

“The Reality is Not as It Seems From Turkey”: Imaginations About the Eurovision Song Contest From Its Production Fields

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This article applies notions drawn from Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory to explore the Turkish production front of the *Eurovision Song Contest (ESC)* and to reveal unorthodox imaginations about the entertainment phenomenon. Its findings, based on in-depth interviews with actors who have been involved in the production of Turkey’s contribution to the *ESC*—rather than consuming it via national media channels as the vast majority of the public does—indicate that the actors’ views are vastly different from the dominant discourses about the *ESC* in Turkey. Along with a discussion of the reasons for the discrepancy between aggressive media discourses and producers’ approaches to the *ESC*, this article also highlights national media outlets’ key role in shaping the imaginations about communicative phenomena beyond national borders.

Keywords: Eurovision Song Contest, Turkey, transnational communication, production field, field theory.

Introduction¹

The *Eurovision Song Contest (ESC)* is an annual TV spectacle produced through the cooperation of national television broadcasters in and around Europe and transmitted live, continuously since 1956, to a considerably large audience in numerous nation-states. Based on the simple format of a song competition, the *ESC* asks active member countries of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) to each submit one song to be performed live on television and radio. Member country participants then cast votes for the songs from other member countries to determine which is the most popular. It is a unique TV program with regard to its temporal and spatial features. Few other TV programs, except for broadcasts of international sports events, such as the Olympic Games, can claim the historical longevity and continuity of the *ESC*. Its ever-growing audience currently consists of more than 100 million viewers from more than

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60 countries. In addition to these quantitative extremes, there are also significant sociocultural aspects of the *ESC* phenomenon. The *ESC* constitutes one of the earliest attempts to promote a pan-European platform in the audiovisual sphere; thus, it historically has triggered discussions centered on the discourse of "Europeanness." The *ESC* has become, as Bolin (2006) notes, "a discursive tool in the definitions of 'Europeanness' and political strategies of Europeanization; and this includes both continental and national aspects" (p. 191). "Decent" representation of the participating countries in the *ESC*, for instance, has turned out to be a key issue while production processes of national representations have led to passionate debates in different contexts, including in Turkey.

Since Turkey's debut appearance in the song competition in 1975, the *ESC* has occupied a special place in Turkish social imaginary with regard to the country's sociocultural relationship with Europe. As stated by Christensen and Christensen (2008), for ever larger portions of the Turkish population, achieving success in the *ESC* has been "an issue of national pride" (p. 159). Before 2003, when Turkey won the *ESC* for the first time, national media discourses in that country had traditionally framed the *ESC*, in large part, as a national struggle to be won against the Europeans, thus confirming Turkey's European credentials at last. One having a modest familiarity with the Turkish context of the *ESC* could argue that imaginations where the *ESC* is associated with "unconstructive" notions such as battle and rivalry and related to the competitive aspect of the *ESC* have been much more dominant than imaginations linked to "constructive" concepts such as festival and friendship and coupled with cooperative characteristic of the *ESC* (Dilmener, 2003; Kuyucu, 2010; Meric, 2006). What about different actors who have had much closer affiliations with the *ESC* in Turkey, such as television production people who have worked on Turkey's contributions to the *ESC* or the musicians who represented Turkey in the *ESC* finals? Do those involved in the national production of Turkey's annual appearances—rather than experiencing them via national media as does the vast majority of the public—imagine the *ESC* phenomenon as "a matter of life and death" as well?

This article positions the *ESC* as a case through which transnational popular communication may be better understood, and it scrutinizes imaginations about the *ESC* from its production environment to shed light on the different ways of experiencing the communicative processes that extend beyond the national borders. Accordingly, rather than focusing solely on the cultural and social implications that are motivated by the *ESC*, special attention is devoted to the exploration of the production fields that sustain the *ESC* as it is, which is an angle not commonly pursued in existing literature on the *ESC*.² Notions drawn from Bourdieu's field theory are deployed as tools for understanding the complex and relational dynamics of the *ESC*'s production realm.

² Akin (2011) states that academic works about the *ESC* can be categorized in four groups based on their respective research focuses: (a) reflectionist (Doosje & Haslam, 2005; Fenn, Suleman, Efstathiou, & Johnson, 2005; Gatherer, 2006; Hindrichs, 2007; Yair, 1995); (b) evaluative (Allatson, 2007; Bourdon, 2007; Sandvoss, 2008; Tobin, 2007); (c) representational (Baker, 2008; Björnberg, 2007; Gumpert, 2007; Heller, 2007; Vuletic, 2007); and (d) discursive (Christensen & Christensen, 2008; Flemish, 2007; Georgiou, 2008; Pajala, 2007, Raykoff, 2007).

The article proceeds with a brief discussion of the communicative characteristics of the *ESC* as a televisual product, followed by a discussion of production fields whose output is the *ESC*. After setting the theoretical framework of the analysis, a particular focus will be on national contexts via the Turkish case and its peculiarities. Here, the *ESC*'s production in the Turkish media field, the agents' actions that bring the *ESC* into being, and their imaginations about the competition are discussed. Subsequently, the article discusses different ways of imagining the *ESC* as well as communicative phenomena beyond the national borders.

***ESC*'s Communicative Nature: The Product**

Transformation of the *ESC* into an idiosyncratic cultural phenomenon from a typical TV program, especially in some national settings such as Turkey, has to do with the social meanings that the *ESC* has gained throughout its existence. Such meanings could be better approached if the characteristics of its three aspects—the televisual product and its production in international and national contexts—are considered individually, yet also in combination. Following Bourdieu's (1993, 1996) analytical methodology, which begins with the study of the visible aspects of a social phenomenon and proceeds to the exploration of its less visible or invisible aspects, it seems that a brief discussion of the genre characteristics and textual features of the *ESC* televisual product (the *ESC* program) is the ideal entry point to the object itself of this research—the *ESC*.

The study of the essential characteristics of the *ESC* program,³ which have remained intact through its lifetime, shows that it inhabits essential features of television narration, such as succession, repetition, and series forms. Different segments of the *ESC* program—performances, interval acts, and vote collection—are presented as a succession, yet each of these segments exhibit internal narratives and constitute the *ESC* program as a whole. The repetition is deployed in two manners: as the short term, where performances or vote presentations are more or less the same units with different actors and actions; and as the long term, where more or less the same format of the program is repeated from year to year. Thus, the *ESC* qualifies as a yearly television series for the last 56 years, with more or less the same format, plot, and added characters. At the same time, its annual repetitive schedule and series form sustain the imagined community of *ESC* audiences.

In addition, displaying the essential characteristics of two television genres—variety show and media event—the *ESC* program is composed, on one hand, as "a family television product" (Georgiou & Sandvoss, 2008, pp. 125–126) to attract the maximum number of viewers. On the other hand, as a contest-type media event⁴ (Dayan & Katz, 1992), the *ESC* program offers audiences a "rule-governed battle," with the underlying message of "Who will win this year?" These genre characteristics are coupled with certain temporal and spatial attributes. The major temporal characteristic of the *ESC* is that of

³ For a detailed analysis of the textual characteristics of the *ESC* program, see Akin (2011) and Bolin (2009).

⁴ For studies where the *ESC* was analyzed as a media event, according to Dayan and Katz's (1992) definition, see Bolin (2006), Rothenbuhler (1998), Scherer and Schlütz (2003), Stetka (2009), and Wolther (2006).

simultaneity, which enforces the community creation function of the *ESC* program among its audiences dispersed in a vast geographical zone. Its "liveness" is further enhanced when the program's spatial reach is emphasized via synchronized vote collection from diverse countries and cities. Another aspect of the spatial characteristic of the *ESC* is "international dispersal," where the show's center is simultaneously in coordination and in touch with numerous centers and capitals. The *ESC*'s overall sense of intimacy and "liveness" is again boosted as the focus of attention moves from one country to the next in real time, especially when votes are being cast. In short, thanks to its textual features and genre characteristics, the *ESC* has become an image-based, symbolic form capable of triggering multiple and diverse imaginations and of enabling imagined communities of audiences, both at transnational and national levels.

***ESC's* Production and Production Fields**

Although the *ESC* has reached audiences and gained its social meanings first and foremost as a television program, like any other symbolic form or cultural product, it came into existence and persisted to this day due to diverse factors and dynamics: agents and organizations. In other words, the production realm of the *ESC*, like that of any other media product, constitutes a vital aspect of its communicative nature that must be taken into consideration. Because this article problematizes the views of the actors involved in the *ESC*'s production, understanding the production side of the *ESC* is of major significance. Here, the focus is switched from the product itself to its production environment, and invisible aspects of the *ESC* are investigated via the study of its production field, particularly on a national level. To do this, notions associated with Bourdieu's cultural field theory are deployed.⁵ Along with such Bourdesian relational notions as "field" and "capital" that capture the layered and interdependent nature of social phenomenon, the evident priority given in Bourdieu's (1993, 1996) works to the broader social relation systems in which the cultural products are embedded allows for viewing the *ESC*'s production contexts through a different lens.

When Bourdieu's approach is applied to the *ESC*'s production environment, it can be defined as a cultural product sustained by a "subfield" of international (indeed, "Pan-Europe and its surroundings") media field, that is, "a structured space of positions which are occupied by agents or organizations oriented to the same prizes or values inherent in this field" (Thompson, 1993, p. 14). Here, the term "international media field" refers to what Bourdieu implies by "global media field" when he states that for a cultural field analysis to be complete, "the position of the national media field within the global media field would have to be taken into account" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 41) while its "subfield" refers to a particular structured space of positions that has emerged around the *ESC*. According to this conceptualization, broadcasting organizations could be viewed as the primary agents competing for the prestige of producing the "best show" which can only happen after a victory in the *ESC*. Thus, broadcasters invest their stakes both in winning the competition and in hosting the most spectacular show, whereas the public (audiences), cultural intermediaries (TV critics, academics, etc.), and the EBU act as the consecrating

⁵ For details of Bourdieu's approach to field theory, see Bourdieu (1993, 1996), Swartz (1997), and Webb, Schirato, and Danaher (2002). For its use in the media field, see Bourdieu (1998, 2005), Benson and Neveu (2005), Couldry (2003), Hallin and Mancini (2004), Hesmondhalgh (2006), and Thompson (2010).

institutions that assess and qualify the competing broadcasters either as winners or losers of the *ESC* competition. The symbolic capital gained or lost in the *ESC* subfield by the broadcasters transfers to the broader international media field, and as the agents of the field, broadcasters reposition in accordance with the actual capital while the field is restructured annually.

The history of the *ESC* affirms this conceptualization in which conjunction of the particular dynamics of the post-war years brought about the birth of organizations (EBU), which, through some specific arrangements (Eurovision Program Exchange), enabled the formation of an international program exchange infrastructure (Eurovision Network) primarily among broadcasters from European countries that were the early members of European media field. The *ESC* was initiated by the EBU as one of the many programs exchanged through the Eurovision Network in this era and has survived to this day. In this subfield of international media field that emerged around the production of the *ESC*, the position of organizations has depended on the type and quantity of resources or capital they have that was not evenly distributed among them in the international media field. Thus, along with cooperation-interdependency which gave rise to the *ESC*, comes conflict-competition, which has also always been inherent in broadcasters' relations among each other. In other words, the *ESC* has been an outcome of cooperation among television broadcasters from Europe and beyond, with different, and possibly conflicting interests.⁶ Therefore, the texture of the *ESC* phenomenon, since its origin, has been characterized by the tension between competition and cooperation among participant countries at the level of musicians, broadcasters, and consequently, publics.

For many nations, including Turkey, that perceive themselves as "poor" with regard to symbolic capital in the international arena, winning the *ESC* and consequently hosting the event is perceived as a major opportunity to increase their international symbolic capital by showing they have the skills to organize such a large-scale event without problems and by promoting their country to an international audience. In that sense, recognition, consecration, and prestige—defined by Bourdieu (1993) as the constituents of the particular economy of the cultural production field—might be seen as the ultimate goal of participant broadcasters in the *ESC* who are predominantly public service broadcasters rather than commercial broadcasters. Due to this ownership characteristic of the organizations, indirect economic gains, such as income from the tourism boosted by hosting the show or promotional benefits reaped by a country hosting the show, have almost always been secondary to the quest for prestige in the *ESC* arena. The quest is very much related to the actual symbolic capital of a given country, and the capital in a given field is not distributed evenly among the agents. Thus, the nations that have historically occupied a relatively dominant position with regard to symbolic capital—UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain,⁷ for example—have not regarded participation in the *ESC* as vital as have countries on the periphery of the symbolic power map of Europe and adjacent geographies, like Turkey.

⁶ For instances of conflict among the EBU members, see Akin (2011), Bourdon (2007), Eugster (1983), Enkelaar (1979), Fickers (2006), and Kressley (1975).

⁷ Since 1998, these five countries have automatically qualified for the *ESC* finals, regardless of their positions on the scoreboard in previous competitions (Italy, since 2011). They earned this special status by being the biggest financial contributors to the EBU. Due to their untouchable status in the competition, these countries became known as the "Big Five" among *ESC* circles.

The notions drawn from field theory help us to understand the national production context as well, which is equally important for grasping the *ESC*'s communicative nature: Its national production and each participant country's contribution to production of the *ESC* results from the combined efforts of the agents and organizations occupying positions in national media fields and striving for the same goals. For musicians, the potential symbolic gain from representing their countries in international *ESC* shows, for instance, might be seen as the grounds of competition inherent in national media fields. Especially in the countries where public expectations from the *ESC* are relatively high, the chance of representing the nation in the contest—not necessarily being victorious—generally bestows a significant increase of symbolic capital for the musicians in the domestic media-entertainment sectors of those nations. Therefore, in many national settings, the selection processes of the national representatives are highly competitive and polemical processes. In the next section, this article offers a closer examination of *ESC* production in the national media fields.

National Media Fields and the *ESC*

The production of the *ESC* on an international level can also be conceptualized as topical and ephemeral incorporation of national media fields into a single field beyond the national borders: Annually, since 1956,⁸ national media fields have "opened up" both to transnational cultural exchange (Cupiers, 2011, p. 543) and to production via the *ESC*, which has constituted the structuring of the aforementioned subfield of international media field. Hence, analysis of the national contexts of the *ESC* is vital for a thorough understanding of the program as a communicative phenomenon; this significance can be better realized if three levels—production, reception, and text—are considered in the national context.

On the production side, the participating broadcasters are active agents in the material production of the *ESC*. By performing specific functions—selecting national representatives from national music sectors, collecting, sending, and presenting votes, hosting the *ESC*, and so forth—the broadcasters are key contributors to international production of the *ESC*, maintaining a dual relationship of cooperation and competition with the other national broadcasters under the umbrella of the EBU. On the reception side, the *ESC*, as a TV program, reaches national audiences mostly through the channels of the participating broadcasters. These institutions, with *ESC*-related programs or with the live commentary provided in the viewing country's native language during the transmission, are in a key position with regard to the national audiences' access to the *ESC*. Finally, as a public issue, the *ESC* airs in national publics primarily through various national media outlets, including the participating broadcasters. Due to different sorts of *ESC*-related texts—news stories, interviews, comments, speculations in written or audiovisual formats, and so forth—that are produced in the national media field before and after the event, the *ESC* gains its meaning in the social imaginaries, largely in national contexts.

⁸ As correctly stated by Arnsten (2005, p. 17), the *ESC* can be seen as an early instance of entertainment program cooperation that has taken place across national borders. Thus, it has become an illustration of processes of globalization and international trade in television formats. In fact, it emerged as a format in TV production even before the concept of the format appeared in the media business and in media research.

As a cultural product, the *ESC* reaches audiences through the combined efforts of agents from national media fields who cooperate with the topical and ephemeral purpose of producing each participant nation's contribution to the annual *ESC* program and who can be grouped under three institutional domains—the participating broadcasting organizations, the remainder of the media outlets, and the music industry. The positions occupied by these agents in national media fields are interrelated in different ways, as these fields are made up of agents and organizations having different kinds and quantities of power and resources or having a variety of practices and specific forms of relations. As each nation's production of the *ESC* takes place in a field structured in particular ways with its own dynamics, the actions of the agents vary dramatically and so does the meaning of the *ESC* in each national context. The next section analyzes the Turkish case of *ESC* production to highlight such variations among different national contexts.

The Turkish Case

The *ESC*, in the Turkish context, has occupied a rather unique space in the broadly defined cultural sphere and, in particular, in the sphere of media-entertainment. As it is a cultural product made possible by two separate but interdependent subfields of the media field—namely, music and television—the *ESC* in Turkey has historically held an important place in both of these two subfields. For the music subfield, the national selection processes for the annual *ESC*, have been especially important platforms for emerging pop musicians in the country. Since the first involvement of Turkey in the *ESC* in 1975, many popular musicians have found their first opportunity for reaching a national audience via the national selection competitions organized and televised by the national public service broadcaster, the Turkish Radio & Television Corporation (TRT). In the television subfield, the *ESC* has been a major entertainment program for the public service broadcaster TRT and for the public. Although its importance and popularity have fluctuated throughout its 38 years, the *ESC* has constituted a corner stone of Turkish television history, both for producers and audiences. At the same time, the *ESC* has served as an important link between television and music subfields. Finally, the *ESC* has functioned as a valuable source of content for national media outlets, including the TRT. Both the press and audiovisual outlets have historically devoted considerable space to *ESC*-related stories and positioned the *ESC* as a key annual news or programming item while the vast majority of the media discourses about the *ESC* have centered on achieving a victory against the Europeans, as is problematized in this article.

International Production of the *ESC* as Seen by Turkish Producers

This section provides a closer examination of how *ESC* production on the Turkish front is conducted, with a focus on the major actors in the field, namely, the agents from the TRT and from the music sector. Based on their own statements, this section examines the motivations for the agents' actions and the dynamics of their relations within the international field that bring the *ESC* into being. Using Bourdesian terminology, we study the agents' positions and their interrelations based on their subjective experiences, because it is believed that objective structures of these two fields—international

and national media fields—and the subjective experiences of the agents and organizations occupying positions in these fields must be taken into consideration simultaneously, since “they are not two competing explanations but are rather two intertwined aspects” (Benson, 1999, p. 467) of the *ESC* reality.

Accordingly, the article summarizes interviews with two musicians who represented Turkey in international *ESC* finals within the last 10 years and with five agents from TRT who have been involved in the production of different aspects of Turkish contribution to *ESCs*.⁹ These accounts do not yield a representative sampling of all the producers who have contributed to Turkey’s place in *ESC* history, but instead function as a window into the minds of those actors whose views have not been taken sufficiently into account in the existing literature about the *ESC*. While it would be far better to be exhaustive,¹⁰ the purpose of this article is to isolate and articulate a way of thinking that is telling about the production aspect of the *ESC*.

The Musicians’ Perspective¹¹

When interviewees discuss their international experiences with the *ESC*, they refer either directly to individual agents, or on a more abstract level, to impersonal concepts, such as the EBU or even Europe, regardless of the individual agents. How the musicians define the *ESC* is an example of the latter. The second musician recalls that before he got into the world of the *ESC*, he considered the program as “simply a pop music competition, especially for amateurs.” However, once he stepped into the *ESC* realm, his views changed radically:

After we were commissioned by the TRT, I began investigating, and realized that I had most of the prejudices about *ESC*, which dominate Turkish media and the public. The obvious prejudice was that *ESC* is an event, which nobody else except us [Turkish public] cares about. But it is not true: [T]here are countries which don’t care at all, there are ones like Turkey—where the *ESC* is important, and there are some countries where the *ESC* is madness, like Sweden or Finland. In short there are things which you do not see from outside. (Musician #2, personal communication, August 20, 2009)

⁹ The musicians studied within the scope of this research were selected on the basis of their relationship with the TRT, that is, if they were selected by the TRT as a result of a national competition or if they were commissioned by the TRT to represent Turkey in the international finals absent a selection process open to the public. The agents from the TRT were identified and selected with the aim of having a research sample that would include and reflect the diverse positions in TRT in relation to *ESC* production. Accordingly, three agents from the television department, plus two from the music department—the two main divisions responsible for annual *ESC* activities—were interviewed.

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of producers’ experiences with the *ESC*, see Akin (2011).

¹¹ Musicians’ accounts shedding light on their engagement with the international *ESC* environment are more limited compared to the accounts of the TRT community, as the musicians spend only one year (or several years in some cases) in the *ESC* finals when they represent Turkey while agents from the TRT community have enjoyed the *ESC* international experience for numerous years.

The first musician, who had grown up in another European country, noted that the *ESC* has a nostalgic value as much as it does a "competition with Europe" aspect:

Since the first year we left Turkey for living abroad, the *ESC* was something we watched and enjoyed all together as a family. It was before the satellite broadcasts started, so it was our only chance to listen and watch Turkish music live, and in competition with Europe. So it was like a national football match, but with music. Therefore I was very happy for being on the *ESC* stage and making my family proud of me. (Musician #1, personal communication, August 20, 2009)

Although this musician underlines the "national competition with Europe" aspect, the tone of the competition that she experienced in the *ESC* finals was rather soft even friendly. With regard to their experiences with musicians representing other countries in the *ESC* finals, the experiences of both Turkish musicians were mostly positive. The interviewees noted that after the performances, having been relieved of the "stage stress," the Green Room, where performers go to relax away from the stage and the audience, turned into a mingling space for musicians. Other opportunities for the musicians to get to know each other during the week before the *ESC* finals occurred mostly at parties or at other entertainment activities. As the first musician noted, one of the best experiences at the *ESC* finals was making new friendships, some of which continue to this day.

What can be concluded about the musicians' experiences with the international production side of the *ESC* is that, although it is spatially limited and dense in scope, their experiences were mostly positive and satisfactory. Regardless of the competition results, the musicians shared positive feelings and created positive bonds with others in their field as well as with "millions of people from other countries." Indeed, none of the musicians displayed any feelings or made any remarks that would align with the dominant discourse in Turkey.

The Producers' Perspectives

When TRT producers talk about the international *ESC* environment, they generally begin by referring to individual agents from the EBU or from other broadcasters. For instance, the TRT staffer who has been providing Turkish commentary for the *ESC* shows said that over the years he had met and become friends with *ESC* commentators for other participating broadcasters at the international finals and that sometimes, they even bring presents to one another. Another TRT producer, who executive produced the 2004 *ESC* finals hosted in Istanbul, Turkey, shared an anecdote that illustrated how positive bonds as well as conflicts may arise between different actors in the international production of the *ESC*:

During the final rehearsals in Istanbul, we had a severe problem with Cyprus. The national spokesperson for [*sic*] Cyprus jury, while giving the votes from Nicosia, said "Good evening Constantinople!" As a response, our presenter replied "Good evening Greek part of Cyprus!" The spokesperson in response said, "This is not the Greek part of Cyprus, this is Cyprus!" And our presenter replied "This is Istanbul for the last 600 years, not Constantinople. Still could not you learn?" So there was a great tension. I

complained to the EBU about the issue, and finally the problem was solved: During the final, the Cyprus' spokesperson used the word "Istanbul" instead of "Constantinople," and even he said a few words in Turkish. . . . After the show, I went to congratulate the Greek delegation for their victory. The head of the delegation, a guy whom I liked very much and who became a friend afterwards, told me to excuse the spokesperson of Cyprus," and made him apologize to me. And, in Turkish! (TRT producer #1, personal communication, August 9, 2009)

The relations between the agents from one broadcaster and those from another are characterized by either the strength of the relationship between the two parties or by the political sensibilities of each side on particular issues. In the case of the Cyprus back-and-forth just noted, this issue was so sensitive that when the TRT producer referred to it in our interview, it was the only time that he displayed signs of aggression, in contrast to his moderate tone throughout the remainder of the interview.¹² What can be concluded from these testimonies is that the agents from the TRT community establish a comradeship with their counterparts from other broadcasters, as long as their talks do not touch on a sensitive issue or a personal problem. The relationship between the agents, which is originally characterized by competition inherent in the international media field, gets more positive as the two sides get closer and become more acquainted.

In the relationship between agents from two participating broadcasters, there is no hierarchical difference between the two sides, since both sides' positions are on the same level. However, the relations between the agents from a participating broadcaster and the EBU are more complicated. Because the EBU holds greater power in the subfield that actually gets the show onto the air, the agents from participating broadcasters have a different view of the EBU that is more impersonal and more conceptual. One producer recalled a story from 1976, when Turkey withdrew from the ESC final to protest Greece's participation,¹³ that revealed his perception of the EBU:

In 1976, even though we did not participate, the TRT still broadcast the finals. During the transmission, when the Greek singer took stage, the TRT interfered and blocked the Greek performance. So, Turkish audiences did not have a chance to listen to the Greek song. Totally a stupid act! Then we got a very strict reprimand from the EBU, as well as a significant money penalty. If you do such a thing now, the EBU may even suspend

¹² The interviews indicate that the Cyprus issue in the 2004 ESC finals in Istanbul was even more complicated, and the TRT team had to consult the Turkish Foreign Ministry to determine how to identify Cyprus: "Greek side of Cyprus" or simply "Cyprus." Finally, a solution was reached in which Cyprus was identified as such only a few times, and then those involved with the show used the name of its capital city, "Nicosia," to identify that country. This anecdote is proof of the Turkish ESC production's limited autonomy versus the political field when it comes to political issues.

¹³ As a response to the Turkish invasion of the north part of Cyprus to defend the Turkish population residing there, Greece withdrew from the 1975 ESC contest in protest of Turkey's participation. The following year, Greece returned to compete in the contest, and this time Turkey protested by not participating.

your ESC participation. They won't let you do such a thing. (TRT producer #2, personal communication, August 15, 2009)

The EBU is seen as the obvious sole authority of the field and as an institution to be respected and obeyed, if one wants to be a member of the field and part of the *ESC* program. Behind this respectful view of the EBU, however, is a more institutional and more abstract perception that views the EBU as more than an organization of agents, but also as an institution with a greater meaning. This broader perception of the EBU applies to the overall understanding of the *ESC* as well. As the interviewees continue to speak, they begin to address larger concepts, such as "Europe" and "the *ESC*," rather than talk about individuals, such as the Greek head of the delegation. They talk about "Turkey" or "the TRT," rather than about themselves, on this more abstract level. For the first producer of the *ESC* in Turkey (1975), for example, the *ESC* is "a universal song contest which has a European form and European understanding" (TRT producer #2, personal communication, August 15, 2009). Turkey's involvement in the event is related to the "European" character of the *ESC*:

Turkey argues in 1975 that she is a part of the European Council, that she is a candidate member of the European Union, and that she is European. She is already a member of the EBU, and she has a light-music movement and sector in the country. Thus, she [Turkey] argues, "I want to be a part of the *ESC*." (TRT producer #2, personal communication, August 15, 2009)

The most recent TRT producer perceives the *ESC* as a "European thing: a body of rules and regulations, which must be followed by the participant broadcasters." (TRT producer #3, personal communication, August 10, 2009). What can be concluded from the interviews is that whether the TRT community sees the *ESC* as a platform, as a competition, or as a body of rules, the program, first and foremost, has a European character. Thus, Turkey and TRT's involvement and history with the *ESC* represents Turkey's integration into the international media field, which is European by definition.

However, just as it is in political and social life, integration is not a simple issue. Another producer of the *ESC* for TRT characterizes the relationship between Turkey and the *ESC* as "weird." In his words, for many years, Turkish representatives went to the contest with great enthusiasm to "conquer" Europe, and each year they came back totally disappointed and unable to understand the reasons for their continuous failures. For him, the reason for such a dramatic disparity between great expectations and disillusionment was simple:

Until recent times, for Turkish public [*sic*], small victories in Europe were extremely important. . . . As a member of a nation who had felt humiliated for year, there was a widespread inferiority complex against Europeans. Therefore the expectation from a Turkish singer in the *ESC* was always becoming the winner but nothing else, which would be seen as conquering Europe. (TRT producer #1, personal communication, August 9, 2009)

This TRT producer's comment, which underlines the "inferiority complex of Turkey against Europe," is indicative of a widespread understanding of how Turkey interacts with Europe in general and of its relationship with "Europeans" in the *ESC* in particular, although what this really means is pretty ambiguous. It is difficult to define precisely what the interviewees are implying by this "inferiority complex against Europeans." However, some hints can be found in the producer's further statement about the same issue:

For years, we did not understand how to be successful in the *ESC*. It was as if, competing in a car race with a motorbike. When we understood what to do in this competition and what not to do, we did much better, and finally we won it [in 2003]. So we learned how to conquer Europe, but it was a different way than what we had followed for years. (TRT producer #1, personal communication, August 9, 2009)

In the previous anecdote, the producer refers to overcoming Turkey's inferiority complex in its participation at the *ESC* by "learning the rules of the game"¹⁴ and eventually winning the competition. As an actor with less symbolic capital in the international media field that produces the *ESC*, Turkey was able to generate self-confidence among its TRT staff and among large portions of the Turkish public when it won the *ESC* competition in 2003. Yet, a victory in the *ESC* does not balance perceived symbolic capitals of different actors indefinitely. The same producer relays an anecdote about the bond between the EBU and the TRT that touches upon this fact:

After we hosted and organized the *ESC* successfully in Istanbul in 2004, we found out that the EBU had hired an undercover inspector from Turkey to control what we were doing during the preparation phase. We did not know about this at all. Obviously, they wanted to be sure that we were following their [EBU] guidance. Of course they do not do such a thing for, say, the United Kingdom, but in our case, they did it. If it is a country that has proven its maturity, then the EBU trusts them and does not need an inspector to spy on them. (TRT producer #1, personal communication, August 9, 2009)

The TRT producer characterizes the UK and the BBC as "actors who have proven their maturity" (TRT producer #1, personal communication, August 9, 2009) while situating Turkey and the TRT at the

¹⁴ The two "rules" he underlines in this case are: (a) commissioning a professional musician rather than holding a national selection round in which amateur musicians can compete; and (b) working with a transnational record company to promote the musician prior to the start of the *ESC*. The latter "rule" indicates that the TRT accepts the superiority of a multinational agent in the music field—a transnational record company. What's crucial here for the TRT producer is that accepting the superiority of the record company means "learning one of the rules of the *ESC* international field." At the same time, it functions as a way to overcome the inferiority complex toward "an international agent." Once a multinational music company, which has more economical and symbolic capital in the field, is accepted by another agent of the field (TRT), its competitive approach to this agent transforms into a cooperative one, which minimizes the tension between two sides. This is perceived by the TRT as "learning the rules of the game," but it can also be interpreted as evidence of the (*ESC*) subfield's decreasing autonomy versus the economical field.

opposite pole. This is evidence that the symbolic capital of different countries and of broadcasters is perceived to be unequal in the international media field by the agents from different national media fields. Clearly, this interviewee accepts the superiority of the BBC as much as he looks down on the TRT's relative inferiority.

Another account relayed by the same TRT broadcaster, this one about the origin of the *ESC* and the changes it went through, helps to better understand his view about the kind of relationships that are established among the "countries" in the international field. For him, the origins of the *ESC* can be sought in a post-World War II European context: "The idea was to exchange cultures and technical know-how between European countries, which had severe problems during and after the [sic] WW2" (TRT producer #1, personal communication, August 9, 2009). The producer stresses the changes that took place in the international media field and that gave a different meaning to the *ESC*. He also notes that, in contrast to the spirit of cooperation present at the origin of the *ESC* in 1956, the program has since turned into "an arena where countries aimed to prove their superiority. This is not only by winning the contest, but also by hosting amazing, spectacular *ESC* shows: Just like we [Turkey] did in 2003, and in 2004"¹⁵ (TRT producer #1, personal communication, August 9th, 2009).

Once again, for this TRT producer, the international media field, which is populated by actors from different countries with different levels of "superiority" or power, is exploited by the participant countries to prove that they are better than or at least as good as the other countries. On this most abstract and impersonal level, he perceives the *ESC* as a pure competition between "countries," a view in sharp contrast with those about his mostly positive bonds with the individual agents from different countries in the field. He cleverly explains the reason for this dilemma that dominates the international field of *ESC*'s production:

These people here [individual actors in the international media field] do not have major problems. But the countries fight, so these people find themselves in the battle. Therefore, the reality about the *ESC* is not as it seems from Turkey. (TRT producer #1, personal communication, August 9^t, 2009)

The TRT producer rejects the dominant reading of the *ESC* in Turkey as "a battle zone" while admitting that, from time to time, how the participating broadcasters relate on an impersonal level may be likened to that of a fierce competition, if not an actual "fight." Furthermore, he underlines the difference between individual actors' attitudes toward each other and the outcome of the way the positions they occupy are related in the international media field that shepherds the *ESC* into being: As individuals they get on well with each other, yet as members of the staff of national broadcasters, they may find themselves in an ongoing battle.

¹⁵ Wolther (2012), among others (Akin, 2011; Bolin, 2006), identifies the transformation that the *ESC* went through, in a simple but illuminating manner: By no longer voting for songs but rather for countries, the contest has become a competition of nations and national cultures, and the importance of music has decreased (p. 170).

Discussion

Read in the light of Bourdesian terminology, the testimonies of the interviewees from the Turkish media field who are involved in the *ESC*'s production reveal that the characteristics of the positions they occupy—or the roles assigned to them in the international production of the *ESC*—as well as the subjective ways in which they occupy these roles, determines their relations, and accordingly, the way they experience and imagine the *ESC*. For instance, although the musicians' position is at the actual center of the competition (the stage), they show no signs of aggression toward other musicians and do not perceive the *ESC* as a battlefield. Since this position is occupied by impermanent actors—musicians who do not spend enough time to internalize the rivalries among the broadcasters—they show no hostility toward each other. Furthermore, many musicians' primary expectation of the *ESC* is to transfer the symbolic capital that they possibly gain in the international *ESC* arena to the national music-entertainment fields, where they may potentially convert this symbolic capital to one that is economic. Therefore, their principal competitors are not their counterparts in the *ESC* finals, but their colleagues in the national field. Thus, they experience the *ESC* in a more peaceful manner than do TRT producers.

The positions occupied by the producers, on the other hand, require the tricky task of balancing cooperation and competition simultaneously. Although their position are viewed as the nodes of a cooperative network (the Eurovision Network) branching off from the center of the field (the EBU), they are perceived by the national broadcasters—their actual bosses—as extensions of their institutional body in the international field. This dual role requires that they labor under a constant pressure that weighs heavily on them, especially when national sensibilities are somehow offended. Furthermore, as the actors who spend sufficient time to incorporate the imbalances of economic and symbolic capitals between the broadcasting institutions in the international media field, they tend to increase the capital of their organization at the expense of others. Therefore, participating broadcasters' relations among each other and with the *ESC* may be more competitive than those of the musicians to their field, although they do develop strong relationships with their counterparts on a personal level. Yet it is obvious that the producers' imaginations of the *ESC* are much more constructive than are the dominant discourses about the program in Turkey.

The TRT producer's statement quoted previously—"the reality about the *ESC* is not as it seems from Turkey"—resonates with the claim of the second musician: "There are things in the *ESC* which you do not see from outside." Although these two interviewees made these statements in different contexts, they both refer to the dominating perceptions about the *ESC* in Turkey, which are not in line with what they have experienced while producing the program. Bourdieu (1998) posits a similar observation, worth quoting at length, about another competition-type media event with an international character—the Olympic Games, which shares various commonalities with the *ESC*:

What exactly do we mean when we talk about the Olympics? The apparent referent is what "really" happens. That is to say a gigantic spectacle of sports in which athletes from all over the world compete under the sign of universalistic ideals. . . . But the hidden referent is the television show, the ensemble of the representations of the first spectacle as it is filmed and broadcast by television in selections which, since the

competition is universal, appear unmarked by national bias. The Olympics, then, are doubly hidden. (p. 79)

Bourdieu (1998) also points out that the market and the media are responsible for the unfortunate "symbolic transformation" of the "reality" of the Olympics—"a competition between athletes from all over" into "a television show" of "a confrontation between officially selected champions from different countries" (p. 79). As presented so far in this article, Turkish actors involved in the production of *ESC* claim that a similar divergence from the reality of the *ESC* exists in Turkish public opinion.

There are two reasons for such deviation. The first revolves around the communicative nature of the *ESC*: As a contest type of media event with international appeal—itsself the outcome of an international production field populated by actors with different and possibly conflicting interests—the *ESC*, since its origin, has had the potential to trigger polarization among its international audiences, and it has done so in many national settings, including Turkey. Second, in a country such as Turkey that has internalized the affective quest for being a part of "the West" in general—and part of "Europe" in particular—the *ESC* has been perceived as a perfect platform where its "Europeanness" could be performed, and in return, Europe's approval of this performance could be sought annually. In the mediated communicative spaces formed around yearly competitions, *ESC*-related issues have been framed and reframed by national media outlets intensively, and two dominant concerns have formed the contours of imaginations about the *ESC*: receiving good results (preferably a victory) and representing Turkey "decently" in the international *ESC* platform. Nevertheless, Turkey's decades of "failure" in the competition have been perceived by that country as Europe's rejection, and the chasm between the two has widened—an outcome that is in marked contrast with the *ESC*'s original mission of bringing different nations together.

The *ESC*'s founding fathers' hope for overcoming the barriers and prejudices between countries by producing an international television product/event seems to be fulfilled only partially in the Turkish case. The musicians, and to a degree, the TRT staff seem to experience the *ESC* as an occasion for creating international bonds (mostly on interpersonal levels) not by watching the program but by getting involved in the production of the *ESC* event, or, put differently, by getting closer to the "reality" of the *ESC*.

Conclusion

The aim of this article is to discuss disparate imaginations about popular communicative phenomena that extend beyond national borders by focusing on their production realms, utilizing Bourdieu's approach to fields of cultural production. To achieve this, an attempt to get closer to a particular cultural product's "reality" is made via better understanding its production front. Accounts by musicians and TRT producers enable us to comprehend the "reality of the *ESC*" as it is imagined from its production field, that is, in contrast with prevailing discourses about the *ESC* in Turkey. As they did help us to explore the dynamics of the field that generate those unorthodox imaginations about the *ESC*, notions drawn from Bourdieu's field theory may enhance our grasp of cultural production fields in detail, allowing us to further existing knowledge about diverse realities of communicative phenomena within, beyond, and transgressing national borders.

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