the use of propaganda by ISIS, music is ever present and plays an important role in the form of hip-hop style videos and music with lyrics containing either Islamic prayers or ISIS propaganda texts concerning the groups own strength and abilities. This music is with its hip-hop style specifically aimed at western audiences as a form of a recruitment tool (Armstrong 2013; Farwell 2014, 50; Fernandez 2015, 9; Fuist 2014, 429; Khan 2014). The use of music and the type of videos differ greatly between the different parties. As such, it is important to dedicate this thesis to one party, the state, in order to be able to properly analyse it. The analytical framework given will be applied to the music as part of the video as a whole and its functions and effects within that video. This thesis will function as a starting point for further research into the use of music in contemporary conflict as a tool for mobilisation of (violent) collective action. The case studies that will be analysed are both videos by the Dutch ministry of Defence. The first video, 'Defensie beschermt wat ons dierbaar is' is an information video on the work the Dutch armed forces do. The second video, 'Wie wil je worden?' is a recruitment video.

Case Study 1: Defensie Beschermt Wat Ons Dierbaar Is

In this first case study I will be taking a look at a video from the Dutch ministry of Defence from 2016. I have chosen this video because it contains the most general message and is not particularly aimed at potential recruits for the Dutch armed forces. The videos by the Dutch ministry of Defence all have a similar style and structure. The video is titled 'Defensie beschermt wat ons dierbaar is'. Translated into English this means '*Defensie* protects what is important to us'. *Defensie* is the overarching name of the Dutch armed forces. Because of this, I will use this word instead of a translation. The video is one minute and forty seconds long and consists out of a series of images and video material accompanied by a narrator. The narrator explains the work of the Dutch armed forces within the Netherlands, together with allies and in foreign countries. Considering the fact that the narration is in Dutch and the focus on the importance of the work of the armed forces abroad for the Netherlands itself, the target audience can be assumed to be the Dutch population.

'Wij zijn Defensie. Onmisbaar in een wereld vol onrust. We beschermen wat ons Nederlanders dierbaar is. We strijden voor een wereld waarin mensen in vrijheid en veiligheid kunnen leven. Omdat we er van overtuigd zijn dat ieder mens dat verdient. Dat is onze missie

en daarvoor gaan we op missie.’ These are the first words of the narration. The translation is: ‘we are Defensie. Indispensable in a world filled with unrest. We protect what is important to us. We fight for a world in which people can live in freedom and safety. Because we are convinced that every person deserves this. That is our mission and that is why we embark on our missions’ (Defensie 2016). This translation of the first words of the video contains the core of what is said in the video and can be analysed within my framing, naming and identification framework. In this quotation we can see the identification of the armed forces as both the protector of the Netherlands and an indispensable force fighting for stability in the rest of the world. What can be seen in this quotation is that this text does not identify a (hostile) other (Demmers 2012, 23). On the contrary, the (non-hostile) other is even framed as an equal to the Dutch citizen as deserving to live in freedom and safety. Besides naming themselves as Defensie and as part of the Dutch citizensry, nothing else is specifically named. This video identifies the members of the Dutch armed forces as ordinary people who are ready to risk their lives for freedom, safety and stability.

The goal of this video is to inform the Dutch population about the work that Defensie does and frame this work as the right thing to do, thus shaping a positive image of the armed forces in the eyes of the audience (Snow and Byrd 2007, 128). The duality between the work within the Netherlands and the work abroad in this video shows that these different tasks go hand in hand and share equal importance for maintaining stability in the Netherlands. Over-all, this video seems to serve as a justification of the work of Defensie both in the Netherlands, and abroad. What effect does the music accompanying this video have on the message? To answer this question I will first analyse the music.

The soundtrack can be divided into four sections. The soundtrack is written in a 4/4 time signature. Between 00:00 and 00:37 we can hear a piano playing a chord progression, each taking one full measure. Added to this, a string ensemble plays a chord progression with the piano. The chord progression is as follows: G minor – Eb major – C major – F major.

Looking at the chords used, it can be determined that the soundtrack is in the key of G natural minor. What stands out is the E in the C chord instead of an Eb, turning the usually minor C chord into C major. This creates an effect of anticipation which is resolved by the F major chord, because the C major chord is F major’s dominant. Because of this, the C major chord ‘dominates’ the flow of the chord progression, as a constant unexpected anticipation for the next chord. Underneath every chord a very deep, almost electronic sounding, beat can be heard. Between 00:37 and 01:14 the string section’s part becomes more dynamic, adding additional notes and taking the foreground. A stronger drum beat is heard now, accompanying

the changes found in the string section. Between 01:14 and 01:30, a brass section starts playing a melody based on the bass notes of the chord progression (G – Eb – C – F), reaching a crescendo at 01:30. The last ten seconds of the video consist of only the piano, playing the chords one last time on its own. This sudden drop in volume in the soundtrack emphasises the last words of the narrator: ‘If we aren’t doing it, who is?’ Even though the narration has overall been in the foreground, it is emphasised by the music completely falling to the background in this last section. This gives the final words of the video more strength.

The video’s soundtrack emphasises the message of fighting for freedom and safety through the specific chord progression and an almost ‘heroic’ or ‘triumphant’ sounding build-up of instrument groups towards a crescendo (Collier 2007, 111). These connotations with the music (heroic and triumphant) can be traced to Hollywood film music and western music history, such as symphonies from the late 19th century. Many of the tropes, such as the build-up of instruments, the increase in volume and the use of the C-major chord in this soundtrack, stem from film music (Neumeyer and Buhler 2015, 183-185). The use of these tropes in this video can bring up the emotional responses in people that are associated with heroism and triumph. The last words of the video accompanied by just the piano emphasise the video’s message that Defensie is the one to trust to fight for your freedom and safety. This can be explained by the crescendo that precedes the volume drop. By working towards a heroic and triumphant sounding crescendo, the softer piano section after the crescendo feels like a victory after a battle. The soundtrack of this video adds a new layer to the framing processes found in the images and the narration. Because of the soundtrack’s positive, even triumphant tone, the work that Defensie does, being shown in the images is together with the narration framed as a good cause. These images portray work done in the Netherlands, the Dutch Navy conducting anti pirating missions, the Army helping locals in Afghanistan and Mali and more. The music accompanying the video adds a sense of righteousness to the narrator and the images shown through its movie-like structure and overall uplifting sound. The music creates this effect so well because the video only focusses on Defensie and its people and, as mentioned before, no (hostile) others are named. This strongly emphasises the role Defensie plays in this video, placing Defensie in the foreground (Bhatia 2005, 10).

Case Study 2: Wie Wil Je Worden?

This second video is found on the YouTube channel ‘werkenbijdefensie’, which is focussed on publishing information videos and commercials with the aim of recruitment. This video is thus particularly aimed at potential recruits and was also aired on Dutch national television. The video’s title, ‘Wie wil je worden?’ translates to ‘Who do you want to become?’ The main character of the video is shown in different situations, switching between physical exercise, and moments of standing up for people and being there for family and friends. The video is accompanied by a narrator. The narrations of the video is as follows: ‘Wat wil je worden? Dat is niet de vraag. Het gaat er vooral om, wie wil je worden? Iemand die alles uit zichzelf haalt. Die je kunt vertrouwen met je leven. Die beschermt wat ons dierbaar is. Wordt groter dan jezelf’. Translated, this means: ‘What do you want to become? That is not the question. The main question is, who do you want to become? Someone who pushes himself to his limits. Who you can trust with your life. Who protects what is important to us. Become bigger than yourself’ (werkenbijdefensie 2017).

In this narration, we can see once again the ‘protect what is important to us’ as seen in the previous video. With this, the target audience of the video, the potential recruits, is shown an image of a protector, someone who strives to become better than he ever was (Snow and Byrd 2007, 128). The images shown are of the main character performing increasingly more difficult physical exercise, combined with imagery of the main character, a young man, standing up for others and being there for family and friends. The last scene of the video shows the main character jump off a bridge into the water with who we can assume is his girlfriend in this story. However, the moment he surfaces again, he is in military gear surrounded by other soldiers, as part of an operation (werkenbijdefensie, 2017). In this video, the main character is framed as possessing the values and virtues that Defensie is looking for in its personnel. The narrator’s words, ‘become bigger than yourself’, frame the work that the armed forces do as a challenge that will make you achieve your full potential.

The instrumentation of the video’s soundtrack comprises a piano, drums, a cello and a violin. Added to this, the soundtrack contains some very deep synthesised bass notes, that ‘drop’ in a descending glissando and ascend back to the original note again. The music is accompanied by additional synthesised sounds, such as a wind-like sound preceding the first chord played on the piano. The first chord, D minor, is played at 00:05. This is where the music really starts in the soundtrack.

The piano plays the following chord progression between 00:05 and 00:25: D minor – C major – D minor – C major – F major – C major. Between 00:26 and 00:37 the first four chords are played again, with a D note played by the right hand on every beat. Underneath this we first hear a cello playing an A and a C note, followed by a violin playing a long E note until 00:37. At 00:37 the music stops and is replaced by the bass glissando which ‘arrives’ back at D at the moment the soldiers rise up from the water, which cues the piano and drums back in, with the chord progression D minor – C major – F major. The pedal D tone that can be heard comes together with the final chord of the soundtrack, the F major, creating the F major sixth chord. This chord does not resolve however, which generates a feeling of unfinished business and inviting the viewer to continue the story.

Every other drum beat is accompanied by what sounds like a group of people clapping, with some reverb added to it. The limited instrumentation and the use of what can best be described as an ostinato in the right hand during most of the video give the images a sense of sincerity (Collier 2007, 111). The D note that is constantly being played over the rest of the music is very noticeable and gives the music a similar ‘triumphant’ sound like the previous video. This triumphant sound works with the framing that the narration and the images apply to the main character, who is shown to physically push himself past his limits and become something more than his old self in the process. Another interesting aspect of the soundtrack is the cello. The cello, only playing a minor third interval (A – C), replicates a sound often found in game and film music as well (Neumeyer and Buhler 2015, 183-185). A very clear example is the theme song of Fallout 3, by Bethesda Softworks (Bethesda Softworks 2008). The minor third adds a more sombre feeling to a more triumphant sounding soundtrack, laying emphasis on the seriousness of the message. The simplicity of the drums at the end, consisting of a bass drum and a synthesised ‘group clapping’ on the beat of the soundtrack give the video a ‘militaristic’ feel. The bass and the clapping alternating each other creates an image of marching.

The video’s target audience are potential recruits. This is very apparent in the narration, which directly speaks to the viewer, asking the question, ‘who do you want to become?’. The narration and the situations portrayed allow the viewer to identify with this role in the armed forces, and create an image of a ‘protector’ of sorts (Demmers 2012, 23-24). The music strengthens this image with its sincere and triumphant tone, creating a feeling of righteousness and necessity. The music and the images together create an image of a protector and frame it as something to live up to, as a way of achieving one’s full potential. Over-all, this video is an interesting example of a recruitment video for Defense. Because of the modest soundtrack,

the video's images and narration gain a serious and sincere tone. Joining the armed forces is shown as becoming a protector, which is framed as something you, as viewer, should aspire to become (Snow and Byrd 2007, 128).

Findings

When looking at the videos analysed, we can see a trend in targeting a specific audience. A significant feature which is prevalent in many of the videos by Defenseie and the Dutch ministry of Defence, is the focus on the self. In both videos, the only ones who are named are the armed forces personnel and the audience. The (hostile) other is only implied in the sense of the armed forces taking the role of the protector of freedom and stability. This allows for the music to fully strengthen the mental images that are created by the videos and the narrations. When the (hostile) other is only implied, the soundtrack fully supports the images of sincerity, triumph and heroism (Collier 2007, 11; Bhatia 2005, 10).

The soundtrack's modern and movie-like sound give it a neutral effect, in the sense that it speaks to a wider audience who will all have similar connotations with this style of music. The genres that this music draws similarities range from adventure and war movies and games to western music history, such as the symphonies of the late 19th century. This is where the tropes of heroism and triumph are often central themes. Because of the short nature of these videos, a comparison can be drawn to movie trailers. In movie trailers the music has to convey a message in only a couple of seconds to a couple of minutes at the longest. To convey this message effectively the music has to rely heavily on the use of tropes and clichés which people can identify instantly through their personal connotations with these tropes and clichés. This allows the videos to convey their message more easily. Added to this, the overarching style and tone of the music and the videos show continuity and consistency in the message. The similarity in music in the different video emphasises this. Furthermore, the soundtrack's pure 'western' sound aids the self-identification in the videos as protectors of the Netherlands (Middleton 2000, 59). Because there are references to a perceived enemy, or 'oriental' and other 'foreign' sounding elements in the music, it is very clear what and who the music represents. Finally, the general positive and sincere tone and style of the music reinforce the videos' similar message.

Over-all I deem the use of the music in the videos by the Dutch state quite effective in reinforcing and emphasising the message found in the videos. While the music might sometimes veer towards the feeling of being cliché, the common tropes used in it are handled

in a way together with imagery seen that they do not take the foreground in such a way that they are too noticeable. Examples of these tropes are the obvious build-up in instrumentation paired with a build up to a crescendo and the piano chords played on their own in the last few seconds as a means of emphasising the message. In these videos, the music complements both the narration and the images. The narration is validated by the music, through the use of certain musical elements, such as the minor third interval in the cello accompanying the sentence: ‘who you can trust with your life’ in the second case study (werkenbijdefensie 2017). In the end the serious yet positive tone of the music does show the idea of the videos being meant to positively influence the viewers opinion of the armed forces, to the point of wanting to enlist. This is especially noticeable in the first case study, where the music takes on a more Hollywood movie like sound (Defensie 2016). The quieter music of the second case study does well in masking this feeling.

Conclusion

In the introduction of this thesis I addressed the importance of recognising the role of music in propaganda in contemporary conflict. I have shown the three different types of actors found in contemporary conflict: the state, the international organisation and the armed group.

Furthermore, I have given a neutral definition of propaganda which can be applied together with the analytical framework. It is important to be able to identify propaganda in an objective manner in order to be able to analyse it and show the effects of the music used. I have focussed on the use of propaganda by the state, using the Dutch state and its videos for the promotion of the armed forces as a case study. By analysing the videos that are the most representative of the entire collection of videos, I have shown the role music plays and the effects it has on the interpretation of the message that the videos try to convey. However, the research does not stop here. This thesis is meant to provide an analytical framework for further research on the role and effects of music in propaganda in contemporary conflict. The next step in this work should be to apply this analytical framework to representative case studies of the remaining actors in contemporary conflict: international organisations and armed groups. The analytical framework given encompasses the most important processes used in propaganda to analyse. I thus suggest this framework to be used in future research.

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