

Weaponized Songs:

*Pro-Putin and Other Totalitarian
Musical Propaganda*

KATARZYNA NALIWAJEK

Institute of Musicology, University of Warsaw

Email: k.naliwajek@uw.edu.pl

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the topic of weaponization of song, understood in the broadest sense as music with text, sung by one performer or several voices, with or without instrumental accompaniment. Whereas battle songs have historically been used during physical attack on the enemy, the use of music in propaganda gained significance in the twentieth century, with the rise of totalitarian regimes. The author refers to Ernst Cassirer's elucidation of political myth and interprets contemporary uses of song in war propaganda by Putin and Islamic organizations, juxtaposing it with the abuse of song in totalitarian (communist and Nazi) regimes, and arguing that it is the mythicizing potential of song encapsulating a concise propagandist message that makes it the ideal carrier for propaganda. The author draws upon a vast range of literature on the topic, referring to the Third Reich, Maoist China, Putinist Russia, and the jihadi *nasheed*.

Keywords: weaponization of song, Putinism, Nazi, jihadi, nasheed, music and politics, artificial intelligence

The marketing of war propaganda undoubtedly has much in common with marketing itself,¹ as well as with the psychological effects of music and other media.² There are striking multilayered similarities between music use in totalitarian propaganda and the functions of pro-Putin war songs produced by Russian and Islamic propaganda. Directly or in a more insidious manner, they market war and offer emotional channels that provide justification for the planned attack at the initial stage and later, at the stage of actual military aggression, incite to systematic killing. Weaponized music is used, on the one hand, because representatives of the aggressor country are to be equipped not only with military weapons, but also with a whole system of beliefs that will instill in them motivation to carry out orders and transform them into fanatic zealots. On the other hand, the tools of 'cultural aggression' are obviously extremely efficient in preparing ground for an attack and convincing the public opinion and leaders of other countries of its necessity, in order to isolate the target on the international scene and, eventually, to influence prospective collaborators or sympathizers.

Culture is thus reduced to a weapon on the ideological battlefield, abused to achieve the main goal, that of expansion – territorial, economical, or symbolic, by persuading and controlling the minds of as many recipients as possible. We can observe several core common characteristic features of such musical propaganda: (1) the use of up-to-date marketing methods to promote a leader, a party, a propagandist product, etc.; (2) precise analysis of psychological, social, and political factors crucial for the manipulation of the targeted recipients of propaganda; (3) encouragement and financial support for the production of propagandist materials by state institutions or by a political entity; (4) appropriation of pre-existing repertoires; (5) replication in different language versions and adaptation to the different cultural / ethnic / national identities of the recipients; (6) mass distribution of the musical / audiovisual product.

Whereas the above-listed six features may characterize any political or marketing campaign, the following three elements mark the difference because of their malicious intent: (7) disinformation; (8) persuasion using simplification and stereotyping to instill clear-cut oppositions between 'us' and 'them', the target of aggression;³ (9) weaponization of music.

To make the recipients identify emotionally with the propagandist message and internalize it as a deep-rooted belief, the weaponized song usually grandiloquently hails the 'values' of the group such as a nation or party, which are to supersede individual values.

This is where references to the symbolic, historical, emotional, psychological, and mythical repositories are introduced, imbued with a messianic-style rhetoric and emotionally charged expressions of self-pity. This mythical landscape tends to include nostalgic images of a glorious past and imperial power, a eulogy for the

¹ Cf. the fundamental texts by the founding father of this discipline, Edward L. Bernays, such as 'The Marketing of National Policies: A Study of War Propaganda', *Journal of Marketing*, 6/3 (1942), 236–244.

² This article has been inspired by the interdisciplinary conference *Music on the Periphery of Aesthetics. Between Politics, Business, and Wellbeing* (6–7 June 2024, University of Warsaw), which made it possible to connect these interrelated areas.

³ I am quoting these two features after Chang-Tai Hung, who states in the conclusions to his article: 'All propaganda involves the paired processes of simplification and stereotyping. The former is reductionism, and the latter is polarization. First, Communist ideals were reduced to a set of simple adjectives – good, joyful, selfless; then these simplified notions were pitted against their opposites: good versus evil [...], and selfless leaders such as Mao versus vicious commanders like Jiang. Such simple contrasts provided an easy choice for the audience, since they were based not on careful and systematic reasoning, but on charged emotions' [underline by KN]. Chang-Tai Hung, 'The Politics of Songs: Myths and Symbols in the Chinese Communist War Music, 1937–1949', *Modern Asian Studies*, 30/4 (1996), 928.

fallen knights / soldiers / militants, evocation of symbolic geographic spaces and other elements of mythical imagery, all of which are known to resonate with transgenerational memory and may be used to legitimize claims for the (re-)acquisition of 'historical' territories. The refrain is used to emphasise the superiority of a country / tribe / race / leader, etc. and the idea of war, concealed as 'liberation', 'duty', or plain revenge, which is justified by the content of the successive stanzas.

Pompous statements by leaders, printed in songbooks, delivered before mass concerts, or disseminated via the Internet have a powerful mythicizing effect. They could easily pass unnoticed, be underestimated or interpreted as superficial ornaments. Indeed, when rationally examined, they reveal their artificiality. The transformation of 'mere songs' into anthems hinges upon such a meticulously prepared propagandist message. Ernst Cassirer's warning, formulated at the end of World War II, provides a vivid explanation of why the seemingly nonsensical constructions of mythical narratives should be closely watched, analyzed, and untangled:

When we first heard of the political myths we found them so absurd and incongruous, so fantastic and ludicrous that we could hardly be prevailed upon to take them seriously. By now it has become clear to all of us that this was a great mistake. We should not commit the same error a second time. We should carefully study the origin, the structure, the methods, and the technique of the political myths. We should see the adversary face to face in order to know how to combat him.⁴

The recognition of such myth-making mechanisms is crucial for an understanding of their toxic character. It is by no means a mere coincidence that propagandist music production in totalitarian states is so abundant, as evident from the example of the countless editions of songbooks with which the Nazis inundated Germany. The *SS Liederbuch* (its ninth edition was published in Munich by the Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1941) opens with the image of an SS ring adorned with a skull, as used in military insignia, and their motto 'Unsere Ehre heißt Treue' ('Our honour is loyalty'), followed by Hitler's words: 'And that's what the songs of our people sound like today, not only within the Reich, but far beyond. They are sung with fervor full of belief, because the hope and longing of all Germans lives in them'.⁵ Such statements, replicated

in thousands (in Mao's case – millions) of copies, and the songs they accompany, reveal their potency when we take into account Cassirer's observation that in the Nazi era it was not only ethical values that ceased to operate, remolded into the values of the Nazi party, but also words previously 'used in a descriptive, logical, or semantic sense, are now used as magic words that are destined to produce certain effects and to stir up certain emotions'.⁶

This fundamental singularity of the propagandist message as a mythicizing force makes the interpretation of war song texts more transparent. Of the more than 200 songs in the *SS Liederbuch*, 'In den Ostwind hebt die Fahnen' ('Raise the flags in the eastern wind, for they stand well in the eastern wind...') was undoubtedly used, among many other propagandist products, to prepare the ground for the invasion of Poland. Composed by Hans Baumann (1914-1988) and published for the first time in *Ruf aus dem Osten* [Call from the East], 1935), later in *Horch auf, Kamerad* ([Hark, comrade], 1936), and in 16 other songbooks before 1939, it was recorded on 25 May 1939.⁷ The first stanza contains the following persuasive images of the need to offer blood for a country that 'bears a German face':

Raise the flags in the eastern wind, / for they stand well in the eastern wind. / Then they command us to depart, / and our blood hears the call. / For a country answers us, / and it bears a German face, / for which many have bled, / and therefore the soil is not silent.⁸

Tatevik Hovhannisyan sheds light on such myth-making in contemporary Russia. She observes that 'popular music has become an important propaganda tool to rally Russians in support of the war against Ukraine', but 'although all the songs are clearly related' to it, the word 'war' is never mentioned.⁹ Instead, such notions as religion or love of the motherland, as well as manipulative euphemisms destined to create information noise about military attacks, such as the 'special military operation', are used. The notion of *Polenfeldzug* (the

⁶ Cassirer, *The Myth*, 283.

⁷ Fred K. Prieberg, *Handbuch Deutsche Musiker 1933-1945* [database], 266; 2827. My thanks go to Professor Michael Custodis of Münster University for providing access to this database.

⁸ 'In den Ostwind hebt die Fahnen, / denn im Ostwind stehn sie gut / Dann befehlen sie zum Aufbruch, / und den Ruf hört unser Blut. / Denn ein Land gibt uns die Antwort, / und das trägt ein deutsch Gesicht: / Dafür haben viel geblutet, / und drum schweigt der Boden nicht!'

⁹ Tatevik Hovhannisyan, 'The weaponisation of music in today's Russia', *New Eastern Europe Magazine*, 5 (2023), 115-116.

⁴ Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, 1946), 296.

⁵ 'Und so klingen den auch heute die Lieder unseres Volkes nicht nur innerhalb des Reiches sondern weit darüber hinaus. / Sie werden mit einer gläubigen Inbrunst gesungen denn in ihnen lebt die Hoffnung und die Sehnsucht aller Deutschen.'

‘Polish campaign’) was employed by the Third Reich in 1939 with a similar intent of obfuscating its real character. It has a Napoleonesque flair to it. This idea was indeed widely marketed, most prominently in the film directed by Franz Hippler under the almost homonymous title, *Feldzug in Polen*, released in February 1940, where Poles are presented as aggressors persecuting the German minority and Great Britain as ‘the villain’.¹⁰ Naturally, there is no mention of the atrocities committed by the Germans in occupied Poland. These myths were successfully instilled. As Robert Edwin Herzstein observes, the Reich indeed conquered the minds and souls of the German people, even though it eventually lost the war.¹¹ The mass concert rallies in Russia similarly attest to the effectiveness of such ‘cultural’ propaganda.

Cassirer lamented the transformation of the man of free will into a puppet of propaganda, pointing out that by ‘performing the same prescribed rites they begin to feel, to think, and to speak in the same way’, being ‘moved by an external force’ – the myth, which ‘acted in the same way as a serpent that tries to paralyze its victims before attacking them’.¹²

This pre-emptive stage is also accompanied by systemic disinformation policies. In the case of Nazi Germany, this was achieved first and foremost by means of anti-Polish and anti-Semitic fake news, marketed in the most powerful media of the time, which made such news into the most tangible example of the Nazi ideological campaign. However, there were multiple methods of manipulating the public opinion, effectively concealed under the guise of e.g. official, state-promoted cultural exchange or scientific collaboration developed by Nazi scholars through various organizations in order to provide intelligence and grounds for the planned military invasion.

In the case of Kremlin policies, a broad range of disinformation projects has been carried out from 2007

onwards. They are described by Jolanta Darczewska, an expert on this topic, in her recent book on Russian strategies of mind control, using sabotage and disinformation to attain the goal of destabilizing targeted countries or institutions.¹³ She analyzes the role of foundations established in that period, such as ‘Russkiy Mir’ and the network of Russian ‘centers for science and culture’ (the so-called RONIks), which collaborate with pro-Russian milieux abroad. Their functioning is presented as allegedly genuine grassroots initiatives, but in fact grants are awarded only to those inspired by Moscow. Several cultural organizations have been financed by the Russian Federation. The same is true of media posing as Ukrainian ones. Their activity also consists in ‘the export of Russian literature, including propagandist and pseudo-historical titles, as well as organization of concerts [...] and popularization of music’. Darczewska explains that

the active measures used, consisting largely in keeping the society within the sphere of Russian media, information and cultural space, were intended to destabilize Ukraine’s socio-political situation, discredit its statehood, and to gain allies for Kremlin’s plans in both countries, i.e. prepare the ground for military intervention and a long-term international conflict. Informational and psychological projects, carried out under the banner of defending the ‘Russian world’, have resulted in successive waves of destabilization in Ukraine and in deepening the divisions among its citizens on the one hand, while mobilizing Russia’s own citizens – on the other.¹⁴

Popular songs by key propagandists such as Oleg Gazman effectively spread such myths as that of the ‘Russian World’, a crucial idea in the Russian Federation. The first stanza of his eponymous song is addressed to all those who are or could become future citizens of new imperial Russia:

I am Russian, I am a Tartar, I am a Chechen, I am a Bashkir. / I am the people of the whole country, and we are all together the Russian world. / Buryats and Jews, Dagestanis, the Ingush / All those who were born here and who found their homeland [here]. / The African – Pushkin, and Bagration – Georgian, / Vitus Bering – Danish, and Aivazovsky – Armenian. / It is impossible to list them all – those under the wing of the Slavs. / Unite together in the state of Russians!¹⁵

¹⁰ Robert Edwin Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won: Goebbels and the Nazi Media Campaign* (New York, 1987), 275–276. See also: Stephan Lehnstaedt, ‘“Polenfeldzug”: Nazi Crimes during the War against Poland in 1939 and their place in German Memory’, *Totalitarian and 20th Century Studies*, 6 (2022), 446–455.

¹¹ The consequences of Nazi and Soviet propaganda are felt to this very day. Poland was not only targeted as a state entity, abandoned after the war by the allied powers, but it was also largely deprived of access to the world media for many decades after the war due to the censorship in force until 1989. I discuss this subject in my recent book, *Sounds of Apocalypse. Music in Poland under German Occupation* (Berlin, 2022).

¹² Cassirer, *The Myth*, 286.

¹³ Jolanta Darczewska, *Zawładnąć umysłami i urządzić świat. Rosyjska strategia dywersji i dezinformacji* (Warszawa, 2024).

¹⁴ Darczewska, *Zawładnąć umysłami*, 74.

¹⁵ ‘Я русский, я татарин, я чеченец, я башкир / Я всей страны народ, / и мы все вместе русский мир. / Буряты и евреи, дагестанцы, ингуши / Все те, кто здесь родился / и кто Родину нашли. / И африканец – Пушкин и Багратион – грузин, / Датчанин Витус Беринг, Айвазовский – армянин. / Их всех не перечислить / тех, кто под крылом славян /

The song refers to the myth of multi-ethnic imperial Russia, lists important nineteenth-century figures with their different backgrounds, and paints a fake paradisiac image, that of a Potemkin village. The image showing joyful representatives of different ethnicities singing and dancing together is effective because it invokes a myth – a deep-rooted human dream of being united and treated equally. When the promise of the great sun of equality is announced again, who would be petty enough to recall the Russian pogroms, the Ukrainian famine, or post-WWII antisemitism. The second stanza looks back at the tragic end of the next embodiment of imperial Russia – the Soviet Union. The old fake slogan ‘we do not leave our [soldiers] behind’ is neatly transformed here into the image of helping to reassemble the lost portions of land. At that point, those who ‘offended us’ by destroying Russian monuments of WWII are threatened with military retribution:

From wars and revolutions to countries in different lands / Waves of emigration have carried away many of us. / When the [Soviet] Union collapsed, and the borders rose / Part of the Motherland remained outside our country. / We do not abandon our own, we will not leave them over the hill. / Whoever offends ours – he will regret it later. / Those who destroyed monuments and stirred up graves / Will hear how the Russian world enters shining with armor!¹⁶

The chorus reiterates that ‘this is the Russian world, the best in the world’ and that ‘this is our time!’¹⁷ The vast repertoire propagated through YouTube channels provides abundant material for analysis.¹⁸ Intended for the wide masses, it is also transformed into a tool of persecution, as in the case of imprisoned Alexei Navalny (4 June 1976 – 16 February 2024), lawyer and anti-Putin opposition leader, then political prisoner. Not long before his death in prison, he was forced to listen to Shaman, another Kremlin propagandist among the singers:

Объединились вместе / в государстве россиян!

16 ‘От войн и революций в страны разные Земли / Нас волны эмиграций очень многих унесли Когда Союз распался / И границы возвели / Часть Родины осталась / За пределами страны. / Своих мы не бросаем / Не оставим за бугром / Кто наших обижает / Пожалеет он потом. / Кто памятники рушил / И могилы ворошил / Услышит, как броней сверкая / Входит русский мир!’

17 ‘Это русский мир / Русский мир, Россия! / Мир моей страны / Самой лучшей в мире! / Новый путь пройдёт / Наше поколение / Мы идём вперёд — это наше время!’

18 Already in *War of Songs: Popular Music and Recent Russia-Ukraine Relations* (Stuttgart, 2019), its authors analyze in depth the active role played by popular music in every aspect of the discourse surrounding the Russo-Ukrainian crisis.

‘Every day at 5 o’clock in the morning, we hear the command “Get up!” followed by the Russian national anthem and then immediately afterwards, the country’s second most important song is played – *I am Russian* by Shaman,’ Mr Navalny said.

Shaman, whose real name is Yaroslav Dronov, has become a regular fixture on Russian state television. He has also performed at patriotic rallies organised by Vladimir Putin, the Russian president. A vocal supporter of the invasion of Ukraine, Shaman rose out of obscurity after performing on Russian versions of *The X Factor* and *The Voice*.

One of his songs, *Rise Up*, a patriotic tribute to the heroes of Russia, was released on the eve of the invasion of Ukraine and has become the unofficial anthem of the war. Another, *My Fight*, was widely criticised in Russia for apparent references to Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. His 2022 hit *I am Russian*, became a pop-culture phenomenon in Russia but was roundly mocked by music fans, inspiring a raft of parodies.¹⁹

The song, with its rousing chorus of ‘I’m Russian, I’ll fight to the end’ and ‘I’m Russian and I’m lucky with this fact’, is accompanied by a patriotic music video featuring the blond, dreadlocked singer alternately striding across a field of wheat and performing to a frenzied crowd, before aliens arrive and begin dancing to the song. Shaman has often performed the song dressed in a black leather trench coat with an armband in the colours of the Russian flag.

Mr Navalny, 47, said he had already been imprisoned when he first heard of the song, which has more than 48 million views on YouTube. ‘Of course I was curious to hear it, but where could I listen to it in prison’, adding that it was ironic he was being subjected to the song, given that ‘Kremlin propaganda persecuted me for years for taking part in Russian marches.’²⁰

WAR PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION IN THE ISLAMIC GENRE OF NASHEED

Scholars analyzing the weaponization of social media frequently note similarities between propaganda dissemination methods used by the Russian Federation and Islamic organizations such as ISIS / Daesh, between the place of music and visual elements in the ‘coordinated use of different channels’ and Kremlin’s ‘cross-media communication’.²¹ Its channeling through various platforms and media is also being described as

19 Satirical responses to Russian propaganda can be found, among others, on the Russian Youtube. e.g. Александр Гудков, ‘Я узкий’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnCLt2qA36Q>, accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

20 Maighna Nanu, ‘Navalny woken by pro-Putin music at 5am in Arctic prison’, *Daily Telegraph* (London), 24 Jan. 2024, 14.

21 Beata Biały, ‘Social Media – From Social Exchange to Battlefield’, *The Cyber Defense Review*, 2/2 (2017), 83, 84, 85.

‘propaganda outsourcing’.²² Similarities between war and criminal propaganda using the *nasheed* as well as multiple examples of this genre’s weaponization have been examined.²³ Kurstin Gatt writes:

In recent years, Arabic chants have received scholarly attention for their strong presence on the battlefield among Salafi-Jihadi groups. From al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula to the Islamic State in Syria [...] and Boko Haram in Nigeria, Salafi-Jihadi groups have integrated Arabic chants as part of their psychological warfare to recruit new fighters, to galvanize support for their ideology, to fuel people’s sentiments against foreign forces and to undermine the ruling governments.²⁴

In the pro-Putin war songs propagated by Syrian, Palestinian and Iraqi musicians, the use of music in war propaganda proves explicit and aggressive. Their texts, sung in Arabic and adopted to local musical traditions, such as the *nasheed*, combine the praise of Putin’s war against Ukraine with ‘holy war’ ideology and explicit threats directed at the West. What is more, links between propagandist war songs from the Syrian and Palestinian repertoires, likewise posted on YouTube, reveal the political, strategic, and military aims of these groups. Different audiovisual versions of one of such ‘hits’ show dancing groups of males (including boys) or warfare ‘documentary’ footage. The chorus runs: ‘Harden your heart, Putin / Attack them and increase your attacks! / Banish them to Palestine / and we shall marry Ukrainian women.’ The stanzas are as follows:

1) Oh Putin, give the worst to Ukraine and don’t hold back! / Their eyes were upon Gaza / and they supported the Zionists. / 2) We sing for Putin: / What do you want from Palestine? / As for double standards / It is a mistake. 3) And to Putin: show no mercy, / but I

want him to show hell / to those who were against Gaza / and who encouraged the bombardments. 4) With the Russian offensive against the Ukrainians / the second major superpower was revived / and Satan’s missiles are extinguished in the sky. 5) We need the Russian bear to move harder against them! / May he demolish the West! / As for us, we’ll count their bodies / and raise the flags for our homeland! / 6) And if the North Koreans joined the war / reality becomes so hard. / There shall be no Messenger, no WhatsApp / we’ll return to the era of antennas. / And we cheer for China as well, may they conquer Taiwan! / Break the noses of Americans / who build the Israeli fighter jets! 7) And yet the war would still be a show / until America joins the fight. / And when the dollar falls – what will you do, billionaires? 8) Now as we cheered the Russians, we cheer for the Chinese / May the world war burst into flame / and bring back memories. 9) Ukraine resists Putin / even though they are not Muslims. / As for us in Palestine / We are alive by the virtue of the dead. [...] ²⁵

Audiovisual products with lyrics sung in Arabic, often with English subtitles such as ‘Glory to Russia – Syrian Pro-Russian War Song’²⁶ can be found on YouTube. ‘Shia Nasheed about Abu Ali Putin Iraqi’, presented as ‘a song made by Arab Shia – Song for Putin, Sunni leader Kadyrov and Russian Christians in Donbas’, features Russian flags, Kadyrov, soldiers, images of Putin mixed with war footage (tanks, rockets, helicopters, etc.). The song contains the following message, with English (probably automated) translation:

The Russian who is warm and tough / he’s the one who is without any competitor / He is the Shia and got the God’s support / He is from the legal axis / US and Israel are confused / [...] NATO is going to disappear it’s the end / It’s the curse from our axis / Luhansk freed on [by?] his hands / He is one who get[s?] the target / Kyiv is not far / [...] Putin the man from our legion / Abu Ali (Putin) is our leader / [...] Kadyrov is the best man from the east / Never forget your terrific standing / Donbas got free by your name.²⁷

Interestingly, there has recently been a proliferation of AI-assisted fake ‘national’ propagandist *nasheeds* (in different language versions) trying to incorporate musical traditions as ‘imagined’ by the AI. They have texts adapted to the given target group. The fake ‘Polish

22 Kostiantyn Fedorenko, ‘Enter the “Bloody Clown”: Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelensky in the Lens of Russia’s Media Machine’, in Bálint Madlovics and Bálint Magyar, eds, *Russia’s Imperial Endeavor and Its Geopolitical Consequences: The Russia-Ukraine War, Volume Two* (Budapest, 2023), 77–104. See also: Ahmad Shehabat and Teodor Mitew, ‘Black-Boxing the Black Flag: Anonymous Sharing Platforms and ISIS Content Distribution Tactics’, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 12/1 (2018), 81–99.

23 Hayat Alvi, ‘Musical Criminology: A Comparative Analysis of Jihadist Nasheeds and Narco Corridos’, *Journal of European, Middle Eastern, & African Affairs*, 9 June 2020, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JEMEEA/Display/Article/2213615/musical-criminology-a-comparative-analysis-of-jihadist-nasheeds-and-narco-corri/>, accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

24 Kurstin Gatt, ‘The Sounds and Sense of Jihad: Revisiting the notion of Jihad in Jihadi-themed Arabic chants’, in Simone Pfeifer, Christoph Günther, and Robert Dörre, eds, *Disentangling Jihad, Political Violence and Media* (Edinburgh, 2023), 186–210.

25 Several versions of this song are available. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgdxKgxJyu>, accessed 3 Nov. 2024. Description on the YouTube channel reads: ‘A Palestinian song related to current geopolitical events. English and Arabic subtitles available as CC. Singers: Mohammed al-Arani and Suhaib al-Jamma’ini. Performed in Qalqilya, Palestine. Date: 2022-03-04’ (I omit the Arabic version and Russian translation here).

26 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Izi-r4ifckQ>, posted on 22 Feb. 2023, accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

27 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0yvJmlq5Uk>, posted on 28 May 2023, accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

nasheed' entitled 'Polish song – Mujahideen of Poland'²⁸ refers to the realities of Warsaw, even though the accent is wrong. The same channel presents other fakes: 'Ukrainian Nasheed about Putin'²⁹, as well as Finnish, Dutch, Irish, Bengali ones, 'Uyghur Nasheed against China', and even a Latin *nasheed*, entitled 'Adoramus te, Allah' [sic!]. There is also 'In God we trust, and Trump's our leader – American Shia Nasheed about Trump', where the words from the title are relentlessly repeated. The song is sung *a cappella*, with an attempt to make it sound like an American hymn and a limited number of Arabic stylistic references.

The style of aggressive battle *nasheed* is represented by a recent product entitled 'Przybyliśmy!' [We Have Arrived], a 'Polish nasheed'.³⁰ The image of a masked soldier and an 'Arabic background' (possibly AI-generated) is combined with words in Polish ('We will annihilate the humiliation we have experienced; we will end the state of tyranny we have faced. / We are sharpening the sword we have offered [...]'). The music is typical of the style, and additional sounds are included, such as the sharpening of a sword, shooting from a machine gun, a detonation, a woman's scream (as if in terror), and the sound of cocking a gun.

MEMORY, NOSTALGIA, RITUAL, THE BODY, AND COLLECTIVE DESIRE

The efficacy of songs as a tool of persuasion and propaganda is linked with the presence of rhythm and with the context of communal singing or listening to music, the magnetic physical sense of being part of a greater whole. A witness to the German 'singing dictatorship' compared Nazi songs to a drug more powerful than heroin since it stays in the brain for years.³¹ Historian Zhang Haihui commented on the ubiquity of Maoist musical 'entertainment' in the Cultural Revolution era, describing its psychological results: 'It's in your bones, it's in your blood. If we have Alzheimer's

we probably still would not forget these.'³² An ironic and clear-sighted analysis of these new rituals, which prohibit, persecute or appropriate pre-existing folk traditions, was given by Tibetan writer Pema Bhumi, survivor of the Cultural Revolution.

According to Cassirer, it is in the face of danger that the pernicious transformative power of new rituals and myths becomes the most intense. That is why war is needed to channel the myth, 'collective desire personified', and to embody it fully in the person of the leader. 'At that moment the former social bonds – law, justice, and constitutions – are declared to be without any value. What alone remains is the mystical power and authority of the leader and the leader's will is supreme law.'³³ Hung points out that justifying and mythicizing war and death 'through the imagery of fallen soldiers and selfless leaders in their songs, and by painting a bright tomorrow under Communist rule' makes the idea of death more tolerable. The awareness of mass death, pain and loss associated with war victims is thus erased. A villain is always needed to augment the glory of the leader. Just as 'Mao took on a legendary character as "the sun"', 'in contrast to Jiang Jieshi, who was depicted as a "devil" and "fascist"', Hitler and Stalin were presented as their respective countries' saviors, as opposed e.g. to the decadent, fat Churchill. Putin, presented as the one 'supported by God' is set against Zelensky, intentionally debased as the 'Bloody Clown'. In this way, 'collective desire personified' orients itself towards the mythical savior figure without any obstacles. The psychological effects of utilizing the figure of an idolized leader – combined with references to transgenerational memory and 'holy war' narratives, as during mass rallies, frequently held among the 'sacralized' monuments of previous wars – are considerably enhanced by collective singing.

Why are these types of music so efficient that they could successfully be used in Nazi Germany to persuade those labelled by the state as 'Germans' that the others, who were not thus labelled, were of an inherently inferior status or had no legal status at all? Why were they effective in Stalinist Russia and in Maoist China, or in Rwanda, to the point that – among other propagandist mechanisms – they managed to persuade one portion of the society that it is necessary to persecute and kill another one? Why have pro-Putin songs been used so

²⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6g_P19ipgpg, posted on 20 May 2024, accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

²⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2WfXHPRUQU>, posted on 2 June 2024, accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

³⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_arhAmy5hc, posted on 19 Oct. 2024, accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

³¹ Gottfried Niedhart and George Broderick, eds, *Lieder in Politik und Alltag des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 133.

³² Lei X. Ouyang, *Music as Mao's weapon. Remembering the Cultural Revolution* (Urbana, 2022).

³³ Cassirer, *The Myth*, 278–279.

widely by some Islamic countries and organizations to destroy any empathy with Ukrainians in their recipients? The outsourcing of war propaganda provides one possible explanation. These questions, however, remain open for further investigation.

REFERENCES

- Alvi, Hayat, 'Musical Criminology: A Comparative Analysis of Jihadist Nasheeds and Narco Corridos', *Journal of European, Middle Eastern, & African Affairs*, 9 June 2020, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JEMEAA/Display/Article/2213615/musical-criminology-a-comparative-analysis-of-jihadist-nasheeds-and-narco-corri/>, accessed 3 Nov. 2024.
- Bernays, Edward L., 'The Marketing of National Policies: A Study of War Propaganda', *Journal of Marketing*, 6/3 (1942), 236–244.
- Biały, Beata, 'Social Media – From Social Exchange to Battlefield', *The Cyber Defense Review*, 2/2 (2017), 69–90.
- Cassirer, Ernst, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, 1946).
- Darczewska, Jolanta, *Zawładnąć umysłami i urządzić świat. Rosyjska strategia dywersji i dezinformacji* (Warszawa, 2024).
- Florian, Amanda, 'Russia invaded Ukraine. Then Spotify users bombarded the music scene with violent, pro-war messages', *USA Today*, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/tech/2022/03/06/ukraine-russia-spotify-playlists/9383409002/>, accessed 3 Nov. 2024.
- Gatt, Kurstin, 'The Sounds and Sense of Jihad: Revisiting the notion of Jihad in Jihadi-themed Arabic chants', in Simone Pfeifer, Christoph Günther, and Robert Dörre, eds, *Disentangling Jihad, Political Violence and Media* (Edinburgh, 2023), 186–210.
- Herzstein, Robert Edwin, *The War that Hitler Won: Goebbels and the Nazi Media Campaign* (New York, 1987).
- Hovhannisyan, Tatevik, 'The weaponisation of music in today's Russia', *New Eastern Europe Magazine*, 5 (2023), 115–121.
- Hung, Chang-Tai, 'The Politics of Songs: Myths and Symbols in the Chinese Communist War Music, 1937–1949', *Modern Asian Studies*, 30/4 (1996), 901–929.
- Lindblom, Kris, *Third Reich Arts 'The documents of culture'*, [website], https://www.thirdreicharts.com/ss-liederbuch-song-book?search=SS%20Liederbuch%20&category_id=0, accessed 3 Nov. 2024.
- Naliwajek, Katarzyna, *Sounds of Apocalypse. Music in Poland under German occupation* (Berlin, 2022).
- Niedhart, Gottfried, and Broderick, George, eds, *Lieder in Politik und Alltag des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999).
- Nanu, Maighna, 'Navalny woken by pro-Putin music at 5am in Arctic prison', *Daily Telegraph* (London), 24 Jan. 2024, 14.
- Ouyang, Lei X., *Music as Mao's weapon. Remembering the Cultural Revolution* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, 2022).
- Paulu, Burton, 'Music: War's New Weapon', *Music Educators Journal*, 35/4 (1949), 25–57.
- Pektas, Serafettin, and Leman, Johan, *Militant Jihadism: Today and Tomorrow* (Leuven, 2019).
- Prieberg, Fred K., *Handbuch Deutsche Musiker 1933–1945* [database].
- Rogatchevski, Andrei, Steinholt, Yngvar B., Hansen, Arve, and Wickström, David-Emil, *War of Songs: Popular Music and Recent Russia-Ukraine Relations* (Stuttgart, 2019).
- Shehabat, Ahmad, and Mitew, Teodor, 'Black-Boxing the Black Flag: Anonymous Sharing Platforms and ISIS Content Distribution Tactics', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 12/1 (2018), 81–99.

Katarzyna Naliwajek has focused her research on the history of music in occupied Poland, including music in concentration camps, forgotten compositions, and wartime losses due to the Nazi plunder and destruction. Her other interests include the interrelations between music and politics, Polish contemporary music, opera, aesthetics, theory and analysis, as well as the history of music theory. Among her awards are the Hosenfeld/Szpilman Gedenkpreis (Leuphana Universität Lüneburg, 2011) for the exhibition *Music in Occupied Poland. 1939–1945*, the Literary Award of the City of Warsaw and the KLIO Award (2015) for the book *Warszawa 1939–1945. Okupacyjne losy muzyków* (2014), which she co-authored with Elżbieta Markowska. Her recent book *Sounds of Apocalypse. Music in Poland under German Occupation* (Berlin, 2022) was nominated for the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) Award. ORCID iD: orcid.org/0000-0003-2450-9357