

Shake it up Şekerim

Turkey's Eurovision Experience

MA Thesis Modern Middle Eastern Studies

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**To my family,
who have made this thesis a group effort.**

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Introduction

The Eurovision Song Contest is an annual televised music competition in which its viewers have the power to choose the winner from the comfort of their own living room. The show was established in 1956, and has ever since been both loved and ridiculed. Its contestants are seldomly praised for originality or talent. Songs should be generic enough for a whole continent to enjoy for at least one evening: a strikingly little number of winning songs became a commercial success outside of the competition.¹ People tune in not to hear a new, innovative sound, but to watch a spectacle of fireworks and silly costumes wherein the song with the widest range of fans wins the prize. Many Europeans thus dismiss the contest as kitsch and irrelevant.²

Yet there is more than meets the eye. The Eurovision Song Contest has also been known to have a political undertone, showing political tendencies in the public voting of the competing countries. With at least 180 million viewers tuning in worldwide each year since 2010 it cannot be discarded as an unimportant media festivity.³ On the contrary, Eurovision has the potential to expose the relationship between media, politics, and popular opinion. While the idea of a common European identity, and as such the creation of a shared peaceful consciousness lay on the foreground of its intentions, the competition has had a long tradition, albeit unofficially, of showing countries' political preferences through a democratic voting system.⁴ In 2011, favouritism in voting had become so obvious that the decision was made that national juries of experts would now make up fifty percent of the vote, with the other fifty percent being the popular votes (or 'televotes') to even out political votes

¹ Alf Björnberg, "Return to ethnicity: The cultural significance of musical change in the Eurovision Song Contest," in *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, ed. Ivan Raykoff and Robert Deam Tobin (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 15.

² Kathleen More, "Estonia: Look For 'Kitsch' Not Classic Tunes At Eurovision Song Contest," Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, May 24, 2002, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1099800.html>.

³ Statista, "Number of television viewers of the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) in selected European countries and Australia in 2016 (in 1,000)," Statista, accessed on December 28, 2018, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/688433/eurovision-song-contest-viewing-figures-by-country-in-europe/>.

⁴ Daefni Tragaki, "Introduction," in *Empire of Song: Europe and Nation in the European Song Contest*, ed. Dafni Tragaki (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 15.

with votes based on the quality of the performances.⁵ Eurovision can therefore be a guide to the European continent, as it lays bare relations between nations according to popular opinion. Moreover, when national media and politics are involved, it is even possible to construct a reasoning of why and how Eurovision votes are being cast. For a country like Turkey, geographically on the borders of Europe and politically and culturally inbetween the East and the West, Eurovision can thus be quite telling about its position in Europe.⁶

The first Eurovision Song Contest in 1956 had six participating countries. Since then its membership has grown progressively, first with other European countries and later branching out to the borders of Europe and beyond. Turkey made its introduction in Eurovision in 1975 and has competed 34 times since. Initially, Turkey's performances were hardly fan favourites, as Turkey only reached the top ten once in its first eighteen attempts. However, the introduction in 1998 of televoting in 1998 changed Turkey's popularity immensely, resulting in nine top ten spot until 2012. An ultimate highlight was the 2003 victory, with Sertab Erener's *Everyway that I can* winning the competition in Riga, Estonia. This victory proved Turkish citizens that it was in fact part of Europe. Moreover, it fuelled ambitions to become part of the European Union (EU), something that had been discussed since the 1960s. According to many Turks, their country had now proven to be a cultural asset to the union.⁷

However, as we know now, Turkey did not join the EU and in 2013, only ten years after the much celebrated victory, the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (*Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu*, TRT) announced its withdrawal from the competition. TRT claimed that the new voting system of 2011 was unfavourable and unjust, as they were of the opinion that political favouritism in Europe would not give Turkey an equal chance for victory.⁸ This argumentation is striking, as the new voting

⁵ Eurovision, "EBU reveals split televoting and jury results," 26 May, 2011, <https://eurovision.tv/story/ebu-reveals-split-televoting-and-jury-results>.

⁶ Zeynep Arkan, "Imagining 'Europe': Constituting Turkey's Identity on the Path to EU Membership," in *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 107, no. 2 (2016) 134-135.

⁷ Thomas Solomon, "Articulating the historical moment: Turkey, Europe, and Eurovision 2003," in *A Song for Europe*, 135-136.

⁸ Daily Sabah, "TRT releases surprising decision to withdraw from Eurovision," 15 December, 2012, <https://www.dailysabah.com/arts-culture/2012/12/15/trt-releases-surprising-decision-to-withdraw-from-eurovision>.

system was put in place to rid political voting. Moreover, TRT's decision coincided with other political developments that seemed to point towards a future without EU. While the *Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP)* indicated in its first years in power that the EU accession process was to be continued, the government's foreign policy shifted towards the East. As the party was re-elected in both 2007 and 2011, a more authoritarian form of government was developing which successfully undercut opposition. Nevertheless, AKP continued being democratically supported by a majority of the population.⁹ TRT, being a state organ, has not remained untouched by the government accumulating power. During the 2000s Turkey has seen a rise of media outlets as entrepreneurs in favour of the AKP government took the stage. While the number of television channels and newspaper grew, a lack of versatility and plurality in broadcasting became more visible. Some of these outlets are considered mouthpieces of the government, as their connection with AKP is undeniably solid.¹⁰

If Eurovision is truly a way to connect media and politics to public opinion, it provides a beautiful opportunity to see how this interaction is put in place in Turkey. It is a way to look at the developments of Turkey's relationship with, and position within Eurovision. Looking at the meaning and opinion of Europe through Eurovision requires a new set of eyes, namely sociocultural ones in which self-reflection and relations with Europe are included. A great enthusiasm followed by a national withdrawal is what makes the case of Turkey in Eurovision such a compelling one, and begs the question if quitting Eurovision was part of a larger initiative to take a cultural distance from Europe.

To make the claim that Eurovision was a way for Turkey to be an active part of Europe, a critical overview of the unique markers characterizing Turkey's national identity and relationship with Europe is necessary. Turkey of course borders the European continent, with Istanbul marking the borders between Europe and Asia. The western geopolitical perspective is based mostly on a historical background. Put simply, western civilisation and the outside world that was not considered as such

⁹ Soner Çağaptay, *A New Sultan? Erdoğan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2017), 99-103, 178-179

¹⁰ Bilge Yesil, "Authoritarian Turn of Continuity? Governance of Media through Capture and Discipline in the AKP Era," *South European Society and Politics* 23 (2018), 248-249.

created an 'Us versus Them' rhetoric among western scholars up until the Second World War.¹¹ This dichotomy was traditionally based on the idea that western countries were bound together by Christian values and a shared history. However, the Cold War brought on a new definition of 'Us versus Them', with a capitalist and a socialist camp. Turkey was of great geopolitical importance, and thus received financial aid from the United States as part of its Truman Doctrine (1947) to avoid the country seeking help from the Soviet Union. In 1952 the alliance was made official by the Turkish NATO membership. Ideology and the zeitgeist of the Cold War played a crucial role in this process. Turkey would become an important ally of the US, thus being part of the 'Free World'.¹² Furthermore, Turkey has had ambitions to join the European unionisation since 1959, establishing its position in the European marketplace and the western geography.¹³ After the attacks of 9/11, it can be argued that a new world order was put in place in which it seems that the Middle East was once again the 'Them' in a century old dichotomy. Turkey, in many instances considered on the flanks of the European geographical and sociocultural unity, was now part of an alliance with a growing anti-Islamic attitude.¹⁴

Turkey's position in this dichotomy shows a better overview of the troubles of adapting to European culture. In the later stages of the Ottoman Empire, the necessities of having to westernise were already felt. A social and cultural transformation, however, was concretely put in order with the birth of the Turkish Republic (1923), when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk actively started the process of remodelling the country through a number of quite drastic reforms. Shaping the state to the image of western countries led to secularism, economic liberalism and democracy. Furthermore, the Latin alphabet was adopted, traditional dress was replaced by western attire, and education was engineered to steer the population away from the Ottoman past. While this 'new Turk' quickly caught on with the urban elite, large parts of the population far removed from city life held on to their traditions. First the authoritarian rule of the Kemalist party, and since 1960 a series of unstable governments and military

¹¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1978), 49-53.

¹² Erik-Jan Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 234-239.

¹³ Idem, 276-277.

¹⁴ Alastair Bonnett, *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 160-161.

interventions, have resulted in a country that has still not been able to straighten out these differences. It is therefore a country of contradictions, with a people pointing both East and West when asked about their place in the world.¹⁵

Turkey's ambiguous position in a divided world arguably applies to both a political and a sociocultural framework. Issues that have derived from this divide have been extensively covered by academics, policy makers, and journalists. This thesis will attempt to expose the politics of pop culture in a pan-European setting. The way performance and politics come together in Eurovision and the phenomenon of televoting can thus give new insights on Turkey's place in Europe. The Eurovision Song Contest has been covered by scholars as Ivan Raykoff and Robert Tobin in *A Song for Europe* (2007), and Dafni Tragaki and Franco Fabbri in *Empire of Song* (2013), both in which the connection of Eurovision with national sentiment have been laid bare. These works often cover a particular performance or event and elaborate on its deeper meaning and societal role on a national scale. Other times scholars like are very broad and general in their explanation of Eurovision through a more Eurocentric point of view, like Dean Vuletic in *Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest*. The ambition of this thesis is to specifically analyse Turkey's position in Eurovision, and its perceived political importance in the quest to become a full member of the EU. Researching the Turkish experience for a longer period of time and comparing performances with internal political and economic developments will give a new meaning to the overlooked influences of Eurovision.

In this research, I will focus on the period from 2000 until 2012. In 1999, the Helsinki European Council officially named Turkey a candidate state for EU membership, and as such the following year was the first Eurovision edition with Turkey competing as a candidate member state. Moreover, the Eurovision board had officially applied televoting for all countries. This resulted in a more dynamic period of performances, with the counted votes shedding light on national and international issues. These developments will be followed until 2012, with the country's last appearance on the stage of Eurovision.

¹⁵ Arkan, "Imagining 'Europe'," 134-135.

There are some limitations to this research that have to be considered. Of course TRT's reasoning for Turkey's withdrawal from Eurovision cannot be disproven, but I will argue that the political environment was so demanding on media outlets that it is unlikely to be the only truth. The same goes for the televoting results. A claim cannot be made that every Eurovision fan votes out of political preference. A third issue is the Turkish audience. Turkey is affected by a growing polarisation of its society. It is therefore impossible to speak of the average Turkish Eurovision fan, as opinions within the Eurovision audience might differ immensely. As the official TRT data are not available, the tone towards Eurovision in Turkey shall be assessed through media coverage, academic works regarding the topic and other sources of information.

Through examining Turkey's Eurovision experience, this research will explore whether Turkey considered itself European on a social and political scale, and represented itself to a European audience during the period of 2000-2012. It will deal with the question of Turkey's participation in Eurovision in three parts. First of all, it is important to establish a clear understanding of how Eurovision functions as an international contest. What role does nationalism play in it, and does Turkey represent itself as a part of Europe or does it distinctively use its own national heritage? To answer this question a thorough analysis of national representation is necessary, which includes a comparison with other contestants. With this established, a next aspect can be considered. What Turkey attempts to represent in Eurovision is of great importance, switching from modern pop songs to what Matthew Gumpert refers to as 'auto-orientalism', portraying one's own culture as to fit an already existing prejudice.¹⁶ As if in doubt about which role to take on, what can be said about Turkey's choice of performances on the stage of Eurovision? Finally a last aspect of Turkey's participation has to be considered, namely what happened within society as the country moved forward to its last appearance in 2012. The AKP era has known many developments, and while some initially seemed to move in the direction of EU membership, turning against the idea that Turkey was part of the western world in

¹⁶ Matthew Gumpert, "'Everyway that I can': Auto-Orientalism at Eurovision 2003", in *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, ed. Ivan Raykoff and Robert Deam Tobin (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 147.

later stages. A tighter grip on media outlets, including the broadcaster of Eurovision, resulted in a lower tone in enthusiasm towards European society and culture. What did this mean for Eurovision's popularity in Turkey, and did these developments correspond with Turkish enthusiasm for Eurovision? With these questions answered, the contest will be a useful tool to analyse the position of Turkey within this mass cultural context. It will showcase what it represented in the light of the country's political ambitions, and how it came alive in the world's biggest party.¹⁷

¹⁷ Esther Addley, "Eurovision: flexible geography, high camp and 'the world's biggest party'," *The Guardian*, 22 May, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/may/22/eurovision-flexible-geography-high-camp-and-the-worlds-biggest-party>.

1. National identity and representation in Eurovision

“Symbol it is of union between the nations, and in one respect, to a degree, it initiates that union. For must not knowledge go before appreciation and esteem? Let the European nations then learn to know each other better; let them be happy and proud to display the national beauties of their countries and its cultural riches; let them open to others the deeper feelings of their spirit and their sincere desire for understanding and cooperation. How many prejudices, how many barriers will thus fall! Lack of mutual confidence, selfishness will lessen, and above all a renewed ambition will be stirred to contribute something to the world community for the common good. Such is Our hope.”¹⁸

These were the words that Pope Pius XII used to give his blessing to the newly founded European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in 1955. Since these founding words the EBU has developed into a mass media platform that is responsible for the annual Eurovision Song Contest. This chapter will examine how Eurovision functions, which role nationalism plays in the contest, and how the contesting nations relate to each other.

Established in 1950, the EBU served as a successor to the International Broadcasting System that had been compromised by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Very much with the idea of rebuilding relations after the devastating war and within the new confines of the Cold War ideology, EBU started off with 23 members from Western Europe and the Mediterranean area (see image 1). Soon after, Swiss EBU member Michel Bezençon came up with the idea of a continental music festival inspired by the Sanremo Music Festival. He envisioned a televised festival that would surpass technological expectations and execute Pope Pius XII’s wishes: build a platform for the European nations to learn to know each other better. In 1956 the Eurovision Song Contest made its first appearance on television. Since then it has developed into a phenomenon that serves to lay bare the

¹⁸ Cited in ‘A First: Pope Pius in Five Languages and via Eurovision,’ in *50 Years of Eurovision*, EBU Dossier 2004/1, 15, https://www.ebu.ch/CMSimages/en/dossiers_1_04_eurovision50_ve_tcm6-13890.pdf.

relationship between media, modernity and nationality as the European nations battle for victory through song.¹⁹

To claim that Eurovision has from the start been a representation of European diversity would be excessive. Until the late 1960's, the show was not yet the cultural phenomenon that it would eventually become. Nonetheless, the number of participants grew from seven to eighteen twenty years after its first broadcast (see image 1). When its popularity rose in the seventies, Eurovision showed an expansion to the borders of Europe with newcomers Israel, Iceland, Greece, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey. The latter, a member of EBU since its establishment, joined Eurovision in 1975.²⁰

Image 1 - List of national membership in chronological order

1	Belgium	1956
2	France	1956
3	Italy	1956
4	Luxembourg	1956
5	Netherlands	1956
6	Switzerland	1956
7	Germany	1956
8	Denmark	1957
9	United Kingdom	1957
10	Austria	1957
11	Sweden	1958
12	Monaco	1959
13	Norway	1960
14	Finland	1961
15	Yugoslavia	1961
16	Spain	1961
17	Portugal	1964
18	Ireland	1965
19	Malta	1971
20	Israel	1973
21	Greece	1974
22	Turkey	1975
23	Morocco	1980
24	Cyprus	1981
25	Iceland	1986

26	Bosnia Herz.	1993
27	Croatia	1993
28	Slovenia	1993
29	Estonia	1994
30	Hungary	1994
31	Lithuania	1994
32	Poland	1994
33	Romania	1994
34	Macedonia	1998
35	Latvia	2000
36	Ukraine	2003
37	Albania	2004
38	Belarus	2004
39	Montenegro	2004
40	Serbia	2004
41	Bulgaria	2005
42	Moldova	2005
43	Armenia	2006
44	Czech Republic	2007
45	Georgia	2007
46	San Marino	2008
47	Andorra	2008
48	Azerbaijan	2008
49	Slovakia	2011
50	Australia	2015

¹⁹ "In a Nutshell," Eurovision, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://eurovision.tv/history/in-a-nutshell/>.

²⁰ Morocco entered in 1980 but only had one appearance until this day.

The growth continued with the former Soviet nations (including the Caucasian countries) from 1990 until 2011 (with Azerbaijan being the last country to enter).²¹ The latest candidate that was added to the list was Australia in 2015. Planned as a one-off event, the Australian presence was met with such enthusiasm that it has been a contestant ever since. The number of contestants could certainly expand, as the remaining members of the EBU (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) are eligible to compete at any time.²²

The growing number of contestants creates the illusion of a pan-European unity of sorts. Eurovision certainly gives the impression of a modern, multicultural union. Whether this means that Eurovision has developed into a monocultural event or still is a platform for diversity is up for debate. One thing is for certain, Eurovision is a highly nationalistic event and has been known to make visible tensions between contesting countries – tensions that have more than once been exposed on the mainstage as well as in the voting numbers.²³ A striking example of this is Georgia's entry in 2009, 'We Don't Wanna Put-In,' which had to be eliminated as it quite bluntly poked fun of president Putin of Russia after the Georgian-Russian war of South-Ossetia a year before.²⁴ The Italian musicologist Franco Fabbri goes as far as to call Eurovision a 'war without tears,' claiming that this perception of Eurovision changed with the expansion of members. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the discourse of Eurovision developed from a singing competition into a political chance of victory among nations. Rooting for your national act has become comparable to supporting your national athletes in sports.²⁵ Vic Duke and Liz Crolley give an example of football as "an easy way to imagine the nation and confirm national identity, when the players are representing the nation in a

²¹ Franco Fabbri, "War without Tears," in *Empire of Song*, 8.

²² "Members," EBU, accessed on March 27, 2019, <https://www.ebu.ch/about/members>.

²³ Philip Bohlman, "Music before the nation, music after nationalism," *Musicology Australia* 31, no. 1 (2009): 92.

²⁴ "Eurovision Axes Anti-Putin Song," BBC, March 10, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/7935865.stm>.

²⁵ Fabbri, "War without Tears," 7.

match against another nation.” National competition thus functions as an opportunity to express nationalist sentiments, either in sports or in song.²⁶

With all its political implications, one would almost forget that music and performance is still the central element of Eurovision. Stereotypically yet undeniably, pop is the most common music genre in Eurovision. However, painting it as a stage exclusively for generic pop songs would sell the competition short: other musical genres as rock, hip-hop and folklore are represented in nearly every edition since the year 2000. Eurovision shows a range of diversity in music and performance styles, but it’s the overall extravagant character of these performances that usually sticks to the memory. Then, a more appropriate term to describe the performances is ‘camp’: the aesthetic that constitutes an over-the-top, and often nostalgic sensibility that might even be considered parodic of actual popular culture. Camp is associated with a particular kind of performance in which the overt meaning of what is performed is subverted by drawing attention to the fact that it is a performance, and therefore a lie.²⁷ As an example, drag performances are defined by camp aesthetic as the performer will often exaggerate femininity. To give an example of camp in a genre other than pop, one of Eurovision’s most memorable contestants can be used: The iconic winner *Lordi* with its rock song ‘Hard Rock Hallelujah’ of Eurovision 2006 showed the Finnish rock band in outrageous costumes and fireworks coming out of their axes,²⁸ an act so over-the-top it seems to fit well within the characteristics of camp aesthetics.

One could argue that musical authenticity might be lacking in a modern media-based setting in which accessibility to a whole continent is the key for victory. This is true in some ways. Assuming a contestant has the ambition of winning, his presentation of national tradition will most likely be adapted and simplified to the understanding of a foreign audience. However, this does not automatically mean that national identity is absent. While performances in Eurovision commonly rely on an army of backup dancers and fireworks shooting out of their instruments (so to speak), there is

²⁶ Vic Duke, Liz Crolley, *Football, Nationality and the State* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1996), 2-3.

²⁷ Helene Shugart, *Making Camp: Rhetorics of Transgression in U.S. Popular Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2008), 2-3.

²⁸ “Lordi - Hard Rock Hallelujah (Finland) 2006 Eurovision Song Contest Winner,” YouTube, accessed March 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAh9NRGNhUU>.

still room for the many cultural riches that Pope Pius spoke so fondly of – even if it comes in a postmodern, commercialised shape.

Annex 1 shows a chart in which is marked which performances from 2000 until 2012 have used distinguishable cultural identifiers. There are multiple reasons why this period of Eurovision performances is remarkable and represents a transition from traditional sounds and visuals to the trend of camp on the Eurovision stage. 1999 was the year that free language rules were reintroduced, meaning a contestant did no longer have to sing exclusively in his or her national language.²⁹ Many competitors took advantage of this opportunity to connect to a wider audience: In the first year of the free language introduction, already twelve out of 23 countries sang exclusively in English making it the unofficial lingua franca of Eurovision. The language rule gave performers the possibility to be more accessible and draw inspiration from western pop stars. Moreover, the late nineties showed a development in performance style due to new contestants and new audiences who had the possibility to vote. With Eurovision growing into a more inclusive event, a need to stand out was necessary to catch voters' eyes. It is also important to note that 1998's winning song 'Diva' by the Israeli transsexual singer Dana International might have influenced performers in being more outspoken and taking more risks on stage.

With the goal of being as objective and unbiased as possible, the sociological approach of intention is used here to identify national representation. This means that symbols of nationality are expressed intentionally by the artist, and are not constructed through the experience of the audience.³⁰ Oversimplified, the artist shows you what the meaning of his art is; there is no need to construct an individual meaning. This approach is fitting for Eurovision, in which subtlety is scarce as it is desirable for meaning to be picked up by every member of its worldwide audience. Moreover, every performance has a stage director, a music producer, a stylist and possibly a choreographer and a properties designer. The team, together with the artist, shapes the performance into a predetermined

²⁹ "Jerusalem 1999," Eurovision, accessed on 21 March, 2019, <https://eurovision.tv/event/jerusalem-1999>.

³⁰ Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 15, 25.

set of visuals and sounds, which is rehearsed until nothing is left to chance. Intention is thus very much present. Intention, however, does not show significance. The significance of a folkloric pop song might be different for a Swede than for a Ukrainian, or even among two Ukrainians. This chart purely shows the observable signs of national identities within a performance, which will make a distinction between national style (with intention national markers) and a non-national style (which is not nation-specific) performance.

Intention of national representation in Eurovision is decided here by the use of the definition of Anthony Smith, who sums up the cultural aspects of national identity as follows: "The territorial boundedness of separate cultural populations in their own 'homelands'; the shared nature of myths of origin and historical memories of the community; the common bond of a mass, standardised culture."³¹ To translate this definition in the context of Eurovision nationalist performances, a set of signifiers is necessary. Firstly, language is an important factor in nationality and identity and the representation thereof to the outside world. It plays a vital role in the operation of ideology and in the framing of national consciousness according to Michael Billig: "Through words, gestures and tones, a unifying mood is created."³² Smith's territorial boundedness is thus hugely affected by language. Moreover, musical styling and instrumentation are of importance. Traditional instruments and folkloric music are an example of both territorial boundedness and historical memory. Visuals, such as choreography, costume design and stage property, give the same option. Lastly, the use of shared myths and traditional customs are means to express identity and collective memory. These signifiers are commonly well established and still widely popular, and thus have deeper roots than the more modern notion of the European identity, which might not be able to provide the same amount of emotional sustenance and historical depth.³³ The performances in which all of these signifiers are absent are marked as non-national.

³¹ Anthony D. Smith, "National Identity and the Idea of European Unity," *International Affairs* 64, no. 1 (1992), 60.

³² Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), 17-19.

³³ Smith, "National Identity," 60-62.

There are however, also aspects of a Eurovision performance that cannot be considered as artistically intentional and are therefore not included in Annex 1. This strongly applies to a song's lyrics, which might be appreciated subjectively by different members of the audience, and as such cannot be regarded as intentional. Political messages, either lyrical or visual, are similarly excluded. Performances that use traditional symbols that do not originate in their home country (like the Maltese entry of 2008 'Vodka' by Morena, with Russian traditional dance³⁴) are not marked as national. Moreover, the chart is limited to the official live performances on the Eurovision stage only; accompanying music videos or other promotional material is not included. National flags and its colours are excluded as well, unless they play an essential part in the performance (as in Ireland's entrance of 2008: 'Irlande Douze Points by Dustin the Turkey'³⁵). The reasoning behind this is that flags are already shown by the Eurovision production on the television screen. Lastly, the competition's two official languages, English and French, will not be counted as national markers in the countries where they are official languages because they are too commonly used by both native and non-native performers, and therefore unable to function as an objective signifier of national style.³⁶

Annex 1 shows that of the 457 songs that competed from 2000 until 2012, 193 performances (roughly 40 percent) showed signs of their national background. This statistic tells us that generally there is indeed a trend of non-nationalist performances in Eurovision, but nationalist performances still have a dominant presence. To further determine what information this chart has to offer, it is necessary to look more closely to the numbers per nation. Image 2 (below) gives a summarised chart of the data, on which it can be seen that Northern and Western European countries have broadly taken on a non-nationalistic approach while Eastern and Southern European countries have generally made more use of their national traditions in their performances. Alf Björnberg explains this phenomenon

³⁴ YouTube, "Vodka – Morena – Malta 2008," accessed on 25 March, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rMRjridFH0>.

³⁵ YouTube, "Eurovision 2008 Semi Final 1 11 Ireland *Dustin The Turkey* *Irlande Douze Pointe* 16:9 HQ," accessed on July 12, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ps3kxGo_gro&t=94s.

³⁶ "Douze Points!," Eurovision Song Contest Wiki, accessed on July 24, 2019, https://eurovision-contest.fandom.com/wiki/Douze_Points!.

by claiming there is both a geographical and a cultural centre and periphery in Europe. This centre consists out of Western Europe, which since the beginning of Eurovision has been included in the concept of being 'European'. It was therefore unofficially decided that on the world stage modernity and unity were the message they wanted to carry out, in contrast to the more traditional European periphery.³⁷

Image 2 – Contestants by percentage of nationalist approach in performances³⁸

Country	Attendance	Nationalist	Percentage
Andorra	6	6	100,0%
Israel	13	13	100,0%
Italy	2	2	100,0%
Serbia	8	8	100,0%
Spain	13	12	92,3%
Portugal	11	10	90,9%
F.Y.R.O.M	10	0	90,0%
Bosnia Herz.	13	11	84,6%
Armenia	6	5	83,3%
Croatia	13	10	76,9%
Turkey	13	10	76,9%
Bulgaria	8	6	75,0%
Czech Rep.	3	2	66,7%
Greece	12	8	66,7%
Slovenia	11	7	63,6%
Poland	10	6	60,0%
Austria	7	4	57,1%
Albania	9	5	55,6%
Romania	11	6	54,5%
Cyprus	12	6	50,0%
Montenegro	4	2	50,0%
Slovakia	4	2	50,0%
Azerbaijan	5	2	40,0%

Georgia	5	2	40,0%
Ukraine	10	4	40,0%
Russia	13	5	38,5%
Moldova	8	3	37,5%
Belarus	9	3	33,3%
Hungary	6	2	33,3%
San Marino	3	1	33,3%
Switzerland	10	3	33,3%
Finland	11	3	27,3%
Estonia	13	3	23,1%
Germany	13	3	23,1%
Latvia	13	3	23,1%
Lithuania	11	2	18,2%
Ireland	12	2	16,7%
Malta	13	2	15,4%
Netherlands	12	1	8,3%
Norway	12	1	8,3%
France	13	1	7,7%
Sweden	13	1	7,7%
UK	13	1	7,7%
Belgium	13	0	0,0%
Denmark	12	0	0,0%
Iceland	12	0	0,0%
Monaco	3	0	0,0%

Moreover, the Second World War was a constant reminder of the dangers of nationalism and self-centredness. It seems to be no different in Eurovision. Nationally specific styles were deemed unsophisticated – as if you didn't get the memo on what the new Europe should have to look like. This trend has in a broad sense remained among Eurovision's earliest members. With the expansion of

³⁷ Björnberg, "Return to ethnicity," 15-16.

³⁸ As summarised from the data of Annex 1.

memberships to Europe's 'periphery', the chemistry of the contest changed. Nations with an arguably stronger musical tradition entered the stage and were less eager to adapt to the predetermined standards of Eurovision entries.³⁹

The research on Eurovision is by no means an exact science. As can be seen, relatively old contestants of the contest as the Southern European contestants Portugal and Spain also scored high on the chart, while the newer members such as the Baltic countries scored relatively low. However, comparing the voting records with this data can give an insight on what these numbers mean. The University of Cyprus has created a mathematical formula to pinpoint voting biases in Eurovision, while taking into account the distinction between 'national affinity' (voting for amiable countries) and 'perceived quality' (voting for the best performance). With data starting from 1981, they were able to decide which so-called 'voting blocs' were generally active in voting for a favourite. Three blocs stood out according to the article: Scandinavia (including Estonia), the former Soviet states and former Yugoslavia. Moreover, multiple duo's were coupled: The Netherlands and Belgium, Spain and Portugal, Cyprus and Greece.⁴⁰ Looking at the charts now, we can better understand the scores as regional trends.

The discourse of national identity emphasises national uniqueness and the constructed differences of 'others'.⁴¹ National identity is shaped through difference, it cannot exist in a homogenous environment. Western and Northern Europe have to a large extent been homogenous in their approach, making them a unity of sorts within Eurovision. However, national identity has been a (successful) tool for newer contestants to use Eurovision as a platform for national pride, while at the same time celebrating regional tradition that gained them votes in neighbouring countries.⁴² This, one

³⁹ Björnberg, "Return to ethnicity," 18-19.

⁴⁰ Sofronis Clerides, Thanasis Stengos, "Love thy Neighbor, Love thy Kin: Voting Biases in the Eurovision Song Contest," in *Ekonomia* 15, no. 1 (2012), 28-30.

⁴¹ Ruth Wodak, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 187.

⁴² Björnberg, "Return to ethnicity," 21.

could consider, also leads to unity among the Eurovision contestants. In a strange way, Eurovision seems to have become both a competition between nations and between European regions.

The political importance of Eurovision has not gone unnoticed in another front as well. As questions of the legitimacy of the European Union started popping up after its eastward expansion in the 2000's, Eurovision has been shown to be a tool to connect all its nations for at least one night every year. A Romanian delegate explained in 1993: "We have always wanted to belong to Europe and the Song Contest is the only part of Europe that functions without political union. For this reason, we want to be a part of this world."⁴³ In the British newspaper *The Telegraph*, a Belarusian spokesperson said in like manner in 2005: "Participation in Eurovision is an excellent opportunity for a young state to establish a positive image and tell Europe about itself." The *New York Times* similarly wrote in 2011 that Eurovision has become a national mission for mostly Eastern European countries to prove their Europeaness, all the while calling it "a wacky song contest."⁴⁴ These remarks show that a connection between Eurovision and EU membership has been made, and the show has become a catalyst for political transformation.

Turkey, neither a newcomer in Eurovision nor a member of the EU, has a unique position considering these findings. Its debut in 1975 was in many ways connected to the country's ambitions to join the union, but official negotiations were not on the table. Neither was the reception of Europe welcoming; Turkey only received points from Monaco in its first year. An article in the newspaper *Milliyet* a few days after Turkey's first appearance in Eurovision wrote that it was clear the country was not perceived as European by viewers, and that Turkey should adapt itself to overcome these prejudices by 'trying harder' to receive better results.⁴⁵ It is therefore no surprise that until the mid-

⁴³ Ivan Raykoff, "Camping on the borders of Europe," in: *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, ed. Ivan Raykoff, Robert Deam Tobin (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 7.

⁴⁴ Jack Ewing, "Uniting a Continent Through a Wacky Song Contest," *New York Times*, May 12, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/13/arts/13iht-eurovision13.html>.

⁴⁵ "Acaba aynı şarkı Türkiye'yi değil de, bir başka Avrupa ülkesini tamsilen yarışmaya girseydi, daha fazla oy almaz mıydı? (...) O sorunun içindeki şüphede bir gerçek payı varsa, Türkiye'nin dışardan sempati ile bakılan bir ülke olmadığı sonucuna varmak gerecektir. kendimizi daha iyi tanıtabilecek etkili hiçbir çabada bulunmamışızdır." *Milliyet*, "Böyle Milliyetçilik Olur Mu?" 24 March, 1975, *Gazetearsivi*, 1.

nineties, Turkey's performances were quite western, both in sound as in aesthetic.⁴⁶ Not since the Eastern European 'return to ethnicity', as Björnberg calls it, did Turkey start using tradition in its performances.⁴⁷

The country's history is also unique when considering these voting groups. Turkey is isolated in that it has a common culture with its neighbouring countries in the Balkan due to their shared Ottoman past, but since the establishment of the Turkish Republic of 1923 an active distancing from this past under the guise of nation building took place. Ottomanism has since returned to the stage of Turkish politics and that of Eurovision, as will be discussed in the next chapter.⁴⁸ Turkey, due to its tumultuous history, might not be as identifiable to these countries as other neighbours might be. Considering the timeline of entrance, Turkey's position within Eurovision is most identifiable with that of Greece or Israel, but these have not been friendly allies to Turkey per se and are therefore not eligible to form a voting bloc. It has found a friend in Azerbaijan since it entered the contest in 2008 (as visible in voting records, see annex 2), but this neighbouring country has generally taken on a more non-nationalist approach in Eurovision. In this sense, Turkey is the 'Other' in Eurovision, not having a shared (recent) past nor belonging to the more homogeneous contestants of Europe's 'centre.'

This chapter has examined the role of national representation in the Eurovision Song Contest. While Eurovision has arguably not lived up to its initial intention to create union through diversity, it has still become a platform for the showcasing of national pride. The different voting blocs insinuate that within Eurovision there is a lack of continental unity but a strong regional loyalty, that reacts strongly to national tradition and heritage. Within this framework Turkey has an isolated position. Nonetheless, it has been extremely successful in Eurovision.

⁴⁶ YouTube, as seen through personal research on video material of Turkish Eurovision performances from 1975 to 1998.

⁴⁷ Björnberg, "Return to ethnicity," 13.

⁴⁸ Murat Şiviloğlu, "Turkey: The land with a lost empire," in *History of Nations: How Their Identities Were Forged*, ed. Peter Furtado (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 134.

2. Turkish branding

“Turkish culture, as such, does not exist. From the vantage point of the politics of culture between Islamists and secularists, when the meaning and components of ‘Turkish cultural practice’ have been debated, produced, transformed, and repeatedly displaced, it would be misplaced to employ the notion of Turkish culture as an analytical category.”⁴⁹

With every Eurovision performance being a chance to present itself to the world, this chapter will analyse exactly which part of its heritage Turkey chooses to exhibit, and what message it therefore attempts to purvey to the European audience. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Turkey is not shy about showing tradition and ethnicity. While the country is hardly unique in this regard, Turkey’s ongoing identity crisis about whether it belongs to the East or the West is what makes it such a compelling case. One might argue that Turkish culture is the product of historical agency, as the builders of the Turkish Republic needed to construct a nationality to legitimise the new, ethnically diverse nation-state. There was no interest to culturally link ‘Turkishness’ with the Ottoman past.⁵⁰ Since then, however, Turkey has been identified as being either western or Islamic oriented.⁵¹ Moreover, Ottoman aesthetics have returned to the European stage.

There are multiple ways for an artist to be chosen as the official national entry for Eurovision. While some countries leave it up to an audience to choose their representative, others leave it to a national organisation to search for and approve a qualified artist. In Turkey, the TRT is both the responsible party for this task and the broadcaster of Eurovision. As a state organ, we can assume that TRT’s entry choices are therefore ‘government approved,’ with a certain level of government interference being present. The method of national broadcasters selecting the entry is however not

⁴⁹ Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the state: Secularism and public life in Turkey* (Oxfordshire: Princeton, 2002), 10.

⁵⁰ Çağaptay, *The new sultan*, 6-7.

⁵¹ M. Hakan Yavuz, "Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 7, no. 12 (1998), 19.

uncommon, as many countries all over Europe do it in a similar fashion.⁵² Nonetheless, with this in mind it is possible to connect Turkey's Eurovision entries to a larger government plan of national branding.

TRT's connection to the state is interesting as a change is tangible in Turkey's Eurovision oeuvre in the end of the nineties. Since the country's first appearance in 1975 its performances have occasionally been folkloric, but the performances never seemed to cross a boundary of what might be called Ottoman aesthetic. This changed in later times. Out of the 34 times Turkey was present on the Eurovision stage, it used the tradition of belly dancing five times: 1999; 2003; 2005; 2007 and 2009. Ironically, the centre-Left Turkish government⁵³ banned the performance of belly dancing at 'Turkish Nights' for foreign tourists at southern holiday resorts in April of 2002. Because belly dancing was in fact from Arab origin and entered Anatolia in Ottoman times, it misrepresented the modern Turkish identity to western tourists.⁵⁴ A year later Sertab Erener won the Eurovision contest with her song *Everyway that I can*, where she was surrounded by – yes – belly dancers.⁵⁵ Moreover, Turkey entered the contest four times with a rock song (2004; 2008; 2010 and 2011). This begs the question what image TRT wants to purvey to European audiences, and why this image changed in the late nineties.

Sertab Erener's performance is by far Turkey's most memorable moment on the Eurovision stage. Her already existing fame in Turkey and her connection to international pop stars (like her duet with international pop star Ricky Martin in 1999⁵⁶) made her the perfect candidate. Erener accepted TRT's invitation to represent Turkey in Eurovision 2003 on the condition that she would be allowed to perform entirely in English – a first for Turkey. This set off a heated debate, with a member of parliament from the ruling AKP confronting the Minister of State as it was in his portfolio to oversee

⁵² Eurovision, "National Selections," accessed on July 20, 2019, <https://eurovision.tv/about/in-depth/national-selections/>.

⁵³ In November 2002, new elections would be held which led to a government coalition between AKP and CHP.

⁵⁴ Öykü Pötüoğlu-Cook, "Beyond the Glitter: Belly Dance and Neoliberal Gentrification in Istanbul," *Cultural Anthropology*, no. 21 (2006), 641-642.

⁵⁵ YouTube, 'Sertab Erener - Everyway That I Can', accessed on 3 March 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3i4S4E7h3I>.

⁵⁶ Sertab Erener, Ricky Martin, *Private Emotions* (Istanbul: Sony BMG Music, 1999).

TRT. In the MP's eyes the representation of Turkey in English would mean alienation of the Turkish language.⁵⁷ On the other hand, a secular audience had issues with the performance as it did not give the correct idea of Modern Turkey.⁵⁸ Criticism, however, would not slow Erener down. Her performance consisted four female backup dancers; while Erener did most choreography with her arms, the dancers sensually crawled over the stage. She was wrapped in long cloths that the dancers would pull at the climax of the song, seeming like they all want a part of her.⁵⁹ Short before the song's debut on the Eurovision stage, a music video was released to enhance commercial success. Shot in a hamam, it shows Erener sometimes in an Ottoman-type dress, sometimes covered by a towel. Other women in the room wash each other, dance sensually, smoke from an opium pipe and eat fruit.⁶⁰ All in all it gives the impression of a harem, sexualised in an Orientalist way. In an interview with the newspaper *The Times*, Erener commented: "The harem style is an advantage. The West finds it exotic, so the song is able to get maximum exposure in European music markets."⁶¹

As *Everyway that I can* became the winning entry, it is only logical that academics as Thomas Solomon and Matthew Gumpert claimed this to be the most outspoken 'Oriental' performance. While Tuğba Önal's performance in 1999 also incorporated belly dancing, it was certainly not as sensual. The choreography was relatively simplistic and next to the women in Oriental costumes stood formally dressed men.⁶² Considering the changes Eurovision went through in the meantime, it would nowadays be seen as a tame performance. Following the success of Sertab Erener, a more outspoken Oriental style would become a recurring theme. In 2007, Kenan Doğulu's *Shake it up şekerim* had a distinct western sound with only a few moments of 'arabesk' musical breaks – a popular music style with its

⁵⁷ Thomas Solomon, "Articulating the historical moment: Turkey, Europe, and Eurovision 2003," in *A Song For Europe*, 136-137.

⁵⁸ Unknown, "Hamamlı klip avantaj," *Hürriyet*, 23 April, 2003, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/hamamli-klip-avantaj-38455411>.

⁵⁹ YouTube, "Everyway that I can."

⁶⁰ YouTube, "Sertab Erener - Everyway That I Can (Album Version)," accessed on March 6, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRAjf9rFA58>.

⁶¹ Suna Erdem, "Turkish harem girl adds spice to Eurovision Song Contest," *The Times (London)*, May 5, 2003, LexisNexis Academic.

⁶² YouTube, "Eurovision Turkey 1999 | Tuğba Önal - Dön Artık," accessed on March 6, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRHK_7oP5Sw.

roots in Arab folk music.⁶³ It is Kenan singing in jeans and what could be described as a modern caftan, with once again sensual female dancers on the background. It is an eclectic mix of belly dancing and dance music, making it the most outspoken western Oriental performance if there ever was such a thing.⁶⁴ In 2009, Hadise's performance was quite similar to Erener's in the sense that it was female-centred. However, it is the singer herself who presents herself as the object of desire. When a male dancer enters the stage he is easily seduced by Hadise's (with a lack of better phrasing) mating dance.⁶⁵

The perks of having the most votes for your entry in Eurovision go beyond national pride. The winning country gets to host the contest the following year, which creates a great opportunity for attracting commercial sponsors and promoting the host country as a tourist destination. Preceding every performance is a half-minute slot of the 'Eurovision postcard.' This postcard welcomes the television audience to the host country while the stage is being prepared for a new act. Throughout the show the promotion continues with interval acts and images of local beauty and tradition. The audience can be in awe of what the European continent has to offer. In a sense these postcards represent a great deal of what Eurovision is: a nation's chance to present its culture and heritage. In his book *History of Nations*, Peter Furtado mentions the opening of the Olympics as having a similar effect: "The opportunity for a nation to present such a high profile, messaged image of its history and heritage to the world is a rare and powerful one, and it is hardly surprising that countries compete for the chance to host the Olympics."⁶⁶ When the contest was hosted in Istanbul, Erener opened the show with a ballad sung in English. On the background were whirling dervishes, a symbol of the sufi Mevlevi order which uses whirling for religious ceremonies. (Vice president Esin Celebi criticised the fact that the dervishes were both men and women, saying that it was not allowed to perform the ceremony at

⁶³ Martin Stokes, *The Arabesk Debate. Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 92.

⁶⁴ YouTube, "Kenan Dogulu - Shake It Up Shekerim (Turkey) Live 2007 Eurovision Song Contest," accessed on March 6, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSs1XHUFfuQ>.

⁶⁵ YouTube, "Hadise - Düm Tek Tek (Turkey) Live 2009 Eurovision Song Contest," accessed on March 6, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzKgojZqO5Y>.

⁶⁶ Peter Furtado, "Introduction: The histories of nations and the history of the world," in *History of Nations*, 9-10.

the same time.⁶⁷) A little later in the show, the Turkish presenter thanks Erener for “bringing the Oriental flavours of last year’s winning act.”⁶⁸ It would be too easy to dismiss this Oriental branding as just another over-the-top Eurovision extravaganza – especially in a country as Turkey that has struggled with its cultural and political position between East and West. The contradiction of the more recent Eurovision performances and the ban on belly dancing in coastal areas is a symptom of this. The same counts for the participation in Eurovision; a contest that is per definition western. Edward Said gives an explanation for this phenomenon in *Orientalism* (1978):

“[The West’s] role has been prescribed and set for it as a ‘modernizing’ one, which means that it gives legitimacy and authority to ideas about modernization, progress, and culture. (...) So if all told there is an intellectual acquiescence in the images and doctrines of Orientalism, there is also a very powerful reinforcement of this in economic, political, and social exchange: the modern Orient, in short, participates in its own Orientalizing.”⁶⁹

Said describes a vicious circle. If ‘the West’ is a synonym for ‘the Modern’, the modern Orient will adopt the Oriental discourse, which in turn affirms western Orientalism. In the context of Eurovision, Gumpert labels Turkey’s winning act of 2003 as auto-Orientalist: adopting western ideas about the East to be part of the West. He claims that by using Oriental landmarks in the song, Turkey is in a way distancing itself from the East (as perceived by the West) by fulfilling western expectations.⁷⁰

While it is tempting to apply Said’s concept of Orientalism to Turkey’s Eurovision stage presence, it gives rise to a new set of questions. Can something as a Eurovision performance, so scripted and tightly directed, be the result of an internalised Oriental sentiment? Is it not directed outwards instead of inwards? As discussed in the last chapter, identity in Eurovision is something alienated and distant from reality. It creates a fairy tale for the audience, something a whole continent

⁶⁷ Milliyet, “Semazen krizi bitti,” 15 May, 2004, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/semazen-krizi-bitti-magazin-959832/>.

⁶⁸ YouTube, “Eurovision Song Contest 2004 - Grand Final,” accessed on April 5, 2019, 0:00-09:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTMER2rKpdA>.

⁶⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Routledge, 1978), 325.

⁷⁰ Matthew Gumpert, ““Everyway that I can”: Auto-Orientalism at Eurovision 2003,” in *A Song for Europe*, 150-151.

has to be able to understand and connect with. Using Oriental clichés might just be the result of the idea that Turkey found a working formula for being successful in the Eurovision Song Contest. As Erener said herself, it turned out to be an advantage. It is a type of promotion that might be recognisable by anyone who has visited Turkey on holidays; the branding of Turkey as Oriental is also very dominant in the tourist experience. From the ice cream sellers wearing a fez to the ‘Turkish Nights’, the Turkish tourist sector feeds off of western visitors who want to experience a holiday in the Orient.

The West’s idea of Turkey as the ‘Other’, and the European association with the country as ‘Oriental’ might have done Turkey a favour in both tourism and Eurovision. The tourism industry, as any other profit-based industry, responds to consumers’ demand. Moreover, tourism thrives on difference: people come from far to see the romanticised ‘Other.’ Said famously revealed the western discourse on the Orient that has created a problematic sense of self-superiority.⁷¹ In the context of mass tourism Nina Wang speaks of ‘top-down exoticism’: the advanced countries’ interest and curiosity about exotic cultures which hides the pre-assumption of the civilised ‘Us’ in contrast with the exotic ‘Other.’⁷² Places can only emerge as tourist attractions when they are designed as such. These tourist places constantly have to be reproduced and contested through being consumed.⁷³ Just like Eurovision performances, they are scripted in a way to accumulate positive results; be it winning an international contest or attracting tourism. It is not a political ideology being purveyed to a foreign audience, instead neoliberalism and profit have taken over as the main reason for tourist satisfaction.

To understand where this tradition of Oriental tourism comes from, a short summary of the development of the industry is necessary. After the coup d’état of 1980, the Tourism Encouragement Act (1982) was called into life. This coincided with the centre-right Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, AP), led by Turgut Özal, winning the 1983 national elections. Özal’s push for a neoliberal economic policies helped create new commercial sectors. With it came an increasing amount of international

⁷¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 1-7.

⁷² Nina Wang, *Tourism and Modernity. A sociological analysis* (Luton: Pergamon, 2000), 141-142.

⁷³ John Urry, Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: Sage, 2011), 193-194.

funding and intermittent privatisation of the Turkish market.⁷⁴ Tourism became a prominent way of economic development. Both local government and entrepreneurs capitalised on Turkey's Ottoman and Byzantine heritage and on its well-preserved Mediterranean and Aegean coastline to lure tourists to the country.⁷⁵ These efforts paid off; profits from the tourism industry escalated from USD 770 million in the beginning of the eighties to USD 26 billion in 2016, according to the numbers of the Turkish government.⁷⁶ Following Öykü Pötüoğlu-Cook's view on Turkey as a popular tourist destination in her research on the commodification of belly dancing, the combination of Turkish Islam and Republican secularism, its pro-American politics and its NATO membership gave Turkey the reputation of being the 'good Middle East'. Though still authentic, it was a tamed version of the 'Arab Middle East' and thus more accessible for western tourism. Through these developments, Istanbul became the metropole and main tourist destination in the 1990s. In 1994, when Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became mayor of Istanbul, historical preservation of the neighbourhood Beyoğlu became essential both for purposes of tourism and identity politics. He spoke in 1994:

"Taksim is a crucial region for tourism in Istanbul. Someone who visits this area will have the sense that he is in an Islamic city. When we gradually bring out the historical and cultural texture of our city, tourists who visit Istanbul will understand that they are in a city populated by Muslims."⁷⁷

This change in leadership in Istanbul's Beyoğlu, previously characterised by its many bars, secular atmosphere and the presence of ethnic minorities, led to the departure of many locals and a fulfilment of neo-Ottoman municipality projects. Together with a neoliberal economy and a growing number of tourists, the neighbourhood became something in between: gentrified and neo-Ottoman at the same time.⁷⁸ In the West's eyes this was possibly the best version of the 'good Middle East.' While the neo-Ottoman project was a top-down operation with a politically religious reasoning, Turkish

⁷⁴ Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History*, 306-308.

⁷⁵ Pötüoğlu-Cook, "Beyond the Glitter," 636-637.

⁷⁶ 'Tourism,' Presidency of the Republic of Turkey Investment Office, accessed April 11, 2019, <http://www.invest.gov.tr/en-US/sectors/Pages/WellnessAndTourism.aspx>.

⁷⁷ Quote taken from Ayfer Bartu Candan, "Rethinking Heritage Politics in a Global Context: A View from Istanbul," in *Hybrid Urbanism: On Identity Discourse and the Built Environment*, ed. N. Al Sayyad (London: Praeger, 2001), 149.

⁷⁸ Pötüoğlu-Cook, "Beyond the Glitter," 638.

entrepreneurs used these new circumstances to create tourist locations in Beyoğlu. Restaurants, night clubs and other establishments started offering 'Turkish Night' entertainment, amusement events that would combine whirling dervishes, belly dancing and other local dances.⁷⁹ Pötüoğlu-Cook describes her experience at a 'Turkish Night' as following:

"The program, which includes three folkdances interspersed with three belly dances, condenses and fictionalises Turkish vernacular entertainment spiced with the belly dancers' sanitised eroticism. Each tourist restaurant is an entertainment factory in which bodies are manufactured as an exotic Oriental extravaganza. This entertainment is the live display of human bodies to secure the authenticity of a tourist encounter. Dance performance is indispensable for a tourist experience to be complete and real. (...) A taste of Turkish nightlife in close contact with belly dancers and folk dancers both complements and authenticates all the sightseeing and souvenir shopping."⁸⁰

Another example of the creation of tourist experiences is given by Hazel Tucker, who gives an analysis of the way tourism has affected the small town of Göreme in the historical region in Cappadocia. Surrounded by a fairy tale landscape, Göreme has become a place where many locals make their living from working in the tourist industry, either as the host of a 'pansiyon' or as a tour operator for trips to the town's surroundings. Cappadocia has been constructed as a tourist location through the production of certain images and myths. Brochures and guidebooks promise visitors villages of innocent simplicity and a pre-modern life.⁸¹ Again, the Orientalist discourse of 'Us' versus 'Them' has been set in motion to let foreigners observe 'the Other.' Tucker tells the story of an Australian tourist who "would hate the Göreme people to all be driving in cars (...). Donkeys and horses and carts are much nicer. It's nice for time to stand still in some places." In contrast, a villager complained about the aesthetic valuing of his home town: "We are forbidden to make new windows or shelves or anything

⁷⁹ A contemporary example of 'Turkish Night' can be found here: www.sultanas-nights.com, accessed on July 20, 2019.

⁸⁰ Pötüoğlu-Cook, "Beyond the Glitter," 640.

⁸¹ Hazel Tucker, *Living with tourism: Negotiating Identities in a Turkish Village* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003), 5-7, 42.

in [our homes]. Before it wasn't forbidden, but when tourists came here it became forbidden."⁸² The romanticised view of Cappadocia thus both enables and blocks development in Göreme. It disallows locals to progress their living environment to contemporary standards.

Both of these examples of constructed tourist experiences show a disconnect between locals and foreign visitors. It shows similarities with William Bissell's account on colonial nostalgia in Zanzibar tourism: "Zanzibar was described as ancient, timeless, or a step back in time. Multiple strands of Orientalist discourse came together to create a narrative that was both gendered and insistently sexualised."⁸³ I would argue that this Oriental branding in the Turkish tourist industry finds itself in a different sphere than day to day life in Turkey. The comparison between Eurovision and tourism is in my opinion a valid one, as both use a superficial way of showing the past – a trick to create an illusion of being 'the Other' in a romanticised, commercialised way. It is something that both the local and the foreigner might know is not authentic, but simply part of the neoliberal experience in a profit-based economy. Turkish entrepreneurs recognise the tourist fantasy of Orientalism, and locals accept it as something that is presented to the outside like a fairy tale; a reaction to the concept of demand and supply. It is not internalised, as Gumpert argues, but instead it is a tool for attraction and fascination; a way to profit from the already existing Orientalist discourse that lives in Europe. This profit comes in different shapes: the economic revenue that tourism produces, or winning Eurovision which in turn is an opportunity to create more tourism.

However, I do not deny the existence of auto-Orientalism or neo-Ottoman aspirations in Turkey. There are many words written on the effects western Orientalism have had on non-western cultures, with Said being the most prominent example. Also, there is no use to deny a Turkish fascination for their own romanticised Ottoman heritage, as there is a Turkish audience for belly dancing as well.⁸⁴ Yet there is a distinction between the internalised Orientalism that Said describes and the way Oriental symbolism is used to lure a foreign audience. Moreover, neo-Ottomanism seems

⁸² Tucker, *Living With Tourism*, 162-165.

⁸³ William Cunningham Bissell, "Engaging Colonial Nostalgia," *Cultural Anthropology*, no. 20 (2005), 230.

⁸⁴ Pötüoğlu-Cook, "Beyond the Glitter," 644.

to function more as a political tool than an auto-Orientalist symptom. The production of Ottoman material is for ideological purposes and stems from a nostalgia for the time when the Ottoman Empire was a powerful player on the world stage and the embrace of a cultural legacy that Kemalism had renounced.⁸⁵ As a result, popular media have also taken to Oriental symbolism for a national audience in Turkey. A good example of the mediatization of both neo-Ottomanist ideology and Oriental symbolism is the Turkish soap opera *Magnificent Century* (*Muhteşim Yüzyıl*, 2011), which centres around Sultan Süleyman and his consolidation of power. With it comes a depiction of the sultanate of women, in which members of the sultan's harem try to become closer to the sultan through seduction. Josh Carney describes nostalgia as a social current, in which authenticity of historical storytelling is less important than a recreation of the 'imagined past'. It idealises heroic figures of the past – in this case Süleyman. Additionally, it makes its audience reflect on government-taught ideas on Ottoman times.⁸⁶ The important political role of women, for example, in Ottoman court. According to the Kemalist message of Ottoman backwardness, the lack of women's rights and low status had to be 'corrected' in the Republic by giving women the right to vote in 1930. *Magnificent Century* was able to show an alternative view of the oppressed woman in Ottoman times: The harem was not a sexual fantasy of the Orient, it was a political battlefield in which women of all ethnic or class backgrounds could rise to the occasion to win influence and trust from the sultan. This does not take away the sexual character of the harem as depicted in the show, but it enriches its image with the presence of strong-willed women. The harem, as such, cleared its reputation in *Magnificent Century*.⁸⁷ This view of Ottoman femininity is strongly in contrast with the Orientalist idea of Islamic women and the Kemalist doctrine of Ottoman backwardness. However, *Magnificent Century* started airing in 2011, nine years after AKP rose to power in Turkey. The party's effect on media and society cannot be overlooked – the same counts for Turkey withdrawing its participation in the Eurovision Song Contest.

⁸⁵ Yavuz, "Turkish Identity," 23-24.

⁸⁶ Joshua Carney, "A Dizi-ying Past: "Magnificent Century" ("Muhteşem Yüzyıl") and the Motivated Uses of History in Contemporary Turkey," (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Indiana University, Bloomington, 2015), 15-16, 28.

⁸⁷ Nilgun Anadolu-Okur, "The demise of the great mother: Islam, reform, and women's emancipation in Turkey," *Gender Issues* 22, no. 4 (2005), 23-24.

Turkey's relationship with both its past and its culture have been impeded by external reforms due to political ambitions they have undergone. To answer the question of what part of its heritage the country wanted to showcase on the Eurovision stage, an answer of what that heritage means to Turks would have to be answered first. In reality, it seemed to be a number of factors that have played a role in the Eurovision decision making. Turkey had to represent the Oriental fantasy, but at the meantime had to exhibit its modernity and progressiveness. This created a performance style that was neither Ottoman nor modern Turkish. Instead it was fuelled by outsider expectations of exoticism and insider ambitions of becoming European.

3. 'Are we European?'

"I want to show you all again what it would be like
If you just let go and let me love you
Every way that I can, I'll try to make you love me again
Every way that I can, I'll give you all my love and then
Make you mine again."⁸⁸

It is almost ironic how Sertab Erener's lyrics for *Everyway that I can* can be applied to Turkey's relationship with the EU. Used in the right context, it almost reads as a plea case for the country's membership. However, Turkey's political ambition of joining the union would change profoundly since Erener's victory of 2003. This chapter will discuss the impact a new political direction in Turkey had on Eurovision's esteem in the country and the Turkish changing representation throughout the years.

Turkey's time in the waiting room of the EU had been long and unsteady; it had been forty years since the Ankara agreement had been signed, making Turkey an associate member of the European Economic Community (EEC); it had been sixteen years since an application for full membership of the European Community (EC) was submitted.⁸⁹ A breakthrough in the relations between Turkey and the EU came during the Helsinki Summit in 1999: Turkey had finally become an official candidate state. Both an economical as a cultural integration was set to happen, as the discourse of Europe as the promised land became more dominant.⁹⁰ The electoral victory of AKP in 2002 brought to power a party that was centre-right with a conservative-democrat identity, which presented itself as being able to govern the pursue of modernisation, democratisation, globalisation, and, most importantly here, Europeanisation. Until 2007, democratic freedoms improved as a result of wanting to accomplish EU criteria. Membership of the EU, and with it the solidification of Turkey's westernness, was in reaching distance.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Sertab Erener, "Everyway that I can," Istanbul: Sony Music Entertainment Turkey, 2003.

⁸⁹ Zürcher, *A Modern History*, 276, 323.

⁹⁰ Başak Alpak, "From AKP's 'Conservative Democracy' to 'Advanced Democracy': Shifts and Challenges in the Debate on 'Europe'," in *Is Turkey De-Europeanising? Encounters with Europe in a Candidate Country*, ed. Alper Kaliber, Senem Aydın-Düzgit (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 16-17.

⁹¹ Çağaptay, *A New Sultan*, 93-94.

It was in this narrative that Turkey, after 25 attempts, won the Eurovision Song Contest. While unrelated to a progress in EU membership, the victory was taken as a historical moment in the history of the Turkish Republic; Erener's victory seemed to serve as a vindication of the country's political ambitions in Europe. Media headlines were dominated with the news the next morning. The pro-government newspaper *Yeni Şafak* crowned Erener the conqueror of Europe.⁹² Mainstream newspaper *Hürriyet* columnist Hadi Uluengin wrote that she did her nation and homeland a favour.⁹³ *Vatan* stated: "We entered Europe with Sertab," claiming that the phrase 'The Turk has no friend but the Turk' ('Türk'ün Türk'ten başka dostu yoktur') has finally lost its credibility.⁹⁴ Writer and journalist Oktay Ekşi seemed to ask the question on everybody's mind: 'Are we European?' ('Avrupalı mıyız?') He concludes:

"Sertab Erener did not just win a music competition. She turned a new page for the Turkish people.

[She] (...) has given us the identity papers to enter the European Union, something we have not been able to achieve in our forty years of efforts, or more precisely, in the last two hundred years."⁹⁵

A proud sentiment was also visible in public life. The event contributed to the feeling of belonging in a cultural sphere, taking the leading role on the European stage.⁹⁶ In her book *Turkey Decoded* (2008), former Swedish ambassador Ann Dismorr (2001-2005) recounted that she heard many Turks comment after the victory that "this really proves that we are European."⁹⁷

Politically the victory was also celebrated. Erener got congratulatory phone calls from prime minister Erdoğan and other members of government, and was later invited to Ankara to visit president Sezer and Erdoğan for celebrations. Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül claimed the victory as the government's as it provided the prestige for a victory. This was opposed by former TRT director Yücel

⁹² *Yeni Şafak*, "Sertab Erener Avrupa'yi fethetti," 26 May, 2003, <https://www.yenisafak.com/arsiv/2003/mayis/26/hayat.html>.

⁹³ "Lisan-ı Sertab," *Hürriyet*, 26 May, 2003, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/lisan-i-sertab-149269>.

⁹⁴ *Vatan*, "Avrupa'ya Sertab'la girdik," 26 May, 2003, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/avrupa-ya-sertab-la-girdik-9819-gundem/>.

⁹⁵ *Hürriyet*, "Avrupalı Miyiz?," 28 May, 2003, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/avrupalı-miyiz-149443>.

⁹⁶ Solomon, "Articulating the historical moment," 135.

⁹⁷ Ann Dismorr, *Turkey Decoded* (Beirut: Saqi, 2008), 34.

Yener who pointed out that it was in fact the government who tried to block an English entry.⁹⁸ Istanbul CHP deputy Mehmet Sevigen sarcastically commented: “Then they also made Beşiktaş champion. What kind of nonsense is this?”⁹⁹ Nonetheless, political figures in Turkey recognised the political gains to be won after the Eurovision success. Erdoğan reportedly claimed that “this result will speed up Turkey’s EU process.”¹⁰⁰ At a press conference in Istanbul, the Turkish Minister for Broadcasting spoke: “[This] Eurovision is important for the Turkish government, which regards the Contest as a unique opportunity to promote Turkey in Europe. This event is (...) more important than any other political summit in Turkey.”¹⁰¹ The latter remark was possibly aimed at the NATO summit, planned to take place in Istanbul in June of 2003

Another notable fact of Eurovision 2003 is that Cyprus, for the first time in the contest’s history, gave Turkey eight points. The Cyprus dispute was a pressing case in Turkey’s EU candidanship, together with the Kurdish issue. However, Turkey’s relationship with Cyprus improved as AKP started talks only two weeks after being elected with the United Nations for a reunification of the island. This was in harsh contrast with the party’s predecessors and once more showed the national priority of the country becoming an EU member. The peace plan became known as the ‘Annan Plan (after the initialiser Kofi Annan).’¹⁰² While votes came in from Nicosia, the Cypriot presenter stated: ‘Europe, peace to Cyprus. Turkey, eight points.’¹⁰³

The following year all eyes were on Istanbul as it presented the 49th edition of the contest. The slogan ‘Under the same sky’ was introduced, suggesting Turkey’s ongoing integration into Europe. “We were spectacular,” *Vatan* wrote. “We have given 1 billion¹⁰⁴ people in 43 countries an unforgettable

⁹⁸ Milliyet, “Sertab sen bizim her şeyimizsin!..,” 27 May, 2003, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-sertab-sen-bizim-her-seyimizsin-----magazin-958658/>.

⁹⁹ Milliyet, “Eurovision’u kim kazandı?” 28 May, 2003, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/eurovision-u-kim-kazandi--magazin-958666/>.

¹⁰⁰ Zaman, “Meclis’te Sertab Erener rüzgari esti,” 28 May, 2003. Taken from Solomon, “Articulating the historical moment,” 143-144.

¹⁰¹ Gumpert, “A Song for Europe”, 147-148.

¹⁰² James Ker-Lindsay, “A History of Cyprus Peace Proposals,” in *Reunifying Cyprus. The Annan Plan and Beyond*, ed. Andrekos Varnava, Hubert Faustmann (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2009), 17-18.

¹⁰³ YouTube, “BBC - Eurovision 2003 final - full voting & winning Turkey,” 18:00-18:04, accessed on 27 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6NU2WznS0I>.

¹⁰⁴ According to Eurovision records this number was around 150 million.

Eurovision night. We became fourth, but we have impressed the world.”¹⁰⁵ The success of hosting and performing well in Eurovision kept the narrative of EU membership being in reaching distance alive. The contest seemed to have become something of immense value for Turkey, elevating it to a symbol of cultural belonging. Turkey was no longer Europe’s outcast but a celebrated member of it. The victory of 2003 was the validation needed for the country to feel acceptance from the European public, as it was the people who voted them to be the best. If Eurovision became the landmark for cultural membership of the EU, how was it perceived when relations between Turkey and the EU on a political field became harder to manage?

With the blessing of the EU leaders, accession negotiations for Turkey started in November 2005. Things did not turn out the way Turkey hoped, as domestic and external factors blocked further talks. Ongoing opposition inside the EU to Turkey’s membership undermined the credibility of the EU’s commitment.¹⁰⁶ Negotiations came to a halt again in December 2006. In the meantime, Turkey experienced a ‘reform fatigue’ after an intense wave of EU reforms up until 2005. Slowly but steady Europe lost its central role within political debate, with AKP starting to lay a focus on other issues.¹⁰⁷

A more conservative approach in Eurovision coincided with the reform fatigue of 2005. TRT stated that the song for the upcoming contest would have to be sung in Turkish. The reasons were the same as in the discussion about Erener’s entry two years prior: parliament members objected the use of English as a way to present Turkey.¹⁰⁸ Data from the Eurobarometer show that a fear of becoming an EU member was in fact the loss of utility of the Turkish language (62 percent of population in 2005).¹⁰⁹ Until 2009, TRT listened and only sent Turkish entries to Eurovision. The change in what seemed a winning formula was incomprehensible for some; Turkish singers Erol Evgin and Garo Mafyan

¹⁰⁵ Vatan, “Muhteşemdik,” 16 May, 2003, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/muhtesemdik-27959-gundem/>.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander Bürgin, “Why the EU Still Matters in Turkish Domestic Politics: Insights from recent reforms in migration policy,” in *Is Turkey de-Europeanising?*, 109.

¹⁰⁷ Alpak, “Shifts and challenges in the debate on Europe,” 23.

¹⁰⁸ Mihalıs Kuyucu, “Media sanat ve dil üçgeni: Türkiye’nin Eurovision Şarkı Yarışmasında kullandığı şarkı dili üzerine bir inceleme,” *İdil Sanat ve Dil Dergisi* 2, no. 8 (2013), 29-30.

¹⁰⁹ “Standard Eurobarometer 63,” *European Commission* (May 2005), 5.

spoke out against TRT, saying there is no place for conservatism on an international platform.¹¹⁰ The conservative side applauded the decision. An opinion piece in the right-wing newspaper *Sabah* by the highly influential writer Hıncal Uluç stated that Eurovision has lost its value. “We did not like Sertab’s song, the English lyrics killed its character. (...) Who cares about Eurovision anyway. We are the only ones in the world who take it seriously.”¹¹¹

AKP consolidated its power after its second electoral victory in June 2007. Erdoğan had built enough popular support to tackle the Turkish military (which had been known as the protectors of the Kemalist ideology), the judiciary system, and the Gülenist movement.¹¹² With it came a discontinuity of the narrative of Europe as the promised land. Instead, Turkey would start assuming the position of a regional power, drifting away from a western alliance towards the East.¹¹³ Moreover, public support for EU membership in Turkey decreased as numerous negotiation chapters were blocked due to the Cyprus dispute. France and Germany spoke of a ‘privileged membership’, meaning Turkey could not become a full member. Erdoğan reacted: “For 50 years we have waited to enter Europe. Now we expect a clear answer. Some leaders say something first, then they do what they want and claim they didn’t say anything. We grew tired of the comedy.”¹¹⁴

In the post-2007 era, independent media in Turkey suffered a blow. In short, there were three main reasons for the loss of media independence: the concentration of media ownership by pro-government companies, the breakup of unions by media owners, and government legislation that restricted critical reporting.¹¹⁵ In her analysis of ‘captured media’ in Eastern Europe, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi argued that a corrupt relationship between governments and media owners create politicised coverage and a manipulation of information in favour of the government’s political agenda. This

¹¹⁰ Hürriyet, “İngilizce söylesin,” 9 January, 2006, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/ingilizce-soylesin-3755705>.

¹¹¹ Sabah, “Eurovision!..,” 23 February, 2005, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/uluc/2005/02/27/eurovision2>.

¹¹² Çağaptay, *The New Sultan*, 110-121.

¹¹³ Alpan, “Shifts and challenges,” 21-22.

¹¹⁴ Radikal, “Erdoğan'dan AB'ye: Komediden bıktık,” 8 July, 2009, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/Erdoğandan-abye-komediden-biktik-944103/>.

¹¹⁵ Yesil, “Authoritarian turn or continuity?,” 240.

corrupt relationship occurs through direct and indirect control mechanisms such as state subsidy, bailouts, preferential distribution of state advertising, and tax breaks for media owners.¹¹⁶ A report on media freedom from The Freedom House stated:

“The government’s greatest leverage over the media is economic. The prime minister’s office controls the allocation of billions of dollars in privatized assets, housing contracts, and a public procurement process that allows rewarding favoured companies, including those with media arms. (...) A small number of wealthy holding companies own nearly all of the country’s most important outlets in both television and print. Many companies are dependent on government favour, and even those with limited direct dealings with the government would find it hard to operate in the face of active hostility. Tax investigations have been used to punish media outlets that dare to challenge the government.”¹¹⁷

Media is an important agent in the making of public life in Turkey.¹¹⁸ Under AKP rule, the Turkish media landscape changed immensely. Independent media, the watchdog of a democracy and an important source for education, became restricted by the government. In this respect, Eurovision is both part of this agency and a topic of discussion within it. More specifically, the public opinion of Europe and the EU could be highly influenced through a change of direction in AKP’s foreign policy and the emphasis on a cultural connection with the regions of the old Ottoman past (including the Balkans) instead of the European continent.¹¹⁹

A feeling of ‘not belonging’ arose in the 2009 edition of Eurovision. It was the first time since 2004 that Turkey entered with an English song, and sent the Belgian-born Hadise on the stage. The performance was in many ways similar to that of Erenner: the belly dancing aesthetic, oriental dress, and *arabesque* tunes. Expectations were high, as even Erdoğan wished the singer good luck on live

¹¹⁶ Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, “How media and politics shape each other in the new Europe,” in *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective*, ed. Karol Jakubowicz, Miklos Sukosd (Bristol: Intellect, 2008), 91-92.

¹¹⁷ The Freedom House, “Democracy in Crisis: Corruption, Media, and Power in Turkey” (2014), 4-5.

¹¹⁸ Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the state*, 6.

¹¹⁹ Ahmet Sözen, “A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy: Transition and Challenges,” in *Islamization of Turkey under the AKP Rule*, ed. Birol Yesilada, Barry Rubin (New York: Routledge, 2011), 111-112.

television.¹²⁰ Even though Hadise became fourth in the finals, Turkish media underlined the injustice of the system. There were complaints about countries not voting for the best performance but on a basis of good relations with other countries. The Norwegian winner Alexander Rybak was not talented, was the explanation.¹²¹ It might be of importance to note here that since Azerbaijan entered the competition in 2008, Turkey has given it twelve points every year.¹²² Another small outrage happened the following year, with rock band *MaNga* being planned as the last act to perform in the semi-finals. This would mean that televoters had more time to vote for earlier acts.¹²³ The band placed second in the finals.

The two last years of Turkey's Eurovision participation became increasingly tainted by the idea that Europe did not play a fair game. This sentiment was empowered by the changing of the voting system starting in 2011: national juries would now make up for fifty percent of the votes. For the first time in history, Turkey did not make the finals in Eurovision 2011. This evoked a range of reactions. *Sabah* claimed: "Let's face it, Eurovision voting is based on the countries' pre-existing convictions. (...) Whoever TRT chooses to send, we will not be successful!"¹²⁴ 2012's performance by Can Bonomo received similar reactions on Twitter: "It is not Eurovision, it is a geography lesson"; "As long as Iran, Iraq and Syria are not participating we have no chance in Eurovision."¹²⁵

Ten years after Erenner won the European hearts, Turkey no longer participated in Eurovision. On the 12th of December 2012, TRT announced that Turkey would not take part in Eurovision 2013. The reasoning behind it were the changes and resulting injustices in the contest's voting system.¹²⁶ A

¹²⁰ Habertürk, "Hadise Başbakan Erdoğan'a konuştu!," 9 May, 2009, <https://www.haberturk.com/medya/haber/145664-hadise-basbakan-Erdogana-konustu#>.

¹²¹ Sabah, "Biz de tatlı çocuk gönderelim," 18 May, 2009, https://www.sabah.com.tr/yasam/2009/05/18/biz_de_tatli_cocuk_gonderelim.

¹²² "Points to and from Turkey", Eurovision Covers, accessed 27 May, 2019, <http://www.eurovisioncovers.co.uk/xttur.htm>.

¹²³ Vatan, "Manga elenebilir!," 27 May, 2010, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/manga-elenebilir--307874-gundem/>.

¹²⁴ Sabah, "Yüksek Sadakat neden elendi?" 11 May, 2011, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/kultur-sanat/2011/05/12/yuksek-sadakat-neden-elendi>.

¹²⁵ Milliyet, "Twitter'da Eurovision yorumları," 27 May, 2012, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/twitter-da-eurovision-yorumlari-magazin-1545717/>.

¹²⁶ Daily Sabah, "TRT releases surprising decision."

sentiment of unfairness of the voting system was not new for Turkey. Before the televoting had been introduced, the country felt disadvantaged because of its outsider position. A specifically painful year was 1983, in which Turkey received zero points. Performer Çetin Alp claimed afterwards that if his name had been Michel, the results would have been different. It is true that Turkey started scoring much better after the introduction of televoting. Up until 1996, Turkey only reached the top ten once in its eighteen tries. Starting from 1997 (in which televoting became optional), this number increased to nine top ten performances out of sixteen. Annex 3 shows a list of Turkey's receiving votes. Here it is visible that Western European countries are more eager to vote for Turkey's entries. Especially Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria, and Belgium have given generous votes every year. These countries' Turkish citizens make up their largest minority group, ranging from approximately two million in Germany to 50 thousand in Austria. Turks residing in Europe could easily vote to support their home country. Moreover, it has happened that TRT commentators would encourage Turks living abroad to vote for Turkey. The loss of these votes due to the jury system have a direct impact on Turkey's biggest voters, as can also be seen in annex 3. Ironically, this system was introduced to prevent biased voting in Eurovision. It seems fair to say that both systems are incredibly biased; Turkey simply preferred the one that worked in its favour. Nonetheless, biased voting has fuelled the thought that Europe, and the EU, indeed do not want Turkey to be a part of it. Likewise, no substantial progress had been made in Turkey's EU negotiations.

While TRT's announcement came as a surprise, in hindsight it could be said that the withdrawal was to be expected. AKP won its third general elections in 2011, encouraging Erdoğan to continue his process of the Islamisation of society.¹²⁷ Islamic politics had evolved during complex processes of transformation and had taken its form by rearticulating its relationship with secularism, neoliberalism, and democracy. More specifically, it was set off against the tradition of Kemalism.¹²⁸ Modernity was no longer synonymous to the West; Erdoğan sought for an alternative modernisation, one in which

¹²⁷ Çağaptay, *A New Sultan*, 129.

¹²⁸ Jenny White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey : A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2003), 8.

tradition and religion-based norms and values were compatible.¹²⁹ If Eurovision was a reflection of Europe, it was no longer desirable to be a part of it as the pressure of being European was lifted.

Media and entertainment were not excluded in the pietisation of society, even when it came to international events. In 2010, for example, cheerleaders were banned from performing at the World Basketball Championships, hosted by Turkey.¹³⁰ Eurovision was no exception: after the news broke that the Finnish entry will show a kiss between two women in the song 'Marry Me', TRT decided last minute not to broadcast the contest at all after complaints by the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK).¹³¹ Two years later, when the Austrian drag persona Conchita Wurst won the contest. TRT chief Ibrahim Eren commented in 2018 that "someone like the bearded Austrian who wore a skirt is one of the main reasons of Ankara's ongoing boycott against Eurovision. I have told the [EBU] on the Eurovision issue that they deviated from their values. As a result, other countries also left Eurovision."¹³² (While there was some outrage over Wurst's victory, no other country withdrew from Eurovision.) Eurovision has been closely connected to gay culture ever since the transgender singer Dana International (Israel, 1998) won the contest. Since then it has become a site of LGBT politics. The contest, known by some as the 'gay Olympics,' has given visibility to homo- and transsexuality in conservative areas, empowering local lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities.¹³³ The Turkish LGBT organisation *Kaos* also took offense to the withdrawal, saying that it is an active attack on media freedom and the censorship of queer identity.¹³⁴ The decision made by TRT on the basis of values thus insinuate an immorality of western media, something that no longer belongs in Erdoğan's Turkey.

¹²⁹ E. Fuat Keyman, Sebnem Gumuscu, *Democracy, Identity, and Foreign Policy in Turkey. Hegemony through Transformation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 37-42.

¹³⁰ Telegraph, "Cheerleaders absent for Turkey matches at World Basketball Championships," 2 September, 2010, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/basketball/7976901/Cheerleaders-absent-for-Turkey-matches-at-World-Basketball-Championships.html>.

¹³¹ Kaos GL, "TRT Eşcinsel Öpücük Protestolu Eurovision 2013'ü Yayınlamayacak," 14 May, 2013, <http://www.kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=14159>.

¹³² Hürriyet Daily, "Turkey to return Eurovision 'if no more bearded divas'," 4 August, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-return-eurovision-if-no-more-bearded-divas-135427>.

¹³³ Catherine Baker, "The 'gay Olympics'? The Eurovision Song Contest and the politics of LGBT/European belonging," in *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 1 (2017), 101-102.

¹³⁴ Kaos GL, "Eurovision, milliyetçilik ve geyler," 25 May, 2015. <http://www.kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=19488>.

Media in Turkey changed immensely in the period from 2000 until 2012. To the Turkish public, Eurovision had gone from representing their chance of becoming European to a discriminatory organisation that wished them no good. A change in foreign affairs was tangible; as political ambitions shifted to the East, Europe was no longer a priority. This led to a drop in popularity of the music event in regard to politics and media. Eurovision started to become an awkward fit in a media landscape that was increasingly influenced by the government.

Conclusion

This essay has explored whether Turkey considered itself European on a social and political scale, and represented itself to a European audience during the period of 2000-2012, examined through the country's experience of being a Eurovision contestant. Eurovision gave the temporary satisfaction for many Turks to feel appreciated by Europe for a period of time, and the contest became the shining example of Turkey's Europeanness. However, Eurovision's social value declined as rapid political developments led once again to a narrative of 'Us versus Them' and the sense of being an outsider returned.

Eurovision was created with the idea of creating a cultural unity in post-War Europe. The contest had long been a stage for non-nationally specific pop music, in which signs of national identity were mostly absent. However, the debut of new contestants such as the former Yugoslavian and Soviet countries in the nineties brought with them a new aesthetic. The use of national identity became a marker for specific regions in Europe, and voting blocs became apparent in the voting results. Members of each bloc generally had a similar approach, dividing Europe in different unities when it came to Eurovision. Eurovision thus started to represent a lack of continental unity but a strong regional loyalty. Turkey did not find itself in any of the regional blocs, but had success in the contest nonetheless. As Eurovision could not unite the continent as it intended to, Turkey's isolated position did not seem to be a problem yet.

As is many times the case with Turkey, there seemed to be a disconnection between what Turkey wanted to represent to a European audience and day-to-day life. Nonetheless, the country was ecstatic when it finally won its first Eurovision in 2003 with Sertab Erener's performance of belly dancing and Oriental sounds. This set a trend for later years, as Turkey started receiving higher scores than ever before. These Oriental performances confirmed the Orientalist thought that is alive in Western Europe, but are not the result of a process of auto-Orientalism as Said would describe it. On

the contrary, these performances received critique on multiple fronts: the harem aesthetic was oversexualised and the Ottoman dress was a reminder of the backwardness of pre-Republican times.

This aesthetic could also be found elsewhere, particularly in Turkey's tourist industry. It gave the traveller the illusion of being in his own Orientalist narrative. This did not mean that Turkey had internalised Orientalism, as Said discussed. It was more simple than that: Neoliberalism reacts to supply and demand, meaning that if foreigners wanted to have a 'Thousand and One Night' experience in Turkey, they would get it – for a price. It was this pragmatic approach of the Ottoman past combined with the already existing Orientalist prejudice of the West, that resonated so well with a European audience on the Eurovision stage.

The rapid political developments that Turkey experienced until 2012 affected the contest's reputation in Turkey. It seemed like the attitude towards it shifted 180 degrees from Erenner's victory in 2003. Even then, however, timing was of incredible importance. The country had been an official candidate state for EU membership since late 1999 and a new party was elected in 2002 that seemed more than willing to facilitate the process. Sertab Erenner had brought home the prize that functioned as proof that Turkey was ready; it had become a cultural part of Europe and, possibly more importantly, Europe had shown appreciation for it. The victory was used as a political tool to vindicate that Turkey was in fact a valuable part of Europe, and would be even more so as a member state of the EU.

The changing political climate brought about a new environment of media and entertainment. Media more and more became an instrument for spreading the political agenda of the AKP. The increasing Islamisation of society, together with a frustration of the EU's unwilling attitude to allow membership thus became the discourse in which Eurovision was aired. Public opinion on the contest once again shifted to the unfairness of the votes, claiming that the voting blocs scattered any chances Turkish performers might have of winning. Even though Turkey did well in the 2000's, a sentiment of injustice became more and more visible in the media.

When the voting system changed in 2011 with the fifty percent of votes now coming from national juries, the motivation seemed to drop further. That same year would be the first time that

Turkey did not make the Eurovision finals. In 2012, after another disappointing voting result, TRT decided that the injustice of the jury voting system was reason enough to withdraw. The voting data (annex 2) shows that the votes of Turkey's biggest fans in the past (Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium) decreased after 2011. This implies that the votes coming from Western Europe's Turkish inhabitants had lost value as the juries now made up half of the votes. Turkey's position in Eurovision thus once again isolated. TRT's decision to withdraw seemed to verify the idea that at least on cultural grounds, Turkey's allies lay in the East and not in Europe. Islamic values were no longer compatible with the liberal image of Eurovision. Comments on the contest's display of queer and trans culture confirm that the voting system was not the only factor that led TRT to withdraw. Moreover, the contest has not been broadcasted in Turkey since 2013.

Evaluating Turkey's position in Europe through the context of Eurovision does not give a positive image. The low number of votes the country received before 2000 and after 2011 suggest that European countries have little national affinity with Turkey. The years in between had been successful, but its performances mirrored the Orientalist fantasy western countries had of Turkey. Moreover, the televotes had made it possible for European Turks to elevate Turkey's scores. Some might even had the painful realisation that without these votes, Turkey might not have won in 2003 as the difference with the runner-up was only three points. However, the political shifts that have taken place since Erdoğan's second electoral victory in 2007 have created an environment in which Turkey no longer wanted to affiliate itself with Eurovision. The lack of affinity seemed to have become mutual.

Turkey has an open invitation for Eurovision. It is welcome to come back anytime, as it has remained a member of the EBU. Every year there have seemed to be speculations of Turkey returning to the stage, but it has yet to happen.¹³⁵ As the government continues to become more authoritarian, it is the question whether a return can happen as long as Erdoğan is in charge.

¹³⁵ ESC Today, "Turkey: TRT's Eurovision return remains grim unless there are changes," 4 August, 2018, <http://esctoday.com/168319/turkey-trts-eurovision-return-remains-grim-unless-there-are-changes/>.

Annex 1 – Performance style per competing country per year

	Non-nationalist
	Nationalist
	No participation

	'00 ¹³⁶	'01 ¹³⁷	'02 ¹³⁸	'03 ¹³⁹	'04 ¹⁴⁰	'05 ¹⁴¹	'06 ¹⁴²	'07 ¹⁴³	'08 ¹⁴⁴	'09	'10	'11	'12
Albania													
Andorra													
Armenia													
Austria													
Azerbaijan													
Belarus													
Belgium													
Bosnia Herz.													
Bulgaria													
Croatia													
Cyprus													
Czech Rep.													
Denmark													
Estonia													
F.Y.R.O.M													
Finland													
France													
Georgia													
Germany													
Greece													
Hungary													

¹³⁶ YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2000 full (ERT) Greek commentary," accessed on March 15, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RV2wtNBzTio>.

¹³⁷ YouTube, "Eurovision song contest 2001 (no comments)," accessed on March 16, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEb8oIJ-YxM>.

¹³⁸ YouTube, "Eurovision 2002 Full Final HQ," accessed on March 17, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIRVWGBMbyk>.

¹³⁹ YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2003," accessed on March 19, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrZhr_TlqSw.

¹⁴⁰ YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2004 - Semi-Final," accessed on March 21, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PcPOiq6DpM>; YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2004 - Grand Final," accessed on March 21, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTMER2rKpdA&t=305s>.

¹⁴¹ YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2005 Semifinal HD," accessed on March 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAkgP-ljDv4>; YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2005 - Grand Final (HD)," accessed on March 23, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG0D22rNG6k>.

¹⁴² YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2006 Semifinal HD," accessed on March 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lzl21SIOD-Q>; YouTube, "BBC - Eurovision 2006 Final (20 May 2006)," accessed on March 23, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9ON0r4o0Y8>.

¹⁴³ YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2007 SEMIFINAL full show," accessed on March 24, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7C_k3jeqH0; YouTube, "BBC - Eurovision 2007 Final (10 May 2007)," accessed on March 24, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qn987nPOdRQ>.

¹⁴⁴ YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2008 -- Semifinal 1 COMPLETE," accessed on March 26, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfkBE8BRV2U>; YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2008 -- Semifinal 2 COMPLETE," accessed on March 26, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Mh2C5s1ZqY>; YouTube, "BBC - Eurovision 2008 Final (24 May 2008)," accessed on March 26, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PF6VnVLhs4g>.

	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09 ¹⁴⁵	'10 ¹⁴⁶	'11 ¹⁴⁷	'12 ¹⁴⁸
Iceland													
Ireland													
Israel													
Italy													
Latvia													
Lithuania													
Malta													
Moldova													
Monaco													
Montenegro													
Netherlands													
Norway													
Poland													
Portugal													
Romania													
Russia													
San Marino													
Serbia													
Slovakia													
Slovenia													
Spain													
Sweden													
Switzerland													
Turkey													
UK													
Ukraine													

¹⁴⁵ YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2009 | Semi-final 1 | 720p @ 50fps | SVT HD | 12/05/2009," accessed on March 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mw66ILYw6Mc>; YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2009 | Semi-final 2 | 720p @ 50fps | SVT HD | 14/05/2009," accessed on March 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFKIKLpobPY>; YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2009 Final," accessed on March 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6JCuoZSyUk>.

¹⁴⁶ YouTube, "Eurovision 2010 Semifinal 1 Full," accessed on March 29, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k20XtwMqc3I>; YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2010 | Semi-final 2 | 720p @ 50fps | NRK 1 HD | 27/05/2010," accessed on April 1, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7FdDok8VfQ>; YouTube, "2010.05.29 Eurovision Song Contest 2010 - Grand Final [full length] [HD] ESC," accessed on April 1, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-T8Z_IXX7_M.

¹⁴⁷ YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2011 | Semi-final 1 | 720p @ 50fps | SVT 1 HD | 10/05/2011," accessed on April 2, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugd7qpagiE0>; YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2011 | Semi-final 2 | 720p @ 50fps | SVT 1 HD | 12/05/2011," accessed on April 2, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u04XJluuul4>; YouTube, "Eurovision song contest 2011," accessed on April 3, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2y3nJC0Jcl>.

¹⁴⁸ YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2012 Baku Semifinal 1 satellite feed," accessed on April 3, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttPqxZOJ-E4>; YouTube, "Eurovision Song Contest 2012 Baku Semifinal 2 satellite feed," accessed on April 3, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOQ33XwlXd4>; YouTube, "Eurovision 2012 - Full TRT yayını -26.05.2012," accessed on April 4, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbL3aYt1oZo>.

Annex 2 – Overview of votes given to Turkey per country per year^{149 150}

	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	AVERAGE
Azerbaijan										12	12	12		12	12,00
Germany	12	10	7	0	10	12	10	12	12	10	10	10		8	9,46
France	5	12	7	0	10	12	12	12	12	10	12	12		5	9,31
Netherlands	0	12	3		12	12	12	12	12	10	8	8		8	9,08
Albania						8	8	7	10	10	10	8		10	8,88
Belgium	0	3		7	12	12	10	7	12	10	12	6		7	8,17
Bosnia Herz.	0		0	0	12	7	8	10	10	8	7	10		4	6,33
Macedonia		5		8		6	4	4	10	7	12	10		0	6,60
Bulgaria							3	4	7	5	10	10		7	6,57
Switzerland	0	5				8	6	10	10	6	12	3		3	6,30
Romania		0		7	10	10	3	6	7	8	6	8		0	5,91
Austria	0	5		0	12	8	7		10					3	5,63
Georgia									2	6		5		7	5,00
San Marino										4				5	4,50
UK	0	0	0	0	7	6	1	0	12	8	12	10		1	4,38
Denmark	0	1	3	0		10	8	0	10	4	6	6		2	4,17
Norway	5	1	0		10	8	0	0	7	2	7	2		0	3,50
Ukraine					2	6	0	3	1	4	0	8		3	3,00
Sweden	0	1	0	0	8	5	0	0	7	0	6	5		6	2,92
Hungary							0		1	5	5			3	2,80
Croatia	0	0	7	3	10	3	0	0	0	0	1	12		0	2,77
Monaco						8	0	0							2,67
Greece			10	0	7	6	0	3	0	0	3	0		0	2,64
Finland		4		0		5	0	0	4	4	5	3		0	2,50
Malta	0	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	5	0		8	1,62
Poland	0		0		2	8	0	3	0	0	0	0			1,30
Andorra						3	0	0	0	0	4				1,17
Belarus						3	0	0	0	3	0	3		0	1,13
Israel	0	0	0	0	7	2	0	1	0	0	3	0		1	1,08
Spain	0	0	0	4	3	2	0	0	0	0	2	3		0	1,08
Cyprus	0	0		0	8	4	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	1,00
Montenegro									1	0	3			0	1,00
Portugal	0		0		8	0	0	0	0	0	3	0		0	1,00
Russia		0	0	0	0	8	0	0	2	2	0	0		0	1,00
Slovenia	0		0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	2		0	1,00
Lithuania	0		0	0		3	0	0	0	0	0	4		1	0,73
Serbia						2	0		0	0	0	3		0	0,71
Iceland	0	0	0		0	5	0	0	3	0	0	0		0	0,67
Estonia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6		0	0,46
Czech Rep.									0	0	1				0,33
Ireland	0	0	0		3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		0	0,33
Latvia		0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	0,17
Moldova							0	0	1	0	0	0		0	0,14
Armenia								0	0	0	0	0			0,00
Italy														0	0,00
Slovakia											0	0		0	0,00

¹⁴⁹ As Turkey did not make the finals in 2011, these votes were not counted. Votes in the semi-finals can only be cast by that nights' participants, and are therefore not representative.

¹⁵⁰ Eurovision Covers, "Points to and from Turkey."

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