Eurovision: Performing State Identity and Shared Values

How states and their critics instrumentalise mega-events and their values to present competing narratives on state identity and legitimacy.

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Abstract

The Eurovision Song Contest has, since its establishment in 1956, became a forum for European interaction and space where European identity is defined and performed. Participating states are expected to embrace the established shared norms and values, while presenting their cultural identity to a global audience. Examining Eurovision through mega-events theory, this thesis will answer: *how are mega-events utilised by states and their critics to present and disseminate competing narratives on the host state's identity and right to host?* To do so, the 2019 contest in Israel will be examined as a case study to demonstrate how mega-events can be instrumentalised by states and critics. In doing so it also explores the dangers inherent in hosting a mega-event. This thesis will conclude that Israel utilised the hosting of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2019 as an opportunity to present a clear narrative of Israel as a legitimate and worthy member of Eurovision, and by extension Europe, by echoing the values of the contest. However, critics of Israel also utilised the same show to counter this narrative by challenging Israel's adherence to Eurovision's values and the ability of Eurovision to uphold its apoliticality when hosted by a controversial state. These competing narratives demonstrate how mega-events create a forum both for hosting states to disseminate their narratives and for critics to counter it, it also demonstrates how the values of a mega-event can be instrumentalised by critics to attack and delegitimate the hosting state.

Introduction

From the 14th to 18th of May 2019, approximately 182 million viewers tuned in to watch perhaps one of the strangest forums of international interaction (Groot 2019). Established in 1956, the Eurovision Song Contest (referred to as Eurovision onwards) sees around 40 countries compete each year in a televised song contest, vying for both professional jury and public votes in hopes of being crowned the year's champion and winning the right the host the next year's contest (EBU n.d.). Over its 60 years, Eurovision has become both good-humoured fun and a forum through which European publics express their loyalties, resentments, and criticisms of each other. It reflects the complex relationships between different European publics with votes rumoured to be as much about politics as musical quality. Neighbours vote for neighbours, diasporas for the homeland, and controversial political actions may result in plummeting votes.

Mega-event theory has long explored the global cultural and political significance of events such as the Olympic games, FIFA World Cups, and Expos. Yet Eurovision remains largely overlooked. While smaller, it is a unique example of an annual cultural mega-event and one of the few recognised mega-events with a strong regional identity. Eurovision is, by definition, a contest for European states, and while this definition of Europe is oft criticised geographically, it has become an unusual but significant way to study the development of European identity. Currently, around 50 countries are eligible to compete, including Russia, Turkey, Israel, Australia, and the Caucasus countries. Instead of geographical boundaries, Eurovision has made its definition of European formally contingent on being a member of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) or the Council of Europe, and informally on a set of shared values (European Broadcasting Union 2018). Eurovision's version of European identity is an inclusive, diverse, and progressive one, and all participating states are expected to uphold these values.

As with any mega-event, Eurovision is a rare opportunity for the host state to engage with and present itself to a large European audience. What message host-countries wish to impart varies by who they are, how they regularly interact with Europe, and how they wish to define their relationship with Europe and its public. It is especially countries on the periphery of Europe, either geographically or culturally, that often invest most heavily in their hosting of Eurovision. But the media attention that Eurovision draws also creates space for critics of a hosting state to present competing narratives. It is an inherent risk that hosting a mega-event can open up a state to heavy and targeted criticism. As such, this thesis will explore: *How are*

mega-events utilised by states and their critics to present and disseminate competing narratives on the host state's identity and right to host?

To do so, it will examine the case study of the 2019 hosting of Eurovision by Israel and the competing narratives presented by Israel and its critics. Guided by the sub-question: *How was the Eurovision Song Contest and its values instrumentalised by Israel and its critics to present competing narratives on Israeli identity and legitimacy within the contest?* It will explore how Israel utilised the contest to present a clear narrative of Israel as a legitimate, worthy, and value-sharing member of Eurovision, and by extension Eurovision's version of Europe. Critics of Israel disputed this narrative by challenging Israel's alleged adherence to Eurovision's values, and the ability of Eurovision to uphold its apoliticality when hosted by a controversial state. In doing so, it situates Eurovision in the wider literature on mega-events – a field of study that has so far largely focused upon Expos and sporting mega-events – and demonstrates how mega-events and their values are instrumentalised by both host states and critics to disseminating competing narratives and further their political agendas, regardless of the apoliticality of the event.

Literature Review

Eurovision Literature

Academic literature on Eurovision, while small, has been growing since the 1990s. Yair (2019, 1013) identified four main areas of academic discourse on Eurovision: imaginings of a unified Europe and nation branding; gender and queer elements of Eurovision; political bloc voting patterns and cultural alliances; and Eurovision as a cultural seismograph for exploring external phenomenon such as economic trade and political conflicts. For the scope of this thesis, two areas of academic discourse are most relevant: conceptions of Europeanness or European identity, and public presentation of the nation-state.

Fricker and Gluhovic (2013, 10) recognise Eurovision as potentially "a way of creating a new European awareness, offering insights into the diverse simultaneous realities that are lived in Europe, increasing the intercultural competence and sensitivity of both artists and audiences, and becoming a force shaping a notion of European citizenship". Similarly, Jones and Subotic (2011) "use Eurovision to explore ways in which collective European identities shape state behavior in the cultural realm, and conversely how these identities are shaped by cultural events". Raykoff and Tobin (2007, xviii) suggest Eurovision provides literal and

figurative access to a European "society that is democratic, capitalist, peace-loving. multicultural, sexually liberated and technologically advanced". In the same vein, Sieg (2013, 245) describes Eurovision as "a harbinger of cosmopolitan values, including diversity, democracy and human rights." However, the relatively recent introduction of Central and Eastern European countries to the competition has led many scholars to study what the contest means to them and how 'Europeanness' is performed by states on the periphery of Europe. Sieg (2013, 245) identified the contest as an opportunity "to demonstrate belonging to and partnership with Europe" but also to position themselves "as stakeholders in a common project to define the meaning, values and norms that attach to Europeanness". Jones and Subotic (2011) argued that for countries on the periphery, Eurovision presents a rare opportunity to "feel as equal and 'European' as everyone else" echoing Kavanagh (2010, 5) who sees participation in Eurovision as 'a means of staking a place on the European stage and furthering the process of 'becoming European'". Meanwhile, scholars including Bolin (2010, 131) have also argued that this identity is inherently centred on Western Europe. Considering Azerbaijan, Ismayilov (2012, 835) saw its victory in 2011 as "dramatically strengthen[ing] the sense of European, indeed Western, identity amidst a certain stratum of the country's society", however the hosting of Eurovision by states on the periphery has also introduced new levels of diversity musically and culturally to the contest and thus its conception of European identity (Bolman 2007, 65).

Within Eurovision, there are however, two duelling agendas at play; the presentation of the nation-state and the performance of Europeanness. Bolin (2010, 131) identified two values presented by Eurovision to the audience: the idea of the nation-state as a basis for cultural identity, and the value of Europeanness. While interpretations of the performances and event may vary, it is almost universally understood that in Eurovision it is nation-states who perform and that these performances represent, in that instance, the nation-state. Thus, Eurovision reinforces the notion of the nation-state and the nation-state as a source of cultural identity for the audiences. Baker (2008, 173) wrote on Eurovision as a site for the public representation of the nation and how "the contest's transnational audience and implication in commercial practices create pressures toward representing the nation through simplified, well-known images". Through both their performances and hosting, states are expected to represent their country and their culture, and as such may resort to stereotypes or commonly recognised imagery. Arntsen (2005, 148) recognised this in her study on Estonia, Latvia, and Norway's hosting of the contest, noting that finals tend to feature "images of nationally significant landmarks, people, and culturally significant locations" and use "cultural types and

stereotypes" to represent "the nation, the nation's culture(s) and its relationship with the rest of the world". Hosting presents an opportunity for the state to advertise and define itself to a large international audience, and many works have focused on studying how states have utilised the contest for nation-branding. A nation-brand can be defined as "the application of corporate marketing concepts and techniques to countries, in the interests of enhancing their reputation in international relations" (Kerr and Wiseman 2018, 354). Miazhevich (2010; 2012) has applied nation-branding to Russia, Ukraine, and Serbia, while Jordan (2014) wrote a book on Nation-Branding and Estonia.

Mega-Events

Mega-events remain a niche area of study in International Relations with most literature having emerged in the last twenty years, and typically focusing upon sporting events, such as the Olympics or FIFA World Cups, or occasionally cultural/social events such as Expos. As such, much of the literature used below has focused upon sporting mega-events, but is still relevant to understanding non-sporting mega-events. The most commonly cited definition of mega-events comes from Maurice Roche's 2000 book, *Mega-events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture,* and defines mega-events as: "large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance" (Roche 2000, 1). He recognises mega-events as having three sets of characteristics: modern/non-modern, national/non-national, and local/non-local. Mega-events are typically 'progressive' events involving "non-religious/secular values, ideologies and principles of organisation connected with 'Western civilisation' including 'techno-rationalism (positive roles for science and technology), capitalism, universalitism, humanism, urbanism and transnational levels of organisation of communications and transport" (Roche 2000, 8–9). They are hosted by nations and nationally-based elites who are able to control the narrative presented by the event and become, Roche argues, quasi-super powers for the period of the event. However, the events are also multinational, cosmopolitan, supernational, and global with actors from all contributing to the creation of the event. Lastly, mega-events are localised to a specific place, typically a city or country, and intend to temporarily transform parts of the city, displaying the local elites power and advertising the place to a global audience. They are also non-local due to their status as media events with the global media playing a key role in how the event is portrayed and spread (Roche 2000, 8–10). Media events are "those historic occasions – mostly occasions of state – that are televised as they take place and transfix a nation or the world", they are by definition not routine but

"*interruptions* of routine" intervening "in the normal flow of broadcasting and our lives" (1992, 1,5). The interplay of these characteristics demonstrate the unique nature of mega-events as opportunities for a state or city to exert its influence and narrative onto a global audience, while also having to adapt to the global set of values and ideals the event embodies.

While quoted in most works on mega-events, Roche's definition is still oft criticised for its broadness and ineffectiveness in helping scholars actually distinguish and identify mega-events (Close 2010, 2981). Müller (2015, 628) attempted to develop a clearer definition of mega-events based on existing literature and identified four key dimensions: visitor attractiveness, mediated reach, cost, and transformation. However, this very quantitative approach does not leave much space to consider the cultural impact of a mega-event. Most scholars have found it easier to identify an obvious mega-event and work backwards in developing a fitting definition that can encompass other similar events; for this the Summer Olympic Games are typically the clearest and most universally agreed-upon mega-event (Close 2010; Grix and Lee 2013; Horne and Manzenreiter 2006). Close (2010, 2977) uses the Olympic Games to identify three fundamental dimensions of mega-events, namely; the economic, the political, and the cultural. He coins a globalisational approach to mega-events that "hinges upon defining and distinguishing these occasions as global, global reach or globalised economic, political and cultural phenomena; upon recognising the way in which they are principal loci, or sites, of globalization, with which they have a close, intimate and mutually-shaping social relationship; and upon acknowledging the way in which they are major vehicles for the progress of globalization" (Close 2010, 2981). The general consensus between scholars seems to recognise that mega-events are interlinked with processes of globalisation and have an inherently international dimension to them. Mega-events are an opportunity for both host and participating countries to present themselves and interact with the wider international community. As Grix and Lee (2013, 529) noted in regards to hosting, "By successfully hosting a major sporting event to showcase shared social norms and sameness, the state can enhance its international prestige and attractiveness in order to boost its agency in international politics."

The sharing and mirroring of social norms, values, and identities is crucial to the significance of mega-events. Roche (2000, 6) recognised this, arguing in his book that "mega-events have been and remain important elements in the orientation of national societies to international or global society and in the theory and practice of public culture and civil society…" and noted that:

> "The staging of international mega-events was and remains important in the 'story of a country', a people, a nation. They represented and continue to represent key occasions in which nations could construct and present images of themselves for recognition in relation to other nations and 'in the eyes of the world'. They represented and continue to represent key occasions in which national 'tradition' and 'community', including a national past, present and future (national 'progress', potential and 'destiny'), could be invented and imagined not just by and for leaders and citizens of the host nation, but also by and for the publics of other nations."

In the hosting of mega-events, states have the opportunity both to construct and explore their own identity, and present this to the wider international community. Hosting states are expected to reflect the values and norms of the events. As Roche recognised, mega-events typically have modern progressive identities and states are typically expected to conform to these if they wish to participate. Grix and Lee (2013, 528) highlighted this in context of sporting events: "Because of the centrality of universally admired values (…), hosting states can enhance their attractiveness to others by demonstrating that they not only share those values, but also that they wish to champion and collectively celebrate these within the context of their own distinctive cultural, social, and political values." Hosting a mega-event gives a state the opportunity to demonstrate that it embraces certain shared norms and values, while also having the opportunity to present its own unique identity. States are able to prove that they are legitimate members of the event's community, while also asserting their distinct identity and values within this context.

Methodology

This thesis explores the question: *How are mega-events utilised by states and their critics to present and disseminate competing narratives on the host state's identity and right to host?* To do so, it analyses the narratives presented by Israel and its critics during the 2019 Eurovision Final as a case study. This analysis is guided by the sub research question: *How was the Eurovision Song Contest and its values instrumentalised by Israel and its critics to present competing narratives on Israeli identity and legitimacy within the contest?*

Chapter one examines the narrative presented by Israel focusing focuses upon the 2019 Eurovision Song Contest, and specifically the Grand Final (referred to as 'the final' here onwards) held on the 18th of May 2019 (Eurovision Song Contest 2019). Since 2008, Eurovision has consisted of two semi-finals and a final. The final has been selected as the main

source to be analysed, as the finals receive the most viewership and media attention, and represents a clearly definable host-driven event to analyse. A Eurovision final always consists of the same segments: an introductory performance; the flag parade to introduce all contestants; the contestant performances introduced by postcards; an intermission with performances by the host; voting; and a final performance by the winner. Postcards are short videos to introduce each performance, the style of which varies greatly year to year. This structure creates a clear way in which contests must be organised, while also leaving space for host countries to add their own flair and personality. It also creates a guideline for analysis. Analysis of the final was split into two steps:

- Firstly, based upon the literature review, two key areas of analysis were identified: presentation of the nation-state and performance of Europeanness. Thus, the first step was to watch the final and begin identifying all potential elements, themes, and patterns related to either the nation-state or Europeanness. From this first round of analysis it became clear that three categories were actually needed, with presentation of the nation-state separated into modern and cultural/ethnic identity.
- Secondly, once all elements had been categorised, secondary research was used to support the analysis and provide context. This included identifying all music used, background on performers and hosts, and identifying the geographic locations used. Academic research on cultural, historical, and economic factors related to Israel's identity and relationship with Europe was also conducted. Through this, the core narrative presented by the final was analysed and broken down to produce chapter one.

Chapter two focuses upon the rhetoric used by critics to counter Israel's narrative. Rather than merely studying how many critical actions occurred, this thesis explores the prevailing rhetorics used and focuses upon actions that received the most media attention. As such, initial research focused on identifying events and actions that had received significant media attention and were easily accessible. Firstly, the terms 'Eurovision 2019' and 'Eurovision Israel 2019' were searched on two search engines (Google.com and DuckDuckGo.com) Google was selected due to its global popularity and news function that allows researchers to search global news articles within a desired timespan. By accessing Google through a incognito mode, I was able to see both what general articles were the most recommended to users and speicifically search news articles in the period between the 2018 and 2019 finals. Google news also groups articles based on topics allowing me to easily see what topics Google identified as commonly discussed. DuckDuckGo was also utilised as the search engine does not save searches or

manipulate results based on the user's history, thus allowing me to see results completely impacted by previous searches. This produced a wealth of material, and so I started identifying the most recurring topics and information. To continue focusing on only easily accessible information anything beyond the second page of searches was discounted, however, separate time period searches were done for the two weeks after the 2018 and before the 2019 finals as these were periods with increased media attention. Any official Eurovision sources were discounted and I focused upon news sources either critical of Israel or discussing criticisms.

From these searches, it became clear that the most prominent critical actions discussed were: Madonna and Hatari's actions in the final, boycott calls and open letters by celebrities, and thinkpieces in major newspapers. Once these had been identified further specific searches were done to familiarise myself with the events/actions and to find original texts/recordings. This also enabled me to confirm how many results each topic had and how many news articles existed.

- Hatari's actions and speeches were widely reported, a number of interviews were conducted, and orginal footage was easily accessible.
- The BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement's boycott calls also received attention and the original text easily accessible. The British and Irish boycott calls were also analysed as again they received significant attention and were easily accessible. They were also produced in English which made analysis easier.
- News articles from the BBC and the Guardian were also utilised based on how regularly they appeared when searching related terms, their large global readerships, and general reliability. The BBC was trusted as a source due to legal requirement for imparitality and widespread reputation for accuracy. While some bias must be expected and this was considered, it was deemed one of the more reliable news sources available (Great Britain and Department for Culture 2016). The Guardian was used for the open letters and opinion pieces it published. These appeared regularly and highly in all searches suggesting they were popular and while the Guardian has a clear left-wing political leaning, in the context of this analysis it was expected that strong criticisms were more likely to come from sources with political leanings. The boycott call directed at the BBC was also only published in the Guardian.

Together all these sources well represented the critical actions undertaken and received widespread attention. Thus, it was felt that analysing their rhetoric would present a good representation of Israel's critics. This was done through close reading or viewing of the sources,

and then identification of the key arguments and language used. Commonalities were then identified and used to develop the argument of chapter two.

Unfortunately, a major limitation for the paper was language as I was only able to read English and German language sources. Given its prevalence online and its position as the main working language of Eurovision and its fans, English should enable me to access most sources and especially those that received the most international attention. My inability to read Hebrew did limit my ability to study Israeli sources and as such this thesis will mostly focus on efforts to communicate to international audiences over Israeli.

Chapter 1: Dare to Dream: Israel's Narrative

States spend significant amounts of time, money, and ingenuity finding new ways to engage with interested foreign audiences and sell their narratives. Mega-events, like Eurovision, practically hand over an invested global audience gift-wrapped. The 2019 semi-finals and final saw an audience of 182 million with the final pulling in an audience share of 37%, double the usual prime-time average (Groot 2019). For the four hours allocated for the final, the host-country has almost unrestricted access to tell its desired narrative to the audience. Outside of the performances, the host-country has creative control over every aspect of the show and the freedom to interpret segments as desired. Typically, this results in states using the show as an opportunity to represent and define their state in the eyes of the audience, and position themselves within the audience's understandings of Europe and Eurovision. For states on the periphery, such as Israel, it is also an opportunity to demonstrate their 'Europeanness' and relationship to other European countries through the echoing of shared values.

Israel utilised the final to present a very specific narrative of itself: one which recognised both Israel's history and cultural importance as well as its modernity. Equal focus was placed on Israel's ancient history as its technical prowess; on its clear cultural identity as well as modern multi-culturalism. Issues of sovereignty and conflict were entirely ignored in favour of a narrative that portrayed modern Israel as a legitimate continuation of a long and proud history. Judaism and ethnic identity was conflated with national identity, and audiences were presented with a clear modern Israeli identity that promises inclusion and diversity. In doing so it also defined its relationship with Europe and European identity, recognising that its culture may seem different but arguing that its core values were the same.

Traditional Notions of Israeli Identity

As Arntsen (2005, 148) has noted, Eurovision finals tend to utilise "cultural types and stereotypes" to represent the nation, its culture and its relationship with the world. For all the options and creativity a host-country has, Eurovision finals tend to echo cultural stereotypes. This works to reinforce stereotypical understandings of identity both for domestic and international audiences. Israel was no different in using obvious cultural stereotypes and identifiers to mark the final as clearly Israeli. This includes both the simple inclusion of national colours and flags as well as more complex and subtle allusions to Israeli history and identity. Given Israel's complex and controversial history, the final was always going to be a political statement about Israeli sovereignty and legitimacy, and these issues are addressed quietly through the use of locations, language, and the erasure of Palestine and Palestinians in the narrative. This is likely to be largely unnoticed by international audiences who do not have the familiarity with Israel to challenge what they are presented, while also reaffirming national identity and legitimacy to domestic audiences who do. Ignoring the more technical and legal questions surrounding Israel, it also tries to gain sympathy from the international audience by evoking feelings of identity, national pride, and spiritualism. In doing so, the final introduces both the tangible characteristics of Israeli identity and the more complex emotional role it plays for its people and the broader world.

Israeli State Identity and Legitimacy

The easiest way to define identity is through the utilisation of obvious and stereotypical symbols and actions, and Israel utilised a number of these. Examples include: the use of Hebrew by hosts, the blue theme of the opening, the use of triangles in the logo to form a star, the star centrepieces of the green room, the repeated identification of certain guests and celebrities as Israeli, and the regular mention of the location. The most overt demonstration of Israeli state identity arguably occurs during the intermission, where the Star of David is displayed briefly but prominently (see Fig 1). None of these actions are unusual or particularly notable but together they ensure the audience is clearly aware of the location of the contest. It also reinforces the notion that certain things like Hebrew and the Star of David are intrinsically connected with Israel and Israeli identity. It both echoes and reiterates Israeli state identity to the audiences, both domestic and international.

Figure 1 (Eurovision Song Contest 2019, 2:39:52)

By reiterating Israeli state identity, the final also clearly asserts Israeli legitimacy. The clearest evidence of Israel's legitimacy in the eyes of the contest comes, of course, from the simple fact that Israel competes. The opening performance's portrayal of Israel's history in the contest helps ensure audiences are firmly aware that Israel is unquestionably a part of Eurovision. It is during the postcards that Israeli sovereignty is most clearly displayed, with contestants invited to dance in Israel's "most spectacular and historical locations". All sides of Israel are shown from modern to historical, rural to urban, but crucially the postcards define what falls within Israel's sovereignty. This is an internationally contentious topic and while most locations fall within the 1949 armistice borders, a number of the postcards occur in more controversial locations (Cleveland and Bunton 2016, 254). Albania and Serbia's postcards (See Fig 2 and 3) both take place in locations within the Golan Heights, territory considered by the UN as illegally occupied by Israel (United Nations Security Council 1981).Thus, Israel utilises a traditional part of any Eurovision Final to quietly assert to audiences what constitutes Israel. Few if any audience members will actively research the locations of each postcards and are instead likely to believe what is presented to them. Israel suggests these locations are legitimately within Israel when the truth is far more complicated. This conveys to the audience Israel's definition of Israeli sovereignty and statehood as well as solidifying Israel's identity as a state.

Figure 2 "EIN ZIVAN - Cherry Blossom" (Eurovision Song Contest 2019, 1:51:22)

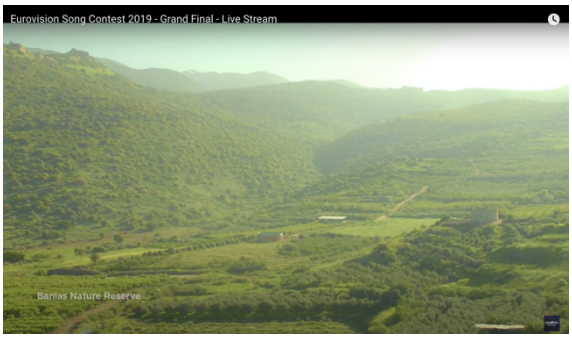

Figure 3 "Banias Nature Reserve" (Eurovision Song Contest 2019, 0:19:15)

Evoking Emotion

The final also utilises emotion to get audiences to relate to Israel and its story. Rather than focusing on fact and history, it uses emotion and universal feelings of identity and pride in one's home to connect. It also explores Israel's traditional cultural identity through an emotive exploration of its people's history and connection to the land, as well as Israel's link to spirituality and religiosity.

The allusions to Israel's history and unique identity as a settler state based on ethnic/religious identity are a combination of subtle and blatant. The official slogan 'Dare to Dream' seems banal at first but early in the show one host remarks: "we are a country of people from all over the world who dare to dream and follow that dream to make it come true" (EBU 2018a). Dare to Dream can be interpreted as refering not only to the contestants of the contest, but also of the Israeli people who are working to actualise their dream of a Israeli state. The final avoids directly addressing or even acknowledging any of controversies around Israel's existence or currently claimed territories.

The existence of Palestinians is also never acknowledged, but references to Israel's identity as an ethnic homeland appear blatantly in two ways. Firstly, the Israeli entry that year 'Home'. The song is broadly about someone gaining confidence, standing up against an adversary, and coming home. The chorus of the song repeats:

"I feel the sun upon my skin
And I am someone, I am someone
You pulled my heart, I took it in
It made me someone, I am someone
And now I'm done, I'm coming home"
(Eurovision World n.d.)

The parallel of the Jewish diaspora coming from communities where they were oppressed to their ancestral home is clear. After finishing the performance he cries and thanks Europe. The postcard preceding his performance was the only introduced by the hosts, and was based in Jerusalem, including a brief shot of the Western Wall (See Fig 4). Together, the performance and postcard present a proud Israeli man showing his cultural and ancestral ties to his 'home' before thanking the audience 'Europe' for giving him the opportunity to celebrate his home. It is a powerful performance and will come across as sympathetic to most audiences who can relate to the patriotic sentiments it conveys. To Jewish audiences there is the additional emotional tie of seeing their ancestral home and religious sites.

Figure 4 (Eurovision Song Contest 2019, 1:12:03)

The second is present throughout the show: the sponsor. The contest was sponsored by MyHeritage, a Israeli genealogy website to build family trees, access historical records, and test DNA (Gobry n.d.; 'Company History and Culture' n.d.). The cut scene of the logo regularly used (see Fig 5) includes the MyHeritage logo and occasionally throughout the final a text bar appears informing audiences of genealogical facts about performers. It is small but its significance cannot be understated. Genealogy is crucial to Israel's identity and existence as the state continues to actively encourage anyone with Jewish ancestry to immigrate to Israel and naturalise (Markus and Semyonov 2011, 3).

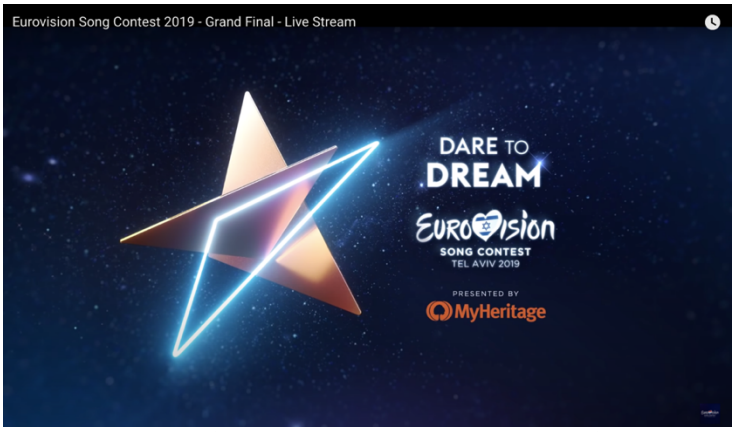

Figure 5 (Eurovision Song Contest 2019, 0:48:46)

Together they remind audiences of the significance Israel and its existence have for Jewish people, through universal feelings of patriotism and a love for one's home. Audiences can identify with the sentiments expressed and together they are likely to solidify the legitimacy of Israel in the minds of the audience. The mention of genealogy creates the notion that being from somewhere is a tangible, biological identifier that cannot be ignored. The final connects these facts with the emotional side of identity and patriotism.

Israel also plays an unique role internationally as the home of major religious sites for three major world religions. While this has naturally played a significant part in the controversy surrounding the country, it also means that many audience members are likely to associate Israel with some form of spiritualism or religiosity regardless of their stance on its legitimacy. The final utilises this connection to spiritualism, but focuses entirely on Israel's connection to Judaism, ignoring Christianity and Islam. The introductory performance of the final begins with a recording of Ofra Haza singing Im Nin'alu (Ofrachai (Ofra Alive) 2009). Im Nin-alu is an ancient Hebrew poem sung by Haza, a well-known Israeli singer and former Eurovision contestant, in Yemenite tradition (Pareles 2000; 'BBC Radio 4 - The Israeli Madonna' n.d.; Shapiro and Midbar 2017). It creates a rapid tonal shift from the modern, energetic introduction video to a slower and more spiritual stage performance. The use of ancient Hebrew – a language linked to Judaism – and the Yemenite singing tradition lends the song a mystical feeling and draws the audience's attention to Israel as a land deeply connected to religion. This segment of music is short, and yet it sets the tone both for the coming performance and for the show as a whole. While, Judaism is never directly mentioned throughout the final – aside from a few short appearances of the Star of David – Jewish culture is subtly referenced throughout, especially through the music. For Jewish audiences these references are likely to be familiar and obvious, while to audiences less familiar with Judaism they still trigger some associations

to Judaism or spiritualism more broadly. It creates a tangible association between Israel and Judaism while never explicitly stating it. For example, Im Nin'alu transitions briefly into Hava Nagila, arguably one of the most well-known Jewish songs ('Hava Nagila's Long, Strange Trip' n.d.). Later in the medley, Dana International performs Omer Adam's Tel Aviv, a pop song that also incorporates Mizrahi – another eastern Jewish diaspora – instrumentation ('Omer Adam | Biography & History' n.d.). Thus, throughout the medley even as modern Israeli songs and classic Eurovision hits are performed the instrumental thread that connects them all is traditional Jewish music. As such, for the audience, the performance feels both modern and ancient, with it clearly connecting to broader Jewish culture and heritage. Songs switch quickly and the most attention grabbing performances are of well-known Eurovision songs, however throughout the audience is introduced to a mixture of Jewish diaspora and Israeli music while being told all represents Israel's cultural and musical history. The usage of spiritual and ancient sounding music also creates the impression that Israel is connected to something ancient and spiritual, something universal.

The final shows Israel's identity and existence as obvious, legitimate, and valued. The audience is shown tangible proof of Israel's existence, reminded of Israel's cultural/religious importance, and crucially shown the love the Israeli people have for Israel. Nothing about this identity is shown as contested or controversial: Israel's existence is shown as fact. For domestic audiences, it will invoke feelings of pride and patriotism, while international viewers will be entertained and educated. Israeli cultural identity and history is conflated with Jewish identity, creating a subtle but strong association in the minds of viewers. Much of the music used comes from or utilises styles from the Jewish diaspora, however it is presented as Israel's cultural legacy. Jewish identity is utilised but as in an ethnic and cultural context rather than religious. This allows the final to reassert Israel as Jewish without making an explicit statement or directly addressing religion, statements that would be controversial within the secular and apolitical context of Eurovision. A valid state needs an unique culture and the final clearly presents this while also evoking universal ideas of identity and home to help audiences relate. Even if this culture is foreign to audiences, the pride the Israelis have for it is relatable.

Modern Israel

However, the final not only explores traditional ideas of Israeli identity but compliments this with an introduction to 'modern' Israel. Eurovision's definition of Europeanness is inherently modern and arguably Western, with Raykoff and Tobin (2007, xviii) describing it as "democratic, capitalist, peace-loving, multicultural, sexually liberated and technologically advanced". While the use of Israel's history and traditional culture are used to identify the final as distinctively Israeli, it is through the display of modern values and ideas that Israel defends its position as Eurovision and a European member.

Technology

Technology is an easy and clear way for states to identify themselves as modern and advanced, and demonstrating your state's technological prowess has long been a part of staging Eurovision (Bolin 2006). As such throughout the final, Israel is clearly presented as a technologically advanced country.

The introduction sequence, as Netta is preparing to land, shows the people of Israel creating a runway lights with, among others, drones, luminous fishing nets, and bicycles with LED lights. It is both visually interesting but also technologically impressive with Israelis easily using complex and fun pieces of technology. As Netta prepares to land, the audience is also shown the modern skyscrapers of Tel Aviv and as it transitions to the stage setting the backdrop of a city skyline is kept. Audiences are reminded that this final is happening in the major modern city Tel Aviv. The staging (see Fig 6) within the stadium is impressive with animated panels that swivel to reveal the plane and triangular lights on the roof that are used to represent the flags of countries during the flag parade. In true Eurovision fashion animated flooring, smoke, and fire all make regular appearances throughout the performances. It is clear to audiences that Israel has the technical skill, expertise, and money to create the quality of show Eurovision has come to be known for. The show's sponsorship by My Heritage also interestingly combines modern technology with a fundamental aspect of Israeli identity: ancestry. Together the show continually demonstrates to the audience Israel's position as a technological and innovative country.

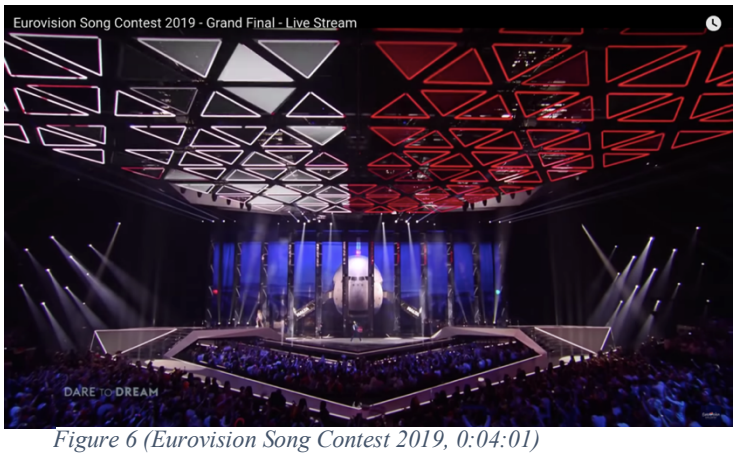

Figure 6 (Eurovision Song Contest 2019, 0:04:01)

Inclusivity and Progressiveness

Another crucial aspect of Israel's portrayal of modernity is through values. Inclusivity is shown through both communal actions and the acceptance of diverse others. Israel is presented as an accepting and welcoming place wherein diverse people can come together as one. The opening scene of the final shows Israelis from diverse backgrounds, settings, and ethnicities working together to guide the plane to the stadium. Every portrayal of Israelis during the show from pre-filmed footage, to live performances, and even the selected hosts shows Israelis from different ethnic backgrounds. The Gal Gadot video includes an image of a woman wearing a hijab (see Fig 7), a notable inclusion as the Muslim community is often portrayed internationally as adversaries of Israel. Acceptance is also demonstrated through the contestants, starting with the Flag Parade where every country is greeted in their native tongue. Later during the postcards, they are invited to experience Israel by performing a dance of their choice with Israeli performers in diverse locations around the country. The contestants are welcomed into Israel and collaborate with Israelis to create something new and unique.

Figure 7 (Eurovision Song Contest 2019, 3:08:55)

The most significant example of progressiveness demonstrated in the show is through normalisation and understated references to LGBT+ identity. One of the hosts, Assi Azar, is gay and references this occasionally, most notably when he mentions his husband during a conversation with Madonna (Fairyington 2016). Since the late 1990s, Eurovision has become a safe space for the LGBT+ community and has demonstrated its willingness to penalise broadcasters who attempt to attack them (Bakker 2018). Numerous scholars (Singleton, Fricker, and Moreo 2007; Baker 2017; Lemish 2004) have studied the relationship LGBT+ fans develop with the contest: appropriating it and recognising it as a queer event. Eurovision in turn, has embraced this connection as part of its identity, as Yair (2019, 1019–20) summarised: "the sexual vision of Eurovision is clear, celebrating lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) identities as the new mode of modernity. Although the EBU bans politics, transgender performers, drag queens, homosexuals and lesbians constitute the liberal spearheads of the cosmopolitan vision of the ESC." This has led to friction with some member countries, with Turkey, which left the contest in 2012 due to dissatisfaction with voting procedures, stating in 2018 that they will not return while transgender individuals and drag artists are allowed to perform (Madamidola 2018). The response by the EBU was clear: "The Eurovision Song Contest's values are of universality and inclusivity and our proud tradition of celebrating diversity through music, (…) TRT has made a huge contribution to the contest in the past, (…) and we would very much welcome them back should they decide to participate again," (Madamidola 2018). The EBU reaffirmed its commitment to inclusivity and diversity and placed the ball firmly in TRT's – the Turkish broadcaster – court making clear that they were welcome to join again once they were willing to accept the contest's values.

Israel plays a significant role in the queer history of Eurovision with their 1998 entry Dana International becoming not only the first transgender performer to compete in the contest but also the first LGBT+ winner. The references to the LGBT+ community through the 2019 final are subtle but clear, they are presented as unremarkable but are a clear statement on Israel's acceptance of the LGBT+ community. Azar having a husband is mentioned in a casually and would draw no attention, except for the knowledge that many countries outlaw same-sex marriages and civil unions (Mendos 2019). Tel Aviv especially has marketed itself as "the world's "most gay-friendly city" and as "a beacon for liberty, pluralism and tolerance" with a "large and diverse LGBTQ population" (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019). Both within the LGBT+ community and outside, Israel and especially Tel Aviv are recognised as progressive on LGBT+ issues and accepting of the community. The hosting of a known queer event like Eurovision and the inclusion of normalised LGBT+ references help cement this

notion. Not only does Israel embrace the LGBT+ aspects of the contest but it demonstrates to audiences that being LGBT+ is normal in Israel and nothing controversial or unusual.

It is interesting to note, however, that by portraying itself as inclusive and progressive, the final was also making a statement on Israeli identity. As mentioned before, the final clearly portrayed Israel as Jewish but in the context of cultural and ethnic identity rather than religious. Eurovision is a modern, secular, and liberal event, something that naturally puts it at odds with more conservative and religious factions. Within Israel, this has put the contest in conflict with many orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jews who criticised Israel's participation and decision to submit Dana International (Barlow 2018). The 2019 final also raised a minor controversy when the leader of an orthodox party questioned the final's timing in relation to Shabbat (Sharon 2018). While these concerns were addressed, the final was clearly not religious and only alluded to Israel's significance in the Jewish religion. By portraying itself as a modern and liberal Israel, it chose to publicly remove itself from the more traditional and religious parts of the Jewish community and identity.

The Israel of the Eurovision final is modern: both in its values and in its technology. It is a country of innovation, progressiveness, and accessibility. Anyone is welcome and together they will work towards common aims. This echoes the story of Israel; of a diaspora scattered around the world coming together to fulfil their dream of a state. Yet as much as Israel is its history it is also its future. Audiences, both domestic and international, are told that Israel is technologically advanced, ethnically and culturally diverse, and a tolerant society that will accept all. Most importantly, this narrative also closely echoes the values of Eurovision as stated earlier: universality, inclusivity, and the celebration of diversity.

Israel and Europe

As a country of the periphery of Europe, one of Israel's challenges in hosting is to defend its inclusion in Eurovision. Geographically, Israel is on the border of what may be typically defined as Europe and its complicated reputation internationally can make it a controversial member of the contest. As such, the final made sure to explain to the audience both Israel's long history with Eurovision and its right to participate. By echoing European and Eurovision values it tried to demonstrate itself as rightfully part of the Eurovision community.

Israel in Eurovision

Eurovision history, is clearly emphasised throughout the show and in doing so positions this final as a continuation of a long legacy. The final begins by reminding the audience both of Israel's long history of performing in Eurovision and the iconic songs it has contributed. The introductory performance begins with a recording of Ofra Haza, who represented Israel in the 1983 contest, before interspacing the traditional Flag Parade with performances from previous Israeli performers: Dana International, Ilanit, and Nadav Guedj. Ilanit was the first Israeli contestant as the audience is informed through a banner at the bottom of the screen. So within the first 10 minutes, the audience has been reminded both of Israel's history and its most memorable performances. Both Dana International and Nadav Guedj performances are well-known within Eurovision's history with Dana's performance having over 6million views on Youtube and Guedj's over 10 (romania3 2006; Eurovision Song Contest 2015). These are performers and songs the audience is likely to recognise and helps further illustrate that Israel has long been a significant part of Eurovision.

This relationship within Eurovision history is then further illustrated by how the voting procedures are explained. Instead of the hosts simply reading out instructions, a compilation of archival footage of previous hosts' explanations is shown. Going back to the early days of the contest this footage creates a sense of history and tradition. It clearly associates the current final with all other previous finals. This referencing to Eurovision history appears numerous times throughout the show. During one of the smaller intermissions, one of the hosts interviews contestants who have performed in previous contests, in another the designer John-Paul Gaultier is interviewed about his relationship to Eurovision. Most memorably, one of the main intermission performances is a 'Mix & Switch' during which a number of well-known previous contestants perform one another's songs. Two of the performers, Conchita Wurst and Måns, were previous winners, while Eleni and Verka Serduchka runners-up (eurovision.tv 2019). All of their performances remain some of the more famous Eurovision songs and are likely to be familiar to audiences. Crucially, at the end all performers unite to sing Milk & Honey's Hallelujah along with member Gali Atari. This song won Israel the contest in 1979 and its understated performance makes the segment suddenly feel intimate, quiet, and nostalgic. It comes across as a return to the traditional ideals of Eurovision: music bringing together the people of Europe.

Israel as European

As discussed earlier, Israel continually tries to demonstrate its modern values of inclusivity, diversity, and multiculturalism throughout the final. In doing so it echoes the values of the

contest and the pre-supposed values of Europe as a whole. During her introduction to Tel Aviv, Gal Gadot describes the essence of Tel Aviv as: "inspiration, innovation, big ideas and open arms, come as you are, bring who you like, love what you do, day or night, daring and caring, outgoing and including everyone under one hot sun" (*Eurovision 2019 🇮🇱 | Gal Gadot Sells Tel Aviv to Europe (and Australia)!* n.d.). Her words are accompanied by images of food, city streets, parties, and people of numerous ethnicities and religions celebrating together. Tel Aviv, and by extension Israel, is creative, lively, fun, accepting, and modern. These are values the Eurovision ascribes to with the light-hearted, fun event aiming to celebrate European diversity and inclusivity. Countries are celebrated for their individuality and come together to celebrate this diversity. Israel, this final argues, not only fits into this diversity but also does the same on a national scale. The Israeli performances are diverse in styles, cultural origins, and meanings. Emotionally intense, spiritual, and culturally rooted performances like that of the Idan Raichel Project are balanced with the fun, playful, and queer performance of Dana International's Diva. As a settler state, Israel has many cultural influences and it celebrates this diversity during the final while also clearly arguing that these all fall under the umbrella Israeli identity. It suggests all people – regardless of race, ethnicity or sexual orientation – are welcome and accepted in Israel.

Chapter 1 Conclusion

Media representations of Israel have been heavily dominated by the Israel-Palestine conflict and this has shaped public perceptions of the country. The Israel presented in this final subverts the common narratives of conflict and aggression, instead showing a modern and progressive Israel with deep cultural roots. It echoes the stereotypes of Israel that audiences are already familiar with and builds upon them to create a distinct experience. Audiences are granted a tour through modern and traditional Israel that works together to develop a very clear definition of what Israel is and how it fits into understandings of Europe. Israeli state identity is clear throughout the final with the use of Hebrew, the flag, and the use of Israeli as an identifier, but this is not the focus. State's confident in their identity do not need to continually assert their legitimacy and so Israel presents its identity and legitimacy as an obvious fact. More focus is taken in exploring Israel's cultural identity through the use of Israeli and Jewish music which both introduce less tangible and more approachable ideas of Israeli identity to the audience. By blending familiar modern and traditional music, the audience is shown a clear connection between Israel's ancient identity and this modern final. Old Israeli Eurovision entries are used

to entertain, remind audiences of Israel's history with the contest, and show a musical tradition within the country. Jewish identity is rarely directly addressed and yet traditional Jewish music is used throughout: conflating Jewish and Israeli identity into one. The use of ancient and spiritual music creates a sense of awe and a feeling that one is dealing with an ancient and powerful culture. All of this helps reassert Israeli legitimacy by showing an apparent clear cultural and spiritual connection between the state, the people, and the land. The audience does not question what they watch and instead accept as truth that what they watch and see must be Israeli land, culture, and heritage. The final then also connects the traditional Israel with the modern by continually mixing the two. Modern Israel is presented as progressive and inclusive: Eurovision and Europe's values. In demonstrating these values, Israel also clearly claims itself as part of Europe. While its traditional culture may be unique and different, its core values are the same. The final both asserts Israel's legitimacy and identity, and positions itself as a member of Europe if not geographically then through shared values.

Chapter 2: Contradicting Israel's Narrative

Public backlash against Israel's victory appeared quickly after their win in 2018. Only a week after the 2018 final, a Dutch satirical show included a parody of Netta's winning song and performance which included the lyrics:

> Is your country surrounded by rock throwers?
> Build walls like Trump himself has wet dreams about.
> Throw a buk-a-buk, throw a buk rocket.
> Look how nicely I throw bombs.
> Yes, again, Israel is winning, Already for 70 years this party has been going on.
> (BBC 2018)

The show had an estimated audience of 800,000 and the Israeli embassy was quick to lodge a complaint, but similar criticisms echoed around Europe. Just days after the final 18,000 people signed an Icelandic petition to boycott the coming contest, and within the next few months numerous boycott movements emerged on national and international levels (Cuddy 2018; PACBI 2018; Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign 2018). Netta's claim after winning "Next year in Jerusalem" also drew ire, and while the final wouldn't ultimately be held in the politically contentious Jerusalem, its controversy did not wane throughout the year (*Eurovision Song Contest 2018 - Grand Final - Full Show* 2018). For activists and Palestinians as well as

more neutral journalists, Netta's win and Israel's intention to host was an opportunity to renew awareness of Israel's actions against the Palestinian population and debate its place within Eurovision, and by extension Europe. High-profile open letters and continued boycott campaigns ensured that any reporting on the contest was tinged by questions on Israel's human rights record and right to host the contest (Letters 2019). While the content of the contest was in the control of Israel, their control of the publicity surrounding it was more limited.

The winning and hosting of Eurovision creates intensive media attention for the host country and while, as mentioned previously, this creates opportunities for disseminating a desired narrative, it also creates space for critics. The question of Israel's hosting sparked a range of responses including, think-pieces and open letters, boycott campaigns, and protests. All of which served to draw public attention to Israel's actions against the Palestinian population and apparent violations of Eurovision's values. Critics of Israel attempted to challenge the 2019 Eurovision through various mediums and strategies but most utilised the same two strategies: (1) challenging Eurovision's claim to be apolitical and Israel's attempt to portray itself as a legitimate state by drawing attention to the plight of the Palestinians, and (2) challenging Israel's claim to echo Eurovision's values and thus its right to participate in the contest.

Challenging Eurovision's Apoliticality

The Israeli final represents Israel as a clearly defined legitimate state, and in doing so entirely erases Palestine and Palestinians from this narrative. At no time does the contest acknowledge the controversy of Israel's borders or the existence of another potential state within its borders. Yet, media coverage in the lead-up to the contest focused extensively on Palestine, highlighted alleged human rights abuses by Israel, and questioned the legitimacy of Israel's hosting. As one journalist considered only days after Netta's victory: "As the world watches on as the bullets rain down in Gaza, those preparing to book flights for Eurovision's 2019 instalment should also consider how the event will materially affect Palestinians on the ground." Within the same opinion piece he linked violence against Palestinians with events and celebrations, noting: "the Israeli Defence Force keen to flex its lethal military muscle on days that are seen as significant, or when Palestinian-led protests are planned" (Segalov 2018). Similarly, many of the early thinkpieces and petitions noted that the 2018 win had occurred during an increasing period of violence in Gaza with May 14th marking the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem and deaths of 60 Palestinians along the Gaza border (Chappell 2018; Cuddy 2018). An open letter by the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate and network of Palestinian cultural

organisations calling for a widespread boycott of the contest reflected: "On May 14 alone, just two days after its Eurovision win, Israel massacred 62 Palestinians in Gaza, including six children. That same evening, Netta (…) performed a celebratory concert in Tel Aviv, hosted by the mayor, stating, 'We have a reason to be happy'" (PACBI 2018).These pieces contrasted the glitz and glamour of Eurovision and Israel's celebration with the brutal reality of Palestinian life.

The letter and other pieces argue that violence against Palestinians cannot be separated from Eurovision, a stance that directly challenges Eurovision's identity as an apolitical event. Eurovision is meant to be a light-hearted, apolitical, fun piece of media offering an idealistic, utopian version of international affairs. Countries and interactions between them are simplified down to entertaining songs and performances; there is no place for violence, pain, or the harsher realities of life. Yet, these authors break the illusion by not allowing the reader to separate the political reality of Israel from the excitement of Eurovision, instead they argue that the consumption of Israel's Eurovision is a form of complicity. The very act of allowing Israel to host and the consumption of its narrative is itself a political act that consciously ignores and erases Palestinians. The official rules of the contest define it as a non-political event and call upon all broadcasters to "make sure that the ESC shall in no case be politicized and/or instrumentalized" and that "no organization, institution, political cause or other cause, […] shall be promoted, featured or mentioned directly or indirectly during the Event"('Rules' 2020). Israel's first statements that the contest would be hosted in Jerusalem drew condemnation as it was perceived as a politicisation of the event. Jerusalem is contested territory and hosting an international contest there would not only be a clear statement by Israel reaffirming its claimed sovereign territory, but also force all participating states to either recognise Jerusalem as Israeli or withdraw. Even when the contest moved to Tel Aviv, participating in the contest was still a clear statement that the participatory states recognised and respected Israel's legitimacy. As discussed at length above, Israel's hosting allowed them to develop and present their narrative of Israel and Israeli narrative to a global audience. While this is naturally standard for mega-events, many of Israel's decisions and stances are arguably highly political. The use of postcards that include disputed territories is a clear political statement about Israel's sovereignty, the purposeful erasure of Palestine a clear message on Palestine's legitimacy, and any defining of a state's culture and identity is always a political act dictating what culture is considered legitimate and official. The underlying argument in these pieces is that Israel itself is too political for any engagement with it to be apolitical. Any

engagement with Israel is already a political act, and audiences cannot delude themselves into believing that their consumption of the contest will not be a political act.

While the EBU cannot control external media and press, Eurovision's apoliticality was also challenged by an internal actor who both challenged the possibility of Israel's hosting being apolitical and by doing so as an internal actor automatically violated the contest's rules on apoliticality. The Icelandic entry Hatari – self-described as an anti-capitalist, techno performance, BDSM band – were a Eurovision band in the extreme; outlandish, queer, and bold ('The Iceland Band Bringing BDSM to Eurovision' n.d.). They were also highly critical of Israel. Upon winning the Icelandic contest to find a contestant, Hatari made clear that they did not believe Iceland should participate in Israel's contest, but as it was, they would go with the clear intention of protesting against Israeli policy (Ravid 2019). They also publicly challenged Benjamin Netanyahu to a Icelandic wrestling match with the 'prizes' clearly meant to mock Israeli politics. If Hatari won they would "reserve the rights to settle within [Israel's] borders establishing the first ever Hatari sponsored liberal BDSM colony on the Mediterranian coast." while Netanyahu's victory would win the Israeli government "full political and economic control of South-Icelandic Island municipality Vestmannaeyjar. Members of Hatari will ensure the successful removal of the islands current inhabitants" (Richter 2019). It was clearly meant to reference Israel's tactics of occupation in internationally recognised Palestinian territory. Their unusual style and outspoken statements drew attention with them profiled by BBC Radio 1 Newsbeat who directly addressed their stance on Israel and led an Israeli campaign group, Shurat HaDin, to call upon the Israeli government to ban the band's entry ('The Iceland Band Bringing BDSM to Eurovision' n.d.; Bjornsson 2019). Two Jewish organisations, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre and UK Lawyers for Israel, also called directly upon the EBU to ban Hatari on the grounds that they had clearly expressed a desire to use their participation as a political act and that their entry song 'Hatred Prevails' was anti-capitalist and anti-European, thus political in nature (Wiesenthal Center and UK Lawyers for Israel 2019; Bjornsson 2019).

After their arrival in Tel Aviv, Hatari's political comments continued and when asked if they were still planning to make political statements at an official press conference, they reflected on the agenda-setting influence they felt participation in the contest gave them and would "try to uphold a critical discussion around the context in which the contest is being held", they also mentioned their hope that the occupation would end (Fontaine 2019b). Later, after taking a tour of Hebron with a Palestinian tour guide – a political act in of itself – they gave more candid comments to a Eurovision blog noting that "the segregation is so clear" and

"The political reality is really conflicting and absurd, and the apartheid was so clear in Hebron" (Fontaine 2019a). They also claimed to have been warned by the EBU for their political statements, a clear indication that their violation of the contest's apoliticality was being noticed. Yet in the final, when during voting the camera briefly focused on Hatari, they used the opportunity to prominently display scarves with the Palestinian flag. Due to Eurovision's nature as a live event, this meant that the entire live audience saw. It broke any illusion of the final as apolitical and clearly reminded audiences of the ignored existence of Palestine. While Madonna's intermission performance had also included monologues and lyrics that have been interpreted as referencing to the conflict, and a brief moment where two dancers with Israeli and Palestinian flags stuck to their backs walked arm-in-arm, Hatari's protest was far clearer. Hatari had been clearly political throughout the lead-up to the final and had often been asked if they intended to protest during the final. Their protest was short but remarkably clear, communicating their stance quickly and boldly to the entire audience. While the hosts ignored Iceland's actions, the audience was more vocal with a mixture of booing, cheering, and whistling clearly heard by television audiences.

Eurovision presents a utopian view of Europe where politics are irrelevant and unity is found through music. Critics of Israel challenged this notion by suggesting that 2019's Eurovision could not be consumed without considering politics. External actors regularly contrasted the plight of Palestinians with celebrations around Eurovision, and clearly suggested to audiences that support and enjoyment of the final meant complicity and participation in Israel's oppression of the Palestinians. A ethical consumer, they argued, could not simply watch the contest and join Israel's celebration; it was their ethical obligation to boycott. The term apartheid was regularly used by calls for boycotts to both draw similarities with apartheid South Africa and highlight the segregation between Israelis and Palestinians. Hatari echoed the same ideas and language but opted to protest from within the contest, skirting the line of the EBU's rules before blatantly breaking them at the end. Before the contest they had spoken against claims of apoliticality arguing "you cannot be completely silent about the situation, as the silence itself is a massive political statement" (Ravid 2019). Their statements resulted in media attention on the subject, meant that any reporting about them in the context of the contest was likely to include their controversy, and their participation in the contest allowed them to make a huge, widely seen political statement. All these actions and approaches ensured that Palestinians were not entirely erased and that Israel's narrative as a peaceful and legitimate state was challenged. Audiences around Europe were challenged to consider the actions of Israel, the legitimacy of the Israeli state, and their own participation in its legitimisation by

engaging with the contest. While viewing figures suggest that these actions had little impact on overall viewing figures, it is hard to gauge how it impacted audience's understandings and memories of the final. It is likely that many may have read news pieces mentioning the contest and Palestine, and even the most casual and uninformed viewer could not have missed Hatari's banners. The EBU was forced to release a statement on both Hatari and Madonna's actions, suggesting that on both audience and organisational levels this contest is likely to be, at least partially, remembered as one of controversy (RTE 2019).

Israel and Eurovision Values

Eurovision is a value-defined community, something it has demonstrated and reinforced repeatedly. As discussed earlier, when the Turkish broadcaster attacked transgender people and drag artists, the EBU re-emphasised the organisation's values of diversity and inclusivity, and made clear that TRT would be welcomed back only if it respected them. In the official rules of the contest, it states: "The Participating Broadcasters shall at all time respect the ESC Values and shall ensure that no contestant, delegation or country is discriminated and/or ridiculed in any manner" ('Rules' 2020). Within the announcement of Tel Aviv as host city, Frank-Dieter Freiling, Chairman of the ESC Reference Group, discussed the guarantees the EBU had requested from Israel "security, access for everyone to attend, freedom of expression and ensuring the non-political nature of the Contest. These guarantees are imperative in order for us to move forward with the planning of the event and to uphold the Eurovision Song Contest values of diversity and inclusivity" (EBU 2018b). This demonstrates that the EBU was aware of possible criticisms in relation to its values and suggests a potential list of requirements to fit its definition of diverse and inclusive: security, universal access, freedom of expression, and apoliticality. As such, it is not surprising that critics of Israel tried to use Eurovision's own values to argue for its exclusion from the contest. While Israel's narrative presented the country as inclusive, diverse, and multicultural, critics countered this and tried to portray Israel's participation in the contest as undermining the contest's values.

A main example used of Israel's incompatibility with Eurovision values was its treatment of Palestinians and Palestine. For example, an open letter by figures from the UK's creative industries calling on the BBC to press Eurovision to move the contest, contrasted the name of the British contest to pick its contestant – You Decide – with the military occupation of Palestinian territory and Israel's new nation-state law. " 'You Decide' is not a principle extended to the Palestinians, who cannot decide to remove Israel's military occupation and live free of apartheid. Even Palestinians with Israeli citizenship were told in the nation-state law

passed last year that only Jews have the "right to national self-determination" (Letters 2019). "With discrimination and exclusion are so deeply embedded" it argues "Eurovision 2019's claim to celebrate diversity and inclusion must ring hollow." Eurovision is a contest that supports inclusivity and acceptance of all, something that critics argue Israel does not. The Irish boycott campaign extensively compared Israel to apartheid South Africa, and described Israel as a violator of Palestinian rights and freedoms and as an occupying force (Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign 2018). Human rights reports from 2018 seem to support the argument of Israel's critics with evidence of clear and widespread human rights abuses against the Palestinian people impacting their rights to self-determination, freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and more. The West Bank has long been occupied with Israel moving 100,000s of its citizens into the territory and providing them with security, administrative services, housing, education, and medical services. Yet Israel's presence in the West Bank has been widely recognised as an illegal occupation and the establishment of settlements a clear violation of international law (Meron 2017, 358; Human Rights Watch 2018). Palestinians in the West Bank also face clearly discriminatory policies that benefit Israeli settlers while making it increasingly difficult for Palestinians to travel, obtain building permits, and have consistent access to essential utilities and services. None of these actions, critics of Israel argue, fall within Eurovision's values of diversity and inclusion, and the inclusion of a member state who actively and consistently violates these values cannot be accepted. The acceptance of Israel, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement argued, could "irreversibly [tarnish] the Eurovision brand with Israel's egregious human rights record" (PACBI 2018). Eurovision has previously demonstrated a willingness to place its values above the placation of a broadcaster, but on the issue of Israel they were largely silent. That the contest did continue as planned, suggests that the guarantees required by the EBU were met by Israel, yet the rights of Palestinians were continually violated before, during, and after the contest. Shortly before the contest began, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced their decision to bar entry to the country to activists they believed intended to disrupt the contest (Holmes 2019). Critics argue that not only does Israel violate the values of Eurovision in its daily interactions and policies regarding Palestinians, but arguably increased its control during and due to the contest (Segalov 2018).

Another area of criticism was Israel's usage of its LGBT+ acceptance as evidence of its inclusivity and diversity. The term pinkwashing is oft used to describe Israel's apparent policy of using its progressive LGBT+ policies to distract from its human rights violations against the Palestinian people and positively contrast it against its Middle Eastern neighbours

(Blackmer 2019, 171; Schulman 2011). The term remains disputed among scholars, journalists, and the LGBT+ community, and yet critiques of Israel's hosting were filled with references to the concept. Considering Eurovision's reputation as a queer event and its strong links with the LGBT+ community, it is not surprising that critics felt the contest was a potential example of pinkwashing. In January of 2019, over 100 LGBT+ organisations from around Europe signed an open letter calling for a boycott of Eurovision (Pinkwatcher 2019). In the letter, they drew direct parallels between the Stonewall riots and the Great March of Return, a Palestinian movement occurring at the time, noting that both communities had faced severe police and military violence. They also recognised Eurovision's significance in the queer community and as a queer event, accusing Israel of using the event to "show 'Israel's prettier face' to distract attention away from its war crimes against Palestinians". Israel was apparently using Eurovision as a "great opportunity to forward its pinkwashing agenda, the cynical use of gay rights distract from and normalize Israel's occupation, settler colonialism and apartheid" (Pinkwatcher 2019). These criticisms attacked Israel's attempts to market itself as inclusive through its LGBT+ acceptance, but also directly challenged Eurovision's LGBT+ audience and fans. Eurovision's LGBT+ fans have given it its queer identity and now, these critics argue, this identity is being used to oppress and erase another minority. "Many Eurovision lovers affectionately refer to the competition as "Gay Christmas", but if anyone makes a pilgrimage to the holy land next year, an effort must be made by all to ensure a visible LGBTQ+ presence is not co-opted" (Segalov 2018). The LGBT+ boycott letter drew parallels between the protests by Palestinians today and the protests that triggered the beginnings of the gay liberation movement; an attempt to have LGBT+ readers relate their struggles with those of the Palestinians, and to have LGBT+ audiences turn against Israel. Israel's LGBT+ acceptance and embracing of Eurovision's queer identity was meant to be seen not as a success or sign of tolerance but a state using and exploiting the identity and community for their own gains. In bringing in allegations of pinkwashing, critics were trying not only to delegitimatise Israel's claims of tolerance and inclusivity but also turn a significant part of the Eurovision fanbase against the host country.

Chapter 2 Conclusion

When interviewed by BBC Radio 1, Hatari clearly recognised the opportunity Eurovision presented for their campaigning, noting that they would "try to use this agenda-setting influence that comes with anything that catches the public eye to put the discussion where it belongs" ('The Iceland Band Bringing BDSM to Eurovision' n.d.). When a mega-event occurs,

it attracts widespread media attention and public interest in both the event, the hosting state, and any participants. This attention creates opportunity for critics to emerge and attempt to counter the narrative set out by the hosting state. Critics of Israel attempted to utilise the 2019 Eurovision Song Contest to draw attention to Israel's actions against the Palestinian population and challenge its right to belong within Eurovision and even Europe. Criticisms were focused towards the audience, participating broadcasters, and Eurovision itself all in attempt to turn popular opinion against Israel and disrupt Israel's narrative. Israel's participation was framed as a violation of Eurovision's core principles and a polluting force that could delegitimise the contest and its apparent values. Eurovision's values were attacked, with critics clearly presenting Israel as a frequent violator and any attempts by Israel to call itself inclusive and diverse as a mockery of the ideals. It is interesting to note that these criticisms were written before the contest and, as discussed in Chapter 1, Israel heavily prompted these same values during the final. With the criticisms in mind, Israel's final can be interpreted as a direct defence against these accusations.

Ultimately though, the effectiveness of these criticisms is debatable. Attempts to cancel the contest clearly failed and overall viewage of the entire contest dropped by 4 million between 2018 and 2019, but considering that 2016 to 2017 saw a drop of 22 million viewers, it is not particularly significant (Spiteri 2019). Mainstream media coverage after the contest heavily reported on Madonna and Hatari's actions but there was no serious criticism of the contest in general (Williams 2019; Al Jazeera 2019; Power 2019; BBC News 2019). What is harder to gauge is how the criticisms may have shaped public perceptions of the contest and Israel. Calls for boycotts, public thinkpieces, and even protests during national contests all raised increased awareness of the Israel-Palestine conflict and linked it, perhaps for the first time, with Eurovision (Nava 2019). It created both interest in and space to report upon the conflict and related issues in new ways and within new contexts.

Conclusion

Mega-events draw attention. They dominate the media cycle, drawing in large-scale global audiences, and presenting hosting states with a unique opportunity to communicate their narrative and identity to receptive viewers. For hosting states they are a defining historical moment, for audiences a celebratory communal event. But mega-events are not completely malleable; they have their own identities, values, and norms. As Roche, Grix and Lee (2000; 2013) recognised mega-events have clear personalities with attached values, and to

successfully host a state must demonstrate its echoing and championing of these values. A state cannot simply use a mega-event for its own desires, but must demonstrate its worthiness to host. In the eyes of fans and audiences, mega-events have a purity to be protected and any perceived violation of its identity by a hosting state is heavily criticised. Mega-events and their values can also be weaponised by critics of a host state to gain attention, concentrate actions and protests, and delegitimate a state in the eyes of the international community. Mega-events are presented as an opportunity for both participants and audiences to make a public stand against the host and consciously reject their right to host.

The 2019 Eurovision demonstrates the twofold benefit of mega-events for both actors: the attention they produce and the values they promote. Mega-events naturally create media attention that both states and their critics can utilise, but it is through the events values that actors are able to most impactfully communicate with audiences. Both Israel and its critics used Eurovision's values to explore Israel's identity and position within the contest. Israel demonstrated its belonging by echoing and demonstrating the apparent shared values, in doing so also presenting itself as attractive and friendly to audiences who share these values. Critics, in contrast, portrayed Israel as violating these values and in doing so challenged Eurovision's legitimacy itself by accusing the contest and its fans of complicity. Both actors used the contest as a medium through which to communicate to new audiences, and its values as a framework through which to either celebrate or criticise Israel.

Israel was able to communicate clearly, directly, and with few restrictions to a global audience of around 180 million people, presenting an inclusive and diverse version of Israel with a clear and confident cultural identity and history. The values of Eurovision were embraced and reflected back to audiences, a clear statement of Israel's legitimacy within the contest. However, from the victory in 2018 up until the final itself, critics of Israel used the attention created by Eurovision and the contest itself to attack Israel's narrative. This was done not only by highlighting international law violations committed by Israel but also by turning the values and beliefs of Eurovision against them. Not only did Israel's hosting create renewed interest in the country that critics could attempt to utilise, but the contest itself offered a lens through which to criticise Israel. Eurovision's apoliticality as well as its long touted values of diversity and inclusion were instrumentalised against Israel as critics argued that Israel violated them and that allowing the contest to be hosted in Israel tainted the contest's entire claims to uphold them. Critics appealed to fans, broadcasters, and the EBU itself to consider how allowing Israel to host would reflect upon the contest and its identity. Criticisms were not limited to the Eurovision community but leaked into mainstream media and widely watched

television broadcasts. In the ultimate protest, they also appeared in the mega-event itself, demonstrating the potential power of a mega-event for criticising a state.

However, it can still be debated how significant the attacks against Israel were in 2019. Despite the heavy and specific criticisms against both Israel and the EBU, the contest went ahead as planned and no evidence exists that not allowing Israel to host was ever even considered by the EBU. The Eurovision audience was also apparently not swayed by calls for boycotts with the viewing figures not suggesting any significant rejection of Israel. For all the media attention, Israel managed to host the contest largely unimpeded and remains an accepted member of the contest. Eurovision itself also largely avoided criticism and no evidence suggests a loss of reputation, legitimacy, or significance in the year since. Most of the boycotts and criticisms came from unsurprising sources, such as the BDS movement and other Palestinian groups. Hatari and Madonna's actions were likely the only actions Israel had not expected. The reality for Israel is that any action by the state, especially engagement with the international community, will always result in criticism. It is a state well-versed in how to deal with criticism and would have been well aware of the response hosting Eurovision would produce. For Israel, the opportunity to host was clearly considered more valuable than a criticism destructive. The way the final addressed many of the criticisms presented by critics also suggests that Israel is familiar with the arguments used against them. Ultimately, the opportunity to speak so directly to a global audience is likely always going to be too valuable to reject. Mega-event may be dangerous and easily weaponised against a host, but the power and influence hosting offers will always be seductive. There are few, if any states, so controversial that an international boycott would be successful and declining to host would be akin to admitting your critics are correct. Israel's hosting of Eurovision may demonstrate the dangers inherent in hosting a mega-event, but it also demonstrates that even internationally controversial states benefit from hosting a mega-event. Hosting Eurovision was not only an opportunity for Israel to communicate directly with a global audience but also an international statement on its legitimacy and its place of belonging within Eurovision and Europe.

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