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New power unlocked:

Israel as a case study for Eurovision
as a Europeanization tool

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1. Introduction

The Eurovision Song Contest is a yearly musical event (interrupted only by the COVID-19 pandemic) established in 1956, with the explicit goal of creating a shared European media environment that would eventually lead to the creation, support and broadcasting of a common European identity, particularly in the polarized world following World War II and the Cold War. It is one of the longest-running shows in the world, and has embedded itself in the consciousness of audiences worldwide, not merely Europe (Carniel, 2017), and it has allowed a multitude of states to collaborate and participate in an event that is outside of the realm of traditional diplomacy, international relations, and even media. From the original 7 to 41 participants in the 2021 edition, Eurovision gathers audiences and performers from all over the world to participate in a showcase of European values, music, and fun.

The Contest's role in European society has been debated since its conception (Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013). It has spent six decades as Europe's most important cultural event, creating a common arena for the showcase of Europe's different states' identities, cultures, and strengths (O'Connor, 2010), but it has also had more than its fair share of 'embarrassing' moments (Coleman, 2008), been the target of mockery both in the media and the public, and even been ridiculed by performers themselves, crossing lines, boundaries and even mocking musical traditions (Yair, 2019). Much like any other cultural event, the Eurovision Song Contest has birthed both fans and detractors, and has been widely studied for its longevity, significance, and role in the global sphere.

In line with the role of other large-scale competitions (mega-events), the attention Eurovision has gathered has had unintended consequences. The situation post-World War II in which the Contest was born led to its being perceived as a symbol of European identity and everything else that entails. The Eurovision Song Contest, in its internationality, is more influenced than any other by political and socioeconomical factors (Filippidis & Lavery, 2018), even more so considering that participants represent states, not artists.

Eurovision as an event has contributed to not only creating a particular dimension of European identity, but it has also served as the route through which states have performed this identity (Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013). The legitimization of European belonging that the contest allows has for long been utilized to associate states with European values, regardless of geography or little else apart from European identification. Through an association of Europe with a particular branch of modernity, Eurovision has represented European

belonging since its conception, and participation in the contest is more hard-fought for than ever.

The logo for the Eurovision Song Contest. The word "Eurovision" is written in a large, black, stylized script font. The letter "O" in "Eurovision" is replaced by a heart shape. Below "Eurovision", the words "SONG CONTEST" are written in a smaller, black, bold, sans-serif font.

Fig. 1. Source: EBU (n. d.)

It is in this contest that we have decided to study Israel's 2018 entry and 2019 hosting. Ever since the state entered the Eurovision Song Contest for the first time in 1973, it has since been surrounded not only by European ideals, but European media as well. The EBU, Europe's Broadcasting Union, has always allowed its members, no matter their geographical location, to participate in Eurovision as a showcase of good will and to honor the original goal of the creation of the contest. However, one must study what Eurovision participation means for Israel, and how the particularities of the 2018 and 2019 contest have allowed it to perform its identity, European belonging, and nation branding through the contest itself.

In 2007, Georgia entered in Eurovision for the first time. In 2008, Azerbaijan made its debut in the Eurovision Song Contest. In 2015, Australia submitted an entry to Eurovision for the first time. In 2018, Israel's win raised questions about European belonging, geopolitical localization, and the showcase of extravagance to hide non-exportable state values. In 2021, we will take a look at the effects of Israel's second win in the contest, the strategies followed by the state to use the advantage of cultural diplomacy this gave it, and the validity of European belonging through a song contest rather than by traditional geographical means.

2. Objectives

As our theoretical framework will prove, much of academia on this topic has been focused on European identity performance and Eurovision significance for particular actors. However, the question of what European identity is being performed in Eurovision, as well as whether European identity performance signifies European belonging remains unanswered

for the case of Israel, a state that is both non-European geographically and European in its association and identification.

Is Eurovision a good enough way of validating European identity? Does European identity validation through Eurovision create a symbiotic relationship between the participating states and their understanding of European values? We believe that Eurovision is not sufficient to validate European identity and European belonging, because the validation it provides does not discern between states aligned with European values and those who seek European validation without European identity belonging. Through a study of the meaning of Europe, the creation and significance of European identity, Eurovision's role and its place as a diplomatic actor, we will analyze Israel's place in Europe, its meaning for the continent, and whether Israel's 2018 win and 2019 hosting of the Eurovision Song Contest validated its position as European, or if instead they brought to light discrepancies that not even Eurovision could fix.

3. Theoretical framework

Here we will present the conjoined ideas that have served to illustrate European identity, how Eurovision plays into it, and the role that Eurovision has been performing for the past six decades of existence.

3.1. Europe as modernity

Europe did not exist as more than a geographical signifier, one that was not even clear, at that (Delanty, n.d.); until well into the sixteenth century. European history has certainly existed for long before that, but it is Europe acting as a community in at least one manner that even remotely starts to create what we understand as Europe nowadays. The notion of Europe assumes a certain level of continuous history and an agreement and common evolution in cultural, social, and political forms (Delanty, 2015) that are directly linked to the creation of today's conception of Europe, its identity, and even the political ideologies that permeate it (Delanty, 2013).

Europe is more than a discursive construction that can be related to 'the idea of Europe', it is also a societal formation in terms of economy, state and social structures and related to subject formation in terms of identity and consciousness. (Delanty, 2015, p. 421)

At this point, Europe is no longer a continent, it is an idea of modernity represented most popularly by the European Union, and Eurovision is its messenger, whose branches extending far beyond the European Union itself (Sandvoss, 2008): it goes beyond the continental, and it is not a purely geographical actor, notion, or idea. While the idea of modernity may have appeared in Europe for the first time, it is certainly not inherently European. The specifically European perception of modernity sits firmly on ideas of freedom, liberty, autonomy, equality, justice, etc.; because it relies so heavily on the historical process that led to the political sphere which allows the new interpretations of these ideas to emerge and transform the world around them (Delanty, 2015).

This modernity tries to create a new type of society, focusing on the social and political dimensions and being aware of the past to present a vision of the future. The past is now understood through the lens that modernity supports, and it empowers human agency in its ability to transform, change and influence the world around itself (Delanty, 2015).

The role of modernity is not to provide easy answers to every fundamental, base-level question in a state, but to create reference points and a stone path to follow to solve questions and understand the world (Delanty, 2015): it is the institutionalization of new ideas which allows each state to create its own version of modernity that will work best according to its history, state formation, capitalism... It allows for the creation of institutions that follow ideas of modernity that will reflect the cultural, social, and political backstage that they are being hung upon (Delanty, 2015). Each country that has adopted modernity has done so by integrating, not assimilating, a model from other states, be it colonial ones or simply by mirroring, some even antithetical to European modernity (Mota & Delanty, 2015).

This view of the creation of modernity is opposed to that defended by Beck and Grande (2010), where they present the concept of “second modernities” that consider such variants of integrated modernity as a reaction to an “original” modernity, in this case the western one. To understand the role that Eurovision plays in simulating belonging to the club of Western modernity we must not understand ones as a reaction to the others (Delanty, 2015), but consider modernity a collective historical effort (based on the consciousness of major historical events, like the conflicts between the liberal emphasis on rights and the idea of social justice) in a particular direction where each application of the concept can be categorized in Western or not. The creation of each modernity is therefore subject to many

more variables (state formation, capitalism, the organization of social relations, etc.); and the belonging to multiple groups of modernities is not only possible but probable.

At this point, and after understanding where Europe's concept of modernity comes from, we must define what it entails and how it fits within the framework of the Eurovision Song Contest. While Eurovision has been criticized for highlighting the failure on Europe's part to become the dominant cultural power globally, like the US is (Coleman, 2008), it is this comparison that allows Eurovision to set European identity apart.

European modernity focuses on values that help define borders, articulate a shared identity and establish a political community (Carniel, 2017): Europe is capitalist, peace-loving, multicultural, sexually liberated and technologically advanced (Raykoff & Tobin, 2007), more liberal and tolerant than the American interpretation of such values (Carniel, 2017, 2018b; Woods, 2020). The usage of LGBT rights in this particular context is one of the best examples. Progressive European societies are directly related to sexual liberation and citizenship (Cook & V., 2014), and not in an arbitrary way. European institutions have consciously constructed LGBT inclusivity as part of European identity, both through its inclusion, reference, and protection (Ayou & Paternotte, 2014; Baker, 2016). This works perfectly to adhere such values to a European identity because it inherently classifies external actors as non-inclusive. By projecting ideas of exclusion and homophobia to non-European cultures, particularly Muslims (Baker, 2016), it inherently creates an essentialistic binary that reduces complex issues to a simple national in/out (Baker, 2016): someone being 'in' with Europe automatically means that those they might be in conflict with are 'out'. Even countries such as the UK, where Eurovision is generally mocked and utilized to set itself apart from Europe, the rhetoric of a tolerant 'in' vs. an intolerant 'out' has been used before (Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013). This rhetoric will be explored in section six in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, but it has already been applied in the context of Russia and the preconceptions that are inherent to its being 'out' with Europe (Rivkin-Fish & Hartblay, 2014). Not only that, but Eurovision has, along with the Olympics, been the main tool for the creation of such a narrative (Baker, 2016).

The European Union in particular is the 'most cost-effective tool that Western powers have deployed to spread peace and democracy since the end of the cold war' (Moravcsik, 2012, p. 208). It is the prime representative of Europe and its brand of modernity, who recently decided on a more pragmatical approach to situating itself in the global sphere. Because of the recent border issues the European Union has been facing, it decided to rely

more heavily on a soft power ‘pursues its own interests and is able to extend norms and values to third countries only as long as those countries are willing to adopt them’ (Panebianco, 2012, p. 184). However, this creates a paradox where no one can be equal to the European Union because there is an inherent power imbalance due to the fact that it is the European Union who decides whether or not someone is ‘in’. This paradox increases the want and need to be ‘in’, further strengthening Europe’s role, its conception of modernity and, on a deeper level, each power’s own role in the global arena.

This fact impedes the establishment of a balanced partnership. For this reason, many in the region would characterize this asymmetric partnership as a form of ‘soft imperialism.’ (Panebianco, 2012, p. 191)

One must also consider the impact that Christianity had in the formation of a European modernity, as it is accepted that the nature of Christianity may have eased the way for modernity (Beck & Grande, 2010; Delanty, 2013; Mota & Delanty, 2015). While this is relevant for our later analysis of Israel and its place in the Eurovision Song Contest, it is not the goal nor in the ability of this work to understand religion’s role in creating modernity in Israel, only how Israel fits in Europe’s version of it.

3.2. Eurovision as cultural diplomacy

The concept of cultural diplomacy is based on what Joseph Nye called ‘soft power’ (1990), and referred to the ability of states to influence their environment through cultural means instead of relying exclusively on military ‘hard power’, a complement to soft power (Nye, 2004). Cultural diplomacy is, as a byproduct of the original idea of soft power, the ‘exchange of ideas, information, art, language and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding’ (Cummings, 2009), often used as the bridge builder divided between states or between conflict parties (Pantea & Stoica, 2014). It is a tool that, if used effectively, will change others’ minds without them ever knowing about it (Lukes, 2005). However, cultural diplomacy and soft power can be a double-edged weapon, as through framing culture as a means of power, states have effectively turned culture into competition (Nisbett, 2017). Soft power, cultural diplomacy, and nation branding all exist within the same sphere, although nation branding and cultural diplomacy are most similar,

as nation branding also allows states to use specific parts of their culture and tradition to promote the country (Borić & Kapor, 2017).

Born in times of the Cold War, today's Europe and the European Union represent the other side to the superpower, not hard power, not military power, but quiet, civilian, 'soft' power. Through this soft power Europe is the most effective superpower, including the United States and China, at projecting its power globally (Moravcsik, 2012). Events like the Olympics or Eurovision are the primary representatives we refer to when talking about cultural diplomacy, but it is worth noting that any sort of exported cultural good serves as an element of cultural diplomacy, planned or not (Cull, 2008).

'If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow' (Nye, 2004, p. 182).

Elements of cultural diplomacy and soft power serve not only to project a desirable image of a state, to take control of one's representation in the global sphere, but also as a way to find an identity of their own among the international community (Fernández del Campo, 2018), which was a particularly important stage of national evolution for post-Cold War states in Europe.

Soft power and cultural diplomacy are particularly important in our case, considered a 'beneficial alternative to the American approach' of hard power and American values opposed to Europe's version of modernity, and are used to promote a 'global Europe' (Bindi & Angelescu, 2012, p. 7). European integration is one of the main selling points of this global Europe which, while not encompassing the whole of Europe, is represented by the European Union (Yvars, 2012). Europe is already influencing military cultures globally because of their soft power: the European Union in particular, as the primary example of European modernity, has developed a domestic model for conflict resolution according to their shared values and based on the concept of peaceful negotiation. Global cooperative processes have already been affected by Europe's 'civilian power' approach (Longo, 2012). Once the values that create a particularly European brand of modernity are set, exporting them is done through soft power and cultural diplomacy.

Eurovision is one of Europe's main tools for cultural diplomacy, and it is understood as such by states themselves (Borić & Kapor, 2017). Even the event itself uses the language

of diplomacy, representing Eurovision's role in the global sphere as Europe's ambassador, consciously or not rep, by referring to artists as 'ambassadors' (Carniel, 2019). Eurovision is what we might call a 'mega-event' (Bolin, 2006; Müller & Pickles, 2015), which is generally a term used to refer to cultural or sports exhibitions such as the Olympics (Roche, 2000) but which describes Eurovision, its goals, rules and regulations and its impact perfectly as well. These events and their significance are widely recognized in the global sphere, considering them as tools for public and cultural diplomacy in for emerging powers (Graeff, 2015; Grix & Lee, 2013) and particularly in post-socialist Eastern European states, which have used Eurovision to legitimize their positioning and belonging to Europe, as previously mentioned (Baker, 2016; Muller & Pickles, 2015). The size of many of these states makes it difficult to gain media recognition outside of their own spheres of influence, and Eurovision allows for the creation of a stage where these countries can be seen and heard both by those in Europe and the rest of the world (Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013).

Factors represented in Eurovision that allow states to engage in cultural diplomacy include the nature, genre, and topics of the songs each ambassador performs, 'the ways in which the contest is received and represented to European and global publics via the media and fans', the connections made between social and political national and international movements and even the measures taken by the contest and organizers to accommodate the evolution that all of these factors are subject to (Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013).

We must acknowledge the difficulties in accessibility to European citizenship because of political, social, and economic factors, as well as nationality-based residency and citizenship rights (Baker, 2016). However, while taking these factors into consideration Eurovision presents a European *cultural* citizenship, while not necessarily a source (Tobin, 2007), that can be accessed more freely.

Today's cultural diplomacy is perfectly represented by Eurovision: it is not one-way communication, but rather a multi-layered conversation that includes states, performers, the media, and every citizen in the world, not exclusively Europeans or EBU members. In this new arena, states are no longer the protagonist but rather play the role of the moderator, and so cultural diplomacy can happen outside of the classical realm of diplomacy, which allows it to reach new spheres, people and, through new mediums, validate states' political and ideological choices (Borić & Kapor, 2017).

3.3. *Eurovision's significance for European identity*

Despite many hiccups, embarrassing moments, controversies and hardships, the Eurovision Song Contest has managed to be Europe's grandest stage for the showcase of a belonging to Europe and everything that entails (Lemish, 2004). From the different conceptions of multicultural modernity (Eisenstadt, 2001; Yair, 2019), Westernity (Beck & Grande, 2010), and belonging to 'the cool' club of integration regarding human rights and multiculturalism (Baker, 2016), as well as and resistance to homogenization (degli Alessandrini, 2015), Eurovision represents not only Europe, but also affords the opportunity to openly identify with one's identity as a nation while being part of the sentiment of regional belonging (Baker, 2016; Lemish, 2004; Press-Barnathan & Lutz, 2020; Woods, 2020).

European identity presents a particular case where regional identity belonging requires multiple other identities that specifically recognize Europe as a formation (Delanty, n.d.): European identity requires European *identification* (Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009; Eder, 2009; Herrmann, 2004; Risse, 2015). Europe's particular branch of multicultural liberalism specifically sets it apart from other types of Western liberalism, represented in part by the European Union in its undefinition (Bruter, 2005), and it is this version of Europe that the Eurovision Song Contest was born to support artists and their delegations actively choose to show their country as diverse, explicitly associating and turning into an exclusive national value (Baker, 2016) things such as LGBT rights (Jordan, 2014), which are therefore associated with Westernity (Ismayilov, 2012), and even 'hypermodern' (Carniel, 2019; Meijer, 2013) to fit in this definition of Europe, which was only further strengthened by the overt identification as European of those supporting such values (Baker, 2016; Tobin, 2007).

[Eurovision is a] node in popular geopolitics about LGBT rights based on symbolic oppositions first of 'Western Europe' and 'Eastern Europe', and later of 'Europe' and Russia. Notions of 'Europe' (re)produced in this process resulted from and fed into spatialised constructions that, [...] have informed hierarchical and racialised/ethnicised juxtapositions of 'the West' against 'Islam' or 'Africa', 'Western Europe' against 'Eastern Europe', and 'Europe' against 'Russia'. (Baker, 2016, p. 99)

Because of this display of Western ideals *à la* European, the East block pre-USSR defunction and the posterior Russia have felt strongly about the contest itself, making Eurovision the arena for capitalism vs. communism battles (Vuletic, 2018). The Eurovision

Song Contest has always been the mirror that reflects all types of changes in Europe, not exclusively cultural, influencing every aspect of European cultural, political, and social life (Vuletic, 2018).

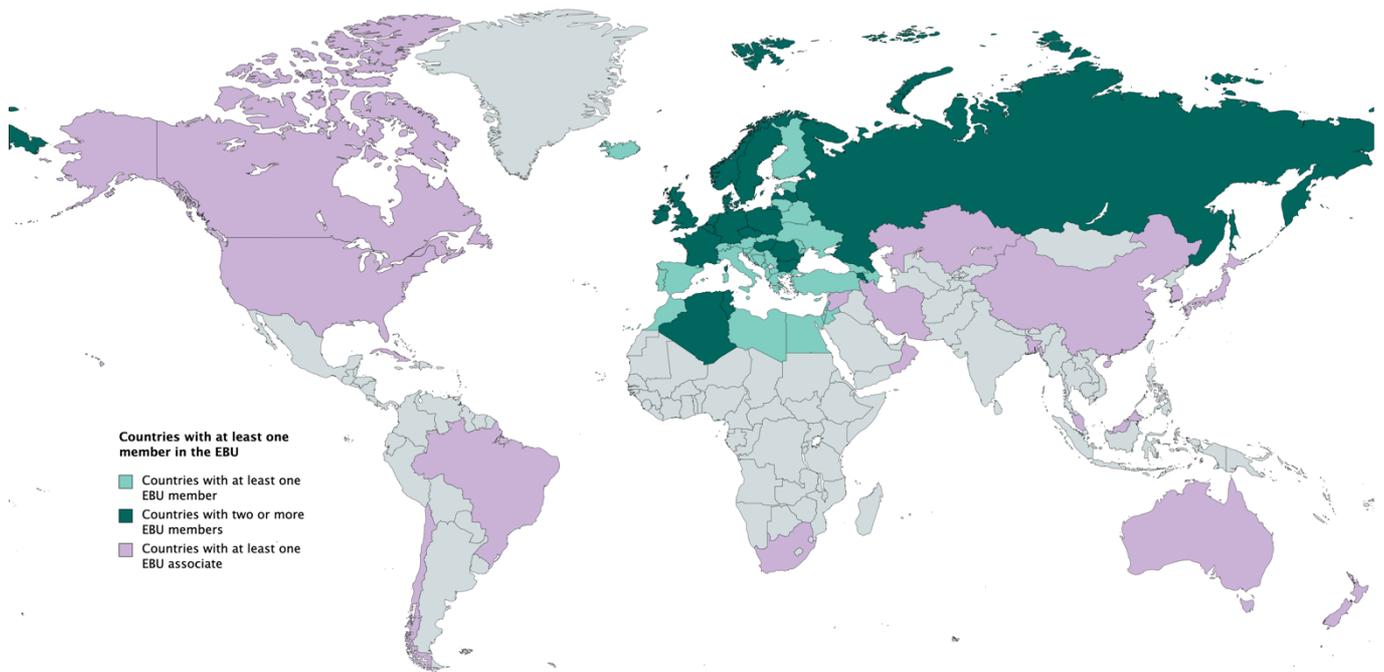


Fig. 2. Own elaboration. Data source: EBU (n. d.)

However, it is not only Europe that Eurovision influences. The EBU, European Broadcasting Union, was founded in 1950 with the goal of creating regional television content at a lower cost (Merziger & Nathaus, 2009), though its value as a medium for ‘pan-European communication and understanding via the sharing and exchange of programming’ (Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013, p. 2) is more widely understood, because its creation essentially meant creating a collective European identity (Borić & Kapor, 2017). It was the EBU who created the Eurovision Song Contest in 1956 as a tool for money-making, and it specifically followed a ‘states, not artists’ mentality: Eurovision was, since its conception, meant to represent nations. With the number of participants more than doubling in the last thirty years, it was inevitable that Eurovision would expand beyond the arbitrary geographical borders of Europe (Carniel, 2018b). Being a member of the EBU is the main requisite for entry into the contest, as it was the body that birthed it, but EBU membership is not limited to European countries. Nowadays, the EBU has members from 56 countries, amounting to a total of 115 organizations (EBU). Eurovision is the most popular and longest running media event with

a global reach that forms versions of Europe in everyone it reaches, both in and outside the so-called European continent (Sandvoss, 2008).

Eurovision's impact has already been studied from every possible perspective, through different interpretations at different points in time (Pajala, 2011) as the contest itself evolved around the changing political, social, and economic climate around itself (Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013), which allow for the buildup of Eurovision lore, and change perceptions about it and its goal. Eurovision as we know it exists as is because there is a memory of it having existed as it had before (Holdsworth, 2008; Pajala, 2011).

Eurovision is enticing for previous watchers because of this knowledge of a shared history, and attractive for new watchers because the knowledge of such history is not inherently essential for the enjoyment (Pajala, 2011). Eurovision's factors for enjoyment are not merely the buildup of European identity, the showcase of multiculturalism or the symbolics of European unity; the Eurovision Song Contest is, above all, fun and kitsch (Carniel, 2017; Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013). The audience can immediately feel like they are 'in' on a joke, and through yearly watching and watch parties, which are often considered essential for a good Eurovision show (Woods, 2020), audiences build a relationship with the contest itself. The more Eurovision is watched, the more it is enjoyed, and the more it is enjoyed, the higher the emotional stakes are. The higher the emotional stakes, the higher the personal involvement is, and therefore the deeper one internalizes the cohesive ideas of the festival. By making it impossible to stop watching it, Eurovision ensures that the ideas that permeate it will be consumed, accepted, and assimilated; whether it be from a European country, an American one, or an Asian one, Eurovision and its ideals will reach everywhere there is TV (or, in this case, everywhere there is EBU associates).

3.4. Eurovision's role in performing European identity

Eurovision's role for European nations is twofold. Firstly and as intended, it is a meaningful cultural stage where nations can assert their own identity and sovereignty, which in turn justifies their belonging to the broad concept of Europe (Carniel, 2017), defined by politics of belonging and the European-specific brand of Westernity¹ (Baker, 2016; Tittle & Lentin, 2011). It was particularly important for newly independent nations after the fall of the Soviet Union, who utilized Europe 'not [as] a static symbol but a resource' that could be

¹ In our case, the term 'Westernity' refers both to a particular understanding of state ideology (capitalist, liberal, democratic) and its associated ideas of modernity, presented in section 3.1.

shaped by those nations participating in Eurovision (Baker, 2015, p. 76). Secondly, and more importantly for the broader public, audience, and participants, it is *fun*. How *campy*, weird, kitsch Eurovision gets is the most important factor for them, while ethnic belonging or identification is only the sixth (Carniel, 2018b, p. 64).

While Eurovision serves as a ‘symbolic contact zone’ for creating a communal identity, it is also a platform to exchange personal or national identities (Carniel, 2017), ‘an arena for European identification in which both national solidarity and participation in a European identity are confirmed’ (Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013, p. 3), which allows everyone from performers to commentators, states and the audience themselves to express their particular narratives of identity, regional, national or otherwise (Baker, 2016). What ‘Europe’ truly means is more and more contested every day, to the point where European identity can be simply described as an integration of European ideals into already existing national identities, allowing both to co-exist at the same time (Delanty, n.d.). European identity is not political, but cultural.

[European identity is] not an identity that is progressively assimilated or adopted by different people, but the internal transformation of identities through the constant re-interpretation of identity and meaning. [...] The main form that European identity takes is, as argued, an Europeanization of national identity, that is an internal transformation of national identity. [...] Rather than a supra-national identity, it is a self-understanding that has recognises the relativity and plurality of the notion of the nation. (Delanty, n.d., p. 6)

It is also important to note that European identity publicity seems to be working, because European identification in youths has been steadily growing since 2015, despite the many criticisms the EU has drawn since that time, according to Losito et al. (2016). It is not surprising to see that young people (16 to 22-year-olds), who have always lived within the Europe of the European Union in times of peace, relate to European identity in such high numbers: 95% consider themselves European and 94% are proud to live in Europe (Losito et al., 2016, p. 10). Eurovision is only one of the tools used to transmit this sense of European identity and, while there currently does not exist a study of European identity in relation to Eurovision participation according to nation, it is notable that all participating countries in the study are also Eurovision participants.

Country	Percentages of students who agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:					
	I see myself as European	I am proud to live in Europe	I feel part of Europe	I see myself first as a citizen of Europe and then as a citizen of the world	I feel part of the European Union	I am proud that my country is a member of the European Union
Belgium (Flemish)	94 (0.6) ▽	96 (0.4) △	84 (0.9) ▽	72 (1.2) ▽	73 (1.2) ▽	93 (0.6) △
Bulgaria	91 (0.7) ▽	90 (0.6) ▽	84 (0.9) ▽	79 (1.0)	74 (1.1) ▽	88 (0.8) ▽
Croatia	98 (0.3) △	95 (0.5)	91 (0.6) △	89 (0.6) ▲	85 (0.7) △	90 (0.8)
Denmark ¹	96 (0.4) △	96 (0.4) △	92 (0.5) △	76 (0.8) ▽	-	-
Estonia ¹	95 (0.3)	92 (0.6) ▽	87 (0.9)	74 (1.1) ▽	81 (1.1) △	88 (0.8) ▽
Finland	98 (0.3) △	96 (0.4) △	90 (0.6) △	85 (0.8) △	86 (0.7) △	92 (0.6) △
Italy	97 (0.4) △	94 (0.5)	93 (0.5) △	78 (0.8)	89 (0.8) ▲	91 (0.6)
Latvia ¹	92 (0.7) ▽	87 (0.9) ▽	73 (1.2) ▼	67 (1.1) ▼	67 (1.1) ▼	84 (0.9) ▽
Lithuania	97 (0.4)	95 (0.4) △	86 (0.8)	79 (0.9)	81 (0.8) △	93 (0.5) △
Malta	95 (0.4)	94 (0.4)	91 (0.5) △	83 (0.6) △	84 (0.7) △	91 (0.5) △
Netherlands ¹	94 (0.6)	94 (0.5)	82 (0.9) ▽	69 (1.2) ▽	61 (1.2) ▼	85 (0.8) ▽
Norway (9) ¹	92 (0.5) ▽	96 (0.3) △	90 (0.5) △	77 (0.8)	-	-
Slovenia	98 (0.3) △	95 (0.5) △	88 (0.8)	83 (0.8) △	83 (0.9) △	92 (0.8) △
Sweden ¹	91 (0.8) ▽	95 (0.5)	87 (0.9)	77 (0.8)	75 (1.1) ▽	90 (0.8)
European ICCS 2016 average	95 (0.1)	94 (0.1)	87 (0.2)	78 (0.2)	78 (0.3)	90 (0.2)
Benchmarking participant not meeting sample participation requirements						
North-Rhine-Westphalia (Germany) ¹	91 (1.0)	90 (0.9)	76 (1.5)	63 (1.5)	67 (2.0)	80 (1.2)

- National ICCS 2016 percentage:**
- ▲ More than 10 percentage points above European ICCS 2016 average
 - △ Significantly above European ICCS 2016 average
 - ▽ Significantly below European ICCS 2016 average
 - ▼ More than 10 percentage points below European ICCS 2016 average
- Notes:**
- 0 Standard errors appear in parentheses. Because results are rounded to the nearest whole number, some totals may appear inconsistent.
 - (9) Country deviated from International Defined Population and surveyed adjacent upper grade.
 - † Met guidelines for sampling participation rates only after replacement schools were included.
 - 1 National Defined Population covers 90% to 95% of National Target Population.
 - No comparable data available.

Fig. 3. Source: Losito, Agrusti, Damiani, and Schulz (2016, p. 10)

Eurovision also serves as a way for the participating countries to take a look in the mirror and situate themselves within Europe, as the contest works as a playing field where every aspect of European society is on display: political, cultural, and economic. Politics are represented by the official votes from each country, who overwhelmingly tend to vote for their neighbors and allies (Pyka, 2019; Sandvoss, 2008), which is often even acknowledged by the voters themselves, as happened in the 2021 Eurovision Song Contest during voting from Cyprus and Greece (Eurovision Song Contest, 2021). Culture is represented by the entries themselves, showcasing both national and European identities both through song and performance (Pyka, 2019). And the economy is represented in the songs themselves, as we saw happen in 2009 after the global economic crisis originated in the United States (Pinto Teixeira & Stokes, 2013), but the performances themselves, which are paid for by each participant state's representative agency, showcase the economic significance of the event and the willingness to part with large sums of money just for the spectacle of it all.

The true phenomenon of Eurovision is that, despite political divides and culture clashes – as much as differences in music tastes – it has fostered European integration and togetherness. It is also relatively unique in giving the pan-European television audience the opportunity to simultaneously participate in being European and to determine an outcome, collectively, outside of nation state politics. And while the lingering political tensions will endure, this annual popular culture referendum continues to provide a space to belong – and that is clearly worth singing about. (Yair, 2019, p. 1016)

Voting is often considered the most important part of the contest itself. Eurovision failure is both a source of national shame and a sign of cultural difference, particularly in countries with the worst track records (Pajala, 2011), but even the process itself is interesting enough to turn the TV on for: there have been years when the only broadcasted part of the show was the voting, and the number of viewers did not drop significantly (Klier, 2009). The results may be interesting, but the process of getting them attracts just as many viewers as the musical showcase, because democracy is perceived as such a core European ideal, and Eurovision relies both on it and a principle of equal opportunity to bank on these ideals (Yair & Maman, 1996).

[...] what might be called ‘the Eurovision model of democracy’: everyone in a participating country who owns a sim card or who has a telephone registered with that nation’s telephone networks has the right to vote, regardless of actual citizenship. Thus, a wider public became aware that diasporas wielded a soft power to be reckoned with. (Pyka, 2019, p. 461)

This is why the current voting system of Eurovision, where there is a professional jury from each country and then a public vote to assign a number of points to each country, works so well. It allows for the petty politics that have always been part of Eurovision to happen while giving the audience an opportunity to weigh in in the only representation of such politics that feels familiar to them. Winning Eurovision is nice, but voting for the winner of Eurovision is better (Yair, 2019).

4. Eurovision history

4.1. Why Eurovision?

The Eurovision Song Contest was created both to unite the nations of post-war Europe (and to fight Cold War polarization) by a common cultural event, and to promote the European Broadcasting Union’s Eurovision distribution network (O’Connor, 2010, p. 8; Press-Barnathan & Lutz, 2020). It was first held by Switzerland in 1956, with only seven participating nations as opposed to the peak 43 participants in 2008 (Yair, 2019). The East/West divide that categorized the times of its conception has followed it until now, as former Warsaw Pact states did not participate in Eurovision until 1993, and the increase in their number demonstrates the political shift in Europe (Carniel, 2017). So relevant was Eurovision’s role in spreading the European agenda, that it was considered an emissary of Western propaganda by the USSR, who attempted its own song contest in 1977, the Intervision Song Contest (Miklóssy, 2011).

However, it is important to remember that Eurovision is a private show, with whom actual governments have little to do (Kiel, 2020). Although it may serve a tool for cultural diplomacy and soft power, it is not a direct attempt to achieve anything by governments themselves, as much as many would like and have tried to claim and use it for propaganda purposes (Gutiérrez Lozano, 2012; Ismayilov, 2012; Vuletic, 2018): it is an implicitly nationalistic contest, where performers are not allowed the decision of representing their nation or not: they will be understood as their country’s champion in both success and failure

(Kiel, 2020). The added elements of cultural diplomacy, nation branding, and pure economic motivation that adds the fact that winners' countries have the right to host the following year's contest are even more attractive to governments, particularly of those who are still looking for European integration through Eurovision and its legitimization of belonging, like Israel (Kiel, 2020).

4.2. Boycotts

While the rules of the Eurovision Song Contest prohibit explicit political statements, this has not stopped participants from advocating for unity from an explicitly European liberal perspective, criticizing political leaders, mentioning economic issues and even started a revolution in Portugal (Pinto Teixeira & Stokes, 2013). The fact that Eurovision yields the power of affirming and confirming European identity inherently makes it a political actor, even if the staged events are supposedly not. This makes both the organizers and the events a target for political statements, both from parties who seeks legitimization and those who oppose it (Press-Barnathan & Lutz, 2020).

The coalitions of nations shown by voting trends (Yair, 1995; Yair & Maman, 1996) suggests that the event participant themselves do embrace issues of cultural and political nature (Le Guern & Lemish, 2000). Entries have over and over again referenced current events and global economic crises, either directly or through irony (Pyka, 2019), taking stances on major global conflicts like the showcasing of a Palestinian flag in the 2019 final in Tel Aviv (Rasmus, 2019) and circumnavigating the 'no politics' rule at will.

Because of this inability to steer away from politics completely, boycotts are a regular part of the Eurovision Song Contest. Worrying political situations in a host state, false broadcasting to hide a conflictive victor in particular states (Jordan with Israel's 2018 win) and even expulsion from the EBU are regular happenings that have always surrounded the contest (Borić & Kapor, 2017). The showcase of peace and harmony with political opponents that Eurovision presents only goes insofar as the repercussions of this showcase do not affect relations too deeply.

Voting controversies have always been a part of the contest. While some suggest that changing the voting system so often is part of keeping the show alive, there have previously been calls for boycott for perceived biases. In 2007 the first fifteen spots of the final were occupied by Eastern European countries, which is the biggest of the four voting blocks, and this eventually led to calls for the boycott of the contest. The boycott did not hurt the contest,

but it did lead to the EBU introducing more semi-finals and a new system of professional jury voting.

Ukraine's win in the 2016 edition also led to calls of boycotting from Russia, because of the very thinly veiled political message of the song, '1944', which alluded to the, at the time, very recent annexation of Crimea by Russia. Such a song would have usually been banned from the contest, and the fact that it was not has been heavily criticized, yet its participation and posterior win were never truly contested, apart from Russia's empty threat to boycott.

Turkey has also issued threats of boycott that they have actually fulfilled, after publicly calling out Finland's 2012 entry for their on-stage kiss between two male performers. This actually led to Turkey pulling out of the contest completely, not having participated nor broadcasted it since 2013, and LGBT-related content (such as Conchita Wurst's presence and eventual win) has been cited as their reasoning for the boycott in the country ("Turkey to return Eurovision 'if no more bearded divas'," 2018).

Because of this history, it is not hard to believe that Israel's participation has been controversial, and that its 2018 win and 2019 hosting has been surrounded by all types of controversy and calls for boycott, although these have been surprisingly well organized in comparison to previous attempts. We will study this particular case in section six.

4.3. Musical relevancy

The earliest Eurovision contests were full of already established artists in their home states, who participated as a showcase of good will from their nation's part. The presence of a live orchestra (which was eliminated as an effort to modernize the contest in 1977) and simple, safe, catchy songs made the contest widely beloved by all ages, making even the losing songs high performers on music charts, such as 'Volare'.

While originally it was understood that songs ought to be in the country's official language, having English and French be the official languages of the contest led to the participation of the 1965 Swedish song 'Absent Friend', and this eventually led to an official rule change forcing songs to be in the official languages of the presenting country. In 1973 regulations eased again and ABBA, arguably the internationally best-known Eurovision winner, triumphed in the contest with the song 'Waterloo'. Regulations regarding song language swung back and force until 1999, when they seemingly reverted to allowing any language, apparently for good now.

There is no genre that has not been performed in Eurovision. 60s swing, punk, and hip hop, while not particularly popular, have been performed in the contest before, with an obvious preference for ballads and pop over other genres, such as rock. The winners of Eurovision 2021, the Italian punk rock group Måneskin, won with their rock entry ‘Zitti e Buoni’, marking a historical win for the genre in the Eurovision Song Contest. Nowadays, live music is banned and all instruments on stage must be *atrezzo*, so the win of such a music-relying genre over ballads, which rely much more on voice, is of particular notice.

The musical quality of the overall participants has been widely discussed and criticized, particularly because genre repetition has incited comments about the contest becoming formulaic (Carniel, 2018a), as well as petty criticisms over English pronunciation in non-English speakers’ songs, the over-the-top performances or the recurring themes of peace and love in participating songs (Picheta, 2020). Ironically, these elements are often what viewers liked most about the contest and are considered an integral part (Carniel, 2017), making the contest what it should be: fun.

5. Methodology

To understand to what extent Eurovision validates European belonging and inspires participating states to change to better represent European identity, we will study the case of Israel’s 2018 entry and posterior 2019 hosting. We will compare these situations and what they meant for Israeli European belonging to the way in which Australia has validated its European identity through Eurovision, which has previously been studied and validated as being a symbiotic relationship, offering not only validation for Australia but actually serve to influence Australia and export European values (see Carniel, 2017, 2018a, 2019).

Israel and Australia fall in the same category as countries who participate in Eurovision while not being European, states who are amiable with Europe and seek its validation, and as countries with very blatant historical ties to Europe. By comparing the way both of them perform their European ideological belonging we should be able to infer whether the performance of such identity in Eurovision is inherently problematic or whether it is the particular national approach which can hurt it.

6. Israel in Eurovision

In Europe, the relation between state, capitalism and civil society evolved in a way that did not allow one to rule over the others so that domination of one single aspect of a state

was impossible by nature (Delanty, 2015). Israel lacked since its formation the system of checks and balances that allowed Europe to check the growth of absolutism (Ertman, 1997), because the lack of a feudal history did not create the same social organization that centralized states in Europe have benefitted from. Israel's lack of history is, in this case, its own worst enemy in regard to relatability to Europe's version of modernity: while capitalism in Europe was a result of successful revolts (Delanty, 2015), in Israel it was merely a reaction to what had already evolved somewhere else.

In this section we will study how other non-European states, in this case Australia, utilize the Eurovision Song Contest to perform their European identity and identification as a platform to ricochet Israeli's particular brand of European performance. European-made and identity-based, Australia's Eurovision participation is based on identity and fun, allowing for historical factors to enter into play where Israel's own do not. While Eurovision may allow everyone the same stage for the legitimization of their European belonging, it is through the comparison of two different actors that the different identity performances can be gauged.

6.1. Australia and European integration: a love story centuries in the making

Many have questioned over the years the participation of Israel and Azerbaijan, as well as Australia, for example, nations that exist outside the geographical borders of Europe (Carniel, 2017). Of course that any state that is part of the European Broadcasting Union, but it is not the legality of it that is questioning, just the reasoning for any non-European country to participate in a contest specifically designed for European multiculturalism broadcasting.

Australia's participation started as a fan event, because of the large following that the Eurovision Song Contest has amassed in the country (Carniel, 2017). The following years' participation, however, was more than a simple invite to honor a fanbase, it was a way of celebrating migrant Australia and multiculturalism (Molloy, 2016), and acknowledgement that ideologically Australia exemplifies many of the ideals espoused by both the EBU and the EU (Carniel, 2017), and that Eurovision chooses to focus on cultural ties instead of geographical or political ones (Woods, 2020), further supporting the previously mentioned idea of the support for a multicultural view of European liberalism.

As a site of European colonization and immigration Australia is, at least theoretically, ideologically and culturally aligned with the majority of European nation states

involved in the contest; that is, despite its geography, Australia has until recent times largely been constructed, and constructed itself, to be of the West, and much of its national psychology has been shaped by the so-called ‘tyranny of distance’ from its ostensible ideological motherland (Blainey, 1991, p. 14).

Understanding Australia as part of the same Western society as Europe is not difficult if we follow Delanty’s (2013) ideas of modernity as based on history, but it is more than an individual interpretation of modernity what makes Australia a good fit in a contest that discusses European identity and that has allowed fans to see themselves represented in that identity. Huntington (1993) already defined in his *The Clash of Civilizations?* Australia as a Western society ‘from its origins’ (p. 151), and defended the consideration by leaders globally of it being ‘European culturally’ (p. 152). Australia’s participation in the Eurovision Song Contest proves that not only does the country belong to Eurocentric Western culture and identity, but also that geographical boundaries are irrelevant for such belonging (Carniel, 2017). This also supports the idea that Eurovision participation allows access to the ‘cool’ club of liberalism, ‘unity in diversity’ (Carniel, 2017), ideas, and political ties that signify European legitimacy for Israel (Lemish, 2004) and Azerbaijan (Carniel, 2015).

However, it is not just the ‘external’ participants who gain something by becoming such. By including Australia, so clearly geographically outside of Europe, Eurovision and therefore Europe prove not only their influence, but also their global reach (Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013).

6.2. Israel’s place in Europe

It has already been theorized that the European model of modernity would quickly have to evolve to include and ensure civility with other parts of the world (Delanty, 2015), but Israel’s participation can tell us so much more than European modernities’ need for accommodation.

Maintaining a positive international image is important for Israel. The public opinion on Israel is mixed at most, with most of its immediate environment in the region being highly antagonistic towards it. While its relations with most European countries and the European Union are positive, Israel could benefit greatly from an advanced cultural diplomacy strategy. Government funding for Israeli musicians and artists who go on international tours is meant to showcase to foreign audiences an Israel ‘beyond the conflict’ (Kiel, 2020). Conflict does

not look good on anybody, and Israel has done its best to align itself with a peaceful Europe over the perceived chaos of the Middle East.

7. Analysis: Israel's 2018 entry and 2019 hosting

Most soft power tools rely on the gap between perception and reality, like the Korean *Hallyu*, to build a new image that can borrow from both sides to benefit the country (Fernández del Campo, 2018). Israel has a history of playing with this perception and reality to build an image that, while based on the truth, serves to promote a better, healthier, more tolerant version of the state. It has been accused of veganwashing (Macleod, 2019), gaywashing (Lemish, 2004), pinkwashing (Vuletic, 2019); which are the concepts of utilizing minorities that are considered progressive to project the image of a tolerant state.

By promoting women's rights, veganism in the Israeli Defense Forces or LGBT rights in Israel, the state is effectively presenting itself as liberal and perceived as more tolerant, which is directly linked to a desire to enhance its soft power (Carniel, 2015; Press-Barnathan & Lutz, 2020). Critics have focused on such strategies because they contrast with other restrictions in place in the country, like the promotion of Israel's 'gay decade' while restricting Palestinian's mobility after the 1993 Oslo Accords (Baker, 2016). Through cultural diplomacy and nation branding, Israel has always worked to hide the uglier, more intolerant, parts that would not fit in well with the exported image of European by the state.

Israel's already being 'in' with Europe situates it in an advantageous position because the inherent values associated with Europe will already be automatically assigned to Israel as well. Although the Israeli government does not have a particularly active or well-planned cultural diplomacy strategy (Kiel, 2020), it has previously chosen as a state to promote itself as a place that shared those values (like LGBT inclusivity) to better fit in Europe (Carniel, 2019; Meijer, 2013; Puar, 2011), and not exclusively through Eurovision, although Israel has weaponized its participation to mean inclusion in the European community before (Lemish, 2004).

Israel also understands that by playing into the rhetoric of in/out with Europe they are, consequentially, aligning themselves with European values and others, Palestine in our case, as having anti-European values: Israel is an LGBTQ-friendly space in an otherwise hostile region (Kiel, 2020). However, this is of course not a black-and-white issue: ultra-orthodox Jews have previously protested the Israeli entry into Eurovision by a trans woman

while the LGBT community in the state considered her entry (and subsequent win) a triumph and a crucial step (Lemish, 2004).

Israel's 2018 entry with artist Netta's 'Joy' won because the current (at the time) social sphere allowed the song to succeed in its environment (Kiel, 2020): the overweight singer who represented the body positive movement, the feminist messaging of the song that resonated particularly during the most popular days of the #MeToo movement, the catchy upbeat music and the signature chicken dance, so easily replicated, led the song, artist, and state to victory.

As previously mentioned, governments have very little to do with artist picks during the contest. However, Israeli representatives were quick to co-opt Netta's win as win for Israel, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tweeting "Netta, you brought a lot of honor to the State of Israel" (translation by Kiel, 2020) the day of the victory. He even went so far as to walk into his next meeting performing the by then famous 'chicken dance' that accompanied the song, and using a play on words by saying 'boker toy' instead of 'boker tov' (good morning), in reference to the winning song, 'Toy'. While Israel has effectively utilized cultural diplomacy before, it has not been particularly well funded nor organized



Fig. 4. Source: Netanyahu, 2018

(Schneider, 2014) and lack resources (Shai, 2018), so moments such as these are incredibly powerful in what they can achieve for the state.

Winning and hosting the Eurovision Song Contest presented Israel with the very welcome opportunity of controlling a narrative that would certainly be beneficial, if only in economic terms through tourism, and they chose to do so deliberately: Israel would present itself as European, liberal, open and diverse (Kiel, 2020). The state aimed to have a contest that was ‘peaceful, joyful, and celebrated as a demonstration of their country’s tolerance, progressiveness and fun’ (Kiel, 2020).

The controversy that followed the organization of the 2019 Eurovision Song Contest and which Israeli city would host it would have tied up perfectly with the move of the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem had it not been banned by Eurovision organizers, who forced Israel to host in Tel Aviv, although Israeli public figures and politicians had been rooting for Jerusalem since Netta’s win (Kiel, 2020). Jerusalem is not officially an Israeli city nor its capital, so while states are usually allowed to present the candidature of whatever cities are up for the job, politics in this case put a stop to the Israeli dream of a Jerusalem-hosted Eurovision. It was not possible for Eurovision to not be political, because any option would have meant a political statement: hosting Eurovision in Jerusalem like Israel wanted would have been an acknowledgement of the city as Israeli, and not allowing Israel to enter whatever city in their territory as the hosting city was a declaration of non-politics. Either way, the controversy ended with Eurovision in Tel Aviv, but it did not end at all: while usually Eurovision politization is a close club, the 2019 edition covered the controversies and calls for boycott widely (Kiel, 2020).

The large-scale media exposure that followed, enhanced only by the already existing controversy, while allowing for incredible self-promotion and economy boosts through tourism, also put on blast the internal and external politics of the state. Movements like the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), inspired by the anti-Apartheid protests, call for the cultural isolation of Israel in the name of non-recognized Arab and Muslim citizens and the displaced refugees who have fled Palestine (Baker, 2016). This movement, which had been of respectable size before Israel’s 2018 win, benefitted from media attention to Israel and utilized this to call out human rights violations under international law (Press-Barnathan & Lutz, 2020). To quote Brannagan and Giulianotti (2018), such movements utilize ‘soft disempowerment’ against states’ soft power, and the BDS movement created a ‘temporary transnational public sphere’ around the event, which

allowed for increased publicity for its denouncement (Baker, 2016; Press-Barnathan & Lutz, 2020).

The BDS and Palestinian effort to call for a boycott of Israel and a cultural isolation of the state effectively flips the cultural diplomacy framework. It is no longer merely a tool for soft power that subtly influences the global perception of the state, but it is now an offensive strategy that could potentially hurt Israel (Kiel, 2020). Turning public opinion itself into a battlefield is a very useful strategy for the weaker party, both in terms of hard and soft power, global influence and global visibility (Mahnken, 2003; Shai, 2018).

While Israel did not want to fight the movement in fear of legitimizing and publicizing it (Shai, 2018), the lack of organization in their soft power policies meant that their co-opting of cultural and sports wins opened the door for legitimate critics of the government to use such arenas for their criticism, and Israel showed its understanding of the damage that such a movement could cause through its increasing efforts to fight it (Kiel, 2020).

Israel's strategy of branding the state as liberal and tolerant only works insofar as no one leaks the stories that contradict such promotion efforts, like those of gay Palestinians who have been blackmailed by Israeli forces (O'Connor, 2013; Salem, 2013) to become informants to stop the publicization of their sexual orientation, which was part of the 'boycott Israel' campaign of 2019 Eurovision.

Regimes have certainly promoted themselves as liberal through mega-events to European visitors before, but this is a particular case in which it is happening while covering up human rights violations (Baker, 2016). Being LGBT friendly only to part of the community has an actual negative effect on local activists or local queer citizens (Moss, 2014), to whom Israel's tolerance is not extended to. This is a similar case to the European Union, as called out by feminist writer Flavia Dzodan: 'Why [do] I speak about homonationalism? [Because] while EU media is spinning wheels of gay rights in Russia, queer asylum seekers are summarily deported' (Dzodan, 2014). The Eurovision space extends beyond Europe the European Union, yet its values do not seem to do the same.

Stories such as this blackmailing have been widely criticized for the apparent hypocrisy at best and blatant gaywashing at worst: to be part of the presented European values one must actually respect and act according to those values. Being part of Europe is not enough, as it, does not mean that there will be permanent improvements in terms of rule of law, democracy quality or LGBT and human rights (Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013).

8. Conclusion

Israel's place in Europe may be performed in part by Eurovision, but that is definitely not the only way through which it legitimizes its European belonging. In a place meant to represent European values and identity, Israel has failed to align their nation branding and steps taken through nation branding with the compromises implicit in Eurovision, and therefore European, identification.

Where Israel has succeeded in aligning itself with Europe and everything that entails others have failed. European validation through Eurovision is the easiest way to access European citizenship in a meaningful way, and its inherent soft power augmentation comes with an inherent alignment with Europe's values. Israel, historically, has failed to act in accordance with those values, particularly in relationship to its 2018 entry and 2019 Eurovision win. Israel's usage of cultural diplomacy to further align itself with Europe falls flat once the veil painted by its soft power is removed. Not even Eurovision could save them in this case.

In this work we have proven a connection between Eurovision and European identity performance and the usage that states make of it to further align themselves with Europe and what it represents. Through a study of Australia's Eurovision alignment and a comparison with Israel's 2018 win and 2019 hosting we have attempted to prove that a better alignment in perceived European values and the performance of them is possible, in the case of Australia, when certain historical requirements are met. However, this alignment does not exist in the case of Israel, who has in our study been proven to make a performative usage of Eurovision and the brand of European belonging it affords, without encouraging any active change towards better aligned actions and European values. However, it is of note that this study is nowhere near extensive enough to draw any further conclusions, so further work in relation to this topic are necessary to deeply understand the role of Eurovision in European identity performance and potentially performative usage.

This failure on Israel's part to relate to European identity through Eurovision creates the larger, more problematic question of what the right way of validating European belonging might be, even for those who do not have to overcome geographical barriers for such belonging. Eurovision's significance and role as the continent's main cultural diplomacy and nation branding event is not enough to create an arena that will align national values, but the next question posed must be whether this is Eurovision's problem or European identity's problem. Is Eurovision fixable as an identity validator and influencer, or does European

identity need a more thorough process of creating validating experiences that will add influence and power to those aligning themselves with it?

Moreover, we must ask ourselves whether Eurovision's failure to align Israeli values with European identity signifiers, such as the defense of LGBT and human rights, means that the validation created by Eurovision participation is unearned and, in that case, whether there should be a higher standard of participation for those entering the contest. In a competition that is meant to showcase the best Europe has to offer, Israel feels out of place, and European alignment with the liberal Western values feels shallow once one remembers that Turkey opted out of the contest not because their treatment of the LGBT community was misaligned with such values, but because they chose *not* to align themselves with a contest that did just that.

Eurovision must choose, and so must its nations: European belonging means alignment with European values, liberalism, and opportunities; but this belonging cannot come exclusively through soft power means. The bar to clear is high, and so those seeking European validation should jump.

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