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Dancing Russia Goodbye: An Interpretive Analysis of Russia's and Ukraine's Identity Manifestations at the Eurovision Song Contest

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1. Introduction

In 2022, just two months after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine started, Ukraine won the Eurovision Song Contest with the highest televoting score ever, receiving top points from the vast majority of countries in a show of support for the nation, while Russia saw itself banned from the competition (Eurovisionworld 2022). Since the 2014 Russian invasion of Crimea, the war between Ukraine and Russia has continuously been one of the most noteworthy topics of global politics, with the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine pushing the war and its attention to new heights. However, tensions between the two countries existed long before 2014, and Ukraine's relatively brief history as an independent nation has always been connected to Russia's dominant position in the region. The relationship between the two countries at Eurovision and their individual participations have often been highlighted and discussed. Both countries are among the most successful at Eurovision and have consistently reached the top five, and have, thus, repeatedly managed to capture Europe's attention with their performances (ESC n.d. a; ESC n.d. b). However, they have also caused their fair share of controversies. Ukraine's win in 2004 became emblematic of a European future for Ukraine and was shortly followed by the democratic and anti-Russian Orange Revolution, which the

2004 winner, Ruslana, actively supported (De Carbonnel 2013). Likewise, Ukraine's 2016 and 2022 wins were read as symbols of Ukraine's resistance against Russia in Russia's war on Ukraine (Welsau and Selck 2023: 13, 18). Conversely, Russia's win in 2008 and the subsequent hosting of the contest in Moscow stirred up controversy because of the RussoGeorgian War of 2008 (Reuters 2009a). Such incidents have spawned several academic articles and chapters focused on Russia's and Ukraine's independent performances at Eurovision and also on the relationship between these two countries at the contest (Bohlman 2007; Jordan 2015; Skey et al. 2016; Borić and Kapor 2017; Welslau and Selck 2023).

However, as will be discussed, the literature that covers this topic often remains superficial and focuses on the most covert messages available to link them to the war, and neglects to make a comparison to the situation before the war to find out whether the cultural diplomacy performed by Ukraine and Russia has differed between periods of peace and war. Furthermore, the actual cultural aspect of *cultural* diplomacy is often overlooked in favour of providing a more realist analysis that explains Russia's and Ukraine's strategic intentions to position themselves on a European political stage. Moreover, when cultural themes like language and genre are mentioned, there is usually no profound analysis of what these aspects mean for the identity manifestation of the countries on an international or domestic level

(Weslau and Selck 2023). Essentially, International Relations analyses ignore the affective dimension of Eurovision performances, and studies from the musicological and cultural disciplines fail to place the affective aspects in a political context. Moreover, the breakout of the war in 2014 was a major intervening variable but is rarely factored into the analyses as such.

Subsequently, this thesis focuses on linking the cultural and IR facets of Russia's and Ukraine's Eurovision performances in the context of their relationship while keeping the war in mind. Doing this will underscore the importance of an international platform like Eurovision to perform cultural diplomacy and the significance of cultural recognition, (in)dependence and integration on an international level for resistance and dominance in conflict. In this way, one might gain a better understanding of how seemingly banal and frivolous elements of life, such as musical contests, can have real-world consequences that shape international standing and impact how viewers perceive certain countries or conflicts. The Eurovision Song Contest is especially relevant in this discussion as it is "the world's biggest live music event" that reaches around 160 million viewers from around 40 countries annually (EBU n.d. a). Furthermore, the contest holds significant importance in both Russia and Ukraine, with it featuring and spawning some of the biggest stars of both countries and producing many hits there, and is openly considered a primary instrument of cultural diplomacy (Kruzin 2000; Welslau and Selck 2023; Dugan 2024). Following this, the central research question guiding this thesis is: *"How do Russia and Ukraine use their Eurovision entries to manifest a national identity?"*.

To answer this question, this thesis starts with a review of the relevant literature before elaborating on the poststructuralist framework and interpretive methodological approach from which the analysis shall be performed. Subsequently, the analysis outlines the findings based on Russia's and Ukraine's Eurovision entries, which shall be examined in the discussion using the theory and existing literature. Finally, the conclusion offers a broad answer to the research question, provides areas for further research, and once again stresses the relevance of the subject matter.

2. A Cultural and Musical Literature Review

For a good grasp of Eurovision's use as a tool of cultural diplomacy and identity manifestation, this chapter outlines the most relevant concepts and how they can be applied in the case of Russia and Ukraine. First, the concept of cultural diplomacy and its different interpretations are outlined. Then, the influence of music and performance on national identity is described. Subsequently, these concepts are explained in the context of Eurovision and through two cases of visible conflict at the contest, succeeded by an account of the relationship between Russia and Ukraine at Eurovision.

2.1 Cultural Diplomacy

The concept of cultural diplomacy has seen many historical developments since its conception, and most consensus on this concept seems to centre around its elusiveness. (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried 2010: 13; Goff 2020: 30; Grincheva 2024: 172). Although cultural diplomacy has been happening for centuries, most authors agree that the actual concept gained prominence during the Cold War and was primarily utilised by the United States and Soviet Russia (González Chiaramonte 2007; Gould-Davies 2003; Grincheva 2024: 173; Gienow-Hecht and Donfried 2010: 13; Schneider 2005). In 1959, the U.S. Department of State first coined the term cultural diplomacy whose "principal feature … is the direct and enduring contact between peoples of different nations", which helps "to create a better climate of international trust and understanding in which official relations can operate" (U.S. Department of State 1959: iv). Around the same time, Frederick Barghoorn (1960: 10) defined cultural diplomacy "as the manipulation of cultural materials and personnel for propaganda purposes".

It is clear that cultural diplomacy has always pertained to using culture as a form of indirect foreign policy to reach the people of different nations to be able to foster tighter official relations in the state's interest (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried 2010: 13). However, this definition still leads to confusion and many struggle to distinguish "cultural diplomacy" from "cultural relations", "public diplomacy" and "soft power". According to former diplomat and professor Richard Arndt (2005: xviii), while both cultural relations and cultural diplomacy should be used and studied with an anthropological sense of culture that denotes "the complex of actors of mind and values which define a country or group", cultural relations flow naturally without government intervention, while diplomats and national governments

actively perpetrate cultural diplomacy to serve national interests. Furthermore, there seems to be a consensus that cultural diplomacy is a subfield under the umbrella of public diplomacy (Arndt 2005: 480; Cull 2008; Goff 2020: 30; Mark 2009). According to Mark (2009: 15), both public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy are, in turn, "elements of soft power" as they focus on "the ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals", as defined by the coiner of soft power, Joseph Nye (2003).

Subsequently, the perception of the central actor(s) in performing cultural diplomacy also tends to differ depending on what definition of cultural diplomacy is used (Goff 2020: 31). Some definitions, which are more in line with the original American conceptualisation of the term, stress the importance of the state and its intentions within the national interest, while the other perspective highlights the outcome of cultural diplomacy and allows for more actors to take centre stage (ibid.). Arndt (2005) and Mark (2009) stick to a more state-oriented approach that focuses on foreign policy as executed by diplomats or other state officials, as diplomacy is generally seen as a governmental activity performed through the state. Milton Cummings's (2003: 1) popular view of cultural diplomacy, which the U.S. Department of State (2005: 4) has also used, "refers to the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding". Within this definition, there is more space for different kinds of actors as it is related more to the general objective of cultural diplomacy as opposed to cultural diplomacy purely as a "foreign policy goal" (Goff 2020: 31). The reason for this perspective's prominence lies in the fact that, while the state may push cultural diplomacy, it requires non-governmental actors, such as artists and performers in the case of this thesis, to perform the diplomacy (GienowHecht 2010: 10). Globalisation has made cultural diplomacy more widespread and it is now not only relevant to sectors of high culture in which the state plays a more significant role but the low culture sector mainly related to pop culture has also become more significant. This sector is more challenging to command in a globalised society, which means the objectiveoriented definition has become more relevant (Goff 2020: 33). In this research, both definitions of cultural diplomacy will be taken into account, as Eurovision entries are both subject to state control and interests, while also strongly related to popular culture.

Building on this, cultural diplomacy, globalisation, and national identity are intrinsically related, according to Mark (2009: 2). Not only the transmission of national identity to other countries is relevant, but cultural diplomacy can also help reinforce domestic national

identities (ibid.). Robin Higham (2008: 139-141) states that in a globalised world, cultural diplomacy can aid in shaping and strengthening a domestic national identity by uncovering what facets of a country make it "interesting to others". Mark (2009: 29) adds that countries have used cultural diplomacy with both international and domestic objectives at the same time. When a state tries to bring several ethnicities within its borders together under one identity, cultural diplomacy can be a powerful tool to push for social cohesion (idem: 38). This function of cultural diplomacy has been broadly understudied and will be used in this thesis to study how Russia and Ukraine not only manifest an identity to be recognised by foreigners but also for its citizens to attach to.

2.2 Music, Performance and National Identity

The study of the relationship between music and identity within ethnomusicology only started becoming popular in the 1980s after the foundational studies of sociology and anthropology had started handling the broader theme of identity in the two decades before (Rice 2007: 19). While individual self-identity is an essential theme in ethnomusicology, Rice states that studies of music and group identity have become much more common. Miller (1995: 22-25) argues that national identity separates itself from other identities through five features, namely: shared beliefs, an embodiment of historical continuity, activeness represented either through institutions or proxies (such as performers at the Eurovision Song Contest), a connection "to a particular geographical place", and a "common public culture" with a set of common characteristics. Therefore, this thesis focuses on these qualities when speaking on Russia's and Ukraine's national identity manifestations. According to O'Flynn (2016: 25), the relationship between national identity and music "can be understood as a general process by which individuals and groups may come to perceive, cognize and articulate associations between, on the one hand, specifically musical phenomena and, on the other hand, wider socio-cultural formations associated with national culture and/or the nation state". Biddle and Knights (2016: 12) concur and add that music can effectively be used to change (sub)national identities at different levels, for example through "the re-territorialization of local heterogeneous musics to nationalist ends" which can play a role in the eradication or incorporation of regional identities into a larger, national identity. This shows the state's great potential in shaping national identity through music and will be used as a lens to understand

how Russia and Ukraine might utilise subnational cultural elements to manifest national identity.

However, in the age of globalisation, national identity is no longer just a product of the commonalities and differences in one nation. According to Connell and Gibson (2003: 143), the relationship between national identity and music is a field that is increasingly linked with a transnational flow of music identities. Magaldi (1999: 325-326) adds to this by arguing that "foreignness" and "nationalness" are flexible and interrelated terms in music production and performance that both play an essential role within one political entity. Because of this, "the designation of 'national essence' to particular music is more problematic within modern nation states where tensions between the homogenous and heterogeneous are often lived out", and a national musical identity may overlap with that of another nation to some extent, especially on a stage like Eurovision in which countries often appeal to the tastes of other nations (O'Flynn 2016: 22).

Elaborating on this, music can be perceived from both an emic (internal) and etic (external) perspective and music that is produced domestically can be used by a nation as a part of its external and internal identity, according to O'Flynn (2016: 23-24). When used for portraying an external identity, music is emblematic and outwardly portrays images or meanings of the nation to foreign nations (Folkestad 2002: 156). Domestic music production can impact the internal identity by improving "group cohesiveness and belonging" (ibid.). While domestic music production today is essentially an amalgamation of local, national and international aspects, perceived authenticity is still crucial for recognising music as part of a national identity (O'Flynn 2016: 33-34). Several elements play a role in recognising music as authentic, like "the style of the music, the ethnicity and nationality of the musicians and other factors", as Green (2001: 103) argues. Nowadays, hybridisation has also become a more relevant concept related to authenticity, in which national music includes more global elements which may seem inauthentic from extremely nationalist perspectives but are more broadly seen "as an antidote to essentialist notions of identity and ethnicity" (O'Flynn 2016: 34). Many Eurovision performances blend authentic cultural elements with more global genres, which is why the use of authenticity in this thesis refers to a hybrid authenticity that does not necessarily imply that a song precisely follows specific cultural standards and rules.

Moving on, the close relationship between music and national identity forms a crucial part of nationalist struggles, resistance and assertion of dominance and has often been instrumental in conflicts between or among different ethnic and national groups (Slobin 1996; Wade 1998). According to O'Flynn (2016: 37), the "sonic and structural properties of music and the social contexts in which it is sounded or heard, the mediating influence of national and non-national agencies, and the sets of values with which individuals or groups experience music" are major components to keep in mind when analysing national affiliations with music.

2.3 Cultural Diplomacy and National Identity at Eurovision

Many scholars have written about the Eurovision Song Contest, and all agree that the contest is a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy and nation branding through music and performance (Bohlman 2007; Borić and Kapor 2017; Yair 2018; Kalman and Wellings 2019; Weslau and Selck 2023). According to Carniel (2024), the song contest is undoubtedly political despite its non-political self-branding and spreads diplomatic messages to the different peoples of Europe. Borić and Kapor (2017) argue there have been many instances of countries using Eurovision as a tool of cultural diplomacy to broadcast political messages to other nations through songs. Bohlman (2007) describes how cultural elements such as languages, genres, and themes are used to connect with other European countries or highlight differences. He specifically uses the example of the song Molitva sent by Serbia in 2007, which mixes elements from different layers ranging from national to global by using the national language, a regional, Balkan style, and an international song form to effectively portray a national image while also connecting with Europe (idem: 43-45).

Expanding on this, there have been several cases of countries using Eurovision as a platform of cultural diplomacy to improve their image in a conflict. One participant that has caused disputes for decades is Israel. Vuletic (2017: 134) states that throughout its participation history, Israel has continuously sent entries that positioned the country as a peaceful and isolated state looking for better relations with its neighbours while also positioning itself as a victim of nearby aggression. In more recent years, Israel's relationship with Palestine took centre stage. According to Belkind (2009), the announcement of Israel's 2009 entry featuring a Jewish-Arab duo singing about peace during a full-scale war waged by Israel on Gaza was met with many cynical reactions. The entry was perceived as discursively promoting Israel's peaceful image despite the ongoing war on Palestine, characterised by "tremendous power

discrepancies" in its favour (idem: 28-29). Furthermore, a different well-known conflict in which both countries are present at Eurovision, like Russia and Ukraine, is the one between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. According to Jordan (2015: 119), the two countries have openly argued about the use of images from the region at the contest, and Azerbaijani citizens who voted for Armenia have been called in for questioning by Azerbaijani authorities, showing how much importance authoritarian regimes like Azerbaijan ascribe to keeping up a façade of unity. Vuletic (2017: 203) adds that an Armenian contestant's use of the flag of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2016 warranted the EBU to threaten Armenia with disqualification if such practices occurred again. This thesis then examines whether Russia and Ukraine focus on bringing their conflict to the foreground in their performances or mainly on manifesting a positive image.

Within the literature on Eurovision, several scholars have highlighted the relationship between Ukraine and Russia (Bohlman 2007; Jordan 2015; Skey et al. 2016; Borić and Kapor 2017; Welslau and Selck 2023). Paul Jordan (2015) delineates Ukraine's use of Eurovision as a platform to manifest a national identity, considering the geographical, historical, and cultural position between Europe and Russia. He argues that Ukraine is an interesting case in which elite, top-down involvement with Eurovision has influenced how the country has been sold to the rest of Europe (ibid.). Building on this, the war between Ukraine and Russia that has persisted since 2014 has received particular attention from several authors. Borić and Kapor (2017: 236-237) briefly describe the case of Ukraine's 2016 entry "1944" by Jamala and clarify the covert links between that song and the invasion of Crimea, which happened two years prior, as an example of how Eurovision can be a platform that can reflect tensions. Welslau and Selck (2023) zoom in closer on the relationship between Russia and Ukraine since 2014 and describe how both countries use Eurovision as a platform for performing cultural diplomacy differently. Through an analysis of the broad themes of Russia's and Ukraine's Eurovision songs since 2014 in the context of the war, they conclude that Russia mainly "engaged in neo-propagandist cultural diplomacy" influenced by the Kremlin, while Ukraine has used chiefly a culturalist approach with elements of neo-propagandism by focusing on representing culture and heritage (idem: 20-21). However, they do not specify the meaning and use of this cultural representation.

2.4 Main Takeaways

This chapter has elucidated the use of cultural diplomacy and its critical role in shaping national identity through music and performance, especially at an event like Eurovision. The various definitions and applications of cultural diplomacy can overlap and do so in the case of Eurovision, where the boundary between state action and broad cultural exchanges is unclear. The existing literature on identity-building and conflict at Eurovision demonstrates how the contest is used to manifest national identities and influence international perceptions of conflicts. Russia and Ukraine employ Eurovision as cultural diplomacy, with representatives functioning as cultural diplomats. However, where the literature falls short and what this thesis will contribute is studying exactly how Russia and Ukraine use culture at Eurovision to manifest their national identities.

3. A Poststructuralist View on Eurovision

3.1 Foundations of Poststructuralism

As this thesis attempts to move away from realist visions of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia at Eurovision that solely focus on linking the countries' performances to the material aspects of the war, a poststructuralist framework is used to guide my analysis for a better grasp of the deeper structures at hand (Campbell and Bleiker 2016: 210). Poststructuralism moves beyond constructivist assumptions of a dichotomy between the material and the ideational and supposes that material factors gain meaning through language, making the material and the ideational inseparable (idem: 209; Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108; Hansen 2006: 20). According to Foucault (1971: 22), the world does not present "us with a legible face, leaving us merely to decipher it", only through discourse do we ascribe meaning to things as there is no "pre-discursive" meaning that we might build on. Thus, it is through discourse that Ukraine's and Russia's identity manifestation through cultural diplomacy at Eurovision should be studied, as an objective identity outside of discourse does not exist (Hansen 2006: 5).

According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 105), discourse can be described as "the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice", in which the articulatory practice is "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified". This description reveals that the articulatory practices that make up discourses have a performative character that does not stabilise over time and remains unfixed (Butler 1993: 9,12). It is crucial to remember that not all articulatory practices are alike, as some discourses aim to challenge the hegemonic discourse (Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 138). It is through hegemonic discourse that any challenging perspectives need to be interpreted, as "politics is a contest between political strategies, with hegemony as the winner's prize" (Jacobs 2020: 51). Considering the dominant view in literature on Ukraine and Russia at the Eurovision Song Contest is that Russia has long been the powerful hegemon in the region which Ukraine attempts to resist against, it thus makes sense to analyse Ukraine's manifestation of identity on the Eurovision stage in the context of its historical relationship with Russia. Foucault (1978: 95) states that "resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power", indicating that any analysis of the use of cultural diplomacy for dominance or resistance by Russia and Ukraine must consider the discursive power balances between the countries.

3.2 Cultural Diplomacy and the Interplay of Foreign Policy and Identity

Building on this, the formation of state identity is "performatively constituted" by marking off the "self" from the "other" and thus the "domestic" from the "foreign" (Campbell 1992: 8; Hansen 2016: 96). Foreign policy discourse then always works with a "self" and an array of "others", with the contrast between the self and the other ranging from radically juxtaposed to marginally different (Hansen 2006: 6). Borrowing from Butler's (1999: 179) poststructuralist thinking on gender identity, identity is "tenuously constituted in time … through a stylized repetition of acts", which can then also be used for studying the construction of state identity (Campbell 1992: 8). Any identity and foreign policy that is constructed will constantly influence the other factor in a repeated interplay of foreign policy discourse in which both identity and policy are the base and the product at the same time which can always destabilise (Hansen 2006: 18-19). In the case of Ukraine and Russia, this distinction between the self and the other will be considered to analyse whether both countries' literal stylised repetition of acts at Eurovision can be interpreted as remaining stable or changing over time in terms of portraying the connection with the other nation.

Furthermore, the use of Eurovision as cultural diplomacy and, therefore, (indirect) foreign policy by both countries not only highlights the differences between them and the other but can also promote or repress internal differences (Arndt 2005; Mark 2009; Gienow-Hecht and Donfried 2010: 13; Zamorano 2016: 169). According to Miller and Yúdice (2002: 1), culture has both an aesthetic register that relates to "artistic output emerges from creative people" and an anthropological register that is concerned with the way of life "grounded by language, religion, custom, time and space". The aesthetic register expresses differences within populations, while the anthropological register expresses differences between populations (ibid.). Because of the unique nature of Eurovision in which independent artists or groups are supposed to represent an entire country's culture, this study takes an "intermestic" approach spanning both the aesthetic and anthropological registers and, therefore, considers the meaning of Ukraine's and Russia's performances for both international and domestic views of the respective national identities (Manning 1977).

3.3 Ethnomusicology

Since this research is based on the analysis of musical performances at Eurovision, the poststructuralist view will be extended to ethnomusicology, the study of people making music in relation to culture, to guide my thinking (Titon 2015: 176). As poststructuralism is a broad

approach that is not linked to one specific discipline, the analysis and interpretation of Eurovision performances for their musicality can logically be connected to what these performances mean for the manifestation of national identities (Campbell and Bleiker 2016: 198). One of the most influential poststructuralist approaches within ethnomusicology is the practice of "deconstruction" put forward by Derrida (Campbell and Bleiker 2016: 206; Dunbar-Hall 1994: 38). Originally, Derrida's approach focused on deconstructing text to study discourse and ignored other parts of music such as melody and harmony (Norris 2002: 33-34). Derrida acknowledged his incompetence in the field of music, which is why musicologists worked to adapt his ideas to their field (Sweeney-Turner 1995: 185). Titon (2008: 72) has stated that poststructuralist interpretations of music should move away from textualising everything and that "meaningful actions be experienced as music, not read as text". He argues that music and sound carry meaning without text, which differs per context, essentially stating that discourse and meaning can also be read non-textually, although this is then interpreted through language again (Titon 1994; Campbell and Bleiker 2016: 209).

Furthermore, Solomon (2014: 729-30) states that "language must be infused with affect … in order to have the 'force' that it often has" and for subjects to become invested in a discursive identity. Hutchison (2016: 81, 110) explains that people who have experienced collective trauma can connect with affective communities through shared emotional responses, especially in times of crisis. In Eurovision, when countries choose to perform in their language, they accept that textual understandings will largely be lost on the audience and thus rely entirely on emotive responses to manifest an identity, which is especially relevant for Ukraine's case as the entire nation is experiencing a crisis.

4. An Interpretive Research Design

4.1 Interpretivism

Considering the poststructuralist underpinnings of this thesis, the research will rely on an interpretive method in which the two cases of Russia's and Ukraine's Eurovision participations will be interpreted, considering the relationship between both countries. Using an interpretive method means that there are many "truths" to be found in one subject of analysis, and it depends on the angle of the researcher what aspects come to the foreground (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012: 4). However, this does not mean that every interpretation is as valuable or powerful, as the most potent interpretations keep in mind the material "reality" and how the ideational factors relate to it (Trifonas and Balomenos 2012: 220; Campbell and Bleiker 2016: 208-209). Furthermore, in the context of Eurovision performances and their visual component, it is vital to keep in mind that while the interpretation of any discourse has linguistic connotations, the "aesthetic and pictorial" are also ideational representations, albeit only understandable through discursive practices (Campbell and Bleiker 2016: 209).

To aid in interpreting the musical aspects of the Eurovision performances, I will use Balliger's (2005) text on how to read and interpret musical performances in the context of resistance. Balliger identifies four broad categories for music analysis: textual analysis, cultural production, performance and the temporary autonomous zone, and sonic squatting. Through textual analyses, one can find direct messages expressed by artists or cultural groups that either show a counter-narrative that focuses on self-representation of identity or countering other representations of their identity (idem: 14-17). Textual analyses can be problematic because lyrics do not always give away everything or may have been censored, especially at a contest like Eurovision, where political messages are forbidden, which is why it is also important to look at the cultural production of music (ibid.). Music can often only be produced and spread through corporate agencies that will not allow for everything to be published, but in recent times, easier access to channels of mass communication has made the publication of music more accessible, which helps oppressed groups to transmit their message in commodified ways (idem: 17-19). Eurovision can be analysed as a platform for lifting different voices, but in the cases of Ukraine and Russia, the method of selecting the Eurovision entries should also be kept in mind. The performance of music can be analysed with a focus on "performance as social organization and cultural empowerment of oppressed groups; music as pleasure, use-value and threat to the necessary commodification of desire

under capitalism" and "music as a site of Refusal" which can create a sort of "temporary autonomous zone" in which oppressed groups can briefly withdraw from the dominant sphere as stated by Balliger (2005: 19-23). Finally, music can be analysed by focusing on how sound can have emotional or psychological effects on those who hear the music (idem: 23-24).

4.2 Eurovision as Data

The primary data set for this research is evident, namely all of the Eurovision entries by Russia and Ukraine. Most performances and their official lyrics with translations can be found on the official Eurovision website or YouTube page. Some older performances are not uploaded on the official Eurovision pages but can be found on fan-created websites like Eurovisionworld.com. While the research primarily relies on the actual Eurovision entries and any common themes found among these performances, it also considers external source material, providing further insight and enriching the analysis by linking the performance to the material aspects of the relationship between Ukraine and Russia and the context of time. These sources consist of news articles, artist interviews, Eurovision blogs related to any news or controversies surrounding the entries and any other relevant sources necessary to understand the context of each year's Eurovision acts.

Based on the literature, theory and methodological insights, five themes have been identified that form the basis of the analysis: *song selection and elite involvement, artists and songwriters, genre and sound, language and lyrics,* and *staging and performance*. These themes cover the different aspects of the Eurovision entries and allow for a link between the material and the ideational. The first theme explains the context in which the entries were selected, and the second theme forms a bridge between the material, political context and the ideational aspects. The final three categories mainly deal with the ideational and cultural facets of the entries in chronological order of song production. To comprehend my interpretations, all Russian and Ukrainian Eurovision performances, supported by relevant information, can be found in Appendix A, and the categories of information for each theme are in Appendix B.

4.3 Positionality

A researcher's identity impacts the results when performing research based on subjective interpretations. While my research relies on publicly available data that my positionality cannot influence, my interpretations of this data will still be shaped by my background. My personal characteristics are my "specific tools" for data analysis (Reyes 2020: 225). However, they might also prevent me from considering certain relevant sides of the story, which I should continuously reflect on and stay open about (ibid.; Lichterman 2017: 38-39).

The first, perhaps most apparent, part of my identity that will influence my interpretation of the Russian and Ukrainian entries is my position as a foreigner to the cultures of these countries and, more specifically, as a Western European foreigner. Because of this, I might not immediately recognise certain cultural symbols and their importance because I am unfamiliar with them. Therefore, I have looked up emic perspectives on the entries to better understand these symbols' meanings to the people whom these entries are supposed to represent. Simultaneously, as an outsider to the relationship and conflict between Russia and Ukraine, yet still an inside member of the European audience of the ESC, I might have a good understanding of how Eurovision entries can impact and influence the views and opinions of a European audience, while keeping in mind that my foreign view will differ from that of, say, the foreign views of different post-Soviet peoples. Furthermore, because of my personal views and since the Netherlands has continuously supported Ukraine in the conflict between both nations, I am aware that my views lean more pro-Ukrainian.

Furthermore, my Political Science and Anthropology background might give me a perspective different from those seen in the literature on (Ukraine and Russia in) Eurovision, which either focuses on realist, state versus state analyses or purely cultural interpretations without linking them. I aim to be aware of cultural identity construction on different levels. Still, I remain conscious that this awareness does not form in a vacuum, and my positionality plays an integral part in my interpretations, which are constantly influenced by any developments in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

5. Analysis of the Entries

The following chapter is divided into five subsections based on the analytical themes mentioned: *song selection and elite involvement, artists and songwriters, genre and sound, language and lyrics,* and *staging and performance.* Every subsection individually handles the cases of Russia and Ukraine through the interpretive framework provided before comparing both countries in the discussion chapter. To fully grasp the context in which both countries sent their songs to Eurovision, it is vital to know the most basic rules of the contest. Firstly, the competition is organised by the European Broadcasting Union and is formally a competition between broadcasters and not countries or governments, which allows for separating a government's actions and their participation in Eurovision (Curran 2024). Consequently, Russia's ban from the competition in 2022 is officially attributed to "breaches of membership obligations" by the broadcaster rather than to the pressure exerted by other broadcasters threatening to quit if Russia participated (ibid.; BBC 2022). Furthermore, broadcasters are entirely free to choose how they select their representatives and songs, and if a country wins Eurovision, the responsible broadcaster is traditionally granted the opportunity to host next year's edition (ESC 2022a; ESC 2024). Besides some practical issues, the only other rule is that the participating broadcasters shall not politicise the contest "in any way" (ESC 2024). What constitutes politicisation remains vague, which is why many entries manage to include thinly veiled political references.

5.1 Song Selection and Elite Involvement

5.1.1 Russia

Russia's methods for selecting its Eurovision entries have varied throughout its twenty-three participations but have mostly excluded the public from weighing in. The most common method of artist and song selection was an internal selection, with processes hidden from the public eye. These selections remove any democratic elements and allow the state to gain complete control over how the country will be represented internationally. Although these internal selections could reproduce the image of Russia as an undemocratic nation where choices are made by the elite away from the public eye, only a tiny minority of the European audience will be aware of how each country selects its entry. This allows Russia to craft an international image through its Eurovision performances without inherently bringing up connotations of corruption and authoritarianism. Considering Russia's public broadcasters

function as arms of the authoritarian Russian regime, the Eurovision entries selected by these broadcasters are used by the Kremlin to fully control Russia's image abroad (Hutchings and Rulyova 2009: 75).

Russia's centralised song selections are "part of a system of control" that aims to influence its people to comply with the state's interests (Balliger 2005: 17). Specifically, Russia utilises its Eurovision entries to promote an image of homogeneity. In Russian, the word "Russian" can translate into *russkiy*, referring to the dominant ethnic and cultural group, and *rossiyskiy*, which encompasses all citizens of the Russian state (Simonsen 1996: 91-92). Russia's strategy at Eurovision is an outcome of the "Russkiy Mir" (Russian world) doctrine, aimed at promoting an image of broad ethnic uniformity rather than acknowledging its diverse demographic reality, which shall be further explored later in this thesis (Meisters 2016).

On the other hand, Russia has allowed the public a say in who gets to represent them six times through televised competitions. The entries selected through these national competitions have often been the ones to contain either the most explicit political messages or the most cultural representations of Russia, showing the disconnection between how the Russian public and the Russian state want Russia to be represented, which shall be elaborated on later. However, even when the Russian government did not have complete control over its entry, it still attempted to influence the public's decision. For the 2009 national final, the Russian broadcaster added Ukrainian singer Anastasia Prikhodko to the line-up well after the deadline for other artists, just two days before the actual final (Michaels 2009). Prikhodko had been disqualified from the Ukrainian national final, and the Russian broadcaster offered her a spot in their final to simultaneously highlight Russia's peaceful tolerance of Ukrainians and Ukraine's unfair treatment of its people (ibid.). Additionally, there were allegations of voterigging in favour of Prikhodko, further proving the point of the Russian government's involvement in the message the country sent to Eurovision (Halpin 2009).

Besides state involvement behind the scenes, Russia's political elite has also gotten involved publicly with the country's presence at the contest. In 2008, after the country won the competition with famous singer Dima Bilan, President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin swiftly congratulated the singer on his win and hailed him for "elevating Russia's image" (Kishkovsky 2008). In a telegram sent to Bilan, Putin claimed his success was not just personal, but a "triumph for all of Russia", showing how the Russian state viewed its performance at the contest as a direct representation of the nation (ibid.). Besides positive

utterances about Russia's success at Eurovision, the political elite has also criticised Russia's representation. In 2021, when Russia sent the singer Manizha, whose song and performance were critical of Russia's conservative culture, the First Deputy Chair of Culture, Yelena Drapeko, heavily criticised the singer for her message and argued that she should not be allowed to perform under the Russian flag (Anatoly 2021). The elite responses to Russia's entries show how Russia sees its Eurovision entries as representations of the entire country and wishes to keep its image in line with Russia's general self-presentation in world politics.

Furthermore, a few years after Russia was banned from the Eurovision Song Contest, Russian officials like the Director General of the state-owned broadcaster and the Minister of Culture announced that Russia would attempt to resurrect the Intervision Song Contest to strengthen cultural ties with different countries like the BRIC nations and neighbouring post-Soviet states (Kyiv Post 2023). The Intervision Song Contest existed during the Cold War as a rival of Eurovision, and Putin had already expressed his desire to bring this contest back to life in 2009 (Reuters 2009b). The suggestion to bring back this contest by some of the most important members of the political elite shows Russia's desire to broadcast their selfrepresentation in other countries and the effectiveness that the government attributed to their presence in the Eurovision Song Contest for the manifestation of the Russian identity.

5.1.2 Ukraine

Unlike Russia, Ukraine has mainly relied on national finals with a combined jury and public vote to determine their entries for Eurovision, with some exceptions during the first few years of participation. These national finals are popular domestic events that continue at any cost, as exemplified by the national final for the 2023 Eurovision held in a metro station functioning as a bomb shelter (Timsit 2022). This selection method is similar to the voting system used at the contest itself and allows for a high level of public participation. As mentioned, the international audience will likely not know how the Ukrainian songs were picked. The involvement of the Ukrainian public in the song selection will thus show Ukrainians themselves that their nation is democratic and that their voice matters in the country. However, the reality is that many of the national finals were wrapped in controversy because of the involvement of high-ranking politicians or allegations of vote rigging.

First of all, before the invasion of Crimea in 2014, Ukrainian government officials had a role in the selection of Eurovision songs to varying degrees. It was not uncommon for the sitting Minister of Culture to be part of the jury in the national final, and thus for the state to have a direct, albeit relatively limited, say in how it wanted its country represented (Interfax Ukraine 2010). A more egregious example of Ukrainian government intervention in the entry selection would be when Deputy Prime Minister Mykola Tomenko requested that four wildcards be entered into the national final for the Eurovision Song Contest of 2005 (Jordan 2015: 120). These wildcards were songs favouring President Yushchenko, who had won the presidential elections after the Orange Revolution of 2004 (ibid.). One of these wildcards then went on to win the national final with heavy speculation that the vote had been rigged, which is ironic considering the Orange Revolution stood precisely against corruption and voting falsification (idem: 121).

Building on this, allegations of vote-rigging and erroneous results did not stop after this incident. The results of the national finals of 2006, 2011, and 2013 were all called into question, but since 2014, there has generally not been any more controversy regarding the validity of the results (RBC.UA 2006; Faryna 2011; Granger 2013). The end of such controversies seems to coincide with the democratic reforms installed after the Euromaidan protests, in which the state-owned broadcaster was transformed into a public broadcaster (Orlova 2016: 443-444). The Ukrainian national finals for Eurovision essentially reflect the state of democracy within Ukraine and the relative success that such reforms have had. However, while accusations of corruption subsided after 2014, political tensions surrounding the national finals did not cease.

After the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, tensions between Russia and Ukraine became incredibly charged, and any potential ties between prominent Ukrainians and Russia were scrutinised intensively, which can be witnessed in the Ukrainian song selections. In 2019, the winner of the Ukrainian national final, Maruv, was questioned for her concerts in Russia, among others by Vice Prime Minister Kyrylenko on Twitter, and refused to sign the broadcaster's contract that would limit her ability to speak about Crimea or travel to Russia (AFP 2019; Kyrylenko 2019). In the end, none of the other contestants of the national final agreed to go to Eurovision either, and Ukraine pulled out of the contest that year (ibid.). This incident led to a change of rules that explicitly forbade participants who had performed in Russia after the invasion from participating (Suspilne 2019). In 2022, Alina Pash, the winner

of the selection, was alleged to have broken the rules and falsified her documents, and after an investigation into her travel history, she was replaced by the runners-up (Kolomiiets 2022). These accidents show the intense desire to break all links between Ukraine and Russia and to only send participants who successively function as cultural and political ambassadors of the Ukrainian people, which will be elaborated on later. No politicians were directly involved in these controversies; at most, they would publicly comment on them.

Related to this, Ukrainian politicians will also comment on Eurovision's positive role for Ukraine. President Zelensky praised Kalush Orchestra for winning in 2022 and expressed his desire to host next year's edition in Ukraine and to address the European public at this edition, neither of which were allowed by the EBU (Jones 2022; EBU 2023). Furthermore, Crimean Tatar leaders expressed their desire to enable Crimean citizens to vote at Eurovision, like Ukrainian citizens, to reject the notion that Crimea is not Ukrainian (Veselova and Melnykova 2016). However, some opposing views criticise Ukraine's participation. Right-wing politicians have commented on entries like those of 2007 and 2012, when the representatives were a drag queen and a black woman, respectively, claiming that Ukraine should not be misrepresented as an "abnormal" or non-white nation (Zhuk 2012; Jordan 2014). Such comments show that contestation of Ukraine's representations at Eurovision also exists, although the more popular view remains that Eurovision is significant for Ukrainian identity manifestation.

5.2 Artists and Songwriters
5.2.1 Russia

Without considering the song or performance, the artists selected by Russia to represent the nation already reveal the general line of the Russian strategy at Eurovision. From the early years of participation until the final few entries, most artists representing Russia have been young, conventionally attractive and ethnically Russian (read: white and Slavic) and represent an almost Aryan view of what a perfect human should be like. These performers were often already massive stars in Russia before their participation and reveal the Russian desire to consistently send what might be considered the best bet at achieving a high placement. All of these factors manifest Russia as a powerful, internationally successful and flawless state made up of strong and healthy white people. This strategy also shows Russia as an exceptionally united state with one common people as most artists carry similar traits with them, and if they

do happen to be of a diverse ethnic background, like superstar and Eurovision winner Dima Bilan, these facts are rarely brought up, and they are presented as purely Russian (Netrebko 2021). Furthermore, Russia has used performers from other post-Soviet countries like Belarus and Ukraine and passed them off as Russian. This is in line with Putin's "one people" narrative, which posits that the Russian identity is the broad category that includes these other identities, which has often been used to justify Russian claims of Ukrainian territory, specifically in the full-scale invasion since 2022 (Person and McFaul 2022: 23; Kolstø 2023).

Besides the Russian Eurovision artists' personal characteristics, many also held a similar status of fame before their participation. They were some of the country's biggest stars, such as Philipp Kirkorov, Alla Pugacheva, Dima Bilan, Polina Gagarina and Sergey Lazarev. On top of being famous, these artists are usually also outspoken supporters of Putin's regime and its actions abroad. They function as representatives of the country and its government and are criticised when they do not align with Russian values. For example, Kirkorov and Bilan were made to apologise and explain their presence at an "almost-naked" party for Russian socialites, which caused controversy in the country (Sauer 2023). When these celebrities express discontent with Russia's actions on the world stage, they are swiftly made to revise their public opinions, or they are treated as hostile agents. After speaking out against Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on social media, Pugacheva was investigated for discrediting the army, and Sergey Lazarev's Instagram account was swiftly deleted but then reinstated with the artist expressing his support for Russia and claiming his earlier comments were misunderstood (Meduza 2022; Fanning 2022). These cases show how important Russia finds its representatives and how their role as cultural ambassadors continues long after participation.

On the other hand, some exceptions prove the rule of Russia's seemingly consistent pattern of representatives. When Russia sent artists who proudly exhibited their identity as an ethnic minority, these artists were selected through a public vote, and their selection was thus not entirely in the hands of the pro-Kremlin broadcasters. The response to such artists differs depending on how they present themselves and how they are seen. When the group Buranovskiye Babushka finished second place at the ESC, everything about them highlighted their identity as Udmurts, a Russian ethnic minority. However, to an international audience, they most likely read as stereotypical, innocent Russian grannies and on top of that, they performed successfully at the contest, therefore not harming Russia's image. After their

impressive placement, the group members were named People's Artists of Udmurtia, and the local government allocated money to restore the church the group attended (Meerzon and Priven 2013: 123). Alternatively, the response differed when the Russian public selected Manizha to represent the country at Eurovision. Manizha proudly presented herself as a feminist Tajik immigrant and essentially represented everything the government wanted to suppress. Her participation sparked debate about what the Russian identity entails, against the state's desire, showing exactly why the Kremlin usually held a tight grip over what they sent to the ESC (Yusupova 2023).

Furthermore, Russia has also deviated from its regular strategy of sending "perfect" Russian artists when the specific deviation could be exploited to paint Ukraine as less tolerant than Russia. As mentioned, Russia sent Ukrainian singer Anastasia Prikhodko to highlight Ukraine's chaotic selection process and to feign their tolerance of Ukraine. In addition to this, when Ukraine hosted the ESC in 2017, Russia sent the visibly disabled singer Julia Samoylova. Many speculated that Russia sent her knowing that she would not be able to participate because of having performed in Crimea after the invasion, making her a persona non grata according to Ukrainian law, to create sympathy for Russia and disdain for Ukraine after she would inevitably be barred from entering Ukraine (Adams 2017). Not only did Russia refuse to participate via live stream as offered by the EBU, but Samoylova herself has stated that she was not taken seriously by her delegation and was only chosen because of her disability, proving that there was never any intention to perform in a Ukrainian-hosted contest (Jensen 2017; Samoylova 2018). These examples show that Russia takes Eurovision seriously as a soft power tool, as evidenced by certain choices to deviate from the regular strategy to provoke specific responses.

An interesting pattern can also be witnessed when it comes to the people responsible for crafting the Russian entries. During the first few years of its participation, Russia sent songs exclusively written by Russian songwriters. This makes sense as a rule was in place until 1999 that forced all countries to send songs in their native entries (ESC 2019a). When this rule was lifted, Russia slowly started experimenting with songwriters from different countries. It almost seemed like a method of figuring out what would work best until they discovered that international songwriters brought them the greatest success. From 2011 onwards, at least half of the songwriting team for every Russian song performed at Eurovision came from another country, although there was always at least one Russian songwriter. This shows that Russia

felt the need to express a global sound on the Eurovision stage to be successful, and needed help with this, but also made sure that the effort could still be recognised as Russian to some extent.

5.2.2 Ukraine

In the case of Ukraine, two different strategies for representing the nation regarding its artists can be witnessed before the war and afterwards. Before the war, nine of twelve Ukrainian entries featured young and conventionally attractive female solo singers. Ukraine seemingly played in on the trope of Ukrainian women as "highly sexualized local" products, a common way to advertise the country to foreigners, but also used for advertising within Ukraine itself (Burlyuk 2019: 163-64; Suprun et al. 2022: 381). However, from 2016 onwards, the typical Ukrainian Eurovision artist became harder to pinpoint. Within seven participations, the country sent a solo male and female singer, three groups led by two men and a woman, and two duos consisting of two men and two women. Furthermore, while 2012 representative Gaitana was essentially the only artist with a noticeably different identity than just Ukrainian from the pre-war era as a half-Congolese woman, the artists that Ukraine sent after the invasion of Crimea have represented different kinds of identities within Ukrainian society (Zhuk 2012). The 2016 representative, Jamala, proudly presented her identity as a Crimean Tatar; the 2022 group, Kalush Orchestra, is named after and represents their city, and Jimoh Augustus Kehinde of 2023 is a Nigerian immigrant to Ukraine (ESC 2022b; Hogan 2023). Since the war, Ukraine has opted to represent itself as a more diverse country with more to offer than just beautiful women. However, all artists have always been Ukrainian in some way and decidedly not Russian.

Furthermore, Ukraine takes the role of Eurovision representative rather seriously. Many of the most famous artists such as Ruslana, Tina Karol, Ani Lorak and Jamala have competed at the contest and have been awarded the prestigious title of "People's Artist of Ukraine" after their participation by the Ukrainian president (Granger 2016; Kobevko 2017). This illustrates how renowned the title of Eurovision representative has always been in Ukraine and how they are seen as cultural ambassadors of the nation. In 2019, after the controversy surrounding Maruv, the Ukrainian broadcaster explicitly stated that Ukrainian Eurovision artists are indeed cultural ambassadors and should express "the opinion of Ukrainian society in the world" (ESC 2019b). Past participants have almost all been incredibly vocal about their resistance

against Russia's aggression and have aided Ukraine in the war in various ways (Wiwibloggs 2022; Bubola 2022; Ratsybarska and Kyzyk 2024). Artists that have not taken enough of a stance against Russia, for example by performing in Russia since the invasion of Crimea like 2009 representative Svitlana Loboda, or even showing various levels of acceptance of the full-scale invasion like 2008 representative Ani Lorak, have been shunned by both Ukrainian public and government alike (LB.ua 2022). This underscores the significant value that Ukrainian society places on the ambassadorial role of its Eurovision artists, explaining the desire to only send artists who will not legitimise Russia's actions in Ukraine's name.

Additionally, the ESC performers are not the only way Ukraine intends to present an authentic Ukrainian narrative. Throughout the entire participation history of the country, Ukrainians have almost always been credited as songwriters with very few exceptions. Ironically, one of the two entries that did not feature any Ukrainian songwriters but did feature Russians was the song performed by Ani Lorak, who has since moved to Russia and is ostracised by Ukrainian society, which may be a contributing factor for Ukraine to select artists that work in Ukrainian spheres. (Malay 2023). Before the start of the war, international songwriters would occasionally still be featured, but since 2016, all Ukrainian entries have been written and composed exclusively by Ukrainians. This development further proves the Ukrainian desire to disseminate authentic Ukrainian products.

5.3 Genre and Sound

5.3.1 Russia

The Russian use of genre and sound at Eurovision shows a generally consistent pattern of modern and international elements that do not represent the culture unique to Russia but represent Russia's dominant attitude on the world stage. With a few previously mentioned exceptions, the Russian entries can be classified as different subcategories of modern, globalised pop music. During the first years of participation, the songs Russia sent already sounded like well-produced pop music. However, some sonic elements could still be identified as Russian, likely because the language rule that was in place also spilt over into the overall sound of the songs. However, as time passed, the songs took on more Americanised, global sounds and often chased whatever trends were popular. For example, in 2011, the promotion of the Russian song consistently mentioned that it was produced by American producer RedOne, known for creating some of Lady Gaga's biggest hits (ESC 2011).

Although the intention of pursuing a popular, sleek and global sound was to position Russia as a modern nation that matters on the world stage and is capable of presenting what other major international actors like the United States and Western Europe do, it simultaneously revealed an insecurity. Russia's intention to emulate the musical trends of other countries implies that Russia itself is not a producer of global trends or modern standards and thus lags behind other world powers.

Contrastingly, the Russian cultural identity is established and unthreatened and it is therefore unnecessary to use ethnic Russian sounds through native instruments to manifest an independent cultural identity. The image of Russia as a political actor within global politics is controversial, and efforts are seemingly directed at shaping this political image. Sonically, Russia alternates between two types of songs to shape this image. On the one hand, it sends songs with uplifting sounds with slow crescendos sung with high-pitched, feminine vocals associated with peace and friendliness, such as with its entries of 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2017 (Eitan 2013: 172-173). On the other hand, songs are sung with deeper male voices that are louder from the start and build up to an even more dramatic climax that emits a threatening and dominant aura, like in 2016 and 2019 (ibid.). Through this dichotomy of peacefulness and dominance, Russia presents itself as a benevolent yet formidable nation that will only act when provoked, which is in line with the desired projection of identity that Russia pursues on the world stage to counter the dominant Western discourse in which Russia is presented as the aggressor (Feklyunina 2008; Szostek 2017).

5.3.2 Ukraine

Regarding the genres and sounds Ukraine uses, a near opposite image and approach can be recognised from Russia's. Ukraine has always shown variety in its entries regarding genre, style and inclusion of ethnic elements, although a moderate change occurred after 2014. While Ukraine has sent clean pop songs similar to those of Russia, for example in 2008 and 2013, many of its entries from early on combined uplifting and modern pop beats with traditional folkloric sounds, which was a successful strategy as it won with such a song in 2004, Ukraine's second year of competing. This trend of combining old and new genres has never ceased but has changed over the years. The folkloric elements have gained a more significant role and often form the basis of the song in a true blend of genres, whereas the folkloric additions from before were often merely added instrumentals within a pop genre.

Additionally, the mood of the songs has become darker and more serious than before.

In the pre-war years of Ukraine's ESC participation, songs like the 2004 and 2012 entries featured local instruments like the trembita and the surma-horn, used by the Hutsuls and the Cossacks, respectively (Wickström 2008: 60; Adams 2012). The songs started with the loud tones of these instruments to set the mood, and then they continued roaring throughout the song. On the one hand, these horns are used as markers of identity that link the entries to specific populations like the Hutsuls or the Cossacks or to Ukrainians at large for the foreign audience (Wickström 2008: 69). On the other hand, playing these instruments loudly demands the viewer's attention in a way that cannot be as easily ignored as a visual component and "symbolically acts on the imagination" (Balliger 2005: 23). The combination of expressing identity and loudly demanding the attention through sound is a form of "sonic squatting" in which traditionally oppressed groups, like the Ukrainians, can take control over space to pull attention to emic narratives about their cultural identity (idem: 24). Before 2014, these narratives mainly focused on conjuring up a cheerful image of Ukraine as a relatively newly independent nation and the actual cultural sonic elements remained rather superficial additions to standard pop songs. Through this approach, Ukraine intended to create a positive and independent image of the country and its culture for foreign viewers who perhaps still associated Ukraine with Russia.

However, the Russian invasion of Crimea and the subsequential threat to the Ukrainian identity pushed Ukraine to take a more serious and authentic approach to incorporating cultural elements in their Eurovision songs, albeit still in a modern way. Beyond adding folkloric elements to typical pop songs, songs like the 2021 and 2022 entries are based on folkloric musical structures inferred from a traditional spring ritual song and a folk lullaby (Fuster 2021; Ten Veen 2022). Furthermore, the 2016, 2020 and 2021 entries feature unique folkloric vocal techniques that express mourning or nostalgic sentiments (Naroditskaya 2012: 164-166; Reyes and McGee 2023: 208). Moreover, many different folkloric instruments have also been used in recent entries. These include not only Ukrainian and Slavic instruments like the Sopilka and Telenka but also the Duduk from Armenia, which shows that Ukrainians are a diverse people made up of groups with different diasporic backgrounds (ESC 2016; Treisman 2022). The sounds of these instruments evoke drastically different emotions and themes, from ancient notions of sadness and death to folkloric expressions of rebirth. The use of these instruments in combination with techno beats or other modern instrumentals allows Ukraine

to both express the century-long existence and diversity of its people(s) and traditions and to establish itself as a modern independent nation that creates its new traditions (Magosci 2010: xxv; Kubicek 2023: xiii). Moreover, both the European and Ukrainian audiences get to experience the emotions that Ukrainians are feeling in dire times, with the Europeans being reminded of the threat to the Ukrainian identity and the native Ukrainian audience likely feeling an extra sense of connection because of the familiarity that the traditional folk elements evoke, aiding in the reinforcement of an affective community of Ukrainians.

5.4 Language and Lyrics
5.4.1 Russia

Through the language and lyrics that Russia exhibits at Eurovision, the country follows one dominant discourse and counters another one. Russia follows the dominant discourse in which Western values are seen as the global standard through its use of English, a remnant of Western and, more specifically, US hegemony (Xue and Zuo 2013; Zeng et al. 2023). Out of the 22 entries Russia has sent or intended to send after the removal of the language rule, 17 were entirely in English (although one featured many random Spanish words throughout), three were a mix of a Russian language with English, one was a combination of Russian and Ukrainian, and just one entry was entirely in Russian. This clearly shows that Russia intends for its messages to be understood by a broad European audience. Furthermore, it means that Russia does not deny that the Russian language and Russian culture are not as dominant and widespread globally as the English language and Anglo culture. To go along with this discourse is not necessarily harmful to Russia, considering its position in world politics remains strong in a world dominated by the English language.

On the other hand, a dominant discourse of today that does harm Russia's image is the one in which Russia is seen as an aggressor state and that post-Soviet countries, specifically Ukraine in this case, are more fragile victims that need Western support. Russia counters this discourse through the messages in its ESC entries' lyrics. Almost all Russian songs textually centre on love and peace or combine the two. These themes are widely used at Eurovision and are often ridiculed for coming across as hollow, even by the hosts of Eurovision, as evidenced by the 2016 interval act called "Love, Love, Peace, Peace", which described the most generic and "perfect" Eurovision entries (ESC 2020). The Russian songs contain superficial, inoffensive

phrases that can only be interpreted positively. The songs centred around love and relationships were more frequent during the earlier years and reflected a Russian desire to keep political associations away from the country. Songs with lyrics expressing sentiments of peace became more common around the time of the invasion of Crimea. They showed how Russia actively tried to improve its negative reputation after the tensions with Ukraine intensified. The negative attitude towards Russia was also noticeable at Eurovision, as the 2014 and 2015 entries were booed loudly whenever they received points (Gallagher 2016). However, there have been some exceptions to this strategy. The 2003 and 2005 entries had more activistic and accusatory themes but presented Russia positively. The only other entry with an explicitly critical message was 2021's entry, for which the singer Manizha was shunned. Russia's overall strategy moved towards becoming less explicit and more peaceful, although its final entry is an ironic exception.

Expanding on this, several motifs and symbols reoccur in the Russian Eurovision songs and are used to paint a peaceful and loving image of Russia, with none of them being specific to Russian culture. The first of these symbols is the metaphor of light as a counterpart of darkness and evil. The lyrics of the entries from 2014, 2015 and 2017 all heavily centre around this concept, for example, by inviting people to "shine into my darkness" or by repeating that "in the dark, a flame is burning". Another motif that is often brought to the forefront is that of unity. The 2013 entry calls for us all to "open our arms" and "come together as one". Then, Russia told us in 2015 that "a million voices" are ready to tackle loneliness together, positioning Russia as a benevolent state that invites others to join them, as opposed to forcefully annexing them. However, while Russia tries to come across as serene, it is common for the country to remind others of their potential power. In the entries of 2008, 2016, 2018 and 2019, there were many textual references to strength, perseverance and invincibility, for example, by stating that "I won't break" or "I'll swallow hard, fall apart, break and bleed, but you won't see". Using the contrasting themes of peace and strength, Russia articulates that it will only use its dominance and strength if provoked by others, considering Russia supposedly deals with a peace-loving conviction. However, the Russian messages can never be directly linked to its war on Ukraine, indicating that Russia does not wish to publicise its role in the war.

5.4.2 Ukraine

Once again, Ukraine's use of language and lyrics shows a clear break in strategy before and after the start of the war, with the manifestation of Ukrainian identity becoming a more pressing priority. From 2003 to 2014, not a single Ukrainian entry was sung entirely in Ukrainian. Of these 12 songs, 9 were entirely in English, and 3 were a mix of English with either Ukrainian or Surzhyk, a Ukrainian-Russian pidgin traditionally associated with Ukrainian peasants (Bilaniuk 2004). Ukraine mainly catered their entries to the rest of Europe to gain attention and recognition from them, a logical choice for a relatively newly independent country for which Eurovision was one of the few ways of presenting itself to other nations in its own way. However, in 2016, the direction of the attention took a more internal turn that targeted the Ukrainian people. Out of the 8 entries that Ukraine sent or was supposed to send since 2016, only 2 were entirely in English, 3 were fully in Ukrainian, 2 were a mix of Ukrainian and English, and 1 was a mix of Crimean Tatar and English. Moreover, two entries that were either entirely in English or a mix were sent in the year that Ukraine hosted the contest, and Ukraine was thus able to feature the Ukrainian language and culture in different ways besides their entry (Jordan 2015: 89). The more frequent usage of Ukrainian in the Eurovision entries indicates that Ukraine wants its songs' precise messages to be understood by Ukrainians rather than other Europeans. Furthermore, it sends the message to Ukrainians that Ukraine is the unifying language among them, and not Russian, which is also spoken by a large part of the Ukrainian population. This development is a part of the broader push in Ukraine to move away from speaking Russian in favour of Ukrainian to fully establish an independent identity from Russia (Bilaniuk 2023; Ebel and Khudov 2023). By targeting its native audience, Ukraine can use its Eurovision songs to "formulate yearnings and values for an entire generation" of Ukrainians on top of using their entries for "explicit political ends", which aids in the manifestation of identity for Ukrainians themselves (Balliger 2005: 17).

The same pattern of intensification of the inclusion of Ukrainian cultural elements can also be witnessed in the broad lyrical messages of the songs. Before the war started, most Ukrainian entries focused on love and relationships and could hardly be recognised as Ukrainian based on the lyrics alone. The exceptions, like the entries from 2004 and 2007, had only a few superficial references to Ukraine or Ukrainian culture. Since 2016, the songs have become deeper and more personal and have often focused on themes of resistance and peace from the

perspective of a suffering nation. Half of the songs after the war make clear references to Ukrainian history, traditions or genealogy, indicating that Ukraine wants to push a more authentic narrative about its national identity that may emotionally impact foreign audiences but does not necessarily have to be relatable for them, such as the emotional 2016 entry about the deportation of Crimean Tatars in 1944.

While the authenticity of Ukraine's cultural projection changed after the war, unambiguous political messages against Russia have never been off limits for Ukraine, despite the Eurovision rules forbidding it. In 2005 and 2016, the Ukrainian entries directly referenced the Orange Revolution and the invasion of Crimea. Additionally, some songs gained a more actively anti-Russian connotation after the full-scale invasion. The 2007 representative, drag queen Verka Serduchka, sang a song called "Dancing Lasha Tumbai", which many understood as gibberish for "dancing Russia goodbye (Kuipers 2007). Serduchka denied this and claimed that "lasha tumbai" was Mongolian for "whipped cream", but this was quickly debunked (ibid.). After the full-scale invasion in 2022, Serduchka has proudly sung the lyrics "dancing Russia goodbye" every time the song is performed (Beaumont-Thomas 2024). Since her participation, Serduchka has become a Eurovision legend, reappearing on the stage multiple times (Tsinivits 2023). This demonstrates the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy at Eurovision, as Serduchka embodies a dual narrative that has been celebrated for over fifteen years and casts Ukraine in a positive light while encouraging criticism of Russia through her song. Furthermore, despite the 2022 song not being written about the full-scale invasion of 2022, it became a Ukrainian anthem of resistance against Russia before the contest took place, with much of the promotion relying on linking the song's meaning to the war (Winfield and Santalucia 2022). It is evident that Ukraine has always used Eurovision to detach itself specifically from Russia and has used it to call attention to the injustices Russia has committed against Ukraine.

Within the themes mentioned above, some lyrical motifs stand out concerning the Ukrainian identity, although they can almost exclusively be found in the entries after the start of the war. The first of these is the use of autoethnography in lyrics, which is a way for oppressed people to "represent themselves and retell history with their image and voice fully included" through autobiographical writing (Balliger 2005: 15). The 2016, 2020 and 2022 entries are all based on personal or familial stories and talk about mourning and pain, youth memories, and nostalgia and ageing, respectively. By using gripping lyrics such as "When people are coming,

they come to your house, they kill you all, and say we're not guilty", the 2016 entry paints a vivid image of familial suffering that emotionally impacts the listener. It simultaneously links these emotions to Ukraine's identity as a country. Related to this, entries like those of 2022 and 2024 also mention family and ancestry differently. One effect of naming family and ancestry is to emphasise the long history of the literal "motherland", which has existed for many generations. Furthermore, it can serve as a message of emotional resilience and perseverance, exemplified by the lyrics of 2024's entry: "And though it may be very scary and dark and sometimes not easy, you'll always have your ancestors following you from heaven".

Besides the more personal and familial themes, motifs linked to nature, pain and strength are also prevalent. The entries of 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2024 have all somehow mentioned natural elements related to spring or to (Ukrainian) flowers, which are integral parts of Ukrainian folk culture and "Ukrainian-ness" at large (Cholodová 2017: 3039, 3046; Chomitzky 2020: 43). The 2020 song repeatedly mentions the flowers periwinkle and guelder rose, which are both prevalent symbols in Ukrainian weddings, and the 2022 and 2024 songs paint pictures of Ukrainian natural landscapes by singing about blooming fields and streaming springs (Cholodová 2017: 3039). By calling upon Ukrainian ritual elements and landscapes, Ukrainian viewers gain a common emotional tie to their culture and native land, where they desire to practice this culture free from foreign oppression (idem: 3046). The protection of the native land, specifically from Russia, is also expressed through motifs of resilience, which are present in the entries of 2018, 2022, 2023 and 2024. This sense of resilience is usually expressed through more obvious and worldly references that the entire viewing audience can understand, although they are also meant to inspire Ukrainians. For example, the 2022 song repeats the lyrics "I got a heart of steel" in English, showing foreign viewers the resilience of the Ukrainian people, but also mentions in Ukrainian that "despite the pain, I continue my fight", inspiring Ukrainians to keep up the resistance against Russia despite the hardships.

5.5 Staging and Performance

5.5.1 Russia

Figure 1: Russia's Eurovision 2004 participant closely resembles Avril Lavigne. Source: EBU 2004.[1]

Following the Russian strategy identified in the previous sections, the staging and live performances of the Russian Eurovision entries reflect global and modern trends that usually do not feature unique Russian elements, with the same exceptions as mentioned before, namely the 2012 and 2021 entries. Regarding costuming and presentation of the artists, the earlier entries often followed trendy styles, such as in 2000 and 2003. Some entries went beyond following trends and seemed like exact copies of popular American acts from then. The 2002 entry featured a boyband in cohesive but slightly different, all-white outfits that seemed like a replica of the Backstreets Boys, and the 2004 singer closely resembled Avril Lavigne (Fig 1). Back then, Russia seemed occupied with presenting itself as a nation that kept up with global trends. However, as negative news surrounding Russia's invasion of Crimea dominated international headlines, Russia started focusing on protecting its international image. The entries from 2014 to 2018 mainly featured artists performing in modern, bright, white outfits backed up by white stage lighting and featured elements that could be described as angelic (Figs 2, 3). Clearly, Russia tried to convince viewers that it was a peaceful and non-aggressive nation through elements that any international viewer could understand.

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[1] The EBU (n.d. b) allows the use of footage for editorial use of ESC editions since 2004.

Figure 2: Russia's Eurovision 2015 entry features white lighting and outfits. Source: EBU 2015.

Figure 3: Russia's Eurovision 2016 entry shows the performer as an angel. Source: EBU 2016.

In addition to the staging, Russia's performances usually feature a lot of movement or choreography in the entries performed by men, while women often move slowly or stand still. Male performers like Dima Bilan (2006, 2008) and Sergey Lazarev (2016, 2019) either move across the stage or perform complex choreographies that rely on modern technology and strength. Female representatives like Dina Garipova (2013) and Polina Gagarina (2015) stand still or take a few steps during the performance. Russian men are represented as active and strong, while women seem more fragile and serene. This image aligns with the "traditional values" agenda promoted by the Kremlin and can thus serve as an example to Russian viewers of what model citizens should be like (Kazakov and Hutchings 2019: 139). Moreover, by switching between feminine and tranquil performances and masculine, technologically

advanced and energetic shows, Russia once again presents itself as both a strong and modern nation and a peaceful one to foreign viewers.

Figure 4: Russia's 2021 entry features a dress made up of different Russian fabrics and shows Russian women of visibly different ethnicities and sexualities. Source: EBU 2021.

Unsurprisingly, Russia rarely sent performances featuring typically Russian cultural elements on stage. Even the exceptions, the 2012 and 2021 entries, featured elements specific to certain regions and not elements commonly used in Russia. The 2012 entry focused on showcasing traditions particular to the region of Udmurtia by having the grannies perform in traditional Udmurt dresses and having them bake "perepechi", an Udmurt pie, on stage (Wright 2012; Sanabria-Rangel 2021). As mentioned before, such an "ethnic" performance is presumably not how the Russian elite wanted its country represented. However, considering the projected image represented a charming side of Russia that outsiders could still interpret as just "Russian", it did not stir up any controversy. Contrastingly, Russia's final Eurovision performance in 2021 featured region-specific ethnic elements from all over Russia by using traditional fabrics from all regions in the costume and by featuring Russians of visibly different ethnicities and even sexualities in the LED background (Fig 4). Not only did this performance showcase Russia as a nation consisting of many different groups that often still adhere to folkloric traditions, but it also went against the traditional view of gender and sexuality that the Kremlin pushes. Ironically, the last impression Russia left on viewers at Eurovision was utterly at variance with the image that Russia wished to emit and was therefore also controversial in Russia.

Figure 5: Russia's 2008 entry features a violinist and famous figure skater Evgeni Plushenko. Source: EBU 2008.

Contrastingly, Russia has sent some entries featuring cultural elements that are not exclusively Russian but are often associated with Russia. In both of Dima Bilan's entries in 2006 and 2008, the staging featured props and background dancers that showcased some of Russia's greatest cultural assets. The 2006 staging featured two female ballet dancers and a grand piano. These elements were obvious references to Russia's renowned oeuvre in ballet and classical music. They reminded viewers of the high arts Russia is known for, despite participating in a contest known for its generally more lowbrow musical output. In 2008, Bilan's staging featured a violinist, referring to Russian classical music again, and a figure skater (Fig 5). This figure skater was Evgeni Plushenko, who had won many Olympic medals and world championships (ESC 2008). By featuring such elements and performers, Russia reminded the world of its impact on global cultural disciplines like ballet and classical music, commonly considered more valuable or prestigious, to show the supposed supremacy of Russian culture (Thomas 2022: 1-2). The specific use of a highly decorated figure skater serves to show how Russia might be "objectively" better than other countries when it comes to the high arts, considering figure skating is often seen as a competitive extension of the high arts because of its associations with classical music and ballet (Kestnbaum 2003: 10). Russia thus uses cultural elements, albeit not uniquely Russian ones, to establish the supposed eminence of the Russian culture which forms part of the national identity.

5.5.2 Ukraine

Figure 6: Ukraine's Eurovision 2004 entry featured an outfit inspired by Carpathian warriors. Source: EBU 2004.

Ukraine's live performances at Eurovision starkly contrast with Russia's approach. From the earliest entries, Ukraine has always included Ukrainian cultural components in its stagings in different ways. However, the use of these components has changed with time. Early on, many entries, such as those of 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009 and 2012, featured Ukrainian costumes or parts of Ukrainian costumes. However, for all of these entries, the traditional wardrobe was customised to become more appealing to international viewers. Singers like Ruslana and Tina Karol wore outfits vaguely inspired by ancient Carpathian warriors and Ukrainian traditional dresses, respectively (Ruslana n.d.) (Fig 6). Both outfits were made to show lots of skin and to use female sexuality to cater to the male gaze in a self-exoticising manner that relied on the trope of Ukrainian women as sexual objects (Suprun et al. 2022: 381). After 2014, Ukraine abruptly stopped relying on sexualised, inauthentic representations of Ukrainian culture and switched to a more authentic and sober approach. If the costuming was not necessarily visibly Ukrainian, it was at least modest, like in 2016 and 2024. Furthermore, when the decision was made to exhibit traditional Ukrainian costumes, effort was put into making them as authentic as possible. In 2022, the different members of Kalush Orchestra wore "accurate replications" of traditional costumes from the twentieth century (Kuzminski 2022) (Fig 7). Some elements of the outfits were modernised, for example, by including a modern interpretation of a Ukrainian embroidered shirt, a "vyshyvanka", which has come to be seen as a symbol of national identity among Ukrainians in recent times (Chomitzky 2020: 28). However, these

modern garments did not come off as inauthentic catering to foreign tastes, but rather as ways of promoting new Ukrainian traditions. The change in costuming after the invasion of Crimea indicates a departure from presenting Ukraine as a cheerful and "sexy" country to foreigners. Instead, Ukraine appeals more to Ukrainians themselves to manifest a cohesive yet diverse national identity. It does so thoughtfully and prudently to clarify the severity of the threat to the Ukrainian identity.
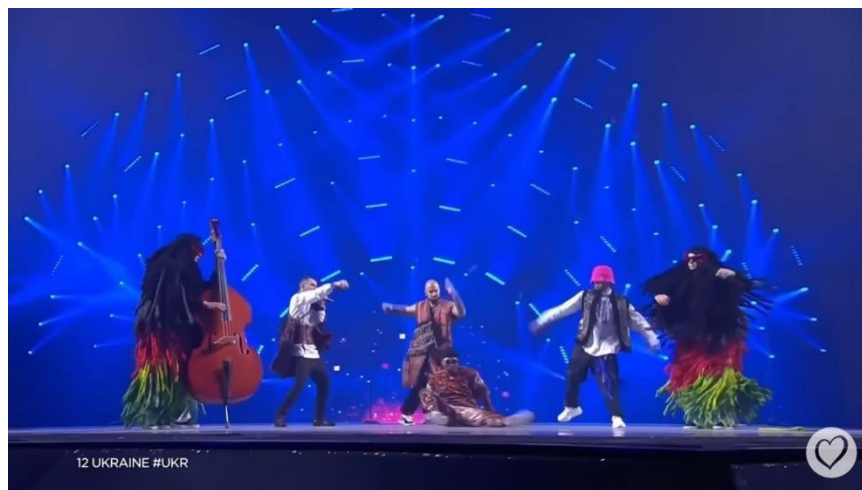

Figure 7: Ukraine's 2022 entry features authentic replicas of different Ukrainian costumes. Source: EBU 2022.

Figure 8: Ukraine's Eurovision 2016 entry features an LED tree that represents hope and genealogy. Source: EBU 2016.

Moreover, since 2016, Ukraine has also used the décor in its performances to depict cultural elements, both Ukrainian and universal, that represent the lyrics and themes of the songs to make them understandable for foreign viewers, but also to allow Ukrainians to connect to the songs to a heightened extent. An example of this is the 2016 entry which featured a tree

growing on the LED screen throughout the performance that represented both the genealogical aspects of the songs and functioned as a sign of rebirth and hope (Fig 8). Furthermore, many performances feature religious symbolism. The 2021 act ends with the singer backed up by a glowing halo resembling a sacred depiction, the 2023 lead singer seemingly experiences a religious ecstasy in front of a cross (Fig 9), and in 2024, one of the singers is portrayed as an angel in the sky on the LED screen. These religious images symbolise hope for Ukrainians and position Ukrainians as the good and pure ones with divine power on their side in a war against a more powerful oppressor. Moreover, one symbol that has consistently been present since the start of Ukraine's Eurovision participation is the Ukrainian flag. The very first entry in 2003 featured an LED rocket with the flag, the 2009 singer played a drum set flanked by two giant flags when the contest was hosted in Moscow nota bene, and all but one of the post-2014 entries featured blue and yellow stage lighting symbolising the national flag (Fig 9). The symbol of the flag has always stood for the united Ukrainian identity and serves as an effective method of emotionally binding people to an imagined community, with the specific affective impact depending on the context (Schatz and Lavine 2007: 330; Muldoon et al. 2020: 271-273). Therefore, the flag has always fit in the Ukrainian strategy for identity manifestation at Eurovision but has gone from primarily being a symbol of independence to additionally being a symbol of resistance during the war. To both foreign and Ukrainian viewers, the use of cultural elements in the décor aids in the manifestation of the Ukrainian identity as one that faces adversity but also represents resistance and hope, although these elements carry extra layers for Ukrainians that may further bind them to the Ukrainian identity.

Figure 9: Ukraine's 2023 entry uses both religious imagery and stage lighting in the colours of the Ukrainian flag. Source: EBU 2023.

Subsequently, the change in presentation since the war started also translates into different performance styles. Before 2016, the performances predominantly featured singers moving around and performing animated choreography. The performers showed excited facial expressions and often ended the performances with frivolous exclamations of love and joy like "Thank you so much, you are the best" in 2009. An almost wholly opposing style can be witnessed in the performances after the start of the war. These performances have generally been toned down and sombre. Energetic choreographies are sparse, and there is not a single performance in which the performers show jubilation through their facial expressions. Furthermore, since the full-scale invasion, the performers have used the few seconds they have on stage after the song ends to call for peace in and support for Ukraine. In 2022, the lead singer made explicit reference to the current state of the war by shouting "Please help Ukraine, Mariupol, help Azovstal right now", referencing the Ukrainian metallurgical facility which was then under siege by Russia (Schwirtz 2022). The performers of 2024 spread a more general message by calling for "Unity for the world, peace and freedom for Ukraine". The change in performance style shows that Ukraine uses every opportunity to remind viewers of the gravity of Ukraine's situation, not only by expressing and transmitting sad and sombre emotions that foreign viewers would not understand from the Ukrainian lyrics but also by explicitly speaking about the war.

6. Discussion of the Findings

6.1 Identity Manifestation

Russia and Ukraine have demonstrated how important Eurovision is as a form of cultural diplomacy to them. The governments of both states are involved in selecting their Eurovision entries and laying out guidelines for their acts to follow. However, they do so differently. As the Russian public broadcasters responsible for organising their Eurovision participation followed Kremlin standards, most interferences happened behind closed doors, which was possible because most songs were internally selected without considering the Russian public's input. Conversely, the Ukrainian Eurovision representatives are partially chosen by the public. This means that when the broadcaster decides an artist cannot participate because of political disagreements or breaches of the law, it has to justify this publicly. Such processes are reflections of the state of democracy in both countries. Russia exhibits authoritarian behaviour and allows for minimal public say to keep complete control over the message and the manifestation of identity. Ukraine's inclusion of the people when deciding how Ukraine presents itself reflects a democratising nation. However, the many controversies surrounding its entry selections show that the political elite is not willing to let all reins loose yet because of the perceived threat to the Ukrainian national identity.

Regarding the role of the selected artists, both countries treat them like cultural diplomats, albeit somewhat differently. Russia's singers have always represented the identity Russia attempts to manifest and the government's policies. Not only does their behaviour matter for this role but so do their characteristics. The preferred Russian artist is white, Slavic and ablebodied to present the Russian people as united and "perfect" in a backwards sense unless an artist's supposed "imperfections" can be used to paint Russia as tolerant at the expense of Ukraine. Furthermore, Russia sends artists of different ethnic and national backgrounds. It passes them off as Russian to push Putin's "One People" notion, which claims the Russian identity as an umbrella term for various post-Soviet identities, including the Ukrainian identity. Russia uses this narrative to encourage its (ethnically non-Slavic) citizens to cultivate a stronger affinity with the Russian ethnicity, fostering a sense of cultural and national solidarity beyond traditional ethnic boundaries. Concurrently, it serves as a justification for its territorial claims of Ukraine. When the public was involved in the Russian song selection, the selected artists frequently resembled the polar opposite of the government's perfect representative. Any artists who fail to live up to the Kremlin's standards of representation are

shunned by the political elite. This shows the discrepancy between the people's and government's desired manifestation of identity and demonstrates how Russia uses the aesthetic register of culture, through its representatives' creative outputs, to manifest its identity as monolithic (Miller and Yúdice 2002: 1).

In Ukraine, the desired candidate for Eurovision is similar for the Ukrainian elite and the people because of the nature of Ukraine's selection method, which involves the public but is also subject to relevant Ukrainian laws. These candidates have always been considered cultural ambassadors, but after the war, their role as political ambassadors also became prominent. Any representative now needs to oppose Russia in the war unequivocally. Unlike in Russia, Ukraine's representatives are noticeably from different regions and ethnicities. They are encouraged to express these facets, meaning that Ukraine relies on the aesthetic register of culture to manifest the Ukrainian identity as diverse and elaborate (Miller and Yúdice 2002: 1).

There are still similarities between the ambassadorial role of Russian and Ukrainian Eurovision representatives, but there are few between the actual entries the countries send. Ukraine's entries have always featured many Ukrainian cultural elements mixed with universal sounds. However, these Ukrainian elements have become more prevalent and authentic since the start of the war, for example, by symbolising personal stories and traumas. By moving away from inauthentic and self-exoticising representations of Ukrainian culture and including the Ukrainian language in its entries, Ukraine promptly directed more attention to its native audience while still appealing to foreigners by retaining the global sounds. Within this mix of sounds, there have decidedly not been any elements that can be considered Russian, despite the many similarities between Russian and Ukrainian culture. Ukraine then uses the anthropological register of culture to manifest the uniqueness of its culture, but also that it is and will be integrated with the Western and European community, and explicitly not with Russia (Miller and Yúdice 2002: 1).

Alternatively, Russia did not use many ethnically Russian cultural elements in its entries. Instead, the focus was on following global music trends and displaying how Russia excels in universal cultural disciplines. Accordingly, Russia manifested itself as a modern and influential nation. It did not focus too much on manifesting a comprehensive and unique identity, presumably because the Russian identity is established and uncontested by others. Furthermore, the Russian entries' lyrics often encouraged spreading love and peace but never

specifically made direct references to the war with Ukraine. These songs were meant to portray Russia as benevolent and peaceful. The direction of Russia's attention is outwards, as it caters to international, instead of Russian, palates and attempts to convince foreigners of Russia's righteousness. By solely promoting songs that downplay the uniqueness of Russian culture, the Kremlin employed the anthropological register of culture to manifest its identity as that of a modern and advanced nation (Miller and Yúdice 2002: 1).

Additionally, as Russia's identity is not threatened, it does not have to rely on affectively binding its people to this identity. Thus, It has preferred to focus on the more superficial aspects of its performances. Viewers are supposed to be impressed by advanced technology in combination with complex choreography or charmed by angelic portrayals of the singers. These presentations are, once again, meant to cast Russia in a positive light, especially since the invasion of Crimea, but also exhibit Russia's strength and technological advancement. Moreover, Russia's performances reinforce Kremlin-approved values. By only allowing men to perform demanding choreographies and overwhelmingly presenting women as calm and fragile, Russia manifests itself as a conservative nation to the European audience. Simultaneously, the Russian Eurovision performances also act as an example for the Russian people to see what they should ideally behave like. The main focus is not on manifesting a comprehensive national identity by showing cultural practices and traditions but rather reinforcing the normative aspects of the existing perception of the Russian identity.

In contrast, Ukraine's live performances have always relied on creating an emotional impact. During the earlier years, these emotions were predominantly of joy and represented an independent nation that got to show off its unique culture to the world for the first time. However, almost all performances have exuded a sombre energy since the war, and the emotions shown on stage reflected the songs' themes of pain and resistance. For outsiders, these emotions served as a reminder of the grave situation that Ukraine is experiencing. This blend of authenticity and emotion carried a deeper meaning for Ukrainians themselves. In line with Solomon's (2014) and Hutchison's (2016) writing, Ukraine's entries emotionally bind its citizens to the Ukrainian identity through affective investment. By relying on emotionally presenting the shared trauma of the Ukrainian people, a Ukrainian affective community is entrenched, which is particularly intense because of the crisis Ukraine is currently living in (Hutchison 2016: 81, 110).

6.2 Discursive Practices

Overall, there seem to be two discursive conflicts that Russia and Ukraine struggle over. One of these is concerned with the manifestation of a national identity, and the other is related to the role of both countries in the war. Regarding the manifestation of identity at Eurovision, Ukraine has always resisted the discourse that positions the Ukrainian identity as simply a sub-section of the broader Russian identity. Therefore, in defining the "self", Ukraine mainly situates itself across Russia as the "other" (Hansen 2006: 6). While Ukraine does use universal cultural elements, it intentionally withholds from using any symbols that could be considered Russian and concurrently uses many elements that are distinctly Ukrainian. This strategy has intensified alongside the escalated severity of the war since 2014 and exemplifies the instability of the articulatory practices that shape discourse, which fluctuate with changing power relations (Foucault 1978: 95). In the case of this thesis, Russia attempts to shift the already imbalanced power dynamics in its favour through waging war at Ukraine's expense, which in turn has prompted Ukraine to respond with greater discursive resistance at Eurovision than before.

Unlike Ukraine, Russia seems to compare itself with the West as "other" to define the Russian "self". Russia tries to come across as a modern and globalised country by using universal sounds and elements originating in the West. On the one hand, following this discourse of Western cultural hegemony does not necessarily harm Russia's current position on the world stage, considering its relatively powerful status in a world dominated by Western influences. On the other hand, by going along with this discourse instead of countering it, Russia implicitly accepts that it has lost the battle of global cultural dominion with the West. This suggests that authentic, folkloric Russian culture itself does not stand for modernity despite still being practised, as revealed in the exceptional entries of 2012 and 2021 that were selected to represent the nation by the public. While Russia still asserts its strength over Ukraine, the inadvertent admittance of its vulnerability relative to the West implies that Ukraine's alignment with the West could undermine Russia's power and further erode its position.

This insecurity leads to the second discursive debate about Russia's and Ukraine's roles in the war, which partially overlaps with the first debate. Since the war started, Ukraine has followed the dominant discourse that positions Ukraine as the victim and the Ukrainian identity as being under threat by Russia, the aggressor. Ukraine has consistently referred to its suffering and resistance in the war and mixed this with authentic manifestations of Ukrainian culture to

substantiate that Ukraine is the victim and needs Europe's support. Russia countered this discourse. It presents itself as a benevolent nation that harbours peace and refrains from referring to the war with Ukraine to frame the war as a non-issue that is not worth debating in the international realm. Essentially, Russia attempts to convince European viewers that what Russia is doing in Ukraine is a peace mission that should be left alone by foreigners.

7. Concluding Remarks

Russia and Ukraine have extensively utilised the Eurovision Song Contest as a tool of cultural diplomacy. Through rhetoric and action, political elites in both countries have demonstrated the significance they attribute to the contest in manifesting national identity. Moreover, their representatives serve as important cultural and political ambassadors, especially since Russia started the war in 2014. However, most similarities end there. Both states adopt markedly different strategies for showcasing their national identities, each emphasising distinct aspects of identity to accentuate, albeit often linked to their relationship in both cases.

For Russia, Eurovision has always served as a stage to show the European audience how modern and united it is. Its entries have typically lacked traditional Russian cultural elements in favour of incorporating universal elements that demonstrate Russia keeps up with the West, and that show its global influence. However, by sticking to global styles originating in the West and accepting the Western cultural hegemony, Russia implicitly reveals its insecurity regarding its position opposite Ukraine, which is aligning itself with Europe and the West. To tackle this insecurity, Russia uses its representatives and their performances to suppress ethnic boundaries and show itself as a strong and united nation. An image of the ideal Russian is manifested as white, Slavic, able-bodied and following conservative values. Moreover, this representation includes other post-Soviet peoples, including Ukrainians, and is used as a justification for the invasion of Ukraine. To legitimise this invasion, Russia manifests itself as a peaceful and benevolent country while simultaneously concealing its actual role in the war. However, the few times the Kremlin delegated control to the public in the entry selection, an utterly contrasting identity was manifested, showing that Russia may be less homogenous than it seems, both in terms of its people's ethnicities and values.

Unlike Russia, Ukraine has always used Ukrainian elements in its Eurovision entries. Before the war, and when Ukraine was still relatively newly independent, these elements were altered to appeal to the foreign audience and manifest a cheerful image of Ukraine as a nation with its own identity. However, the war made Ukraine take a more intensive and authentic approach regarding including cultural elements. By representing even more aspects of Ukrainian culture, particularly folkloric ones, Ukraine manifests an identity with ancient roots and shows how the Ukrainian identity has always been separate from the Russian identity. At the same time, it mixes these elements with modern, global sounds to demonstrate the endurance of the Ukrainian identity while also appealing to Europe and decidedly not Russia. Furthermore,

Ukraine manifests its identity as diverse and intricate by showing artists from varied backgrounds who tell their stories differently. By exhibiting personal yet relatable stories linked to Ukrainian culture through emotional and sombre performances, Ukrainians might attach to an affective community that binds them together and strengthens their hope and resistance. Moreover, the European audience gets to witness and feel the grave threat to the Ukrainian identity and could become sympathetic to Ukraine's role as the resistant victim in the war waged by Russia, the aggressor.

Although this thesis has outlined how Russia and Ukraine manifest a national identity through Eurovision entries, some limitations exist. First of all, not all aspects of Eurovision have been considered. For example, future research could consider the importance of hosting Eurovision to manifest a national identity. Furthermore, the precise success of Russia's and Ukraine's identity manifestations has not been examined as this lies outside the scope of this research, but it is an interesting angle to study. Additionally, new studies could perform similar research on other hotly debated cases from Eurovision or other international platforms, such as the role Eurovision plays in the war by Israel on Palestine, where Palestine cannot defend itself at Eurovision like Ukraine, or compare how countries in conflict use platforms like Eurovision to uncover similarities and differences between the strategies used.

Despite the limitations of this research, this thesis has demonstrated the significant role of Eurovision as an instrument for cultural diplomacy and national identity manifestation, and how viewers may be subtly, and not so subtly, influenced. It becomes evident that through music and performance, perceptions can be shaped, and narratives can be advanced. In the context of Eurovision, where nations display their identities on a global stage, each song becomes a message resonating within and beyond borders. In the context of Russia and Ukraine, this platform has become a stage where cultural and political tensions intertwine and where Europe and Ukraine may ultimately be "dancing Russia goodbye".

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9. List of Figures

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Figure 9: Ukraine's 2023 entry uses both religious imagery and stage lighting in the colours of the Ukrainian flag.

(EBU) European Broadcasting Union (2023). *Eurovision Song Contest 2023.*

10. Appendices
10.1 Appendix A

Russia

Year: 1994	Artist: Youddiph	Song: Vechny Strannik (Eternal Wanderer)
Songwriters: Lev Zemlinski, Youddiph	Language: Russian	Result: 9th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/1994/russia		Selection Method: National Final, Jury Vote
Year: 1995	Artist: Philipp Kirkorov	Song: Kolybelnaya Dlya Vulkana (Lullaby for a Vulcano)
Songwriters: Ilya Bershadskiy, Ilya Resnik	Language: Russian	Result: 17th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/1995/russia		Selection Method: Internal Selection
Year: 1997	Artist: Alla Pugacheva	Song: Primadonna
Songwriters: Alla Pugacheva, Rutger Gunnarsson	Language: Russian	Result: 15th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/1997/russia		Selection Method: Internal Selection
Year: 2000	Artist: Alsou	Song: Solo
Songwriters: Andrew Lane, Brandon Barnes	Language: English	Result: 2nd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2000/russia		Selection Method: Internal Selection
Year: 2001	Artist: Mumiy troll	Song: Lady Alpine Blue
Songwriters: Ilia Yagutenko	Language: English	Result: 12th

Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2001/russia	**Selection Method:** Internal Selection	

Year: 2002	**Artist:** Prime Minister	**Song:** Northern Girl
Songwriters: Kim Breitberg, Evgene Fridlyand, Irina Antonyan, Karen	**Language:** English	**Result:** 10th

Kavaleryan		
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2002/russia	**Selection Method:** Internal Selection	
Year: 2003	**Artist:** t.A. T.u.	**Song:** Ne ver', ne boysia (Don't believe, don't fear)
Songwriters: Valeriy Polienko, Mars Lasar	**Language:** Russian	**Result:** 3rd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2003/russia	**Selection Method:** Internal Selection	
Year: 2004	**Artist:** Julia Savicheva	**Song:** Believe Me
Songwriters: Maxim Fadeev, Brenda Loring	**Language:** English	**Result:** 11th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2004/russia	**Selection Method:** Internal Selection	
Year: 2005	**Artist:** Natalia Podolskaya	**Song:** Nobody Hurt No One
Songwriters: Viktor Drobysh, JP Järvinen, Mary Susan Applegate	**Language:** English	**Result:** 15th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2005/russia	**Selection Method:** National Final, Public Vote	

Year: 2006	Artist: Dima Bilan	Song: Never Let You Go
Songwriters: Alexander Lunyev, Irina Antonyan, Karen Kavaleryan	Language: English	Result: 2nd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2006/russia	Selection Method: Internal Selection	
Year: 2007	Artist: Serebro	Song: Song #1
Songwriters: Maxim Fadeev, Daniil Babichev	Language: English	Result: 3rd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2007/russia	Selection Method: Internal Selection	
Year: 2008	Artist: Dima Bilan	Song: Believe
Songwriters: Jim Beanz, Dima Bilan	Language: English	Result: 1st

Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2008/russia	Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote	
Year: 2009	Artist: Anastasia Prikhodko	Song: Mamo (Mum)
Songwriters: Konstantin Meladze, Diana Golde	Language: Russian, Ukrainian	Result:11th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2009/russia	Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote	
Year: 2010	Artist: Peter Nalitch & Friends	Song: Lost And Forgotten
Songwriters: Peter Nalitch	Language: English	Result: 11th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2010/russia	Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote	

Year: 2011	Artist: Alexej Vorobjov	Song: Get You
Songwriters: AJ Junior, Alex Sparrow, Bilal 'The Chef', Eric Sanicola, RedOne	Language: English, Russian	Result: 16th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2011/russia	Selection Method: Internal Selection	

Year: 2012	Artist: Buranovskiye Babushki	Song: Party For Everybody
Songwriters: Timofei Leontiev, Viktor Drobysh, Mary Susan Applegate, Olga Tuktaryova	Language: Udmurt, English	Result: 2nd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2012/russia	Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote	

Year: 2013	Artist: Dina Garipova	Song: What If
Songwriters: Gabriel Alares, Joakim Björnberg, Leonid Gutkin	Language: English	Result: 5th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2013/russia	Selection Method: Internal Selection	

Year: 2014	Artist: Tolmachevy Sisters	Song: Shine
Songwriters: Dimitris Kontopoulos, Philipp Kirkorov, Gerard James Borg, John Ballard, Ralph Charlie	Language: English	Result: 7th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2014/russia	Selection Method: Internal Selection	

Year: 2015	**Artist:** Polina Gagarina	**Song:** A Million Voices
Songwriters: Gabriel Alares, Joakim Björnberg, Katrina Noorbergen, Leonid Gutkin, Vladimir Matetsky	**Language:** English	**Result:** 2nd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2015/russia	**Selection Method**: Internal Selection	
Year: 2016	**Artist:** Sergey Lazarev	**Song:** You Are The Only One
Songwriters: Dimitris Kontopoulos, Philipp Kirkorov, John Ballard, Ralph Charlie	**Language:** English	**Result:** 3rd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2016/russia	**Selection Method**: Internal Selection	
Year: 2017	**Artist:** Julia Samoylova	**Song:** Flame Is Burning
Songwriters: Leonid Gutkin, Netta Nimrodi, Arie Burshtein	**Language:** English	**Result:** - (Withdrawn)
Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qu5kSWkZqOI		
Year: 2018	**Artist:** Julia Samoylova	**Song:** I Won't Break
Songwriters: Arie Burshtein, Leonid Gutkin, Netta Nimrodi	**Language:** English	**Result:** Not Qualified
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2018/russia	**Selection Method**: Internal Selection	
Year: 2019	**Artist:** Sergey Lazarev	**Song:** Scream

Songwriters: Dimitris Kontopoulos, Philipp Kirkorov, Sharon Vaughn	**Language:** English	**Result:** 3rd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2019/russia		**Selection Method**: Internal Selection
Year: 2020	**Artist:** Little Big	**Song:** Uno
Songwriters: Denis Tsukerman, Ilya Prusikin, Viktor Sibrinin	**Language:** English, (Spanish)	**Result:** - (Contest Cancelled)
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2020/russia		**Selection Method**: Internal Selection
Year: 2021	**Artist:** Manizha	**Song:** Russian Woman
Songwriters: Ori Avni, Ori Kaplan, Manizha	**Language:** Russian, English	**Result:** 9th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2021/russia		**Selection Method:** National Final, Public Vote.

Ukraine

Year: 2003	**Artist:** Olexandr	**Song:** Hasta La Vista
Songwriters: Svika Pick, Mirit Shem Or	**Language:** English	**Result:** 14th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2003/ukraine		**Selection Method:** Internal Selection
Year: 2004	**Artist:** Ruslana	**Song:** Wild Dances
Songwriters: Ruslana, Fayney, Jamie Maher, Oleksandr Ksenofontov, Ruslana, Sherena Dugani	**Language:** English, Ukrainian	**Result:** 1st
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2004/ukraine		**Selection Method:** Internal Selection
Year: 2005	**Artist:** Greenjolly	**Song:** Razom Nas Bahato

Songwriters: Roman Kalyn, Roman Kostyuk, Mikola Kulinich	**Language:** Ukrainian, English	**Result:** 19th

Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2005/ukraine	**Selection Method:** National Final, Public Vote

Year: 2006	**Artist:** Tina Karol	**Song:** Show Me Your Love
Songwriters: Mikhail Nekrasov, Tina Karol, Pavlo Shylko	**Language:** English	**Result:** 7th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2006/ukraine		**Selection Method:** National Final, Jury and Public Vote

Year: 2007	**Artist:** Verka Serduchka	**Song:** Dancing Lasha Tumbai
Songwriters: Andriy Danylko	**Language:** English, German, Surzhyk	**Result:** 2nd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2007/ukraine		**Selection Method:** National Final, Jury and Public Vote

Year: 2008	**Artist:** Ani Lorak	**Song:** Shady Lady
Songwriters: Dimitris Kontopoulos, Philipp Kirkorov, Karen Kavaleryan	**Language:** English	**Result:** 2nd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2008/ukraine		**Selection Method:** Internal Selection for the Artist, Public Vote for the Song

Year: 2009	**Artist:** Svetlana Loboda	**Song:** Be My Valentine! (Anti-Crisis Girl)
Songwriters: Svetlana Loboda, Yevgeny Matyushenko	**Language:** English	**Result:** 12th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2009/ukraine		**Selection Method:** National Final, Jury and Public Vote

Year: 2010	Artist: Alyosha	Song: Sweet People
Songwriters: Alyosha, Borys Kukoba, Vadim Lisitsa	Language: English	Result: 10th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2010/ukraine	Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote	
Year: 2011	Artist: Mika Newton	Song: Angel
Songwriters: Maryna Skohomorova,	Language: English	Result: 4th

Ruslan Kvinta		
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2011/ukraine	Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote	
Year: 2012	Artist: Gaitana	Song: Be My Guest
Songwriters: Alex Nabrodov, Gaitana, Igor Nikolayev	Language: English	Result: 15th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2012/ukraine	Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote	
Year: 2013	Artist: Zlata Ognevich	Song: Gravity
Songwriters: Mikhail Nekrasov, Karen Kavaleryan	Language: English	Result: 3rd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2013/ukraine	Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote	
Year: 2014	Artist: Mariya Yaremchuk	Song: Tick - Tock
Songwriters: Mariya Yaremchuk, Sandra Bjurman	Language: English	Result: 6th

Link:	Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote
https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2014/ukraine	

Year: 2016	Artist: Jamala	Song: 1944
Songwriters: Jamala	Language: English, Crimean Tatar	Result: 1st
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2016/ukraine		Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote

Year: 2017	Artist: O. Torvald	Song: Time
Songwriters: Denys Myzyuk, Yevhen Halych, Zhenia Galych, Yevhen Kamenchuk	Language: English	Result: 24th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2017/ukraine		Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote

Year: 2018	Artist: Mélovin	Song: Under The Ladder
Songwriters: Mélovin, Mike Ryals	Language: English	Result: 17th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2018/ukraine		Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote

Year: 2020	Artist: Go_A	Song: Solovey (Nightingale)
Songwriters: Kateryna Pavlenko, Taras Shevchenko	Language: Ukrainian	Result: - (Contest Cancelled)
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2020/ukraine		Selection Method: National Final, Jury and Public Vote

Year: 2021	Artist: Go_A	Song: Shum (Noise)
Songwriters: Kateryna Pavlenko, Taras Shevchenko	Language: Ukrainian	Result: 5th

Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2021/ukraine	Selection Method: Internal Selection (Because artists could not perform the year before)	
Year: 2022	**Artist:** Kalush Orchestra	**Song:** Stefania
Songwriters: Ihor Didenchuk, Tymofii Muzychuk, Vitalii Duzhyk, Ivan Klymenko, Oleh Psiuk	**Language:** Ukrainian	**Result:** 1st
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2022/ukraine	**Selection Method:** National Final, Jury and Public Vote	
Year: 2023	**Artist:** Tvorchi	**Song:** Heart Of Steel
Songwriters: Andrii Hutsuliak, Jeffery Augustus Kenny	**Language:** English, Ukrainian	**Result:** 6th
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2023/ukraine	**Selection Method:** National Final, Jury and Public Vote	
Year: 2024	**Artist:** alyona alyona & Jerry Heil	**Song:** Teresa & Maria
Songwriters: alyona alyona, Anton Chilibi, Ivan Klymenko, Jerry Heil	**Language:** Ukrainian, English	**Result:** 3rd
Link: https://eurovisionworld.com/eurovision/2024/ukraine	**Selection Method:** National Final, Jury and Public Vote	

10.2 Appendix B

<u>Themes</u>

- **Song Selection and Elite involvement** ○

  National final or internal selection?

  ○ Controversies around selection ○ Involvement of/

  comments by national politicians

- **Artists and songwriters** ○ Background of

  the artists and songwriters ○ Level of fame ○

Affiliation with politics o Gender o

Composition (solo/group?)

- **Genre and Sound**

    o Actual genres (pop/hiphop/r&b/folkore/electronic?)

    o Diversity of genres o Mixing of genres o Loudness

    of the songs

- **Language and lyrics** o Languages used and diversity (just English, or

    Russian/Ukrainian/minority language?)

    o Lyrics and the overall meanings (love, love, peace?/ reference to war/
       autoethnography)

    o Motifs and symbols in the lyrics (themes of flowers, religion, cultural symbols,
       or lack thereof)

- **Staging and**

    performance o

    Outfits o Staging

         ☐ Lights

         ☐ Constructions/Objects

         ☐ LED backgrounds/ Visual effects o Dancing, movements, poses

       o Facial expression o Camera work and interaction

     o Any phrases said at the end