Title: Discourse, Music and Political Communication: Towards a Critical Approach

Abstract:

Political communication is expressed in politicians’ speeches, campaign advertisements and government statements. Politics are also articulated in music, in both traditional political contexts such as anthems and party political broadcasts as well as less traditional contexts including songs, promotional videos and live performances. There is a wide spectrum of opinions as to exactly what are relations between music and politics, though most scholars acknowledge it can communicate meanings, though again, what these are remains contentious. One way to better understand relations between music and politics and meanings expressed in music is to closely examine these issues through the prism of discourses analysis. Through such an examination, not only what is being communicated becomes clear, but also how this is done, contributing to the fields of political communication, musicology and discourse studies.

Keywords:

Music, politics, discourse, discourse analysis, political communication, popular culture

1. **Introduction**

Communication is a prerequisite for the functioning of any political system, and most of this is achieved through the media (Almond and Powell 1966). Whether citizens’ demands and ideas or politicians’ policies and decisions, “[n]owadays more than ever, politics cannot exist without communications” (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999, 250). Though there have been many scholars who claim the media in fact have become too politically powerful, named as “media-driven democracies” (Entman 1989; Jameison 1992), others see media’s political power less intrusive. Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999, 258) argue that there has been a “mediatisation of politics” where “media power is counterbalanced and quite often exceeded by the power of political parties and institutions”.

Though numerous perspectives on how to examine political communication abound, there are solid arguments for examining political communication discursively. Analysing discourse allows scholars to uncover how power structures are maintained through language both implicitly and explicitly (Fairclough 2003; van Dijk 1993). For example, Krzyżanowski (2017, 412) notes that examining politics (in Krzyżanowski’s study, EU political communication) from a discursive perspective is “central in understanding the on-going search for and negotiation of agency and identity in EU’s complex intra-, inter- and extra-institutional contexts”. Put more bluntly, analysing discourse exposes “discursively shaped and sustained power structures” (ibid, 416).

Political communication is not simply restricted to news stories and politicians’ speeches. Popular culture, including social media, can also articulate politics. Since the 1990s, scholars have noted the impact the internet and social media have had on politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Von Hippel 2005; Jenkins 2006; Vatikiotis 2014). Other forms of popular culture have also been noted for their political content, as seen in late-night satirical TV talk shows (Molek-Kozakowska 2013), comic strips (Wodak and Forchtner 2014; Veloso and Bateman 2013), toy figurines (van Leeuwen 2008), war monuments (Abousnnouga and Machin 2010), factual crime reports (Machin and Mayer 2013) and popular music (Way 2018).

Arguments for examining politics expressed in popular culture are compelling. Van Leeuwen (2017, 290) notes, “The power of such [visuals in popular culture] representations lies precisely in the fact that their ideological meanings can be so easily denied by arguments such as that ‘it is only a story’ or ‘only a toy’, or that words are ‘precise’ while images are ‘polysemous’.” Though van Leeuwen was referring to visuals here, these attributes to all forms of popular culture, including popular music, are widely circulated, suggesting their importance for analysis by critical researchers. Machin (2013, 347) concurs by linking the popular with power. He notes that popular culture is where we most experience politics “as fun, as style, and simply as part of the taken for granted everyday world…. [though] all these different levels of communicative activity are infused by and shaped by, power relations and ideologies.”

Music is one such area, dismissed by many, though shown to articulate politics (Street 1988, 2013; Way 2018). Here, I argue that musical sounds play vital roles in expressions of politics universally in both traditional political contexts and less traditional ones. Opinions on relations between music and politics range from the most optimistic to those like Stravinsky who claimed that music is “essentially powerless to express anything at all…” (Stravinsky 1936). Though Stravinsky may have had reasons for making such a claim (Zbikowski 2015, 144), most scholars across disciplines acknowledge that musical sounds play a key role in meaning making (Frith 1996; Cook 1998; Machin 2010). Music produces broad “unnuanced” emotions in us, as well as signalling more nuanced memories and emotions attached to individual people and relationships in our lives (Cook 1998). Music communicates in ways which are either difficult or impossible to express in more propositional linguistic texts or images. For example, in advertisements, “Music transfers its own attributes to the story line and to the product, it creates coherence, making connections that are not there in the words or pictures; it even engenders meanings of its own” (Cook 1994, 38).

Here, I contend that one insightful way to understand relations between music and politics is to closely examine how political discourses are articulated in music. By approaching the subject “discursively”, we are able to answer specifically not only *what* is communicated in music in detail but also *how* this happens. This area has received some notice recently (see below), but is still very underdeveloped. The aim of this special issue is to enhance this area of study to enrich the wider academic fields of politics, music, discourse analysis, communication and specifically language.

**2. Music, Politics and relations between the two**

Music is not a universal category agreed upon across time and place (Cook and Everist 1999). Even within a given culture, what is considered music, speech or noise is in a constant state of flux (Attali 1977; van Leeuwen 1999; Way 2018). Think of how opinions differ between people listening to Heavy Metal, Grime or Muzak. All the same, a given culture shares some common ground on how they define music where music culture “is a tradition of imagining sound as music. Its basic identity lies in its mechanism for constituting sounds as intentional objects, from the level of a single note to that of a complete work” (Cook 1990, 223).

Politics is another contentious area. The Cambridge on-line dictionary defines politics as “the activities of the government, members of law-making organizations, or people who try to influence the way a country is governed”. But dictionaries also include definitions about ‘power’, ‘control’ and ‘status’ within groups or organisations. In fact, Machin and van Leeuwen (2016, 246) note a shift in power where the “power of centralized nation states has waned” with a corresponding rise in power of “the global economy”. But it is not just governments and corporations who articulate politics. Activists and musicians also use music to articulate a point of view, including the pleasures and values pop is associated with which may affect the actions and thoughts of fans. In this special issue, we consider politics in music to include “the politics of the everyday…being concerned with issues of power, equality and personal identity…[music which] affects the way people behave” (Street 1988, 3).

Political music has a long history with some claiming its origins reach as far back as ancient Greece. Much scholarly work has examined more recent offerings including music from 1920s Europe which, along with art and architecture, was “used as central parts of communicating fascist ideology” (Machin and Richardson 2012, 331). Popular music has also had its share of ‘political’ songs from Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit”(1939) to Childish Gambino’s “This is America” (2018). Though political music abounds, there is no real consensus amongst scholars as to the nature of relations between music and politics (Hesmondhalgh and Negus 2002, 7). Some views are highly optimistic in terms of music’s ability to represent and promote socio-political interests or particular cultural values (Lorraine 2006; Korczynski 2014) while others are far more limited (Grossberg 1992). Here, I consider some of these in detail to inform our study.

The study of music and politics did not start with The Frankfurt School and Theodore Adorno’s (1941) *On Popular Music*. However, this is a seminal piece that still reverberates in scholarship and everyday life. Adorno claims popular music is political. It serves listeners standardised fare with unique selling points, or pseudo individualisation. This promotes consumption which is always passive, and endlessly repetitive, confirming the world as it is, a kind of “social cement”. “Serious” classical and advant garde music, alternatively, offers an implicit critique of capitalist society and suggests an alternative, utopian vision of society expressed through “form” rather than commanding through “content”.

 Opposed to Adorno, Raymond Williams and other Culturalists believe active production of meaning is at the heart of popular culture, not passive consumption. Cultural texts reveal the “structure of feeling” or shared values and beliefs of a society. Through an examination of cultural texts, we can uncover dominant discourses of a given society. The cultural products which are widely distributed, archived and held in esteem are selected, where “there will always be a tendency for this process of selection to be related to and even governed by the interests of the class that is dominant” (Williams 1963, 313). Furthermore, though most popular culture given to the public is aesthetically wanting, Williams believes meaning is generated by how fans use popular culture products. This theoretical positioning emphasises the importance of social, political and consumption contexts in the making of meanings. This is confirmed by a large number of scholars from various disciplines who also note that much of pop’s political power lies with listeners, meanings being ambiguous and open to individual interpretation (Hebdige 1979; Grossberg 1987; Street 1988; Huq 2002).

Sociologists have demonstrated how production, promotion, social and consumption contexts constrain and influence political meanings in music (Frith 1988; Street 1988). Street (1988) notes how politics in pop are a result of its making, marketing and distribution. Musicians’ politics, which they may choose to represent in song, are a result of their experiences as individuals, citizens and workers (Street 1988, 128). Musicians’ original ideas are only the beginning of a process which sees input by musicians, record executives, lawyers, accountants, producers, engineers, publicists, sales personnel, radio programmers, disc jockeys, music journalists and many more. As Street (1988, 6) observes, “A single is not a piece of pure art; it is the result of countless choices and compromises, using criteria that mix the aesthetic, the political and the economic”.

Simon Frith (1981) breaks down pop’s institutional context into three steps: who records, what is recorded and what reaches the public. Who records is determined by Artist and Repetoire (A & R) personnel, managers and bands. Record companies want bands that turn a profit, so conservative choices and stereotypes are exploited. What is recorded is determined in the studio by bands, record producers and engineers all of who want to produce something that sells, that is, “a sound that can be fitted into the appropriate radio selling-slots” (ibid, 113). The final step is music distribution determined by musical gatekeepers such as radio station music directors, disc jockeys in clubs and pubs, concert promoters and now YouTube recommendations and Spotify all of which tend to favour music that “maintain[s] the status quo” (Street 1988, 124).

Production and promotion by large corporations, along with social and consumption contexts constrain potential meanings in pop. Though constrained, the music industry does not necessarily control music “unless the stock market is offended” (ibid, 107). Again this is open to debate. Capple and Garofalo (1977) blamed 1970s de-politicised rock on “the control of musical production by a few major labels that led to the erosion of oppositional or anti-materialist music” (in Hesmondhalgh and Negus 2002, 145). However, Garofalo (1986, 83) later re-assessed the scale and certainty of this critique by acknowledging that “there is no point-to-point correlation between controlling the marketplace economically and controlling the form, content and meaning of music”.

Another issue considered by academics is what styles of music are compatible with which politics. When dealing with political issues, most pop songs such as Pussy Riot’s “Punk Prayer” and hip hop from around the world rarely deal with other country’s politics, keeping to the local (Terkourafi 2010; Street 2013). Saying that, there are exceptions where music attempts “to address and transform both local and global political discourses” (Hess 2010, 169), such as Saian’s “Feleğin çemberine 40 kurşun” which tackles injustices both in Turkey and globally (Way 2016). But these are more the exception than the rule. Pop also does not necessarily express conventional politics well (Street 1988; Frith 1988), as examined in detail by Lyndon Way in this issue. Instead, music is more compatible with political ideas such as nationalist struggles, the politics of leisure, gender, race, class, sexuality and the environment (Frith 1988; Shuker 2001).

Likewise, “not every style of music or every form of musician” can be associated with politics (Peddie 2011, 53). In short, genre plays a large role in fans’ expectations about music and politics. Street (1988, 6) notes how “rock, soul and folk musicians can talk about politics, and country singers about marriage and children, in ways that are denied to most pop musicians”. Rock’s politics can include being anti-establishment, something pop bands have more trouble with. Alternatively, American hip hop may tackle black rights and racism (Fraley 2009, 43) while global hip hop includes “youth protest and resistance around the World” which challenges the status quo (Lee 2010; Williams 2010).

When tackling politics, pop tends to be highly populist rather than about specific issues (Street 1988; Way 2016a). By populist, I mean “representing popular interests and values” (Williams 1988, 238), including a universal “appeal to the people and anti-elitism” (Laclau 2005, 7). Populism “pretends to speak for the underdog [‘the people’] whose political identity is constructed by opposing it to an elite” (De Cleen and Carpentier 2010, 180). According to Laclau (2005, 74), “the people’’ is not a prefixed natural category, but a signifier that acquires meaning through a diversity of discourses articulated by different groups. This has been demonstrated in music associated with protests (Way 2016a).

Much recent research acknowledges the important role fans play in constructing the politics in pop. In his classic study, Dick Hebdige (1979) demonstrates how music and other cultural artefacts are used by youth as part of a self-imposed exile from mainstream culture. The idea of “using” pop to be political is seen in the activities associated with different tastes of music (Grossberg 1987). Settings, fans’ lifestyles and consumption context also contribute to meanings (Frith 1988; Zbikowski 2015). Zbikowski (2015) argues how Harburg and Arlen’s “Over the Rainbow” functions one way while performed by a cabaret performer in a nightclub and quite another way when performed by an amateur singer at a friend’s funeral. Though he acknowledges overlap in meaning, he believes “there will also be significant differences, many of which reflect the multivariate ways the musical utterances actually function within these social and cultural contexts” (ibid., 149).

Furthermore, public perceptions and reactions to popular music and their fans also contribute to meanings in music (Shuker 2001). In fact, at times these make pop “political”, as was the case of 1970s punk which experienced a hostile reaction that “help[ed] to politicize the musicians and their fans” (ibid., 217). Pussy Riot’s well-publicised 2012 performance in a Moscow church and its aftermath were political because

Whatever view one takes, the fact that a group of musicians can ignite feelings among presidents, pop stars, diplomats, academics and clerics is worthy of note. Perhaps more significantly, the feelings they provoked were not about matters of moral behaviour (the traditional focus of pop-inspired discussion), but about political rights, the abstract principles that found constitutions (Street 2013, 48).

Beyonce’s 2016 Superbowl 50 performance of “Formation” caused much debate. This featured dancers dressed in black and sporting afros — reminiscent of the 1960s Black Panther Party. They performed black power salutes, arranged themselves into the letter X for Malcolm X, and held up a sign which read “Justice for Mario Wood”, the 26 year old shot twenty times for not dropping a knife for San Francisco police officers. This performance caused former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani to exclaim on Fox News that "I think it was outrageous….the halftime show I thought was ridiculous anyway.” Alternatively, Black Lives Matter activist Erika Totten praised Beyoncé's message claiming “Our goal is to disrupt the status quo and bring the message wherever the message may not be heard." Here again is a case which highlights the importance of consumption contexts in politicising pop.

**3. Prioritising a critical multimodal discursive approach**

Most approaches to music and politics tend to ask *what* politics are articulated in music. This special issue extends this area of study by focussing on *how* this is achieved using a number of perspectives which put to the forefront an examination of discourse. Despite contributors using a range of approaches, all critically examine the juncture of discourse, music and politics with an emphasis on discourse and an appreciation that music is a “multimodal ensemble” (Norris 2004). This description opens up a Pandora’s box of ideas which needs clarification.

By critical, I mean scholarship that reflects political commitments opposed to social inequality and the abuse of power (van Dijk 1993). Scholars argue that all social science is socio-politically situated, selective, limited, partial and thereby biased (Fairclough 2003; Richardson 2007). Choosing a critical approach provides, “a scientific basis for a critical questioning of social life in moral and political terms, e.g. in terms of social justice and power” (Fairclough 2003, 15).

“Discourse” is a contested term with “formalist” definitions being associated with formal linguistics and “functionalist” definitions associated with social semiotics. Ruth Wodak (2001, 66) provides a particularly useful functionalist one, seeing discourse as

…a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts, which manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic, oral or written tokens, very often as “texts”, that belong to specific semiotic types, that is genres.

This definition acknowledges discourse as groups or “bundles” of communicative acts which represent a “thematically interrelated” issue or idea in a particular way. Interestingly, for this special issue, Wodak notes that these can be expressed in writing as well as “oral” and “semiotic” communication.

Recent definitions have become more encompassing, to accommodate contemporary neo-liberal uses of language. Though indeed, scholars acknowledge that discourse is “language-in-use” (Krzyżanowski and Forchtner 2016,254), it is seen as more than just representations of, say, people and groups of people. Krzyżanowski (2016, 309) notes that discourse encompasses “various social and political and indeed abstract concepts.” In the articulation of neo-liberal discourses, he argues that concepts become operationalised

for the introduction and legitimation of various forms of regulation. They are not just additions or elements of a meta-language tied to representation and abstraction of social action, but often become outright replacements of discursive constructions – in the sense of representations – of social change or of those that are undertaking and/or undergoing some rapid and very often abrupt social processes (ibid.).

Concepts and representations articulate discourses which are powerful, a form of social practice or action, something people do to, or for, each other (van Leeuwen 1993). They are closely interconnected with other elements of social life (Fairclough 2003, 3; Machin 2016, 330). In fact, van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999, 92) note this interdependence where “discourse constitutes social practice and is at the same time constituted by it”. Music, I argue, is a means of communicating discourses which project social values and beliefs beneficial to some parties at the expense of others, used by music producers and interpretted by fans to communicate (political) discourses.

Ideology is closely entwined with the concept of discourse. It is key to understanding issues of language, communication, power, and politics across a large variety of communicative acts (Kress and Hodge 1979; Fairclough 1989, 2003). Fiske (1989, 165) views ideology as “a way of making sense [of the world], the sense it makes always has a social and political dimension.” So, ideology is social and political. Kress and Hodge (1979, 6) note that ideology is “a systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view,” that is, representations. Fairclough (2003, 9) seizes this idea, defining ideology as “representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power domination and exploitation.” Here, ideology is seen as “representations” of the world, such as those found in musical communications. This definition links representations to “power, domination and exploitation” yet acknowledges struggle in “establishing, maintaining and changing social relations” of power.

 The concern for discourse can be traced back to the 1970s when Kress and Hodge investigated the way ideology could be studied through the analysis of language. They found that ideology always “involve[s] language,”and language choices (Kress and Hodge 1979, 15). In fact, if you track the importance of language in relation to power and politics in society historically, it is claimed that “the exercise of power, in modern society, is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through the ideological workings of language” (Fairclough 1989, 2). Subsequently, scholars argue that ideological workings are evident in not just language, but a whole host of representations, including those in music (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; Machin 2007; Way 2018). It is through the analysis of ideological discourses that we can answer *what* is the extent to which music can articulate ideas about politics by focusing on *how* this is done, systematically and in detail.

But music is not monomodal, as is the case with almost all communication, where a mode may be defined as a socially agreed upon channel of communication (McKerrell and Way 2017). In 1996 and again in 2001, Kress and van Leeuwen demonstrated how meanings in texts are generated not just by written language but through other semiotic resources such as visuals, material objects and architecture. Machin (2013, 348) believes their multimodal analysis points “to the possibility of a social semiotic approach to different forms of communication that allowed not only deeper analysis, but as in linguistics, a more systematic level of description. And this is where its strength lies.”

Analysing texts multimodally can reveal how different modes, play various roles in articulating ideological discourses (Kress 2010; Machin 2013). This has the advantage of revealing the way each mode works to articulate discourses “on a particular occasion, in a particular text” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 29). So, the affordances of each mode need to be taken into account, as each mode communicates to us in different ways. That is, “It is possible to say something with one kind of semiotic resource that you cannot say with another” (Machin 2016, 326).This multimodal approach views features in texts as communicating discourses, comprising identities and values. Though textual features are analysed to uncover their meaning potential, rigid connotative meanings are not assigned to these. Instead, analysis considers the important role of cultural conventions and metaphorical associations which work alongside features of texts to construct meanings. The music industry, governments and artists have embraced the idea of music being multimodal, relying on visuals such as posters, films and album covers to enhance and make specific, the meaning potential in musical sounds. Music videos utilise visuals, lyrics and musical sounds, while live performance may include spoken word, stage positioning, guests and even venue to articulate political discourses (Way 2018).

There is a small but growing field of research examining music and discourse (see Machin 2010; Way and McKerrell 2017; Way 2018). These studies demonstrate how music can communicate ideas, attitudes and identities through cultural references and specific meaning potentials. Much of this research leans on ground-breaking work on music and meaning, resulting in an approach developed by van Leeuwen (1999) and Tagg (1982, 1984) and furthered by Machin (2010). Van Leeuwen (1999) identifies six major domains of sound that music producers manipulate to generate meaning potentials (perspective, time, melody, voice quality and timbre, and modality). These ideas have been applied to music in a number of contexts, with most found in a special journal issue, an edited collection and a monograph (see van Leeuwen (ed.) 2012; Way and McKerrell (eds.) 2017, and Way 2018). Studies like these point to the importance of analysing music discursively and multimodally to reveal in detail political discourses articulated in music. This special issue is an important trajectory to this area of study, offering case studies from around the world by scholars from a wide variety of academic backgrounds.

**4. In this Special Issue**

To illustrate how relations between music, discourse and politics relate to each other on a universal level, in this special issue, we examine a wide range of case studies. The case studies offer variety in terms of international scope, methodology and types of communication, enriching the study of musical political discourse. These case studies can be used as evidence for universal claims, while also highlighting the importance of different social, historical and political contexts. We have organised the articles in terms of whether they articulate political discourses which challenge existing political and social structures or support these. This structure emphasises the point that music is political, regardless of where it is positioned by producers and audiences on any political scale.

Four of our contributors examine music which challenges dominant political and/ or social discourses. Martin J. Power and Aileen Dillane ask how a popular music song and performance can tell listeners about society, privilege and the political sphere. They argue that British singer Billy Bragg successfully represents himself as an authentic voice of struggles of the international working class whilst challenging discourses which represent capitalism as innate, natural and inevitable. Centered on a deep textual and musicological reading of a Bragg song, they argue that the track’s relevance spans time and governments. This highlights that while political songs are a product of their time, many of them also have the ability to transcend that historical moment and have a longer shelf-life in terms of their capacity to inform political thinking and action.

Laura Filardo-Llamas also uses internationally renowned musicians as a case study. Filardo-Llamas examines how the performance of songs by U2 are used as reactions to different political events. She argues that the political function of performance can be reflected in the promotion of particular world-views about given socio-political events and/or in the attempt by the singer to make the audience perform given political actions. To illustrate this, she examines the re-contextualisation process of U2’s “Sunday Bloody Sunday” which was originally written in response to the Northern Irish conflict, but was later used to react to other socio-political events.

The following two papers take more ‘local’ case study to determine how politics can be challenged. Barbara Henderson turns her attention to the UK’s centuries-old history of subversive choir singing. She notes that since the election of a UK Conservative coalition government in 2010, the number of choirs with a left-wing, green or anarchist agenda has grown to around thirty. This paper performs a discourse analysis on some works of the Leeds-based Commoners Choir. The study focuses on the roles of lyrics, performance, genre and use of dialect in challenging discourses of austerity-based economic and social policies.

It is not only the left that challenges elite discourses. As a case study, Eduar Barbosa Caro and Johanna Ramírez Suavita examine the lyrics and images in nineteen ‘corridos paracos’ videos which support far-right armed resistance in Colombia. In this paper, Barbosa Caro and Suavita ask what are the discourses articulated in the *corridos paracos* and the implications of their communicative practices. They perform both an image content analysis and a quanti-qualitative lyric content analysis based on actions and actors in conflict settings to identify behaviours, places and self-presentation in these musical artefacts.

Though some music challenges dominant discourses, much music can also reproduce the political and social status quo. Four of our papers examine how this is done in four different contexts. Gooyong Kim critically examines how Korean popular music (K-pop) group Girls’ Generation promotes a discourse of resilience as a neoliberal ideal of female subjectivity. An analysis of K-Pop videos reveals these provide audiences with a hegemonic message that individuals have to be responsible for their success and well-being. While ostensibly promoting female empowerment, the videos update and reinforce patriarchal gender norms and expectations and promote neo-liberal discourses.

Lyndon Way examines the juncture between music, discourse and political parties using the case study of Turkish political campaign advertisements. Here, leaning on Multimodal Critical Discourse Studies and musicology, Way examines how the Turkish government employs popular music videos to articulate party specific discourses. The study encompasses the 2011 parliamentary election campaign and the 2017 presidential referendum campaign. The analysis reveals precisely the discourses articulated, how this is done and importantly, the strengths and shortcomings of music video as a means of communicating party political discourses.

Matthew Ord considers how cultural nationalist discourse is articulated in the recording choices of contemporary English folk music. Ord also uses Multimodal Critical Discourse Studies and argues that relatively little of MCDS deals specifically with the semantic contribution of sound recording to the construction of political meaning in musical texts. This article focuses on ‘field recordings’ of contemporary folk artists Stick in the Wheel’s *From Here: English Folk Field Recordings* (2017). Through a detailed multimodal analysis, the article traces how the artists construct a politically-charged image of ‘Englishness’ as part of an ongoing contestation of the space of English cultural identity.

Our last article, written by Soudeh Ghaffari, examines the roles of religious musical Eulogies used as ‘war songs’ during the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war. Ghaffari argues that these ‘War songs’ construct and characterise the Iranian national identity and aided in mobilising volunteers for the war effort. She performs a multimodal analysis on the lyrics and musical sounds of ten of these songs, with a deep religious and socio-political contextualisation. She argues that by reflecting the power of religious discourse in the (non-religious) highly nationalistic occasion of war, these war songs not only encouraged the Iranian nation to attend to the war fronts, but also ensured the survival of the Islamic ideology of Iranian revolutionaries.

**5. Conclusion**

This special issue is unique and advances the study of music, discourse, politics, communication and language. This is achieved by bringing together musicians and scholars of media, communications, musicology, ethnomusicology, sociology and discourse to examine music and politics from discursive perspectives. This collection of diverse case studies exposes how music can articulate politics. Though this has been done before, here the variety of scholars in terms of approaches and expertise that we have assembled enriches this area of study. The aim of this special issue is grand indeed. Though by all means, much more of this is needed, here we offer a start.

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