2. Conceptualization

2.1 Conceptualizing "external communication"

Communication during conflicts happens in a variety of constellations. The numbers of actors and different forms of communication enable us to distinguish between different "communication contexts". This study focuses on a particular communication context: "external communication".[1]

Upon consulting the literatures about propaganda, persuasion, public diplomacy and other related literatures exploring communication in competitive and conflictive settings, the following characteristics can be identified as distinguishing the different communication contexts: (a) The type of the selected target audience, (b) the directionality of the communication, (c) the relationship of the target audience with the target audience, (d) the type of communicating actor, and (e) the

1 The communication constellation is a crucial scope condition that needs to be clearly determined and understood before acts of communication are compared. This study exclusively focuses on examining one particular communication constellation that shall be called "external communication". Distinguishing between different communication constellations, focusing on one particular type of communication constellation and defining what is meant when speaking about "external communication" as communication constellation is important, as different communication constellations have very different characteristics and qualities and, therefore, can provide very different conditions for communication: For analyzing what strategies of external communication conflict parties use during asymmetric conflicts, the first research question examined in this study, it is important to define what is understood as "external communication" to be able to make sure that for all analyzed actors the same type of communication, i.e., communication within the same communication constellation, is examined. Focusing on only one type of communication constellation allows keeping the influence of the communication constellation constant and thereby makes sure that the same forms of communication are examined for the different conflict parties. Furthermore, for examining what shapes the selection of communication strategies of the different conflict parties, the second research question of this study, keeping the type of communication constellation selected for the analysis constant and thereby avoiding varying conditions provided by unequal communication constellations matters, as these unequal conditions would constitute an interfering variable distorting the results.

Table 1: Understanding of external communication in this study

Feature of communication context	Manifestations of the communication context
Target audience	Foreign audience, particularly thus far unaffiliated civil population
Directionality	Unidirectional mass communication (one-to-many)
Relationship of the target audience with the target audience	Friendly, or at least neutral, attitude toward the Western world and the international community
Communicating actor	Official organizations representing the conflict parties
Attributability	Fully attributable (i.e., overt communication)

attributability of the communication. Using these characteristics, "external communication" shall thus be understood as open and fully attributable, unidirectional mass communication of an official organization representing a conflict party that is directed to a foreign audience, toward which the communicating actor has a friendly or at least neutral attitude, and in particular, to a so far unaffiliated civil population (cf. table 1). A detailed discussion of the different characteristics can be found in the chapter A.1.2. "Detailed discussion of the categories of the definition of 'external communication'" of the online annex.

2.2 Conceptualizations of strategies of external communication

Having introduced what shall be understood as external communication within the realm of this study, the next section introduces and conceptualizes the two most relevant strategies of external communication during conflicts.[2]

Within the existing literature referring to conflict and communication two strands of literature can be identified: One group highlights the effectiveness of external communication making negative attributions to the opponent ("shaming"), whilst another one highlights the importance of positive self-attributions ("branding"). The following section introduces both strategies, identifying their rhetorical structure by summarizing how the two strategies are defined within the state of research and discussing what makes them particularly promising

2 For purposes of linguistic simplicity, the term "strategy of external communication" shall refer to both a specific type of content used in a communicated message and a general tendency of an actor to use specific types of content in its external communication. To emphasize the former alternatively the term "tactic" could be used, to emphasize the latter the term "overall strategy".

strategies of external communication from the point of view of the two strands of theory. It shall also be evaluated which types of reference themes are particularly promising for the corresponding strategies of external communication. This thus develops a typology which is then used in chapter 5 to analyze what strategies of external communication conflict parties use. At the same time, the typology also serves as conceptualization for the dependent variable and their manifestations when answering the second research question of this study.

2.2.1 Conceptualizing "shaming"

A diverse group of authors, of which many are scholars dealing with research fields and concepts such as norm diffusion (e.g. Risse et al. 1999: 11, 15; Jetschke & Liese 2013: 26,29), naming and shaming (e.g. Krain 2012), blame-shifting (e.g. Mortensen 2012) and rhetorical action (e.g. Schimmelfennig 2001: 64), point out that the most prominent option for a conflict party to manipulate the image of the conflict (regardless of whether it is a private, a political or even a violent military conflict) of a third-party audience is to ascribe attitudes or behavior that are typically perceived by the targeted audience as negative to a rival actor. Actions like these are typically labeled as "shaming", respectively "naming and shaming" (in eponymous literature) or "blaming" (in the field of blame-shifting).

The rhetorical structure of shaming

Within the different literatures on shaming two core elements of the rhetorical structure of shaming[3] can be identified: On the one hand, a shaming message contains a description of a perceived negative experience, e.g. an experience of a loss or harm. On the other hand, an attribution of the negative experience to another actor is made. The negative experience is portrayed as avoidable or someone else's fault and another actor is depicted as responsible for either causing or failing to prevent this negative experience (i.e., the actor is depicted as a perpetrator, offender or culprit) (Mortensen 2012: 441f.; Hood 2011: 6; Sulitzeanu-Kenan & Hood 2005: 2; Iyengar 1989 & 1991). The element of identifying and recognizing an experience as injurious or harmful has partially also been separately labeled as "naming" (Hood 2011: 7; Felstiner et al. 1980: 635). While attributions can theoretically be undetermined or implicit, typically the (alleged) perpetrator is mentioned explicitly. Optionally, the (alleged) victim(s) can also be described.

The following two social media posts are examples of typical shaming posts:

3 Respectively of "naming and shaming" or "blaming". For purposes of linguistic simplicity, in this study from now on the term "shaming" is used to refer to negative descriptions of opponents.

1. A post published by the Rojava Defense Units on their English Twitter channel on the 14th of March 2018 (*accessible online: https://twitter.com/DefenseUnits/status/974033581914968064, source accessed on: 23.04.2018*) shows a series of four pictures portraying wounded children, partially with blood on their faces. The caption of the post reads: "Turkish artillery and airstrikes once again attacking civilians and children. #TwitterKurds #TurkeyHandsOffAfrin #TurkeyKillsCivilians #StopAfrinGenocide #Afrin #Efrînê". The post contains the typical elements of the rhetorical structure of a shaming post: The children are portrayed as victims and the post deems Turkey as the perpetrator. The negative experience for which Turkey is shamed is the country's violent aggressions and the hurt afflicted to the children and civilians.
2. A post published by the Syrian National Council on their English Facebook page on the 19th of April 2018 (*accessible online: https://www.facebook.com/SyrianNationalCoalition.en/photos/a.437287806357010.1073741828.436337196452071/1680600082025770/?type=3&theater, source accessed on: 25.04.2018*) shows destructed buildings and a military vehicle with a Russian flag. The caption of the post reads: "#Assad Regime & #Russia Blocking Entry of #UN CW Experts to Site of Chemical Attack in #Douma https://buff.ly/2JYlsSm #Syria #OPCW". Like the post of the Rojava Defense Units described before also this post contains the typical elements of the rhetorical structure of a shaming post: The Syrian government (labeled as "Assad Regime") is portrayed as a perpetrator. It is accused by the authors of the post of actioning attacks with chemical weapons and blocking access for international controllers. Russia is referred to as a perpetrator in this instance, too. A specific victim or group of victims is not mentioned. Additionally, the picture shows destroyed buildings as a further negative experience.

The rationale of shaming

The rationale of shaming is to damage the image of the opponent (Krain 2012: 574) and/or to shift blame away from oneself (Mortensen 2012). Successful shaming manages to present its accusations credibly for either the decision-makers in the targeted third-party country, for the civil society and the public of the targeted country (or at least certain influential and/or powerful constituencies) or even for both. In any case, damaging the image of the shamed actor can trigger actions that are detrimental to the shamed one. Altogether, shaming can be effective in the following ways:

1. Firstly, the shamed actor might be persuaded by the shaming message that its own behavior has been wrong and thus adapt the desired behavior.

2. Moreover, decision-makers abroad might believe the accusations and the image portrayed of the conflict party and the conflict itself. These images may be what influence decision-makers abroad regarding whether or not to intervene in the conflict, how to do so. This can also lead to decision-makers abroad considering whether or not they should cooperate with the conflict parties, and how to do so. This could ultimately lead to changes to the detriment of the shamed actor.
3. Furthermore, the accusations of the shaming message might not be believed by the decision-makers of a targeted third-party country, even then, however, the decision-makers abroad can exploit the accusations as an argument to justify an intervention against the conflict party that reflects their own interests.
4. Finally, the shaming message may be used as a means to build up moral and public pressure on foreign decision-makers by rhetorical entrapment, convincing and mobilizing relevant constituencies within the public and civil society of the targeted third-party country.

While the first of the four aforementioned options in practice is surely the least likely effect of shaming and the fourth option the most likely to be put into effect, all these effects can theoretically result from shaming. The following paragraphs introduce the corresponding rationale and functioning of shaming in further detail:

The first (though least likely) way shaming can be effective is that it might persuade the actor accused in the act of shaming. Indeed, Hood points out that it is a normal psychological trait that humans want to be well thought of (Hood 2011: 7). The shamed actor might be hurt emotionally by the shaming, as the image of the actor presented in the shaming diverges from its self-image. Indeed, Gränzer and Risse et al. offer an empirical example for such a case, arguing that when Morocco was accused of its human rights violations in the 1980s, the shaming which came in the course of international protests against these violations persuaded Hassan II, the king of Morocco, that the political practice in the country concerning human rights was not consistent with the identity to which he aspired and, ultimately resulted in a change to Moroccan political practices (Risse et al. 1999: 15; Gränzer 1999: 125; cf. also Gränzer et al. 1998).

Although the accusations of a shaming message can, theoretically, directly persuade a conflict party of its misbehavior (Risse et al. 1999: 15; Gränzer 1999: 125; cf. also Gränzer et al. 1998), the effectiveness of the shaming typically results from the damaging of the shamed actor's image caused by shaming. Shaming creates an external pressure on the shamed actor: Being perceived in a negative way harms the reputation of an actor within the eyes of relevant political third-party actors as well as within the international community as a whole (Krain 2012: 574, 575, 577). Such a reputational loss affects the shamed actor, as when the image of the conflict abroad is used to make strategic foreign political decisions, the corresponding

decisions are less likely to be favorable for the conflict party, if its image has been damaged by shaming. For example, a loss of reputation can decrease the likelihood that other actors, potential partners and donors will maintain or initiate cooperation with the shamed actor, making it more difficult for other actors to justify supporting the shamed actor (Krain 2012: 575). If it is particularly successful, shaming can even trigger third party actors to impose sanctions on the shamed actor or to intervene against them (Badescu 2010: 158).

Shaming does not even need to persuade the decision-makers abroad that see or hear the shaming to be successful. Shaming can also be harmful to the shamed actor, if it is exploited by third-party actors that do not necessarily believe the accusations in the shaming messages, but that have interests in the conflict region which, however, diverge from the interests of the shamed conflict party, as the content of the shaming messages can provide arguments which can be used to justify an intervention against the accused actor. Some authors have pointed out, for example, that human rights shaming can also be used (directly or indirectly) as a justification for measures motivated by other interests. For instance, measures in the context of the "war on terror" like the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s were not only justified with security-related concerns such as the possession of mass destruction weapons and terrorism but partially also with accusations of human rights violations (Montgomery 2006: 90; Terman 2013; Cushman 2005: 93). On the one hand, shaming messages can be used to illustrate the need for military measures abroad, thus decreasing domestic opposition to such measures (Evans 2009: 24ff.). On the other hand, shaming can serve in the context of international law as an argument as to why certain extraordinary measures such as a military intervention are necessary, even though such an intervention violates fundamental principles of the international law such as the sovereignty of state and the non-intervention principle (Cushman 2005: 93).

Successful shaming, however, neither requires convincing the decision-makers in the targeted third-party country themselves nor evoking their interest to intervene. It is sufficient, if the shaming communication manages to build up public and/or moral pressure onto them to react (Dietrich & Murdie 2015: 2), e.g. by ceasing support or imposing sanctions. Often, indeed, for example, economic ties and interests, as well as the high costs of intervention, or a lack of information about the ongoing events make the decision-makers in third-party actors hesitate to intervene in the conflict, even when fundamental principles, norms and values such as the protection of human rights are violated in the conflict. In this case, however, the suffering side in the conflict can use – supported by international human rights networks and international media reporting – shaming to raise awareness about the violations and their negative consequences. The pictures of the negative experience have the potential to generate outrage among viewers in the country in which the shaming message is viewed. If the shaming messages succeed to prompt

such strong emotions and if it is possible to reach out to a wide audience, this can create a public pressure that, if big enough, has the potential to pressurize the government in the corresponding country to the extent that it has to intervene (Hildebrandt et al. 2013; cf. also Risse et al. 1999: 20). Additionally, a particularly efficient form of moral pressure can be built up by the use of shaming, if it manages to create a situation of rhetorical entrapment by exposing inconsistencies between the commitments and declarations made by the pressured actors in the past and their current behavior, as this makes it easy to remind them of their commitment to certain values, ideas and norms which the actors perceive as important and relevant (or at least useful) and which they, therefore, do not want to be discredited (Schimmelfennig 2001: 64, 66; Risse et al. 1999: 16,28; Risse 2000: 23,32[4]). A prominent empirical example of a case in which a shaming strategy managed to induce governments to impose sanctions on a shamed actor are the shaming and lobbying activities of the Anti-Apartheid movement. The movement managed to raise world-wide attention for the human rights violations of the South African government and could thus build up moral and public pressure to impose a series of sanctions on the regime and to insulate it internationally (Risse & Ropp 1999: 268).

Reference themes that are particularly promising for the use of shaming

Shaming is particularly successful, if it can stimulate emotions such as outrage or concerns within the targeted audience. The best way to stimulate such strong emotions is to feature something that is perceived by the targeted audience from the perspective of its norms, ideas and values as particularly despicable and that can be presented clearly as the direct fault of the shamed actor, i.e., to feature a defiance of the shamed actor from one or more notions (norms, ideas or values)[5] that are perceived by the targeted audience as particularly important and relevant, portraying the negative consequences of these (alleged) violations (Woods 2009: 16f.).[6]

4 Cf. also Katzenstein 2013. Katzenstein's considerations also show that an interactive communication constellation as context offers different options than a unidirectional communication constellation as context, like it is the focus of this study. Therefore, as argued already in section 2.1., it is important to keep the communication constellation as context constant within the analysis.

5 Researchers from communication science and sociology examining the news value of media items such as, for instance, Niklas Luhmann have identified conflict (Luhmann 1996: 59) and breaches of norms ("scandals") (Luhmann 1996: 64ff.) as themes that are particularly promising to attract attention and that are perceived as particularly newsworthy, too.

6 Scholars of the field of norm diffusion highlight that shaming contributes to consciousness-raising abroad. States and actors credibly accused of defying from notions that are perceived by the targeted audience as particularly important and relevant (such as, for instance, human rights) are at risk to be perceived by the convinced audience as "pariah states" or "terrorists" not belonging to the civilized international community. This way shaming has the potential

Corresponding pictures and stories that are particularly promising for shaming are either pictures and stories representing particularly extreme acts of physical violence[7] and/or pictures and stories representing structural violence and disadvantages that are perceived as injustices. Both can trigger emotions such as shock, empathy and outrage and typically portray a subject that is or is linked to a violation (or at least an alleged violation) of human rights, a norm group which is globally perceived to be particularly fundamental and important.[8]

As the following example illustrates not all acts of violence can, however, be expected to be equally effective reference themes for shaming:[9] A border shooting between combatants leaving one of the combatants wounded for example is less likely to cause an outcry than a bombing of a hospital causing a high number of civilian casualties. Shaming can be expected to be most successful, if it refers to breaches of norms that are perceived as particularly extreme and/or immoral. As also the example above illustrates violence is perceived as particularly extreme, when it fulfills the following characteristics:

1. The damage is large scale, and the number of human casualties is particularly high (cf. also Clarke et al. 2015: 25ff.). Corresponding quantifications can help to illustrate the extent and therefore how severe the (alleged) norm violation is.
2. The action causing the damage and casualties is clearly attributable to the opponent conflict party. A clear "perpetrator" is thus determined, and no doubt is left about the question of guilt.

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to construct a strong distinction between "us" and "them", respectively in-groups and outgroups (Risse et al. 1999: 15).

7 Psychologists, media researchers and practitioners have observed an "if it bleeds it leads" bias, i.e., that violence receives particularly much attention in the media coverage (cf. e.g. Miller & Bokemper 2016: 10,13; Miller & Albert 2015; Schradie 2017).

8 Human rights are an attractive reference notion, as references to human rights are omnipresent in the daily political language and they are claimed to be a fundamental principle of the current international community of states. The violent context of wars offers plenty of opportunities to claim and show real or alleged violations of fundamental human rights and often also of the humanitarian law, such as violence against civilians, and to portray opponents with negative connotations, e.g. as "perpetrators", "evil", "terrorists" or "traitors" (Jetschke & Liese 2013: 41; Risse 2000: 29; Laursen 2000: 444; Prakash 2007). Secessionist forces also can refer to another generation of human rights, the notion of a right of self-determination of peoples, which emerged as part of the third generation of human rights, and condemn "occupation" and "aggression" (cf. e.g. Hartnett 2013).

9 This matters for communicating actors, as opportunities for allegations of norm breaches and reports about norm breaches are common and frequent. Headlines about violence and war for example are nearly every day in the news. To stand out from the crowd communicating actors, therefore, need to select pictures and stories which are not only promising but as promising as possible.

3. The victims belong to a group that is typically perceived as particularly vulnerable (cf. also Münkler 2005: 90). Violence against victims that are perceived as innocent and particularly helpless, such as "refugees, crying women and desperately resisting children" (Münkler 2005: 90), is typically perceived as particularly immoral and is typically condemned more vehemently and strongly than violence against soldiers and other combatants. This conventional wisdom is also manifested in the principles of humanitarian law, granting special protection to civilians and particularly vulnerable individuals, while accepting violence against ordinary combatants.

2.2.2. Conceptualizing "branding"

Altogether, the explanations above show that shaming is a highly attractive and powerful strategy of external communication. Reflecting upon the common use of external communication, mass media and social media, however, raises the question of whether shaming is indeed the only existing strategy of external communication that has the potential to be helpful for conflict parties. Looking at the private use of social media or at practices of marketing, it can be observed that this communication is dominated more by positive self-representation and promotion rather than by shaming. Considering their success in marketing and in everyday media and social media communication, such tactics focusing on positive communication could be a second particularly promising strategy for the external communication of conflict parties.

Indeed, several fields and concepts such as (nation) branding (e.g. Dinnie 2016), soft power (e.g. Nye 2008; Nye 2009; Nye 1990: 168ff.; Melissen 2005), cultural diplomacy (e.g. Arndt 2005) and sports diplomacy (e.g. Murray 2012) as well as public diplomacy (e.g. Gilboa 2001) show that actors cannot merely just influence how they and the context in which they operate are perceived abroad by shaming their opponents – they can also use more positive forms of communication and focus on improving their own image abroad: The theories of nation branding parallel ideas from marketing and emphasize the importance of countries defining their "brand". Similarly, the concept of soft power emphasizes the power and political implications of cultural attractiveness (Nye 2008). While public diplomacy and cultural and sports diplomacy are not limited by their definition to positive communication, most contributions from the corresponding fields predominantly deal with activities based on positive forms of communication and show how foreign decision-making can be influenced indirectly by building up relationships with foreign civil societies and individuals and influencing their opinions. I propose to define such acts of communication in which an actor depicts themselves in a positive way as a strategy of "branding".

The rhetorical structure of branding

Analogous to shaming the rhetorical structure of branding has two core elements which can be defined identified as follows: On the one hand, a branding message contains a reference to a subject that is assumed by the communicating actor to be perceived by the targeted audience as positive. On the other hand, branding also requires an attribution; it needs to name an actor to which the positive experience shall be attributed to. In the case of branding the communicating actor depicts itself, someone or something related to itself as the target of the attribution and thereby claims the positive experience for itself (Hood 2011: 9).[10] This means that structurally branding is the opposite of shaming, as it is concerned with the target of the attribution ("self" not "other") as well as the ascribed value of the described experience ("positive" instead of "negative").

Table 2: Comparison of the rhetorical structures of „shaming" vs. "branding"

Type of communication strategy	**Shaming**	**Branding**
Characteristic	**Attributes of characteristic**	
Ascribed value	Negative	Positive
Target of attribution	Other	Self

The following two social media posts are good examples of typical branding posts:

1. A post published on the English-speaking public diplomacy channel of the Republic of Turkey on Twitter (now: Presidency of the Republic of Turkey Directorate of Communications, earlier Republic of Turkey Office of the Prime Minister Directorate General of Press and Information) on the 14th of October 2016 (*accessible online: https://twitter.com/ByegmENG/status/821289050875129856/, source accessed on: 25.04.2018*) shows a solar power plant with plenty of solar panels, a blue, sunny sky and a green tree. The caption of the post reads: "Alternative #energy upturns in #Turkey in 2016 Rising figures: – 230% #solar – 31,5% #geothermal – 27,5% #windenergy http://byegm.gov.tr/english/agenda/solar-e

10 Hood does not use the term "branding" but the term "credit claiming". The definition of "branding" can be built up parallelly to Hood's most basic definition of "credit claiming".

nergy-in-turkey-shines-out-in-2016/104621 …". The post contains the typical elements of the rhetorical structure of a branding post: The Turkish government promotes itself by showing its efforts for renewable energy. This is an action that is typically perceived as positive by the international community, as these actions align with the notion of sustainability, a reference notion that is shared as a common value within the international community. The hashtag "#Turkey" attributes the merits clearly to the Turkish government.

2. A video published by the Syrian Ministry of Tourism on their English-speaking YouTube channel on the 30th of August 2016 (*accessible online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=saXH4yQARqg, source accessed on: 25.04.2018*) promotes tourism in Latika. Like the post of the Turkish Government described before, also this post contains the typical elements of the rhetorical structure of a branding post: In the video cultural attractiveness, natural beauty and touristic value have been selected as a positive experience which is instrumentalized for depicting the Syrian government in a positive light: The video from 2016 shows the sunny beaches of Latakia with jet skis driving over the blue sea and party music as background music.

The rationale of branding

Like the rhetorical structure, the rationale of branding can be described as parallel but reverse to the rationale of shaming: While shaming is a good tool to harm the relationships of opponents with the international community and third-party actors, branding is a good tool to maintain or improve existing relationships or even to build up new relationships with the international community or specific third-party actors. To do so the communicating actors convince decision-makers abroad of their positive qualities either directly or indirectly by winning the support of public opinion of the targeted country (or the power politically relevant parts of it) and in this way creating pressure on the decision-makers to adapt their positions toward the communicating actors in a positive way. If successful, the communicating actors can profit from branding in two ways:

1. On the one hand, branding can motivate the target audience to support the communicating actor (and to refrain from negative interventions).
2. On the other hand, with branding communicating actors provide arguments to existing supporters abroad to justify their support for the communicating actor.

Branding can motivate the target audience to support the communicating actor: If the communicating actor manages to successfully present itself credibly in a positive way, its reputation increases. Positive attributes gained by branding, such as

being a "nice", "reliable", "fair", "appropriately acting", "trustworthy "or "attractive" actor form a positive (or, at least, an improved) image of the actor. This image, in turn, influences how foreign actors react to the conflict itself as well as toward the conflict parties involved. Practically, this matters for the communicating conflict party, as a good image, positive emotions (such as sympathy) and strong relationships make it more likely to receive support and less likely to be sanctioned (Gilboa 2001: 5; van Ham 2003: 429). This social effect of branding is to a certain extent similar to a company that creates an advertisement in order to increase the likelihood of selling one of its products. It is not a coincidence that fields such as "public diplomacy" or "nation branding" lend a lot of their terminology and ideas from research and practitioners of the field of marketing. Similar to commercial advertisement branding can appeal to the interests and/or the needs of targeted viewers to make its branding message particularly efficient. This way the conflict party can present itself as an attractive partner from which the targeted audience can also profit, e.g. in fields such as trade, technology, culture, tourism or security.

Moreover, branding provides the communicating actors with arguments to existing supporters abroad to justify their support for the communicating actor: Like shaming can provide arguments for third-party actors with divergent interests to intervene in the conflict branding can provide arguments for third-party actors that are already supportive toward the communicating conflict party. This helps them to justify why they defend their allies and do not intervene against them or resume their support to them. The messages can be used as "evidence" that the actor is e.g. a "role model for democracy", a "reliable partner" or a "legitimate, elected government enjoying the support of the people", even if it deviates from other fundamental notions.

Reference themes that are particularly promising for the use of branding

There is a large variety of possible reference notions and themes conflict parties can use for this purpose. To promote themselves, conflict parties e.g. can highlight their strong military capacities or their military victories (cf. also chapter 1).[11] The actors, however, can also choose not to refer to conflict at all and instead use their soft power: referring to appealing not conflict-related reference notions and subjects, especially to fields that are not typically primarily associated with political interests but that provide positive publicity for the country or entity using it, such

11 Showcasing one's victory has been popular through the ages. In former times victories e.g. were staged in the form of victory parades or by constructing triumph arches (Zaho 2004). Some images like the photo "Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima", depicting a key US victory against the World War II Japan, have become iconic (TIME Magazine 01.11.2016b). Especially in modern asymmetric conflicts the conflict parties often contest for being perceived as the victorious conflict party (cf. also Toledano 2010: 589f. on the example of the 2006 Lebanon War).

as culture (Dinnie 2016: 120 ff.) and sports for example. Scholars examining cultural and sports diplomacy e.g. have described the Chinese panda diplomacy as a prominent example for such a strategy (Xing 2010; Zhang 2007; Hartig 2013) (often accusing that these strategies are used for distracting from human rights violations and democratic deficits by the use of nice words, symbols and gestures).[12] Besides culture, arts and tradition (Nye 2008: 94, 96) and sports other internationally popular reference notions that can be used for branding include, for example, "shared values" such as equality, diversity and democracy (Nye 2008: 94), contributions to humanitarian and development aid, international cooperation and responsibility (Tüney 2016; Karadag 2016; Vail 2018), economic attractiveness, scientific achievements and technological innovation (Krasnyak 2018).

Again, similar to the case of shaming, branding is particularly efficient, if it connects its branding message to a reference notion or theme that is perceived by the targeted audience as particularly important and relevant or interesting. This way the likelihood increases that the message will attract the attention of the targeted audience and that it cares about it. While the conflict research literature has, to date, not yet focused on discussing what corresponding reference notions or themes might be, within communication science and marketing research scholars have identified particularly promising reference themes and notions. According to this literature, the corresponding types of pictures and stories can be expected to be particularly promising for branding:

1. The pictures or stories which feature something that makes it easy for the target audience to identify with the communicating actor (Percy & Rossiter 1992: 271; cf. also Galtung & Ruge 1965: 81 ff.; Luhmann 1996: 60f.; the concept of "brand personality" in marketing research, e.g. Aaker 1997).
2. The pictures or stories credibly signal to the target audience a significant potential benefit for themselves (cf. also the basic concept of "profit motive" in economic studies, e.g. Lux 2003). When presenting the economic attractiveness of a country, for example, it is beneficial for the prospects of success of the branding, if a possible economic cooperation can be depicted as particularly profitable.
3. And/Or, the pictures or stories feature something that stands out from the average and is particularly prestigious or is perceived as particularly admirable, surprising or innovative (cf. also Schultz 2007: 191ff.; e.g. Luhmann 1996: 58f.; Galtung & Ruge 1965: 82f.): In sports, for example, a thirtieth place at the Olympics

12 Partially also (alleged) contributions to (international) security or "counter-terrorism" are highlighted. This argumentation allows actors to frame themselves as important, valuable, stable strategic partners and at the same time can serve as a justification for their own use of violence.

is less likely to impress than a gold medal. For reports about the international cooperation of a state it is beneficial, if official pictures with particularly important and popular people can be shown. For reports about aid and development support donated by a country it is beneficial, if the support can be presented as particularly generous and selfless. Reports about scientific innovations will be particularly attractive when the audience perceives them as useful for their own daily lives or to be particularly spectacular or surprising.