The Battle of Eurovision

A case study of Russia and Ukraine's use of the Eurovision
Song Contest as a cultural battlefield

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Abstract

 This study aims to explore and analyze how Eurovision Song Contest functioned as an alternative – cultural – battlefield in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict over Crimea. With the use of soft power politics in warfare as the root of interest, this study uses the theories of cultural diplomacy and visual international relations to explore how images may be central to modern-day warfare and conflicts as the perception of. The study has a theory-building approach and aims to build on the concept of cultural diplomacy in order to explain how the images sent out by states can be politized and used to conduct cultural warfare. To explore how Russia and Ukraine used Eurovision Song Contest as a cultural battlefield this study uses the methodological framework of a qualitative case study with the empirical data being Ukraine's and Russia's Eurovision Song Contest performances in 2016 and 2017, respectively, which was analyzed using Roland Barthes' method of image analysis. The main finding of the study was that both Russia and Ukraine used ESC as a cultural battlefield on which they used their performances to alter the perception of themselves and the other by instrumentalizing culture for political gain.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, visual IR, Eurovision Song Contest, Crimea
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1   Introduction

"Every age has its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconception" – Carl von Clausewitz

Ukraine's 2016 Eurovision Song Contest (hereinafter ESC) entry '1944' garnered much attention in media and academia alike. The entry was seen as controversial due to the song's perceived political message, which depicted the mass deportation of Crimean Tatars from the Crimean Peninsula to Central Asia by the Soviet Union. The entry was performed by Jamala, a Ukrainian Crimean Tatar born in Kirgizstan to a family that lost members during the deportation in 1944.

Many saw the Ukrainian entry as criticism towards Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, as a continuation of the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Russia – which finds ESC important for creating its international image – asked for the entry to be disqualified due to its political content, arguing that the entry was an attempt to defame its image due to Crimea's policies and the ensuing conflict with Ukraine. Russia did this referring to ESC's strict rules regarding the contest being a non-political event (Holmström 2016; Eurovision 2020d; Vuletic 2018, p. 310). The European Broadcasting Union (hereinafter EBU) did, however, conclude that the entry did not breach the contest's rules as they saw that the entry did not have an explicit political message but rather depicted a historical event.

Ukraine went on to win the contest, which led many ESC observers to assume Russia would boycott the 2017 contest in Kiev. Instead, Russia sent entry' Flame is Burning' performed by singer Julia Samoylova. Soon after that, news emerged that Samoylova would not be granted a Ukrainian visa as she, according to Ukraine, had entered the annexed Crimea illegally to perform in 2015. The decision garnered much criticism from other states taking part in the contest as they saw this as a further politicization of the contest. Samoylova being a wheelchair user and the theme of the 2017 contest being 'Celebrate Diversity,' caused even more criticism towards Ukraine. Some scholars and journalists argued that Russia knew that

Samoylova would not be granted a Ukrainian visa and that Russia used her as a political tool (Shekhovtsov 2017). After Russia declined EBU's offers to perform via satellite or send another entry, EBU released a statement saying that Russia would not be allowed to compete in that years' competition. The Russian state broadcaster Russia-1 later refused to air the contest and instead only aired Samoylova's performance from Moscow (Kazakov – Hutchings 2019, pp. 137-138). In this way, the contest functioned as an arena for soft power politics in the conflict, or more specifically, cultural diplomacy between Ukraine and Russia. With the ESC functioning as a safe arena, the entries were able to fight a political and cultural battle that was contained by the rules and regulations of the contest. A fight which in the world of inter-state politics may not have been possible due to the asymmetric power balance between Russia and Ukraine (Carniel 2019, chapter 8; Kalman – Wellings 2019, chapter 1; Marcus 2014).

ESC creates a level battlefield where the two states have equal opportunity to influence how their state, or their opponent, is perceived by hundreds of millions of viewers. The former director of the television department of EBU Jørgen Franck explains this by describing the ESC as a battlefield for cultural diplomacy where all states, no matter their size or perceived power, can allow themselves to be patriotic and criticize other states. Franck argues that if Europe did not have the battlefield of ESC where conflicts can be fought through soft power, the continent would have more battles using hard power methods (Pavlyshyn 2019, chapter 7).

1.1 Purpose and research question

As stated by Clausewitz in the quote in section 1, every age has its own kind of war, and as we live in a world increasingly dominated by visual culture where images shape international events and how they are perceived, I would argue that that the war of images has become at one of the defining ways of waging wars in our age. To discuss how states – or in this case, Russia and Ukraine – have used ESC as an arena for cultural diplomacy, one needs to build on the concept of cultural diplomacy to include a visual aspect. By adding a visual aspect to cultural diplomacy, one can analyze how the images sent out by states can be politized and used to conduct cultural warfare. Scholars focusing on image analysis argue that it

is people's perception of images that give images meaning. Therefore, war can be waged with images and culture through the meaning people attribute images (Bleiker 2018, Introduction). Analyzing the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the context of ESC is interesting as it highlights the complexity of modern conflicts where the dynamics of an asymmetric conflict can change by the conflict being fought on an unconventional battlefield. With this thesis, I aim to analyze how Russia and Ukraine through images – their entries in ESC – highlighted parts of their cultures and national identities that they thought would benefit the perception of them, or hurt the perception of the other, and through that, gain an advantage in the Crimean conflict. The thesis hence aims to answer the following question:

How has the Eurovision Song Contest functioned as an arena for cultural diplomacy in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine?

1.2   Background

To analyze Russia and Ukraine's use of ESC as a cultural battlefield, one must first understand how the conflict between the states came to be and the history and function of ESC. The following sections will, therefore, give a brief history of the Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and ESC as well as a brief summary of previous research on ESC and cultural diplomacy in order to highlight how this study will contribute to research on the topic.

1.2.1   Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

The Crimean Peninsula has, over the centuries, been colonized or annexed by the Greeks, the Romans, the Mongols, the Ottomans and most prominently, the Russians. The Russians first annexed Crimea in 1783 and the peninsula stayed as a part of Russia and later the Soviet Union until 1954 when it became part of Ukraine. While most sources state that the Crimea Tatars were being treated better under

Ukrainian rule than under Russian rule, they are generally not perceived to have the same status as ethnic Ukrainians (Sadovskaya – Pfeilschifter 2020). The Crimean Tatars – the predominately Sunni-Islam Turkic-language indigenous people of the peninsula – were for many centuries the majority population of the peninsula. After the first Russian annexation, more ethnic Russians were moved in and Crimean Tatars were forcibly removed to other parts of the Soviet Union. The most notable example of this being in 1944 (section 1.1) when the entire Crimean Tatar population of Crimea was exiled to Central Asia. The Soviet regime described the move as a humanitarian settlement as the Crimea Tatars were brought to live by other Turkic-language Muslim populations. However, the Crimea Tatars describe the resettlement as a genocide with approximately only one-third of the Crimean Tatars surviving the journey (Kozelsky 2018, pp. 2-5).

The current Russian-Ukrainian conflict over Crimea began in 2013 when protests broke out in Kiev due to pro-Russia Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych rejecting a deal for greater economic integration with the European Union. Violent crackdowns by state security forces led to an escalation of the conflict and the president fleeing the country in February 2014. The political instability sparked a political crisis in the already divided Crimea with pro-Russia separatists backed by the Kremlin seizing control of the peninsula. In March 2017, Russia formally annexed Crimea following a highly contested local referendum deemed illegal by Ukraine and the majority of Europe. Vladimir Putin cited the need to protect Russian citizens and Russian speakers in Crimea and argued that the annexation was legal. The annexation was heavily condemned by the EU and the United States – among others – with sanctions later being imposed on Russia. The conflict spread to other parts of southeastern Ukraine and is, as of the writing of this thesis (May 2020), still active (BBC 2018; CFR; BBC 2014).

1.2.2 Eurovision Song Contest

In a 1950s post-war Europe, EBU set up a committee tasked with finding ways to bring Europe together. The result was ESC, a competition meant "to encourage the creation of original songs and to stimulate, using an international competition, a spirit of friendly rivalry between writers and composers" and unify a continent

divided after several wars (Kalman - Wellings 2019, chapter 1). The first competition was held in Switzerland in 1956, had seven participating countries and was primarily a radio show. The 65th edition of the competition, which was to be held in The Netherlands, planned to have forty-one participating countries and would broadcast to around 200 million viewers (Eurovision 2020b; Eurovision 2020c). Despite the contest being one of the longest-running and most-watched television events worldwide and drawing more viewers than the UEFA Champions League final 2018 and the elections to the European Parliament 2014, the competition has long been viewed as mindless entertainment and an object of popular satire in media and academia. However, during the 2000s and 2010s the political importance of ESC, as discussed in section 1.1, has come to be seen as an important aspect of the creation and maintenance of a common European identity and European integration as a whole (Vuletic 2018, pp. 303-304; Kalman – Wellings 2019, chapter 1). The states' national broadcasting organizations choose the entries through internal or national selections. The artists or groups appear under the state they represent name rather than their own, creating an association between the entry and the state rather than the entry and the people performing it. The winner of ESC is decided through televoting and professional juries in each state, with the groups deciding 50 percent of the vote each. Unexpectantly good or bad results are analyzed in international media and are often equated to the image of the states (Vuletic 2018, pp. 303, 305).

1.3 Previous research

Research on cultural diplomacy has become more popular in recent decades, with it receiving increased interest in the information age. Cultural diplomacy has also been discussed in connection to ESC by several scholars, especially as more and more states have joined the competition (Saliu 2017, p. 87). Much of this earlier research has however focused on the competition being used in order to better the image of the states with scholars discussing terms such as national representation and nation branding. This has been done through promoting issues such as

LGBTQ+ rights and respect for cultural diversity in order to enhance the image of one's state (Xie 2015, p. 1; Ismayilov 2012, pp. 883-884). Lauren Wilken, for example, describes how ESC has functioned as a stage on which states on the European periphery have been able to communicate their norms, ideas and values (Wilken 2019, p. 171). Shannon Jones and Jelena Subotic have a similar argument concerning the competition being used for nation branding, but also argue that the states on the European periphery use the competition to "[…] express their fantasies of power and equality within the [European] international system "(Jones – Subotic 2011, p. 543). Zrinka Borić and Ana Radović Kapor discuss Ukraine's use of ESC as an arena for cultural diplomacy in 2016 and the contest's politicization as a whole. Borić and Radović Kapor's article does, however, focus on the reactions to Ukraine's entry – through analyzing quotes from newspapers and interviews – as well as how it politicized the contest and the consequences of that politicization rather than how Ukraine and Russia employed cultural diplomacy through their actual performances (Borić – Radović Kapor 2017, pp. 236-237).

These studies have contributed to the expansion of cultural diplomacy as a theory and given important insights into how cultural diplomacy can be applied to non-state actors and in non-formal settings. What could be argued to be missing in the field is how the visual plays a part in states' cultural diplomacy as well as what part it plays. All the above-mentioned works argue that states used ESC to send out the preferred self-image of themselves. However, none of them analyze the actual visual images, i.e., the pictures or videos, or what they could be meant to represent. Therefore, I believe that a study utilizing image analysis will be a meaningful contribution to the field of cultural diplomacy.

2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework outlined below is a combination of the theories of cultural diplomacy and visual international relations. Cultural diplomacy will form the basis of the framework with visual IR functioning as an additional aspect, which I argue will make cultural diplomacy more applicable to modern-day conflicts. The theories of Gillian Rose and Stuart Hall show the connection between cultural diplomacy and visual IR by arguing that its people's perception of images that give them meaning and, through that interpretation, creates the ability to wage war through culture and images.

2.1 Cultural diplomacy

2.1.1 Definition of Cultural Diplomacy

To discuss cultural diplomacy, one must first conceptualize the concept of culture. There is no general agreement on the definition of culture, with each credible source offering a differing opinion. For this study I have chosen a broad definition which explains culture as "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also: the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time" (Merriam-Webster 2011). Much like culture, cultural diplomacy does not have a universally agreed-upon definition. Due to cultural diplomacy being quite different from other traditional diplomatic interaction, as it is conducted between a government – traditionally, but not always – and a foreign people rather than strictly between governments, but quite similar to other soft power approaches such as

nation-branding, many find it difficult to define what exactly the concept of cultural diplomacy entails (Gienow-Hecht – Donfried 2010, p. 13; Ang et al. 2015, p. 372). However, Milton Cummings' definition is often quoted as it is seen to be the most comprehensive one. Cummings defines cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding". Although, Cummings also states that these exchanges do not always occur, cultural diplomacy can be more of a one-way process where one state is attempting to promote its view of, for example, an issue or its self-image (Cummings 2003, p. 1). As this broad definition of cultural diplomacy may suggest, scholars have differing opinions regarding how to categorize cultural diplomacy. Some argue that cultural diplomacy is a branch of public diplomacy. In contrast, others such as Patricia M. Goff (2013), argue that cultural diplomacy "sits on a spectrum of ideational approaches to diplomacy" along with nation-branding, propaganda and public diplomacy (p. 1).

With his paper 'Reframing Cultural Diplomacy: The Instrumentalization of Culture under the Soft Power Theory' Mariano Martín Zamorano aims to create a clearer definition of cultural diplomacy and establish its limitations. Martín Zamorano summarizes other scholars' definitions of different types of cultural diplomacy into two broader types: culturalist and neo-propagandist. According to Martín Zamorano, the culturalist type is characterized by policies that focus on artistic, intellectual and pedagogic areas and utilize, for example, exchange programs and cultural centers abroad in its diplomacy. The neo-propagandist type is characterized by governments instrumentalizing culture politically or economically in order to manage a state's external cultural representation, which is often done through the transnational private sector. As touched on above, cultural diplomacy can sometimes be more of a one-way process rather than an exchange, as shown by the neo-propagandist type. The policies are then focused on the distribution of culture (as mentioned above) that presents a positive view of the state's external cultural representation, with these constructions of the state's image being the most effective when combined with an ideological conception. During conflicts or wars, cultural diplomacy is often neo-propagandist as it can shape geopolitical events (Martín Zamorano 2016, pp. 178-179, 181).

While the neo-propagandist type may sound more like propaganda and less like diplomacy, cultural diplomacy in its strictest sense – both the culturalist and the

neo-propagandist type – is solely the utilization of culture in order to present the image the state aims to promote. Its aim is not to manipulate others into believing that image. States that choose to use cultural diplomacy in their international relations aim to persuade other states to believe their viewpoints, not coerce them into doing so. They aim to highlight the parts of the state's national identity as a state wants others to associate with them. This way, cultural diplomacy can humanize policy positions or official actions (Carniel 2019, chapter 8; Schneider 2005, pp. 147-148; Goff 2013, p. 3).

In order to more clearly illustrate the differences between the two types of cultural diplomacy – the culturalist and the neo-propagandist types – discussed above as well as how they are different from the other ideational approaches to diplomacy mentioned by Goff above, a table sourced from Martín Zamorano's paper can be studied below.

Table 1: Cultural Diplomacy

Activities / Variables	Cultural diplomacy		Public diplomacy		Propaganda	Branding
Ideal types	Culturalist	Neopropagandist	Soft	Hard		
Aims	Mutual understanding	Power/ Persuasion				
Projection term	Long-term			Short-term		
Pattern of communication	Two ways	One-flow messages				
Control of the message	Less	More	Less	More	High	
Character of the audience	Active	Passive	Active	Passive	Passive	
Results	Relative	Specific	Relative	Specific	Specific	
Social participation	More	Less	More	None	None	

Source: Mariano Martín Zamorano (2016)

As Ukraine and Russia both deployed a neo-propagandist type of cultural diplomacy – with the governments politically instrumentalizing culture to manage their external cultural representation – rather than a culturalist type, the theoretical framework will focus solely on neo-propagandist cultural diplomacy.

2.1.2 Cultural Diplomats

As mentioned in section 2.1.1, not only governments can function as cultural diplomats. The broad definition of the concept by Cumming's creates room for non-state actors to have central roles in the communication of culture (Carniel 2019, chapter 8). The definition of diplomacy and diplomats has changed and become wider over the past decades, much like the definition of war. More non-governmental actors have become mainstays in international relations, operating through transnational networks, or competitions, as is the case with ESC. Crucial to note is that governments still occupy important roles in cultural diplomacy as they are the outward representative for the state. Although this does not mean that states cannot use non-state actors to carry out cultural diplomacy, it is instead a consequence of the above-mentioned changing nature of war and conflict (Ang et al. 2015, p. 371; Goff 2013, pp. 9-11). When conflicts are no longer unfold solely within the framework of physical territory but instead can unfold in, for example, the mediatized global space, the concept of power can just as easily be tied to culture as it could be territory during Clausewitz's time. This can be seen in the contemporary globalized era since popular culture has been given unrivaled prominence on the world stage. This means that, for example, an artist in ESC can become a diplomat as they by representing their country can share the preferred image of their country's culture and, through that, impact other states' perception of them to an audience of 200 million people (Goff 2013, pp. 5-6).

2.2 Visual International Relations

The visual is not a new aspect of politics or international relations, but the field of visual international relations did not start to expand until the last half-century. The reason for this may be that the world has gone into a visual age and that visual messages can now be circulated to a much larger audience through technology and globalization than they could previously. Our view of important social and political phenomena as protests, humanitarian disasters and conflicts can be influenced by

how they are portrayed in traditional media such as cinema and television or digital media such as YouTube, Instagram and Twitter. The fact that images surround everything we do and have the ability to influence how we perceive the world could, therefore, be argued to make images inherently political as images become political forces in themselves. Alternatively, as Bleiker puts it, "images are political in the most fundamental sense: they delineate what we, as collectives, see and what we do not and thus, by extension, how politics is perceived, sensed, framed, articulated, carried out and legitimized" (Rose 2016, pp. 21-22; Bleiker 2018, Introduction).

James Der Derian takes this argument one step further and argues that modern technology has made it possible to wage visual wars due to images' political nature, so-called wars of images. He argues that an 'affective image' through being recorded, transmitted and observed enough times can lead to wars being fought with and because of images. In visual wars, the images become weapons in various ways, such as through projecting fear, affecting public opinion and recruiting combatants (Der Derian 2018, chapter 50). Images gain the ability to wage war through how they are interpreted, as it is people's interpretation of images that give them meaning. How people interpret images is, however, dependent on culture as what we see is culturally constructed. This, and the relationship between images and cultural diplomacy, will be explained in further detail in the following paragraph.

Gillian Rose and Stuart Hall make the case that culture is "concerned with the production and exchange of meanings," that culture depends on its participants to interpret the characteristic features of everyday existence mentioned in the definition of the term in section 2.1.1. What we see, and how perceived it, is culturally constructed and makes the difference between a picture and an image (Rose 2016, pp. 2, 18; Hall et al. 2013, p. xix). An image is never without meaning as it is a rendering of the world, a rendering through which the cultural layers we, as the people viewing it, add on that changes it. The images come to represent something. In this way, images function in the same way spoken language does. In spoken language, we use signs and symbols to represent concepts and ideas in order to communicate how we experience the world to others just as the signs and symbols which an image consists of does (Hall et al. 2013, pp. 1, 5). What an image represents will be different depending on who interprets the image and what group – or culture – that someone belongs to (Hansen 2011, pp. 53-54). As a result, images have agency, which means an image can be a site of resistance, defiance, or othering

of the enemy (Rose 2016, pp. 21-22). Images can then be used in cultural diplomacy to better the perception of one's state, or, as frequently done during conflicts, worsen the perception of another state.

3   Methodology

The following section will outline the methodological considerations and choices made when conducting the study. The research question is descriptive (section 1.1) and aims to understand how ESC has functioned as an arena for cultural diplomacy, and through that, cultural warfare in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict over Crimea. To give an in-depth understanding of the case the study will be conducted as a descriptive case study (Halperin – Heath 2017, p. 156).

3.1   Research design

Through this study, I aim to develop the theory of cultural diplomacy by adding the visual – as discussed above under visual IR – as an aspect of the theory. Therefore, the study will not be theory testing but instead aims to build – or develop – theory. I believe the visual to be an essential aspect of cultural diplomacy, which has been overlooked in previous research, as we live in a visual age. Visual culture and the images that represent it through new media such as social media or old media such as newspapers or TV, have come to shape international events and how they are understood. They are, therefore, of great importance when analyzing conflicts (Bleiker 2018, Introduction). The study will be conducted as a small-n qualitative case study analyzing Ukraine and Russia's ESC performances in 2016 and 2017, respectively, through Roland Barthes' method of image analysis. It will focus on the two isolated events of Ukraine and Russia's entries in ESC as a small selection is most appropriate when conducting a small-n case study (Halperin – Heath 2017, p. 218; Yin 2017, p. 54).

A well-performed case study is said to possess two main attributes; firstly, it should seek to say something new and valid about the studied case. I argue that the

addition of the visual to cultural diplomacy adds something new and relevant to the case as it, through expanding the theory of cultural diplomacy, explains in greater detail how ESC has functioned as an arena for cultural diplomacy in the conflict. It also engages in a broader academic debate on the use of ESC and similar events for soft power politics. The study is then internally valid. However, the ability of small-n case studies to produce externally valid results has been questioned. This, as some scholars argue that comparing two or more cases of a similar nature through a large-n case study often can contribute to a clearer and more precise scientific context and as well as results. As my study has a theory-building ambition, I believe conducting a small-n case study will be beneficial as it makes it possible to maintain a clear focus on the theory as it is at the center of the study. This, as small-n case studies are said to represent a meaningful contribution to theory-building as they work to question and extend theory (Halperin – Heath 2017, pp. 214-217, 223). Robert K. Yin asserts that small-n case studies are to reach analytic, rather than numerical or statistical, generalizations and that the strongest empirical foundations for such generalizations come from the in-depth study of a specific case in its empirical context, not through having a multitude of cases (Yin 2013, pp. 325, 327; Yin 2017, pp. 20-21).

Rather than an image analysis, a discourse analysis could have been conducted and the alternative was considered during the early stages of the study. A discourse analysis could have been conducted by analyzing, for example, newspaper articles on the reactions to the performances in Russian, Ukrainian, European and American media. I did, however, conclude that an image analysis would both correspond better with the case, as ESC is a competition based on states sending entries – images – to represent them and be of more academic value as I could not find another study conducting an image analysis on the case or on similar cases. Conducting a study consisting of both an image analysis and a discourse analysis where the conclusions reached by the different methods would be compared could also have been interesting. Due to the scope of the study I, ultimately, chose not to undertake such a study.

3.2 Case selection

As I chose the case for the study, the theory – or rather, theories – were already chosen as was the decision to analyze how ESC worked as an arena for cultural diplomacy. To answer the research question, several different ESC entries could have been chosen to form the empirical basis of the study. For example, I could have chosen to analyze if there were connections between Israel's entries – which often have political messages behind them – and one of the intifadas or Armenia's entries in 2010 and 2015, which both focused on the Armenian Genocide. The case that forms the basis of this study was primarily chosen as it was representative of what I wanted to analyze; how ESC functioned as an arena of cultural warfare. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine was still active when the conflict moved to ESC and both actors in the conflict took part in the ESC, allowing for analysis of how both sides of the conflict used the contest as a battlefield. This meant that one could see an actual conflict being fought at the contest (Halperin – Heath 2017, pp. 216, 218, 223).

The decision to limit the study to the Ukrainian 2016 entry and the Russian 2017 entry was quite simply based on the two entries functioning as the one strike each for each of the conflict actors. Analyzing more Ukrainian and Russian entries from other years may sound good on paper as large-n case studies are often seen as producing more reliable results. However, it would not have been advantageous for my study for one simple reason; Ukraine and Russia's other entries between 2014 and 2020 were not political (Eurovision 2020e; Eurovision 2020f). At least the entries themselves were not. Ukraine did have to withdraw from the competition in 2019 after the winner, and the runner-up's, of its national selection, refused to sign a contract – and through that compete in ESC – with the Ukrainian national broadcaster that stated that they would not play concerts in Russia in the lead-up to Eurovision. The winner, Maruv, later also stated that she refused to be a political tool (Savage 2019).

While the study focuses on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict over Crimea, it is crucial to note that this study does not aim to seek a deeper understanding of that

conflict. The aim is first to evaluate the states' use of cultural diplomacy as a part of warfare.

3.3   Material

To answer the research question posed in section 1.1, material in the form of qualitative data will be used. The material consists of solely primary sources in the form of the ESC performances of Ukraine and Russia in 2016 and 2017, respectively (Halperin – Heath 2017, p. 253). There are two main reasons why the study will be based on such limited material. Firstly, the study is a small-n case study focusing on the particular case of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine playing out in ESC, that is to say, two isolated events. As I analyze the performances as strikes that are part of a larger conflict, adding more material would not be productive or suitable for the analysis. Secondly, when conducting case studies in the form of image analysis, a smaller number of materials is preferable as analytical integrity is more important than applicability to a wider range of material (Rose 2016, p. 110).

Both images that form the basis of the analysis were gathered from YouTube and uploaded by ESC's official YouTube account. Due to the Russian 2017 entry not being allowed to perform at the 2017 competition, there is a difference in whom captured the material. EBU recorded Ukraine's 2016 performance at the finale of the contest in Stockholm and the state-owned Russian broadcaster Russia-1 recorded Russia's 2017 performance on a stage in Moscow (Knoops 2018; Rose 2016, pp. 53-54).

3.4   Image analysis

3.4.1 The Rhetoric of the Image

The material will be analyzed using Roland Barthes' method for image analysis outlined in the essay 'The Rhetoric of the Image'. To clearly state how the study has

been conducted, I will explain how Barthes' method works and exemplify it by giving a short summation of Barthes' analysis in his essay.

The basic stance of Barthes and most scholars focusing on image analysis is that all images are polysemous; they signify – or mean – multiple related things. When one views an image one can select some of the signifiers – words or phrases they would use the describe it – and ignore others. Which of the signifiers the viewer selects depends on the viewer's cultural norms as well as the context, as mentioned in section 2.2 (Barthes 2016, p. 14). Barthes' method focuses on what he describes as the image's three messages; the linguistic message, the denoted message and the connoted message. The denoted message is the literal message of an image, what one actually sees, while the connoted message is the symbolic or cultural message, what one sees means. The connoted message is dependent on one's perception and experiences. The three messages are not analyzed in a vacuum but in relation to each other. Regarding the linguistic message, Barthes argues it can function in two ways. Either as an anchorage, when it is used to focus the viewer on one of the various meanings an image may possess, or as a relay, when it adds meaning as the text and the image work together to convey the intended meaning, like for example, in a comic book (Barthes 2016, pp. 36-38, 40-41).

In his essay, Barthes analyzes a French advertisement for pasta-brand Panzani. The image is of a reusable bag overflowing with Panzani products – pasta, tomato sauce and cheese – and tomatoes, mushroom and pepper on a red background. The linguistic message Barthes sees is a denoted message in the caption and the labels on the produce, and a connoted message as he sees that the word 'Panzani' connotes Italianicity. The connoted messages include the half-open bag signifying a return from the market, the tomatoes and bell peppers signifying Italianicity and the collection of objects signifying that Panzani can provide complete culinary service. The connoted image is not discussed in detail in Barthes' study of the Panzani advertisement as the image of the tomato represents the image of a tomato, the image of a pepper represents a pepper and so on. However, it is not always the case that a signifier and a signified are fundamentally the same (Bathes 2016, pp. 29-34).

3.4.2 Setup of Analysis

As I am unable to attach stills from the performances analyzed in sections 4.1 and 4.2 of this study due to Copywrite, the analysis will follow the sequence of the performances chronologically to give the same experience as if one were to watch the performances. The analysis will be conducted in such a manner where the denoted message will first be described briefly to explain the section of the image being analyzed, followed by the connoted message. The linguistic message – the songs' lyrics – will be discussed as an anchorage when it aids in focusing the viewer in understanding the meaning of the image. The analysis will focus on three different sites at which images gain meaning; the site of production, the site of the image itself and the site of circulation. The sites each have three different aspects; the technological, the compositional and the social, which contribute to the critical understanding of the sites which will be utilized in the analysis (Rose 2016, pp. 24; 30-32, 37).

The site of the audience will not be analyzed as the aim of the study is not to analyze audiencing, but rather what Russia and Ukraine aimed to convey with their images.

4   Analysis

In this part of the thesis Ukraine's 2016 performance and Russia's 2017 performance will be analyzed in order to understand how both states used ESC as a battlefield. The findings of each analysis will then be presented and compared briefly.

4.1   Ukraine 2016

The importance of creating meaning at the sites of the image's compositional and technical modalities is in Ukraine's performance apparent within the first seconds of the performance. The performance starts with Jamala being out of focus in the shadows with traditional Crimean Music being played in the background (Eurovision Song Contest 2016b, 0:10-0:17). As the stage lights up, a contemporary backing track starts and Jamala begins to sing. The backing track has a drawn-out beat that creates a feeling of doom, of something terrible looming. In turn, this feeling of doom is reflected in Jamala's facial expression, body language and her staring straight down the lens of the camera during the entirety of the verse as she is singing (Eurovision Song Contest 2016b, 0:18-0:49). As Jamala is singing about strangers – the Russians in this narrative – coming, how they are killing her people and saying they are not guilty, her being scared and upset is visible. This is something the viewer can understand without knowing the history of Crimea or the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The image, and lyrics as its anchorage, could be interpreted as an entry about violence and oppression in general.

The portrayal of Crimean Tatars as the victims and the Russians as the perpetrators – the strangers – is an interpretation one can only make if they have the cultural knowledge about Crimea and what Jamala's entry aims to represent (section 2.2). It

is that knowledge, that viewing, of the image that can make Jamala and her entry a weapon because it is that viewing that depicts the Crimean Tatars, and through them Ukraine, as victims. This is important to keep in mind for the rest of the analysis.

As the verse moves into the chorus, this connote message is made even more apparent as Jamala switches from English to Crimean Tatar. English is the language most commonly used as a lingua franca in Europe, the language ESC is presented in and the language most entries in ESC are sung in (Molyneaux 2015, pp, 1,13, 24; Eurovision Song Contest 2016b, 0:50-1:19). Therefore, one can assume that Ukraine used English to most effectively promote the perception of them as the victims and create mistrust toward Russia, the stranger and enemy in the Ukrainian narrative. Were the chorus to have been sung in Russian, which is the most spoken language in Crimea, large parts of southern Ukraine and the first language of Jamala, the number of people reached, even though the show broadcasts in over 200 territories and has 200 million viewers, would have been comparatively few. The entry would then have been a less powerful strike against Russia on the cultural battlefield.

The use of Crimean Tatar in the chorus could be seen as taking a stance against the Russian annexation of Crimea, to show that the Crimeans are their own people. The chorus of the entry repeats the Crimean Tatar words' Yaşlığıma toyalmadım, men bu yerde yaşalmadım' which roughly translates to 'I could not spend my youth there, because you took away my peace'. While the use of Crimean Tatar may be powerful, the linguistic message's anchorage of the connote message – that of the Crimean Tatars as victims – may have been more effective if the lyrics were sung in English. This as the suffering of the Crimean Tatars would have been more evident for the average viewer. Although one could also argue that it does not matter what Jamala sings in the chorus or what language it is sung in. This as the visual of the image itself through Jamala's body language, sharp intakes of breath and anguished singing tells the story of the Crimean Tatars suffering as well, if not better, than the lyrics do. To someone who has the cultural knowledge of Crimea and the Crimean Tatars, however, the lyrics in Crimean Tatar can be of great importance when interpreting the image as they are taken from the traditional Crimean Tatar protest song 'Ey, Güzel Qırım' (Sonevytsky 2012, pp. 149-150). This song has been passed down through generations of Crimean Tatars to remember their heritage and the incidents of 1944, which in turn made the trauma of 1944

transgenerational (Volkan 2001, p. 79). Again, this illustrates how the cultural layers we put on the images we view matter and can make them powerful weapons.

During the second verse of the song, the Ukrainian entry starts making use of the physical arena ESC presents to convey its preferred meaning of victimization through the compositional and technological modalities. During the chorus, the stage's floor is a mix of warm colors such as yellow and orange in a soft and organic pattern whereas during the verse harsh red lines cover the stage's floor and background with cold blue lights surrounding the stage creating the illusion of a cage around Jamala (Eurovision Song Contest 2016b, 0:50-1:19; 1:20-1:53). The significance of this is what these combinations and colors can represent. As argued by Bruce Block (2007), colors that are separated indicate coldness, whereas colors that are mixed indicate warmth. Colors such as blue and green are often perceived as cold, whereas colors such as orange and yellow are perceived as warm (pp. 39-40). The connoted message of these colors is then of great importance. The colors and combinations that symbolize coldness and separation are on the stage as Jamala singings about the acts of the Russians in English, and the colors and combinations that symbolize warmth and togetherness are on the stage as she singings lyrics from a Crimean Tatar protest song in Crimean Tatar.

One can also see that the entry gains meaning at the site of production, the physical arena where ESC is held as part of the battle. The performances before and after Ukraine in the running order – Spain and Latvia before, Malta and Georgia after – all use the physical arena and the live audience as part of its performances. When the camera pans over the arena and the audience lights and camera angles where the camera goes through the audience are used to show how large they are and how enthusiastic the crowd is (Eurovision 2016; Eurovision Song Contest 2016a; Eurovision Song Contest 2016c, Eurovision Song Contest 2016d; Eurovision Song Contest 2016e). In Ukraine's performance, the arena and the live audience are entirely blacked out throughout the entire performance with the only light being on Jamala, even though the camera zooms out and pans over the audience multiple times during the performance (Eurovision Song Contest 2016, 0:49-0:58, 1:20-1:22, 1:35-139, 1:53-2:00, 2:46-2:50, 2:59-3:03). By blacking out the arena and the audience Ukraine's performance can be seen as representing how – while being in the middle of the competition which is meant to unify Europe –

the Crimean Tatars and the Ukrainians feel alone in their victimization as the entirety of Europe is watching and no one is helping (section 1.2.1)

Toward the end of the second verse's build into the chorus, the warm colors and soft patterns of the first chorus do not come back. The intensity of the harsh red lines is instead increased until the backing track, the lights and shapes fade, and all attention is on Jamala as she wails an anguished melody while mimicking the motion of rocking a small child (Eurovision Song Contest 2016b, 2:26-3:11). Much like with the use of the Crimean Tatar protest song 'Ey, Güzel Qırım,' the wailing and the movements may not represent anything to many viewers of the image, at least not more than a woman suffering. However, the melody of Jamala's wailing is reminiscent of traditional Crimean Tatar song 'Arafat Daği' and the motion of rocking of a child can be perceived to represent the child Jamala's great-grandmother lost as she and her family were exiled in 1944 (Astakhova 2016). As the wail reaches its crescendo, the earlier warm colors surround Jamala on the stage floor and move to form a large tree with many branches and roots on the background. When Jamala goes to sing the words' Yaşlığıma toyalmadım, men bu yerde yaşalmadım' one last time the tree disappears and is substituted with a blacked-out background and Jamala staring down the lens of the camera (Eurovision Song Contest 2016b, 02:45-3:11). The tree grows while Jamala is wailing the melody reminiscent of a traditional Crimean Tatar song and disappears as she sings the words which translate to 'I could not spend my youth there, because you took away my peace'. This can be interpreted as the roots the Crimean Tatars planted in Crimea being uprooted as the Russians first exiled the Crimean Tatars and when they later annexed the peninsula after the Crimean Tatars had once again settled in the l980s and 1990s. The individual suffering as portrayed by Jamala this way comes to represent the collective suffering and trauma felt by all Crimean Tatars and further strengthens the narrative of the Ukrainians as victims and the Russians as oppressors.

Finally, the role of ESC and EBU play as the arena and the organizer must be analyzed as the social modality of the sites of production and circulation is vital to how Ukraine's entry gains meaning. The broadcasting of ESC has spread beyond the traditional media of the competing states national broadcasters to being streamed live on YouTube and being available on Netflix. With ESC uploading the videos on YouTube to be shared with anyone and watched on any electronic device,

the total number of viewers reached through the contest is approximated to be one billion. It is no longer solely Europeans watching; the world is watching. The broad circulation of the contest also made it possible for Ukraine to use the contest as a cultural battlefield. For a comparatively small state such as Ukraine, it is not easy to reach a European or global audience. The medium of ESC enabled Ukraine to share the preferred image of itself as the victim and worsen the image of Russia by describing the Russians as perpetrators to not only other European states, but to a global audience (Goff 2013, p. 5). Due to the power asymmetry between Ukraine and Russia, this could most likely not have been done using traditional hard power politics.

The widespread circulation of the performance may then have led to the perception of the performance changing depending on where and when one first perceived the image. Due to the performance garnering much attention (section 1), many non-ESC viewers then first viewed the image after they had read about it and its perceived political nature as well as its connection to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Those viewers saw the image through layers of discourse, which had added to the entry's political message (Hansen 2011). The broad circulation of ESC then, ironically, may have contributed to the politicization of Ukraine's entry in a contest created to be non-political.

4.2   Russia 2017

As mentioned in section 1, the Russian entry was not performed at ESC or broadcasted by EBU as Russia pulled out of the contest after its performer Julia Samoylova was denied a Ukrainian visa due to – according to the Ukrainian government – having entered Crimea illegally years earlier to perform there. However, the performance of the entry was uploaded to ESC's official YouTube channel and the performance as it was televised on Russia-1 will be analyzed below in the same manner Ukraine's performance was.

Similar to Ukraine's entry, the importance of the site of the image's compositional and technical modalities are made obvious with the first seconds of

the performance. The performance begins with the camera zoomed out, the stage being covered in smoke and bright lights highlighting the stage (Eurovision Song Contest 2017, 0:06-0:18). This theme of brightness, soft lights and smoke carry on throughout the entirety of the first verse and the first chorus with the colors staying light and natural but warm, indicating warmth and positivity (Block 2007, pp. 39-40). The linguistic message, with the lyrics of the chorus being 'After the night there's a light, and in the darkest time a flame is burning, it shines so bright. Deep in the night love is alight, and in the dark a flame is burning. A flame is burning', function as anchorage for the feeling of positivity and hope created at the site of the image's compositional and technical modalities (Eurovision Song Contest 2017, 0:19-1:27). During the second verse and the second chorus, the backing track's tempo becomes more dramatic and the lightning of the stage becomes darker with the lights turning orange (Eurovision Song Contest 2017, 1:28-2:14). However, it is not until the bridge between the second and third chorus that there is any significant change in the performance. The lights become more intense and turn a dark orange while the lights behind Samoylova form the shape of a phoenix which seems to rise from the ashes as Samoylova repeats the lyric 'A flame is burning' three times before ending the performance (Eurovision Song Contest 2017, 2:17-3:09). While the performance remains fairly static, one can, through the combination of the warm lights and colors, the uplifting lyrics and the phoenix, interpret the message of the entry to be one of hope and new beginnings. One could argue that Russia sent an entry with this message in order to display an image of themselves as innocent in the Crimea conflict or as willing to move on and that is how Russia used the contest as an arena for warfare; to rid itself of responsibility and salvage its reputation in Europe. One could, however, question this as Russia's preferred image traditionally has been one which portrays them as a strong state or even, in more realist terms, a great power (Urnov 2014, p. 305).

However, I would argue that the intended message of the song was overshadowed by Russia not being allowed to take part in the contest and that Russia not being allowed to take part became a much more effective weapon than the entry itself. Furthermore, as mentioned in section 1, some scholars and journalists argued that Russia sent Samoylova despite knowing that the risk of her not being allowed to participate being plausible. Were this to have been the case, Russia would have knowingly sent an entry which would garner sympathy for them

and reflect badly on Ukraine. Analyzing Russia's use of ESC as a battlefield in the conflict, therefore, becomes more complicated as the image of Russia became more complex than it had been previously. The public narrative shifted from Russia being the enemy, as Russia was portrayed by Ukraine the previous year, to Russia becoming the victim by Ukraine banning Samoylova from entering the country. This, as it led other states to feel sympathy for Russia as they felt it was unfair of Ukraine not to let Russia take part in the contest (Stolworthy 2017). The sympathy felt for Russia could then be used as a weapon on the cultural battlefield as Russia could portray itself as the ones being wronged, rather than being the perpetrators. That is, Russia femininized its self-image in order to be perceived more positively on the European and, due to the reach of ESC in a visual age, global stage (Sjoberg, pp. 18-19, 21). At the same time, Russia discredited Ukraine by questioning the image Ukraine had created of themselves as the victims. Although, while Ukraine declined Samoylova a visa it was ultimately the EBU, the organizer of ESC, who is supposed to stand for unity and European integration, that would not allow Russia to participate. While this was in accordance with EBU's rules, it could have further strengthened other states' view of Russia being treated unfairly and, through that, garnered even more sympathy for them. That is to say, for Russia, having the arena of the battlefield – ESC – removed from them became a weapon in and of itself. One could also argue that the removal of the arena came to impact the social modalities of the site of circulation and strengthened the Russian narrative of itself as the victim. By not being part of the live broadcasted contest, Russia missed the widespread circulation of its preferred message that the contest can provide. Although, if Russia did in fact from the beginning intended to use that Ukraine and EBU made it so that they could not take part in the competition to its advantage, the entry's lack of circulation would not have mattered to them as they – as mentioned above – then intended to use the image of them as the victim as a weapon.

4.3   Findings

The entries were quite different in their approach to cultural warfare regarding what tactic they chose to utilize. Ukraine's entry was bold and direct in how it instrumentalized its culture and history politically to promote the preferred image of itself and illuminate Russia's actions. Jamala's performance made her family's individual suffering represent the collective suffering and victimhood of all Crimean Tatars, and through that, all Ukrainians as Jamala represented Ukraine (section 4.1). As for Russia, it is not quite as simple to pinpoint the exact tactic they chose to use in its cultural warfare. As Russia was not allowed to participate in ESC 2017, which some argue it knew when sending its entry (section 4.2), Russia could have expected two different possible outcomes from its entry in ESC 2017. One being that they would receive sympathy from other states if Samoylova was not allowed to participate and Ukraine would receive backlash, the other being that Russia with their entry portraying hope and new beginnings could display an image of itself as innocent in the Crimea conflict. This image could attempt to salvage its reputation in Europe.

Neither Ukraine nor Russia used their performance to highlight a positive image of their own external cultural representation, but rather to highlight a negative image of the other. With the existing power imbalance between the two and the state of the conflict, Ukraine choosing to portray a narrative in which Russia is the perpetrator and itself the victim is not strange. More interesting is Russia's choice also to highlight its vulnerability and portray itself as the victim as Russia's preferred image often is one that portrays it as powerful.

5   Discussion

Ukraine instrumentalized its culture and history politically by Jamala using her family's individual suffering to represent the collective suffering – and through that victimization – of the Crimean Tatars (section 4.3). Interestingly, one could argue the same thing was done by Ukraine on a larger scale when they seemingly attempted to integrate the Crimean Tatarian culture as part of the traditional Ukrainian culture to instrumentalize it for political gain in order to be seen as the victim in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. In a way, Ukraine took over part of the victimization tied to the Crimean Tatarian identity. In doing this, the victimization became shared and something the Ukrainians could utilize in their cultural warfare. It is also important to note that the Crimean Tatars are a minority in Ukraine which have not always been seen as equal to ethnic Ukrainians (section 1.2.1). One could question if Ukraine would ever have willingly done this if the prospect of the potential political gain would not have been present due to the existing Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

EBU created ESC attempting to unify Europe. The contest was meant to be non-political and mend a broken continent after two world wars (section 1 and section 1.2.2). While this may have been how the contest originally functioned, I would argue it is quite far from how the contest functions today, which this thesis exemplifies. The rules which dictate that ESC is to be a non-political contest do, however, remain. EBU's rules state that "All Participating Broadcasters, including the Host Broadcaster, shall ensure that all necessary steps are undertaken within in their respective Delegations and teams in order to make sure that the ESC shall in no case be politicized and/or instrumentalized" (Eurovision, 2020d). Although, when even former employees of EBU such as Jørgen Franck argue that the contest being used as a cultural battlefield is useful for the continent's political stability (section 1), should there still be rules against entries with political messages?

Additionally, are the rules concerning the contest being non-political being followed if entries like Ukraine's 2016 entry are allowed to participate?

The difference in how the states approach cultural warfare in ESC, as mentioned in section 4.3, could result from how the actors in the conflict were perceived before ESC was made a battlefield in the conflict. As mentioned throughout this thesis, it is people's perception – which is culturally constructed – of images that give them meaning. Therefore, one's perception of Russia and Ukraine before the contest may influence how they interpret the performances. As Russia is commonly seen as the perpetrator and not the victim in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict over Crimea and its politics are generally viewed unfavorably, fewer people may be inclined to believe in the Russian portrayal of itself (Vice 2017). Russia's annexation of Crimea was from the start condemned by the EU and the US; sanctions were imposed on Russia, and the public consensus by much of Europe was that Ukraine was the victim (section 1.2.1). Were Russia to have sent an entry similar to Ukraine's entry 2016, in which they had declared themselves the ones being attacked and being the victim, one could question how many would have believed them. That is, for Russia to present its preferred image in a way that would be believable, Russia had to use less forceful tactics than Ukraine.

6   Conclusion

This thesis aimed to further build on the theory of cultural diplomacy by adding a visual aspect to the theory in order to analyze how images sent out by states can be politized and used to conduct cultural warfare. At the beginning of this thesis, the quote by Clausewitz stated that every age has its own kind of war, limiting conditions and peculiar preconceptions. After having analyzed how Russia and Ukraine used ESC as an arena for cultural diplomacy in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict over Crimea, I believe that my findings support my statement from the beginning of this paper that war of images may be one of the defining ways of waging wars in the present age. The analysis findings showed that both Russia and Ukraine used their images – their performances – in ESC to alter the perception of themselves and the other by instrumentalizing culture. Ukraine did this by its performance making Jamala's family's individual suffering represent the suffering of all Crimean Tatars. By then choosing Jamala to represent Ukraine, the Crimean Tatars' victimization became shared by all Ukrainians, and Ukraine could use this as a weapon in its cultural warfare. The analysis did, however, not give a straight answer as to how Russia did it. Suppose Samoylova would have been allowed to take part in the contest. In that case, Russia's performance could have represented hope and new beginnings, which Russia could have used to display an image of itself as innocent in the Crimea conflict. As Samoylova was not allowed to perform, however, Russia instead came to be seen as the ones being wronged. It used the sympathy this garnered as part of their cultural warfare. The removal of the arena became a weapon. Ukraine and Russia used their performances to depict the other negatively and portray themselves as the victim to garner sympathy from parts not involved in the conflict. Ukraine portraying itself in this manner was not surprising due to it being the less powerful actor in the dyad. More surprising was that Russia chose to do the same as Russia would usually present itself as a powerful state.

Having started building on cultural diplomacy theory with a visual aspect, further research that would help develop the theory – especially focusing on war

with images – would be interesting. As the topic is quite new, more research can solely help strengthen the analytical generalizations reached in this thesis. Further research on different ESC performances to analyze if this type of occurrence has happened previously, or if similar events could also potentially function as arenas for cultural warfare, would also be interesting.

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