

Rethinking Eurovision Song Contest As A Clash Of Cultures*

Kültürel Bir Mücadele Alanı Olarak Eurovision Şarkı Yarışması

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Abstract

Modern era's understanding of culture overlooked culture, as a social and cultural analysis category as well as a way of life. This point of view has lost its validity and culture gained significance as an area where rulership and power struggle exists. Especially the privileged existence of popular culture; having an interdependence attachment to power relations in addition to an allowing structure for alternative discourses other than the official discourse is a crucial asset.

This article examines Eurovision Song Contest with its over 50 years of traditioned history, as a noteworthy television program of popular culture. Despite often being considered as "kitsch", the contest refers more than of an ordinary song competition. The artists who participate in the contest compete for the country they represent rather than an individual race which takes "national identity" more on stage. In this respect the contest has a stimulus effect on national consciousness. This alerted effect can clearly be seen on public debates just before, during and after the contest. It is claimed in this study that Turkey's position in Eurovision Song Contest offers a view of the "cultural struggle" towards Western civilization since the beginning of the modernization process. In this framework this study primarily focuses on the relationship between identity and culture, followed by the role of popular culture in the construction of cultural identity. Afterwards the study tries to discover how does this contest became a tool of cultural struggle in Turkish society by analyzing the news and the discourse of the news that took place in national print media.

Keywords: Eurovision, Popular Culture, Identity, Modernity, Culture

Öz

Modern döneme ait bir kavrayış olan kültürün gerek sosyal ve toplumsal bir çözümleme kategorisi olarak, gerekse de bir yaşam biçimi olarak öneminin göz ardı edilmesi, günümüzde geçerliğini kaybetmiş ve kültüre yönelik ilgi yeniden canlanmıştır. Kültür, iktidar ilişkilerinin bir parçası ve iktidar mücadelesinin farklı biçimlerde devam ettiği bir alan olarak anlam kazanmıştır. Özellikle popüler kültürün iktidar ilişkilerinden bağımsız olmayışı ancak aynı zamanda direnişe geçit veren ve resmi söylemlerden başka alternatif söylemlere de olanak sağlayan yapısı büyük önem taşımaktadır.

Bu çalışma Eurovision Şarkı Yarışması'nı 50 yılı aşkın gelenekselleşen geçmişiyle dikkatle incelemeye değer popüler kültür ürünü bir televizyon programı olarak ele almaktadır. Çoğunlukla "kitsch" olarak değerlendirilse de yarışma, katılımcı ülkelerin "kültürel kimliklerinin temsiline" dayalı forma-

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tiyla sıradan bir şarkı yarışmasının çok ötesinde anlamlar içermektedir. Yarışmaya katılan sanatçılar bireysel bir yarıştan ziyade, ülkelerini temsil ettikleri için yarışmada bireysel kimlikleriyle değil, ulus kimlikleriyle yer almaktadır. Bu yönüyle yarışma milli bilinci doğrudan uyaran bir etkiye sahiptir. Bu etki yarışmaya ilişkin kamuoyuna yansıyan tartışmalarda açık biçimde görülmektedir. Türkiye'nin yarışmayla kurduğu ilişkinin, modernleşme süreciyle birlikte Batı'ya karşı gelişen "kültürel mücadele"nin bir görünümünü sunduğu ileri sürülen bu çalışmada öncelikle kimlik ve kültür ilişkisi incelenerek, kültürel kimliğin inşasında popüler kültürün rolü üzerinde durulmuştur. Sonrasında ise ulusal yazılı basında geçmişten bugüne yer alan haberler, haberlerde kullanılan dil ve söylem aracılığıyla Türk kamuoyunda yarışmanın nasıl kültürel bir mücadelenin aracı haline geldiğinin izleri sürülmüştür.

Anahtar kelimeler: Eurovision, Popüler Kültür, Kimlik, Modernlik, Kültür

Culture As An Area of Struggle

The structure of modernity which treats its determining characteristics; that are, facts and concepts in the axis of antagonisms, has led to development of perception on culture in the same direction as well. Expressing itself in the antagonism between high arts – low arts or high culture – popular culture, this approach to culture stems from a perception that is based on 18th century discourse which goes back to 19th century German Romanticism.¹ Classifying the culture as "high", "low" or "popular", the approach emphasized superior and privileged aspects of the higher culture and appraised the culture as a criterion to measure aesthetic perfection from a classical and conservative point of view. And the popular culture is trivialized as a culture with negative impacts on the system and the social structure. This point of view has entered into a transformation process when the culture was began to be seen as a life-style. This approach which goes back to Herder and becomes a source for anthropology has expanded the culture out of its elitist definition boundaries.

Suggesting to pluralize the word "culture", which is the life-blood of 18th century late period romanticism, Herder also mentions cultures of different periods and nations as well as different economic and social cultures in a nation.² That's why, Herder is considered as a pioneer for non-universalist culture concept. Following the footsteps of Herder, Raymond Williams also made significant contribution to that of the meaning of culture which received recognition as of mid-19th century. Believing that even art that was considered as a benchmark for highest values of civilization is only a special form within general social processes, Williams democratized culture's aspect as an aesthetic criterion and representative of the best, and defended the view that culture is not elitist, but ordinary. Perceiving culture as a life style but drawing attention to the fact that the cultural field on which this life-style exists is not homogeneous, Williams has underlined that there are different opposing and struggling life-styles; that are, cultures in this field.³

1 Meral Özbek, *Orhan Gencebay Arabeski*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2010, p.62

2 Terry Eagleton, *Kültür Yorumları* (çev. Özge Çevik), Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul 2011, p.22

3 Meral Özbek, a.g.e., pp.77-78

The culture has started to attract increasing interest as economic aspects and material infrastructure remain insufficient in analysis of capitalist system in the second half of 20th century. In this scope, studies concerning culture have been institutionalized through the Cultural Studies Centre after the World War II.

Suggesting that the culture should be in a place which is not looked at so far, and should be regarded as an area where power and resistance operate, not independently from the human and the society, the cultural studies approach emphasizes life as a product of cultural practices and tries to understand it in relation with historical processes.⁴ Following traces of resistance element in the popular culture, this approach accepts power of hegemonic forces and considers the popular culture as a field of struggle, and tries to understand daily efforts to escape from and resistances to power in this field.⁵ Defined over opposing to higher culture or as a superstructure where material basis was reflected, the popular culture started to be conceptualized as a field of political and social conflict and a weapon of political mobilisation.⁶ It also gained importance as a field of research with the potential to pave the way for emancipation.

By defending the view that the resistance against dominant ideology are carried out through rituals in daily life, what cultural studies are trying to point out is that the individual is not under unconditional sovereignty, and is aware of the hegemony which the powers that be are trying to establish, and creates different areas of resistance in line with the situation he is in. These different areas cover the popular culture, thus, every field of life. This is because the economic understanding of the approach is not limited to material basis. The scope of economy is extended to include an economy of culture where meanings and jouissance are also mediated, and in this economy, any unique commodity, any TV programme or even a blue jean are considered as a text.⁷ Eurovision Song Contest, our topic of research in this work, is taken into consideration in that framework.

The Role of Popular Culture in Building Identity

Produced by the modern world order, the nation-state form has become operational, radically changing traditional administration methods of the states. Transforming society has precluded continuation of the existing political or

4 Hanno Hardt, "Eleştirelin Geri Dönüşü ve Radikal Muhalefetin Meydan Okuyuşu", Mehmet Küçük, der. *Medya İktidar İdeoloji*, Ark Yayınevi, Ankara 1994, pp.37-39

5 John Fiske, *Popüler Kültürü Anlamak* (çev. Süleyman İrvan), Bilim ve Sanat Yayınları, Ankara 1999, p.33

6 Chandra Mukerji, Michael Schudson, "Introduction", *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1991, p.1

7 John Fiske, a.g.e., pp.39-49

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social order. New means were needed to express social cohesion and identity and restructure social relations; and formation of new administration methods or ties to ensure loyalty has become a necessity.⁸ The identity has been the most important instrument to reach the target of a homogeneous nation with a sense of belonging for the modern state as it was transforming from community to society. Following this target, the modern state has designed a national identity which will be based on a singular culture understanding by taking into account the policies of the power. More clearly, the state has been the manager of the identity rules which are made and controlled by itself; that is, the identity has been included in the field of responsibility of the state.⁹

In nation-states where face-to-face communication does not exist, and sense of cultural belonging does not spontaneously develop, and cohesion is provided through “cultural construction”, mass communication tools play a very significant role. Defining nation as an “imagined political community”, Anderson’s views clearly reveal the role played by the mass communication tools. For Anderson, the nation is imagined because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”.¹⁰ Anderson asserts the source of this imaginary tie as “print capitalism”, and notes that books and especially newspapers have a revolutionary impact on development of the national conscience.¹¹

“(Newspaper reading) . . . allows an extraordinary mass ritual: Consuming the newspaper as a fiction almost simultaneously. . . The significance of this mass ceremony – Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers – is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?”¹²

Briefly, for Anderson, “imagining a nation” is a process that occurs thanks to the fact that the nation-state organisation which is a form of moder-

8 Eric Hobsbawm, *Millletler ve Milliyetçilik* (çev. Osman Akınhay), Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul 2002

9 Denys Cuche, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Kültür Kavramı*, Bağlam Yayıncılık, Ankara 2013, p.123

10 Benedict Anderson, *Hayali Cemaatler* (çev. İskender Savaşır), Metis Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2007, p.20

11 Benedict Anderson, a.g.e., p.54

12 Benedict Anderson, a.g.e., p.50

nity takes its place in the world scene. And the national identity is the imagining of the community members in a way to develop a sense of cultural belonging which is specified by the nation-state. Replacing earlier forms of cultural belonging and being a highly mediated imaginary belonging, the sense of national identity is primarily mediated through the media.¹³

In 20th century advanced capitalism, the media has quantitatively and qualitatively established a determinant and basic leadership in the cultural field; on economic, technical, social and cultural basis, the mass media have colonized qualitatively a bigger slice of older traditional cultural channels which managed to survive.¹⁴ The most basic reason for this is that the culture which takes place in the basis of individuals' sense of belonging is mediated through media in the modern society. In pre-modern traditional societies, the sense of belonging provided by cultural contexts was dependent on the contexts where relations were directly face-to-face within the structures of affinity, religion and tradition. This natural sense of belonging provided men with their general existential tendencies and ethical contexts.¹⁵ However, with the organisation process of modern mass societies in the form of nation-state, the ground on which the sense of belonging is formed loses its natural aspect and gains a fictional dimension. Consequently, the process to form a national identity has gained special ideological and political meaning, and a consciously-made "cultural construction" is seen in the formation of national identities.¹⁶

Taking into consideration that primary information source in modern societies is the media, and thus, the popular culture, it is possible to say that those who receive the popular culture also have the potential to think about their own identity and thus the popular culture is functionalized as their practice of giving the world a meaning.¹⁷ Television comes one step further because it has the largest area of utilization between the tools which play a role in construction of a new identity, and are functionalised as a cultural reproduction tool to ensure continuation of that identity. Television shares lives of individuals as being a part of daily life, it has easy access, and watching television is an event which can be shared by the members of the family or friends, so on and so forth, and thus it has privilege between mass communications tools. Television is dissociated from other mass media tools by being a tool of representation which participates in the signification process by producing

13 John Tomlinson, *Kültürel Emperyalizm* (çev. Emrehan Zeybekoğlu), Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul 1999, pp.129-136

14 Stuart Hall, "Kültür, Medya ve İdeolojik Etki", Mehmet Küçük, der. *Medya İktidar İdeoloji*, Ark Yayınevi, Ankara 1994, p.200

15 John Tomlinson, a.g.e., p.130-131

16 John Tomlinson, a.g.e., p.107

17 Nuran Erol, "Kültürel Bir Kimlik Olarak Delikanlılığın Yükselişi", *Doğu Batı Dergisi*, 4/13, 2001, pp.129-140

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meanings and allowing changes in the meanings, not as a tool which codes or echoes only existing things.¹⁸ In this direction which was defined by Hall as “constructivist approach to representation”, we encounter the television as a cultural reproduction space where a meaning struggle to “naturalize” social power relations and itself under names such as “joint signification” or “common sense” occurs in its most severe form.¹⁹

In 1950, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) was established to serve exactly to such a goal, and create cultural partnerships in the process of constructing a European identity. Starting service to ensure countries get to know each other’s life styles, cultures, and daily lives by making joint live broadcast between member European states, the EBU has developed contents in this direction. Most famous of the culture policies produced in this scope is undoubtedly the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC). The contest tops the events carried out in the field of popular culture that stem from the desire and the project to build a European identity.

Eurovision and Culture

Eurovision Song Contest is a television programme and an international song contest organized between the European countries since 1956 and accepted as the world’s biggest song contest, reaching millions of viewers every year. ESC was first organized in 24 May 1956 in Switzerland and seven countries attended the contest that year. Targeting to ensure a cultural exchange between participating countries’ televisions through a joint broadcast, the Eurovision Song Contest also aimed to bring post-war Western European countries together around music.²⁰

Stating that Europe has entered into a process of restructuring itself after the World War II, Ivan Raykoff notes that post-war Europe which was characterized by modernism was idealized as democratic, capitalist, peaceful, multi-cultural, sexually liberated and technologically developed. According to Raykoff, for most of the participating countries, ESC is qualified as an area which represents their relations with that Europe vision. Indeed, after collapse of Soviet Union, this situation gained a more distinctive sight. By the inclusion of East European states which gained their independence, the Eurovision stage has almost transformed into a showcase where countries use to promote themselves. Administered by socialist regime for long years, the East European countries started to give hints on the ideological attitude which they will adopt and the vision they will follow through the Eurovision stage.

18 Sevilay Çelenk, *Televizyon Temsil Kültür*, Ütopya Yayınevi, Ankara 2005, p.81

19 Sevilay Çelenk, a.g.e., p.16

20 Ivan Raykoff, Robert Tobin, “Introduction”, *A Song For Europe*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, London 2007, p. xvii

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For these countries, the contest has become an area where an international public relations campaign and promotion activities are held. Indeed, today, even participating in the contest which carries a symbolic meaning as the representation of Western modern identity and values, has been per se an indicator of political and cultural values of the participating countries. When the results of the expansion after 1990s started to influence the contest with East European countries winning the contest in tandem, the balances in the event were spoiled. Organizing the event, the Western countries changed the voting system first, and they even proposed holding two different Eurovisions for the West and the East.

As of the year the ESC was first held, debates continued in Turkey as well as the other broadcasting countries with the allegations that the contest is not actually a song contest, and elements other than music such as politics, power relations, geographical proximity and neighbourhood relations are also involved. Leaving aside whether the allegations in this debate are true or not, what should be asked is that "if it is possible to have music only in a contest where music is in the centre." Because the music has meanings beyond being an aesthetic experience. Although it is seen as a natural phenomenon which exists by itself, the music inherent in the culture is filled with human values and feelings. As put forward by Adorno in his works on music, the music gains objectivity at the level of a developed hypothesis only in relation with categories such as social life, functions of dominant culture, and operation of sub-culture²¹ Consequently, the music should be perceived not as an individual production and consumption, but as a mediation relation inherent in the social.²²

Music is a cultural phenomenon shared by a certain group or, in Anderson's words, a "community" and carries symbols and hints about the identity, culture, and behavioural patterns of the community which shared that music. Music plays a significant symbolic role in building, acknowledging and consolidating the cultural identity of societies, and currently accepted popular music pieces form a depot of source and meaning to reveal existing social conditions.²³

The music is a field suitable to reveal elements concerning the identity of a community and by an inverse reading, it is also very practical element to create a joint culture and identity by bringing different masses together. When marches are considered as an extension of policies to strengthen the nation-

21 Ünsal Oskay, *XIX. Yüzyıldan Günümüze Kitle İletişimin Kültürel İşlevleri*, Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, Ankara 1982, pp.55-56

22 Vefa Saygın Öğütle- Hüseyin Etil, "Bir Geçiş Döneminde Müziğin Kalp Çarpıntıları", *Doğu Batı Dergisi*, 15/62, 2012, pp.96-97

23 Ayhan Erol, *Popüler Müziği Anlamak*, Bağlam Yayıncılık, Ankara 2009, pp. 105-228

state organisation which emerged in 19th century, it is seen that it is used to serve an ideological function; that is, the construction of a nation. In this period where symbolism, ceremonialism, and feelings on the flag and the nation gained extraordinary importance, the music also gained a socio-political meaning corresponding to nationalism as a manifestation of the national feeling; and in the “imaginary communities” that were created, the sense of unity and cohesion felt by people who did not know each other as they were singing the national march simultaneously has played an important role in creating the nation-state which in fact is a fictionalized entity.²⁴ Consequently, the music is clearly a highly important area of activity for nation-states.²⁵

When it is taken into consideration that Eurovision is a contest based on competition by the nation-states, the framework and justifications of “cultural struggle” become more meaningful. Beyond being an ordinary television programme, the Eurovision includes elements which “stimulate national consciousness”. The basic reason for the contest to stimulate national consciousness is that the subjects of the contest are not individuals, but countries. In other words, the main competitors of this contest are in fact countries themselves as it is the case in a national football or basketball game. When this is the case, the winner or the loser is not the contestant, but the country he/she represents. In this respect, the ESC in fact assessed as a ground where national identities compete.

One of the most important reasons why the contest has become a “cultural struggle” for Turkey is that the national identity represented here is already in a competition with the Western nations which is the ideal of the Republic of Turkey since its establishment. Rather than the contest, the rival contestants should be underlined in order to understand Turkey’s position in the race. Through this dimension, the contest gains a different meaning in national public opinion and is assessed as an arena of struggle against the Western nations.

This work asserts that Eurovision bears meanings beyond being a contest for Turkey and an effort to analyse the contest will contribute to bringing a meaning to cultural dimension of Turkey’s modernisation process. Analysis of the contest covers the selected articles from Zaman, Milliyet and Cumhuriyet Newspapers.

Eurovision as a Field of Cultural Struggle

Turkish identity has established a contradictory and tense relation with the West as the criterion of a contemporary and civilized culture and the West

24 Süreyya Su, “Türkiye’de Batılılaşma Sürecinin Bir Tezahürü Olarak Müzikte Kimlik Sorunu”, Toplum Bilim Dergisi, 2001/12, p.58

25 Ayhan Erol, a.g.e., p.247

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which is referred as “the other” culturally and politically and even as an “enemy” during the period of national struggle. This contradiction reveals itself very clearly in debates concerning ESC. As the political struggle of Turkey with Europe continues with the process Turkey’s accession to the European Union, its cultural struggle also continues through the ESC. The ground for the struggle with the West is not the battlefields any more, but the cultural field.

“We have a tradition:

-Sir! Why did we take part although we knew that we would be the last, etc.?

In my opinion, we must absolutely take part in such civil and cultural events to the expense of even being the last.

... But there is a point, which is our fault which we cannot overcome...

- We are not humane. We are not sociable. We cringe like a hedgehog and fell into a complex of mostly not speaking their language. Tear apart this meaningless shroud. Rise, boys and girls, rise. The difference between you and your addressee was limited to your being not self-confident and forward. And it is easy to overcome it.

I would like to congratulate in advance the Turkish melody which will be included in the 10 contestants next year and congratulate and appreciate Semiha, our contestant this year, as the first “*fedai*” (warrior) of this culture war.”²⁶

In the quoted column, a very striking description is made for Eurovision and Semiha Yankı, the first representative of Turkey. Eurovision is called as a “culture war” and Yankı is heroised as a “warrior” of this battle. Even if the result is a failure, Yankı has shown the courage to “take on the war” and deserved praise. The using of the word “*fedai*” which is described as “*a person who does not hesitate to sacrifice his/her life by engaging in dangerous affairs for an ideal*” by the dictionary of Turkish Language Institution, is very striking with regard to indicating the level of Turkey’s approach to the contest in that period. Indeed, there are also directives in the text which will feed the fighter spirit such as “tear apart”, and “rise”. One of the remarkably prominent themes in news stories concerning Eurovision is the “militarist discourse” which is used distinctively.

Such discourse is frequently used in international events, and especially in sports competitions. Before and after games played with European teams, national press uses a rather harsh nationalist and militarist discourse. Adaptation of concepts that belong to military terminology such as “conquest”, “invasion” and “siege” to civilian life, turning them into a part of popular discourse is another topic for discussion which should be dealt with in the axis of culture. The assessments by Altınay and Bora who search the traces and development of this discourse in the cultural history draw an elucidating framework.

Underlining that there is “army-nation myth” on the basis of Turkish nationalism, Altınay and Bora note that historically, Turks’ most distinctive peculiarity are their being good soldiers and identifying themselves with the army. Drawing attention that the military service is “an extension of culture, not defence, army, or state organisation in general” Altınay and Bora state that this situation causes a discursive shift and thus ruptures “the relation between military and war.”²⁷ Pointing out that, thanks to this rupture, military terms, symbols and forms of relation have become determining elements of citizenship, identities and daily life, Altınay and Bora continue as follows;

“As of the national struggle, the army has played an important role in popular reproduction of Turkish nationalism. War and national campaign atmosphere, consequently, the military practice gained importance in the process of transferring Islamic belonging and references to the new national state’s intellectual spiritual system. The holiness of “jihad” and “martyrdom” is confined to the “homeland defence” and “national freedom” target in this practice, and the occasions for collective enthusiasm, excitement and losses, and the occasions for mourning have emerged through this practice, and they were aestheticized by functioning of this practice.”²⁸

In Turkey where borders concerning perception of nationalism and militarism are obscured and intertwined in cultural dimension, ESC is experienced as a state of “national mobilisation” as it is precisely expressed above. The contest is defined as a “national case”, the contestants are “warriors”, successes are “victory” and failures are “defeat” and this form of expression encodes the contest in the minds as a “war that has to be won”. This war reveals geographical East-West, Christian-Muslim antagonisms, and the antagonism of Turkish identity with the West both as an ideal of civilisation and as the other, reproducing Turkey’s central concerns in the axis of identity. The result is that the discourse feeding the warrior spirit which gain weight in national press and news stories about the contest serves a kind of rehabilitation.

“Eurovision....

I think I am not a much civilized person. I cannot digest “0” point given to our “operator” in that of the Eurovision.

.. I suggest that Barış Manço should join this rat race for once. With his forelock hair over his shoulders, massive rings, shiny belt buckles, vest, caftan, cloak, boots, gestures and all his might. If we cannot get a point then, we should stop chasing

27 Aşge Gül Altınay-Tanıl Bora, “Ordu, Militarizm ve Milliyetçilik”, *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce*, v.4, 2002, p.141

28 Aşge Gül Altınay-Tanıl Bora, a.g.e., pp.146-147

this contest completely. I personally will not watch this Crusade any more. Such Turkish enmity in fine arts is both meaningless and ugly.”²⁹

Describing the contest directly as a “Crusade”, the author also defines the feeling for failure as “indigestion”. This feeling does not stem from the contest alone, but the reanimation of extensions of a historical positioning and accumulation through Eurovision.

“Our daughter Ajda Pekkan represented us rather well with all her beauty, ability and song which is really pleasant for us. But we could only take the 15th place with 12 points given by an appreciating Moroccan jury.

.. As you know, we have sieged Vienna twice but failed to conquer it. What should be done? We must not lose heart.

.. When the time comes, we should not shy away from snubbing our Western friends who recklessly speak and write about us.”³⁰

One of the most important historical milestones that leaves traces in Turkish nationalism is the sieges of Vienna during the Ottoman period. Sieged twice, but could not be conquered, Vienna has a symbolic meaning in the collective memory of Turkish nationalism. Imprinted in memories as the beginning of the path leading to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire which started to decline after the second siege, the Vienna siege is the “unforgettable defeat of the glorious Ottoman history”. Efforts are exerted to complete this unfinished conquest by using the phrase “the gates of Vienna” which is a common discourse in popular language in various forms, and references are made to the phrase again and again in topics related with Europe. Continuously keeping this “defeat” alive leads to considering Eurovision as an occasion to “snub Western friends”. This approach is so internalized that Turkish singer of the “Sürpriz” group which was qualified to represent Germany in 1999 said “we will make the eyes in the world turn on Turks in Germany. We have slapped at the German state which does not recognize our double citizenship rights”³¹ and also taking part in European Athletics Championship after Turkey became the last with “0” point in 1987, a national athlete said, “The zero point received in Eurovision incited me. . . I was devastated when I was watching Eurovision the night before. . . and with the start, I took the first place, imprinting the name Turk in the minds of those who did not give us even a single point in Eurovision and spoil art with politics. Because 25 countries were broadcasting the marathon live, the camera had to shoot me and the commentator had to repeat my name and the name of my country”. The athlete’s statement was

29 Milliyet Newspaper, 27 April 1983

30 Burhan Felek, Milliyet Newspaper, 24 April 1980

31 Milliyet Newspaper, 18 March 1999

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covered in the press as follows: “as our national athlete himself states, he had given the best lesson to Eurovision which is an extension of political games played in Europe”.³²

The expressions “giving a lesson”, “snubbing”, “slapping” and many similar discourse also received criticism on grounds that the contest is really perceived as a “war” and leads to a “hysterical” state.

“Anymore we can call this event not Eurovision contest, but ‘Eurovision hysteria’. And this contest has turned into a hysteria only in Turkey. Perception of a contest with no musical importance which nobody pays attention to in the West as a ‘war of independence’ by us is humiliating”.³³

The contest having a spirit of war was commented by contestants in various ways.

“For us, it was a task which we proudly accepted and fulfilled because it was an opportunity to pay our debt to our country, to fulfil our task for our country. Firstly, we thank to TRT for making us proud. We are content with them, and we hope that they are content with us, and with our performance during fulfilment of this task”³⁴(Yüksek Sadakat Group)

“It is magnificent and making me proud to represent Turkey in a very important contest like Eurovision”³⁵ (Can Bonomo)

As exemplified above, some contestants described the Eurovision as a case of “pride and honour” supplementing the “national cause” perception in Turkey, and others passed through a rather difficult and exhausting period under the heavy burden of country-wide expectations.

“Çetin Alp and his group who will represent Eurovision Song Contest in Germany, asked protection from Istanbul Chief Prosecutor’s Office for all team members because of the assault on Buğra Uğur, the composer of the song “Opera” and threats to Çetin Alp. Prosecutor’s Office considered the request as proper and allowed for protection”³⁶

Asking for protection in 1983, one of the years where Eurovision was fiercely debated, because of the threats he received, Çetin Alp faced very harsh criticism, leading other singers to keep themselves at a distance from

32 Milliyet Newspaper, 13 May 1987

33 Zülfü Livaneli, Cumhuriyet Newspaper, 17 March 1986

34 Zaman Newspaper, 15 May 2011

35 Zaman Newspaper, 13 January 2012

36 Milliyet Newspaper, 11 April 1983

the Eurovision contest. Answering a question whether he will take part in Eurovision if he is offered to, opera singer Hakan Aysev said, "Çetin Alp has taken part in it earlier. People said anything to criticise him because he failed to win the contest and killed him of a broken heart. His carrier ended after Eurovision. That's why, I do not want to fall into a similar situation."³⁷ The news stories about Hadise who joined the contest in 2009 provide striking samples showing how contestants are affected from this atmosphere;

"I was very ugly and I was very scared. Doctor gave me a treatment with very heavy antibiotic injections. Looking at the doctor in the eye, I begged that all these should be overcome by 12th of the month."³⁸

"Hadise said, 'I made a vow 'I will provide education for a child if my nose is healed' and I will keep my promise when I return to Belgium', noting that she used high doses of medicine and her nose was healed. Our Eurovision finalist also said she saw Hannibal abducting her and she shouted 'I have to catch the Eurovision' in her dream."³⁹

Taking into consideration the contest like a "war" by the public opinion means that the singers who will take part in the contest will either be a "hero" or a "traitor". For the contestants who are aware of the fact that they have to meet a great, country-wide expectation, this situation caused Eurovision process to be another state of "war" psychologically. This situation is accepted both by the contestants, the press and the society and has become an extremely ordinary and common discourse in daily life.

By fictionalizing the military service as a cultural aspect, intertwining of military and civilian areas is normalized beyond discursive borders of Turkish nationalism; and concepts such as "national interest", "national target", "national power", and "national strategy" were mentioned as a self-evident and transcendent source of legitimacy.⁴⁰ Eurovision Song Contest with the tag "national cause" has been a strong event helping reproduction of this discourse from the moment it was included in Turkey's agenda.

One of the areas of struggle which comes to the fore in the cultural field within the contest has been the language. The language has led to differences of opinion as of the first years of the contest, and views were put forward alleging that participating in the contest with a song in Turkish has significant share in the failures.

37 Zaman Newspaper, 14 May 2011

38 Zaman Newspaper, 13 May 2009

39 Zaman Newspaper, 16 May 2009

40 Ayşe Gül Altınay-Tanıl Bora, a.g.e., pp.144-148

“The result showed that some incontestable things have not changed. The fate of the songs other than English, French and German is presumably this [failure]. The regulations of the Eurovision should be changed. Either we will not take part in such contests or we will take part by making these changes. Otherwise, the result will always be this way”⁴¹ (Ajda Pekkan)

Above, Ajda Pekkan pointed out at the language of the song as the reason of her failure and said no result could be taken from the contest with songs in Turkish in a statement she made after the contest which she attended with great expectations. Similar debates occurred in every contest period, but the real debate occurred after the administrators of the contest annulled the rule which “obligated participating in the contest in mother tongue”. Earlier, although briefly, the countries were allowed to participate with songs in languages they preferred, but this permission was short-lived and it was decided that the countries should participate in the contest by songs in their “national languages”. This rule was abolished in 1999 and the contestant countries were allowed to participate with the song in the language they preferred. Following the change in the rules of the contest, many countries decided to take part with songs in English, leading to serious debates for a contest where national identity is represented.

“Turkey will take part in the Eurovision Song Contest with a song in a language other than its official language for the first time in May in Lithuania. AK Party Samsun Lawmaker and Member of Parliament Speaker’s Office Suat Kılıç, asked a written question to State Minister Beşir Atalay who is responsible from TRT to be answered in written at the parliament: “Is it true that Turkey will be represented by a song in English in this contest? If it is true, why English is preferred over Turkish? Is it thought that a song in English will represent Turkish culture better?”⁴²

Deciding to participate with a song in English in 2003 for the first time, TRT authorities sparked a debate which will continue for years in the national public opinion much before the contest started. Without an election process, TRT authorities offered Sertab Erener to represent Turkey, approving her condition to join the contest with a song “in English”. The decision by TRT authorities drew reactions and the issue was even brought to the parliament but Erener did not step back.

“Responding to those who were critical of the song in English, Sertab Erener said, ‘it is now time to get united, not to react.

41 Milliyet Newspaper, 21 April 1980

42 Zaman Newspaper, 18 April 2003

Everything should be played according to rules. The result Turkey has received in the contest which it took part for 25 years is obvious'. The singer has a request from the Turkish public opinion: 'I definitely do not regard taking part in the contest with a song in English as result of an [inferiority] complex. It is a more visionary work. Instead of looking at the lyrics and video clip of the song alone, we should see the picture as a whole. We have to think why we are there. People go there to win.'" 43

"National-conservative" groups criticized the decision to represent the Turkish national identity by a song in English while some others thought that Turkey's chance for success increased by the decision. A song in English which was thought not to represent Turkey would mean representation of Turkey as "something else" other than itself. This debate over being itself and not, in fact, constitutes another aspect of the debate on modernity. Abandoning own values, authenticities, music, and even own language in the point that was reached, caused discomfort in the public opinion. Prof. Dr. Şükrü Haluk Akalın, the then-president of the Turkish Language Institution expressed concern, "representation of our country by a song in English in Eurovision Song Contest is extremely wrong, saddening and worrisome." 44 Noting that his views had not changed after Turkey won the first place in the contest, Akalın said his concerns continue: "Representation of our country in an international composition contest will lead to new forms of alienation in the language and every field of our lives." 44

Following the first place won in the contest with a song in English, authorities continued to prefer songs in English, deepening the debate in the public opinion.

"The group called Athena will represent Turkey this year. In the audition made by the initiative of TRT, another song in English (For Real) was deemed worthy of representing [Turkey]. *Tebrikler*; that is, Congratulations! *Çok happy olduk* [We felt very happy]; Turkey'in tek official broadcasting kuruluşu mevkiindeki *Ti-Ar-Tii'ye bu zorlu temsil missionunda very very başarılar dileriz..* [We wish very much success to the TRT which is Turkey's only official broadcasting institution in fulfilling this very tough representation mission]. Sir, I think you are probably rather ashamed of our poor Turkish; Let's talk about TRT: the TRT authorities have a sound mentality: We have lagged behind for years; and last year we became the first by a song in English; they are thinking by a motto that winning team should not be changed. 'This is a pop music contest, and young people in the World listen to pop music in

43 Zaman Newspaper, 3 May 2003

44 Zaman Newspaper, 26 May 2003

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English; if what counts is to promote Turkey, we should act this way' is also an excuse in reserve. But I do not want to be recognized that way, for instance; Does that of my personal desire count for something in your eyes?"⁴⁵

After the rule of the contest was changed, letting the contestant to join the contest with the language that they would prefer to, the "language issue" has taken into account by the organizers of the contest because the change was carrying political and ideological meanings that were much beyond being a simple amendment.

European Broadcasting Union which was established in 1950 and organized the contest since 1956, is an institution which is directly related with the European identity policy.⁴⁶ One of the primary goals of the Broadcasting Union is to make simultaneous broadcasts and keep different countries together through the broadcasts, unite them, and create a common culture.⁴⁷ With this goal, many trial broadcasts, sports competitions, several competitions were held, but the most important event of the Broadcasting Union has been the ESC which was first organized in 1956. One of the acknowledgements which was revealed distinctively by the contest is the necessity of culture in construction of a European identity. In the "Green Book"^{48**} which was published in 1984 in relation with formation of a "common broadcast market", this necessity is mentioned as follows: "Information is one of the vital factors, and even the most vital factor for the European Union... The European Union will come true only if Europeans want it. And Europeans will want it only if something called European identity will exist and such an identity can be developed only if Europeans are furnished with information at sufficient and equal level. Yet recently, information can be controlled only at 'national level' through mass media tools."⁴⁹ In order to overcome it, ensuring free circulation of European television programmes in the internal markets and increasing production and distribution of European visual-audial programmes were targeted. Joint productions were increased but the main problem for these broadcasts to serve the final target was stated as the "language problem". In the end, TV spectators preferred to watch broadcasts in their own languages. Authorities tried to solve the problem in many ways, presented subtitle options, and tried simultaneous translation option in the ESC. However, these options led the communication between the viewer and the programme to

45 Turan Alkan, Zaman Newspaper, 31 January 2004

46 Jerome Bourdon, "Unhappy Engineers of The European Soul", *The International Communication Gazette*, 69/3, 2007, p. 265

47 Jerome Bourdon, a.g.e., p.265

48 ** Principal texts produced to stimulate discussion on certain topics by the European Commission at the level of Member States of the European Union and ensure production of ideas by all parties to mature the topic.

49 Jerome Bourdon, a.g.e., p.268

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lose its transparency, ceasing the event to be an entertainment by transforming it into a transmission reported by a foreigner. And this led to interruption of instantaneity, which is the most important peculiarity of the television, bringing a distance between the viewer and the object he watches, decreasing the satisfaction of viewers to insufficient levels.⁵⁰ Not being able to broadcast over a common language constituted a significant obstacle before the formation of European identity.

If the change in the rules of the ESC is assessed in this perspective, the “debate over language” in national public opinion gains a different dimension. The language has a symbolical meaning as one of the most important elements of identity. And taking a decision to participate in the contest in a language other than its own, authorities have created concern over identity and traditional culture in Turkey.

“Kenan Doğulu who will represent Turkey in 57th Eurovision Song Contest was criticised by his words ‘It is an old-fashioned thought to have a song in Turkish. English is important because it addresses more people. The song should include a few foreign catchy words which foreigners can easily understand and sing’ as he was describing the song he will compose.”⁵¹

Turkey joined the contest with an English song six times after Sertab Erener won the first place with a song in English. A part of the public had the opinion that a song in English had a big impact on the success because it was catchier for the European viewers and allowed them to understand the song easier. This perception was not shared by all sections of the society and a strong public opinion emerged which thought that Turkey should be represented by its official language in a platform where national identity was represented. In this polarisation, defending songs in Turkish was assessed as “die-hardism”, fuelling the debate.

“..A statement by the TDK urged Doğulu to apologize and said, ‘He should sing in Chinese. It will address even more people’. ‘Doğulu should apologize firstly from his mother from whom he learned this language, then from our singers and composers who create best examples of Turkish in popular music and then from all our nation,’ said the statement. ‘If English language was that miraculous, the UK would not have become last with its song in English in the year where Sertab Erener won the contest by her song in English. ..We expect him to apologize from Turkish nation and his mother who speak this language.’”⁵²

50 Jerome Bourdon, a.g.e., p.274

51 Zaman Newspaper, 21 December 2006

52 Zaman Newspaper, 28 December 2006

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Considering the song in English as a “threat” led the debate over the contest go beyond verbal arguments. For example, Adana province representation of the Turkish Public Workers’ Union launched a “Speak Turkish if You Are a Turk” campaign to ensure Kenan Doğulu who will represent Turkey in the Eurovision Song Contest to sing in Turkish and it made a statement before the TRT Çukurova Regional Headquarters that Kenan Doğulu’s words ‘singing the song in Turkish is an old-fashioned thought’ were unfortunate and saddened the Turkish nation.⁵³

The concerns over language can be seen not only in Turkish public opinion, but also in international public opinion.

“Not being able to win the contest since 1977, the French who are known with their commitment to their language tried their chance by a song with lyrics mostly in English, creating a heated debate in the country. Ruling UMP Party lawmaker Gonnat brought the issue to the parliament.

... The event garnered extensive space in English press, and The Times defended the view that the French decision means a ‘victory of English’⁵⁴.

The above news item with the headline “France’s Eurovision defeat” is one of the news articles which clearly reveal that the ESC is completely a cultural struggle. When “language”, one of the most important elements that form and shape the culture, was left behind by the French, it was assessed by the British as victory, and a cultural defeat by the French.

In a contest platform where national identities are represented, presentation by a language other than its own constitutes a problem in countries which did not lose their sensitivities over their traditions. This contradiction which can be expressed as reaching larger masses by a song in English or addressing a more confined mass in its own language, is an outlook of Turkey’s relation which it established with modernity; and it is one of the titles which Eurovision keeps alive the gap which does not (cannot) be closed between tradition and modernity.

Conclusion

Ceasing to be an aesthetic criterion but being perceived as a life-style, the culture has gained meaning as part of power relations and an area where power struggles continue in different forms. What is reflected from the cultural aspect of the struggle has revealed that culture analyses are a notable field of research. Underlining that especially popular culture has indicators of power

53 Zaman Newspaper, 12 January 2007

54 Cumhuriyet Newspaper, 17 April 2008

relations, Fiske suggests that the popular culture always bears traces of the social system, and consequently of the powers which are in the centre of social experience and which take under hegemony and subordinate, and shows indicators of resistance to and getting rid of these powers.⁵⁵

Being a significant field of the political struggle, the culture has mostly remained behind economic, commercial, industrial, military and diplomatic analyses for studies concerning European international society, and has not seen required interest in analysis of hegemonic relations.⁵⁶ However, a study on culture which is impossible to be taken into account independently from politics provides important perspective on how existing structures operate in the background. Although Eurovision Song Contest seems to be a fair international contest based on equal opportunity principle, it is a TV programme that reveals structure of hegemonic relations in the European society. Being far from official discourse, predominantly having a nature based on joy and allowing a more transparent discourse developed by means of the humorous elements that popular culture nature has, give a chance to reveal all the emotions and feelings regarding the debates on contest, in a natural, unfiltered and uncensored manner. All the emotional instabilities, contradictions and conflicts experienced through the contest become visible and meaningful within its context.

This study regards Eurovision Song Contest as a projection of Turkey's modernisation adventure in the field of popular culture which should be attached much importance. As shown above the debates in Turkish national print media regarding the ESC reveals the way identity is attached to culture and thus cultural preferences identify the identity.

Eurovision is on the one hand a basis on which the Republic of Turkey can legitimize its ideal that it has modern Western identity and on the other hand is a ground which distances itself from its national identity and traditional culture. Since every modernisation effort is a struggle between being like what is taken as a model and being like itself, Turkish modernisation corresponds to a dialectic between being subject and resistance to the West.⁵⁷ ESC clearly demonstrates this dialectic, difficulty and the paradox of taking a side. ESC challenges popular notions of what it means to be "European" even geographically and/or culturally for Turkey.⁵⁸ As Jones and Subotic argued ESC

55 John Fiske, a.g.e., p.15

56 God Yair- D.Maman, "The Persistent Structure of Hegemony in the Eurovision Song Contest", *Acta Sociologica*, v39, 1996, p.310

57 Besim Dellaloğlu, *Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar- Modernleşmenin Zihniyet Dünyası*, Kapı Yayınları, İstanbul 2012, pp.164,165

58 Miyase Christensen-Christian Christensen "The After-Life of Eurovision 2003: Turkish and European Social Imaginaries and Ephemeral Communicative Space", *Popular Communication*, v.6/3, 2008, p.155

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is the site of a remarkable 'hidden transcript' of European fantasy, identity contestation and profound ontological insecurity on the European periphery which makes it worthy of serious academic treatment.⁵⁹

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