Communicating anti-racism

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CHAPTER 5

Urban Alchemy

Performing urban cosmopolitanism in London and Amsterdam

[I] can’t really say [I am British] coz they always cut it down like, (...) they cut it down like, I’m “British Pakistani” so that sort of limits me to that. ..So I just say ‘yeah, I’m a Londoner’

Azar, 18 years old

I don’t feel Dutch, I have a Danish passport. My dad is American, my mother is Danish. I don’t feel Danish, I used to but now I don’t anymore too. I also don’t feel American, it’s more a piece of paper. Also don’t feel Dutch ..but I do feel like an Amsterdammer.

Fritz, 44 years old

Introduction

According to some urban studies scholars, the multicultural (global) city constitutes the ultimate site for the development of cosmopolitan sensibilities (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Bauböck, 2003; Çaglar, 2002; Morley, 2000; Sandercock, 1998; Staeheli, 2003). Urban dwellers are inevitably and consistently confronted with cultural difference in their daily lives. Such confrontations demand interactions and negotiations that can upset the essentialist logics of national, ethnic and religious identities. ‘Unmoored’ from their traditional sources, these identities become open to renegotiation in possibly cosmopolitan directions (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Keith, 2005; Holston & Appadurai, 1999; Sassen, 1999). According to Patton, the borders between self and city have now become fluid and enabled the emergence of ‘imaginary cities’ – cosmopolitan constructions and performances of community and citizenship that are based on urban belonging and identity (Patton, 1995). The multicultural city may thus constitute a potential alternative to more exclusionary senses of community and citizenship that are based on national, ethnic or religious identity (Bauböck, 2003; Çaglar, 2002; Patton, 1995).
Despite these high hopes, however, few empirical studies have been carried out that substantiate and deepen our understanding of cosmopolitanism. Much of the literature on cosmopolitanism has instead concentrated on postulating normative ideals and abstract ethics for an as-yet unrealized cosmopolitan society (Beck, 2002; Ignatieff, 1999; Sandercock, 1998). Other strands of cosmopolitan literature have been concerned with theorizing the cosmopolitan qualities of the lives of international business elite or refugee Diasporas (Hannerz, 1996; Ossewaarde, 2007). Existing literature on cosmopolitanism therefore lacks a thorough empirical base and shows little appreciation for extant cosmopolitanisms amongst ‘ordinary citizens’ who live more sedentary and unremarkable lives (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge & Chakrabarty, 2000; Robbins, 1998; Skribis, 2004). According to Vertovec & Cohen, our understanding of cosmopolitanism consequently remains largely ‘rhetorical’ (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002).

This paper addresses these concerns by presenting an empirical investigation into the performance and negotiation of urban forms of cosmopolitanism amongst ‘ordinary’ residents of two multicultural cities in Western Europe. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it seeks to redefine cosmopolitanism in concrete empirical terms as a discursive social practice, rather than a set of de-contextualized attitudes, skills or identities or an abstract philosophy. Such a redefinition is necessary to render the concept of cosmopolitanism more concrete and open to critical empirical research. By conceptualizing cosmopolitanism as a discursive social practice, it becomes possible to ask the questions when, where and by whom it can be performed and what it means to be ‘cosmopolitan’ in everyday life. The second purpose of this paper is to contribute substantially to our understandings of existing forms of cosmopolitanism in the domain of urban culture and identity. As a starting point, it takes the literature on cosmopolitan potentials of the city (cf. Çaglar, 2002; Lefebvre, 1968; Patton, 1995) as well as the quotes presented above that were collected for this paper. As the quotes illustrate, some urban dwellers, at least, draw on their own urban identities to claim belonging to the city and in so doing transcend the exclusionary logics of their national, religious and ethnic backgrounds. But what does it mean to make such statements for urban dwellers, and how does this (and the contexts in which they are produced) illuminate our understanding of people’s everyday engagements with cosmopolitanism? What is the moral and emotional economy that underpins speech acts such as these, and how does this relate to the social relations in the urban community? Is such a discursive positioning always available, to every inhabitant of the city, all the time? The empirical question that this paper will
address is: ‘What roles do urban identities play in the performance of cosmopolitanism among residents of London and Amsterdam?’

To answer this question, I present an analysis of 16 focus group discussions in which Londoners and Amsterdammers explored the connections between their urban identities and cosmopolitan values of social inclusion and intercultural tolerance. In the interviews, participants reflected on the appeal of two recent municipal poster campaigns for urban cosmopolitanism, called ‘We are Londoners, we are one’ and ‘We Amsterdammers’. Both poster campaigns were set up after a Muslim extremist attack on civilians in these cities.vi They constitute public attempts to promote urban cosmopolitan sensibilities amongst their audiences. In London, the slogan that was used in the posters initially read ‘7 million Londoners, one London’ and, when the campaign was re-issued a year later ‘We are Londoners, we are one’. In Amsterdam, the posters used the slogan ‘What are you doing for the city?’ and featured models from a range of different cultural backgrounds to emphasize cross-cultural solidarity. Starting from their responses to this campaign, residents of both cities were invited to discuss issues and themes that could elucidate the role of their urban identities in the performance of cosmopolitanism.

In the following, I will first present a redefinition of cosmopolitanism as a discursive social practice that is open to empirical scrutiny. Then, I briefly discuss the method of the study and the two campaigns that were used to focus discussions amongst Amsterdammers and Londoners on the connections between their urban identities and cosmopolitanism. This is followed by a presentation of the analysis of the discussions themselves organized according to the sub-questions, which are formulated below.

Grounding cosmopolitanism

Current academic literature has not reached consensus over the definition of cosmopolitanism. Binnie, Holloway, Millington and Young (2006) argue that there are two main strands of cosmopolitan theory. The first conceptualises it as a philosophy of world citizenship. The second conceptualises it as sets of skills, attitudes and lifestyles that characterise an idealized cosmopolitan subject. Ulrich Beck (2002) and Michael Ignatieff (1999), for example, are more concerned with the former. Their work can be read as attempts to normatively delineate the ideal philosophy of world citizenship and global ethics for the current age of globalization. On the other end of the spectrum, writers such as Ulf Hannerz (1996) have taken a more individualist focus by seeking to delineate the essence of the individual cosmopolitan. This literature
emphasises individual skills, attitudes and behaviours that characterise the cosmopolitan subject. It has notably singled out particular social groups (such as international business elites, or refugee Diasporas) as exemplars of these kinds of subjectivity (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002).

Critics have argued that both strands are problematic because of their normative and theoretical approaches to the issue of cosmopolitanism (Skrbis, 2004). Skrbis, Kendall and Woodward (2004) have argued that writers often tend to confuse their social ideals of cosmopolitanism with existing social categories and risk slipping into unhelpful political utopianisms (see also Ahmed, 2002). The current emphasis on normative and idealist theory means that it often lacks clear empirical referents (Holston & Appadurai, 1999; Skrbis et al., 2004; Vertovec & Cohen, 2002). As a result, the value of the concept for social inquiry and social intervention remains limited.

Many theorists have therefore called for a more grounded empirical approach to the study of cosmopolitanism (e.g. Holston & Appadurai, 1999, Skrbis et al., 2004; Vertovec & Cohen, 2002). The point of departure in such an approach would be to investigate cosmopolitanism as a collection of (emergent) empirical phenomena. Empirical studies of these phenomena are urgently needed to substantiate and deepen our understanding of the current and potential roles of cosmopolitanism in contemporary societies.

Theoretically, this requires defining cosmopolitanism in such a way as to render it open to empirical investigation. Following the lead in recent empirical studies on actual, existing cosmopolitanism (Lamont & Aksartova, 2002; Skrbis & Woodward, 2007), this paper defines cosmopolitanism as a (discursive) social practice. In particular, it is defined here as those discursive social practices in which people manage to supersede the parochialisms of their own national, ethnic and religious identities and position themselves and others as members of a shared community of equals, without compromising their cultural differences.

I will use the concepts of discourse and social practices as defined in the work of Michel Foucault (1978). In Foucaultian discourse analysis, these two concepts are intimately related to the workings of power and considered productive of social reality and subjectivity. To define cosmopolitanism as a social practice from such a theoretical perspective has a number of important consequences. Most important for the discussion in this paper, it implies that cosmopolitanism cannot somehow transcend the forces of power that are played out in the everyday use of national, ethnic and religious identities. Instead, its performance may be
conceptualised as the practice of negotiating those power differentials using locally available discursive means.

The work of Potter and Whetherell (1992) provides a further analytical tool to conceptualise the performance of urban cosmopolitanism. For these authors, negotiations of the discursive effects of power are possible because in many non-institutional settings, discourses are not as fixed as in the hospitals and prisons that are the focus of the work of Foucault. In everyday life, subjects have a considerably larger degree of agency with respect to the ways in which they discursively construct their own identities and the world around them. Thus, it is often possible for individuals to argue over definitions of identity and social reality by drawing on a range of discursive resources or strategies (called ‘interpretive repertoires’ by Potter and Wetherell, 1992). Their agency, however, is also not unlimited in non-institutional everyday settings as it is dependent upon the locally availability of discursive resources with which such constructions can be made (Ibid.).

The resources necessary for the performance of cosmopolitanism can be defined as those interpretive repertoires that enable the social construction of society as a culturally inclusive community. These resources enable people to imagine and construct their own identity and social reality around them in ways that transcend the social exclusionism that national, ethnic and religious identities produce in everyday life. By focusing on the performance of cosmopolitanism through the everyday social construction of self and reality, the focus of enquiry is shifted onto ‘ordinary’, everyday performances of cosmopolitanism.

A study by Lamont and Aksartova has already shown some of the viability of such an approach to the study of ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism (Lamont & Aksartova, 2002). In their article, they investigate ordinary cosmopolitanism amongst white and black working class males in the US and France. Using discourse analytical techniques, they demonstrate the kinds of rhetorical resources that these groups have at their disposal to argue for equality and solidarity between the races. Their results show regional and ethnic differences in these argumentations and imply that cosmopolitan discursive practices are situationally performed practices that depend on locally available discursive resources.

The situated nature of the performance of cosmopolitanism challenges the idealist notion that cosmopolitanism can be grasped in a singular pure form. Instead, it becomes possible to imagine cosmopolitanism to take any number of forms, depending on the context and the discursive resources available there (Skrbis et al, 2004; Skrbis & Woodward, 2007, Vertovec,
Moreover, individuals may exhibit cosmopolitan sensibilities in some contexts and not in others, or exhibit contradictory cosmopolitanisms in different domains of their daily lives. The definition espoused here paradoxically also challenges other (potentially) more concrete approaches that define cosmopolitanism as sets of individual skills and attitudes that enable the performance of cosmopolitanism (as for example is central to the work of Ulf Hannerz, 1996). Critics have argued that such definitions run the risk of pathologizing those who cannot or do not exhibit these specified idealized ‘cosmopolitan’ values and behaviours (Ahmed, 2002; Baban, 2006). From social-discursive perspective, however, the performance of the cosmopolitan should not be taken as a purely individual achievement. Instead, individual agency needs to be understood in the context of various social and historical factors that determine and enable people’s development of cosmopolitan sensibilities in a given social context.

In summary, a redefinition of cosmopolitanism as a social practice enables the focused empirical investigation of its emergence, performance and contestation from a situated, socio-historical perspective. This investigation is specifically concerned with the kinds of performances that are enabled by particular social discursive contexts and how differently positioned individuals come to embody the subject positions of the ‘cosmopolitan’. Moreover, it centrally addresses the issue of power as it seeks to understand when and how cosmopolitan positions become available and the kinds of efforts that are needed for its performance.

**Urban cosmopolitanism**

In this paper, I demonstrate the viability of this approach by addressing cosmopolitanism in the domain of urban culture and identity. In particular, I start off with the assumption, derived in part from earlier literature (e.g. Çaglar, 2002; Lefebvre, 1968; Patton, 1995), that urban identities can constitute a resource in the performance of cosmopolitanism in an urban context. Çaglar, for example, has described how second generation Turks in Berlin positioned themselves as ‘Berlin Turks’ to overcome the problems that their hybrid cultural backgrounds present them in identifying socially and culturally as fully German or fully Turkish (Çaglar, 2002). The city, Çaglar argues, serves them as a grounding for a sense of community and belonging in which their difference is accepted and normalized. In the work of Henry Lefebvre, the city’s cosmopolitan potential lies in the fact that it is possible to ground a sense of community solely on residential status. In the ideal situation envisaged by Lefebvre, this ‘right to the city’ could thus serve as a guarantee for maximum social inclusion of all inhabitants of the city (Lefebvre, 1968).
Urban reality, however, far from approaches such a utopian vision, as Lefebvre himself has of course continuously emphasised. As many authors have pointed out, daily life in the city is characterised by at least as many social exclusions as inclusions (Lefebvre, 1968, Massey, 2003, Morley, 2000). Any communal vision of the city thus needs to be regarded as a product of discourse and power and therefore carries risks of its own. According to Marcuse, metaphors that present the city as a unified whole are essentially ‘perverse’ since such rhetoric invariably obscures certain others, divisions and oppositional processes in the city (Marcuse, 2005). The notion of an ‘imagined city’ as a community of equal citizens risks delineating a homogeneous community in which conflict over its core values is unthinkable (Iveson, 2006; Marcuse, 2005). The progressive use of the city in practices of cosmopolitanism therefore depends on the ways in which it is defined as an inclusive community whereby difference is not pacified, obliterated or reified but remains open to contestation and negotiation.

Given the commonality of social exclusions in the city and ‘perverse’ uses of the metaphor of the city as community, accounts of Berlin Turkish identity as recorded by Çaglar have to be understood as situated performances of cosmopolitanism. Their assertion does not denote a static state of affairs, nor does it imply a set of de-contextualized skills and attitudes that these individuals carry with them to every domain of their daily lives. Instead, it can be read as discursively claiming to belong to a cosmopolitan urban community. At present, however, it is not known how such performances hold up in the fray of day to day negotiations of identity and social exclusion in large multicultural cities such as London or Amsterdam.

Second, it is unclear to what extent urban dwellers, which are differently positioned in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, length of residence in the city, have equal access to positions of urban cosmopolitanism. It is important to assess what other kinds of definitions of urban identity and belonging might exist beside the cosmopolitan ones that are of most interest here. The ‘constitutive outside’ of such identities is crucial to appreciate the effort that goes into the performance of urban cosmopolitanism and how it is situated in a broader set of power relations.

In order to assess the ways in which urban identities can thus be used to engage in the cosmopolitanism defined as discursive social practices, this paper will continue with a discussion of data collected on the links between urban identities and cosmopolitanism through focus group discussions. In these discussions, Londoners and Amsterdammers were invited to reflect on appeals to urban cosmopolitanism made by the governments of their respective cities.
The questions that guided the analysis were derived from the considerations above and are as follows. First, how do urban dwellers negotiate the meaning of appeals to urban cosmopolitanism amongst themselves? Second, how does this relate to their everyday constructions of their urban identities? Third, under what circumstances can urban identities serve as a resource in the performance of urban cosmopolitanism? In the following, I first present the methodology of this study and describe the two appeals for urban cosmopolitanism that were used to elicit discussions in the focus groups. This is followed by a presentation of an analysis of the data gathered.

Method
In order to answer these sub questions, an interpretive study was carried out in which urban dwellers discussed urban identity and community using the two campaigns mentioned earlier. To complement these data, the visual and verbal campaign material was also analysed and the designers of the campaigns were interviewed in order to ascertain the preferred reading of the posters.

For each campaign, eight focus groups were conducted with four to seven participants. Participants were selected using civic organizations, schools, churches, snowball sampling techniques and the networks of the interviewers. Because the main interest of the study was to examine reactions of urban audiences to an appeal for urban cosmopolitanism, our initial selection criteria were whether participants were living in London or Amsterdam. Although there were no immediate theoretical reasons to assume that a representative sample had to be drawn with respect to age, ethnicity or gender, an attempt was made to include people that varied along these dimensions to ensure that if conflicting views of the campaign were related to these dimensions, we would have a good chance of eliciting them in our focus group sessions.

The participants of the focus groups differed in terms of age, ethnicity, occupation and length of residence in the city. In the Amsterdam focus groups, the age of participants ranged from 16 to 58 and participants were of varying ethnic backgrounds. The latter included white Dutch majority (n=17), Holland’s three largest migrant groups (Moroccan, Turkish or Surinam (n=7) and a host of other backgrounds from smaller migrant groups such as Dutch Antilles, Polish and German (n=12). In the London focus groups, participants’ ages ranged from 14 to 87 and a variety of ethnic backgrounds was also represented. These included white British majority
(n=15), Pakistani & Bangladeshi (n=10), Afro-Caribbean (n=5) and other backgrounds such as Iraqi, Australian and Polish (n=12).

The focus groups typically lasted from 45 minutes to one hour. The moderator started by asking the group ‘when would you call someone a ‘Real’ Londoner?’ The moderator subsequently introduced the posters with an appeal for urban cosmopolitanism and asked the group to reflect out loud on their impressions of the posters and their message. All focus group discussions were recorded on audiotapes or digital recorders and transcribed ad verbatim by the moderators. All transcripts were then analysed using a constant comparative approach (Boeije, 2002; Seale, 1999). The analysis focused on the meaning that participants gave to the campaigns, which shared representations of the city they drew from their negotiations and under what circumstances urban identity could be used in the performance of urban cosmopolitanism. Before discussing the results of this analysis, a brief overview is presented of the poster campaigns that were used to elicit discussions.

Appeals to urban cosmopolitanism

Although the campaigns held in London and Amsterdam were similar in their uses of urban identities, there were also some notable differences. In the following, I will first briefly describe each campaign and then discuss their similarities and differences.

We are Londoners

The campaign ‘We are Londoners’ was initiated in direct response to the terror attacks that struck the London subways on July 7th 2005. The first round of posters was designed within 48 hours of the attacks and used the slogan ‘Seven million Londoners, one London’. This text was a simplified version of a diversity campaign called ‘7 million Londoners, 300 languages and 14 faiths’ that had been held four years earlier. The addition of the ‘one London’ thus introduced a sense of unity to the diversity message. The official goal of the campaign was to counter the negative feelings amongst the London population and ‘celebrate the diversity and unity of London’. According to the head of marketing at the London City municipality, the campaign was intended for all ethnic communities:

(... this campaign is talking to the majority living in the community, the majority of people in the Chinese community, the white community (...) what the message means is: yes there are different communities, but we also live together as one (...) But if you talk about the people at the
In the aftermath of the bombing, a number of media outlets were keen to participate in making a statement against terrorism in London and provided the municipality with free advertising space. A year later, the municipality produced a second round of posters in which the slogan had been changed to ‘We are Londoners, we are one’. This time, the municipality funded all of publicity itself and people were encouraged to put up posters, stickers and badges to display their commitment to a diverse united London. As can be seen in Figure 1, the main posters of the campaign were kept very simple, basically showing only the slogan.

By changing the colour of the letters in ‘7 million Londoners’ that together spell ‘one London’, the poster also visually constructs an interconnection between the diversity and the unity of the city. On the website of the campaign, where people could order posters and badges for their personal use, a number of pictures were also provided of the campaign message in its relevant urban context. As can be seen in Figure 2, these campaigns made more the diversity of London.
more visually explicit by showing Londoners of different ethnic backgrounds underneath the campaign banner.

*What are you doing for the city?*

The media campaign ‘What are you doing for the city?’ was set up after the murder of Theo van Gogh as part of a campaign called ‘We Amsterdammers’ which intended, amongst other things, to generate a collective Amsterdam identity amongst the Amsterdam population and to stimulate intercultural exchanges and social participation (ActionPlan Wij Amsterdammers, 2004). The campaign consisted of posters and local television ads in which volunteer workers who live in Amsterdam were presented to the urban audience (See Figure 3). Their activities ranged from helping schoolchildren with their homework and providing after school care for neighbourhood kids to giving free legal counselling and organizing a soccer tournament between Muslims and Jews. Apart from this variation in the kinds of volunteer work portrayed, the designers also sought to explicate the diversity of Amsterdam by including models of various ethnic backgrounds and ages and assuring an equal amount of male and female models. The ethnic backgrounds of the models are sometimes visually explicated by particular items of dress or aspects of the visual surroundings. For example, the Jewish man who organizes soccer matches between Muslims and Jews is shown wearing a traditional yarmulke to visually explicate his ethnic identity.

![Figure 3. Posters from the ‘What are you doing for the city’ campaign](image-url)
According to the designer, presenting various ethnicities as part of a shared urban community was the central aim of the campaign message:

[in the aftermath of the murder of van Gogh, when] you would see immigrants [see footnote viii] people walking with their eh headscarf, you think, you MAY think, well it’s a horrible Muslim or, it’s a suicide bomber, or what’s going on behind the veil. So then we thought it would be nice to look for all kind of different people working hard to make the atmosphere better in Amsterdam, doing it on volunteer ground. (...)  

Designer Santje Kramer

Each poster shows one individual volunteer worker photographed in full body portrait, standing or sitting alone in surroundings that are related to his or her volunteer work activities. He or she looks straight at the viewer with a relaxed look or a light smile while holding a large, shining yellow lamp in their hands. According to the designers, this lamp is intended to convey the message that these people are being put in the spotlight of the public’s attention for doing such good things for the city (Interview with the designer, May 2006). At the bottom of a poster, the person and his activities are described in a couple of sentences. Over the top of this, the slogan ‘What are you doing for the city’ is written in crude large letters, exhorting readers to start contributing to the urban community themselves. For example, one of the posters featured the following text:

“Braien Candelaraia is a street corner worker. When he gets off work, he helps keep adolescents off of the streets. By making music with them, he gives them a push in the right direction. What are you doing for the city?”

Results

The analysis below is presented in the order of the sub-questions formulated above. First, the ways in which Londoners and Amsterdammers respond to appeals to urban cosmopolitanism are addressed. Second, the constructions of urban identity that are related to these responses are analysed. Finally, the ways in which urban identities can serve as a resource for the performance of urban cosmopolitanism among Londoners and Amsterdammers are discussed.
Responding to appeals for urban cosmopolitanism.

When Londoners and Amsterdammers were presented with posters of the campaigns ‘We are Londoners’ and ‘We Amsterdammers’ respectively, it was not immediately clear to them how the campaigns should be interpreted. Focus group participants in both cities debated the meaning of the posters at considerable length and generally produced a wide range of diverging interpretations. A typical example of such an initial discussion is the following excerpt from a discussion amongst a multicultural group of 7 London college students aged 18 to 22. After they were handed the posters of the ‘We are Londoners, we are one’ campaign, their discussion started as follows:

1. George: we are Londoners, we are one (.)
2. Roy: we are Londoners and we are one (.)
3. Hernan: its like during the world cup, where you know even, it doesn’t matter who you are, it’s like everybody can be in a pub and they all support the same country, it doesn’t really matter.
4. Stephanie: [but] it’s being treated like a first now. I mean ‘We are Londoners’, we already knew we were Londoners even before this thing came out! (…) we don’t need a poster so we know!
5. Walter: I think its trying to say that yeah a sign of unity is like, yeah, we are one, and one London, to say that why are we struggling on over crime and stabbings so forth and just keep it peace, that’s what its trying to say
6. Dennis: or if you cut us do we not bleed.
7. George: I don’t know I don’t buy this stuff though. I don’t think some mugger is going to see this and go ‘you know what, yeah!’ (Laughter)
8. Walter: even so, it’s a starting point. Because you have to start somewhere.
9. Roy: well I think this is the government, trying to, you know they messed up after the whole 7/7 [terrorist attack on the London subways] thing,
10. Jason: I think they were trying to unite people. Which it probably did, coz when you see ‘We are London’ you do feel kind of proud.. Well I do.
11. Dennis: not really, I don’t

In the interaction above, which lasted a mere 2 minutes, urban identities were immediately negotiated amongst the discussants as they struggled to produce a shared meaning of the campaign message. At least 4 different interpretations were introduced ranging from social inclusion (turn 3) to anti-crime (turn 5) and an attempt to repair mistakes made by the government (turn 9). Moreover, these interpretations were contested as quickly as they were
produced, through arguments that urban identity is self-evident and does not need to be promoted (turn 4), crime won’t be solved by sharing an urban identity (turn 7) or that pride in the city is not shared (turn 11).

A consensual interpretation of the campaign message was rarely achieved in both the London and the Amsterdam groups. Moreover, when it was achieved, it was generally quite negative in tone. At times such negative appraisals even appeared to arouse strong emotions. In such cases, participants often reflected more directly on their own relation to the city and urban identity, such as is evident for example in the following quote:

This [campaign] is embarrassing. You know how embarrassing this is? Coz this isn’t what they think or they believe. They’re trying to fool you. They on purposely are going ‘I’m putting some multicultural people in the same picture’ and then say ‘We are London’! No! Because so much shit has happened since 9/11 and 7/7 that’s why they’re doing this. That’s bollocks. You know what, five years ago, they wouldn’t have even wanted a black person representing London!

Aisha, 31 year old Londoner, Iraqi background

Constructions of urban identities

The analysis showed that this persisting ambivalence, disagreement and criticism was related to the ways the appeals to urban cosmopolitanism elicited contradictory sets of common sense constructions of urban identities. Through these contradictory constructions, different groups of urban dwellers could be included and excluded at different times. An analysis of the different ways in which the cosmopolitan appeals of both campaigns were discussed shows that they were at odds with common sense constructions and uses of urban identities. At first glance, being a ‘Londoner’ or ‘Amsterdamer’ could therefore be constructed in so many ways that it would seem that an inclusive urban community was a clear matter of fact:

I cannot say what makes the people special in Amsterdam, when they are real Amsterdammers. I have no characteristics for them to say: Oh, they are eating a lot of cheese or whatever. That’s not typical for Amsterdam. (Laughing) That would be my problem. I don’t know what the real Amsterdammer is. Maybe this is the advantage of the city, that everyone can be an Amsterdammer.

Martin, 24 year old white Amsterdammer, American background
At other moments, however, participants constructed their urban identities in more negative terms that reflected the harder aspects of city life. In these accounts, the acceptance of difference and a sense of shared ‘common good’ were acutely lacking.

Nova: A Londoner is someone who is kind of hardened by the city, so they are a bit jaded, correct me if I’m wrong, if someone throws up on the tube,
Janelle: you don’t notice it.
Nova: you know you just ruffle your papers or whatever. And when the tube is late again, [you think] ‘oh great, someone’s thrown themselves on the tracks’ ah great, now I’m gonna be bloody late for that appointment.

A closer examination of these constructions of urban identity revealed that they were drawn from a larger shared repertoire of constructions of urban identities. These different constructions were not all equally conducive to the performance of urban cosmopolitanism and the conceptualisation of a culturally inclusive community of urban dwellers. The following set of quotes illustrates the range of possible constructions of urban identity and its relation to urban cosmopolitanism.

Tony: well a Londoner to me, I never thought of it. But now you put this in my mind, and I think, well, anybody, he could be black, Chinese, whatever, white, he's a Londoner! It’s a mix of people, you know that’s basically it.

Jacky: when you live in Amsterdamer then you are an Amsterdammer. (...) you don’t necessarily have to want to be a part of it but as long as you live there, you are to me, I am an Amsterdammer, to me you are an Amsterdammer. (...)

Chris: I think everyone has periods where they think suddenly they are a Londoner, I know its being a Londoner when I’m on my way to work, and when I’m on my work I become just, Chris again. I think it all boils down to travelling,

Marije: [you are an Amsterdammer] when you feel at home in the city. There are also people living in the city, who actually feel that it’s too crowded and stuff like that.

Audrey: well, I think that you can call yourself a real Amsterdammer when you’ve lived there for the greatest part of you life or maybe even only when you were born there.
Matthew: that’s like another reason why we don’t count ourselves as Londoners, because we’re in the boundary of London, but we don’t really count as Londoners. We’re more of a suburbs than the centre of London where they actually advertised [the we are Londoners campaign]

Giro: I don’t consider myself a Londoner, I consider myself an east ender. Not a Londoner as a whole.

Some of the constructions above lend themselves to the performance of an urban cosmopolitan identity. They reference the shared urban environment (Jacky), or explicitly argue for the multiculturalism inherent in the city (Tony). Others, such as those expressed by Giro and Audrey, were more exclusionary and implied a discrimination against newcomers, residents of particular neighbourhoods in the city or, as will be discussed below, against ethnic minorities.

The performance of urban cosmopolitanism

This variety of available discursive resources for the construction of an urban identity problematized the notion of an inclusive urban cosmopolitanism for many urban dwellers. In stark contrast with the notion of an urban cosmopolitan community, discussions in the focus groups showed that identities of a ‘Londoner’ and an ‘Amsterdamer’ were not always equally accessible to urban dwellers of different ethnic backgrounds. More specifically, constructions of urban identities often had connotations of ethnicity and class:

[When I had to think of a Londoner], I just saw my geography teacher. He’s just a typical east end person, white, short hair, balding, fat,

(Elman, 16 year old Londoner, Bangladeshi background)

No, I think a real Amsterdamer, [that’s] a woman, a woman with bleached blonde hair, a tacky spandex legging and who is nowadays living in the outskirts of Almere.¹⁰

(John, 23 year old Amsterdamer, white Dutch background)

The references to a ‘typical’ white east end male in the London case, and bleached blonde hair and tacky clothing in the Amsterdam case, constitute a pejorative reference to traditional white working class majority population of the city. When these shared representations of Londoners or Amsterdamers were salient in a group discussion, it rendered an urban identity inaccessible to
urban dwellers with a different racial or class background. For some black respondents, this meant that identifying with the ‘the city’ and its community were off-limits to them:

Seraino: [to be able to consider yourself an Amsterdamer,] the fact that you have non-Dutch background, I think that is important too. I came from Surinam, I’ve lived my whole life more or less in Amsterdam but I don’t feel like an Amsterdamer either because I am a Surinamer. It will stay that way.
Marius: But isn’t it both possible?
Seraino: Well, it isn’t for me. I live in this city, but I don’t have sympathy for the city. So that’s my opinion.
Jacky: More of a Surinamer than an Amsterdamer.
Seraino: yeah, that’s kind of how you are made in this society, really, of course you also get discriminated and other stuff, so I’m also taking those kinds of things into account.

In the above, Seraino, a 22 year old black man, refuses to adopt an urban cosmopolitan position even when he is invited by participants (who are all white) to do so. In London, some participants similarly constructed the urban community as white and therefore refused or felt unable to identify with it. This process was open ended however, and like in the quote before, it was always negotiated in interaction with other participants. In the following quote, a black man and woman and a woman with an Iraqi background discussed their London identity in the following way:

Janelle: I am a Londoner, I am a Londoner.
Pierre: but I wouldn’t class myself as a Londoner.
Janelle: yeah because when you think of London you're thinking of union jack flags, someone playing the old piano, you know what I mean, the old school white type of thing. I used to think that way myself but at the end of the day..
Aisha: (overlapping, addressing Janelle) can I say? The union jack represents racism, you know that don't you?

The quote above illustrates how negotiations of belonging to the city could end up excluding non-whites from the urban community when representations of Londoners as ‘white’ were salient. Janelle’s attempt to tell the tale of her eventual cosmopolitan identification as a Londoner based on a different kind of inclusive representation, for example, is broken off by the implicit accusations that she might thus unwittingly be condoning racism. In such contexts, taking a cosmopolitan approach to the urban community was something that needed to be actively defended against other, more excluding definitions.
However, the ethnic connotations of many constructions of urban identity could also work to exclude or alienate white, middle class urban dwellers from a notion of an inclusive urban community. When presented with calls for solidarity and civic participation, ethnicity of other members of this urban community were perceived as grounds by whites to dismiss these calls altogether. One example of this is the following remark by one white Dutch Amsterdam student who adopts an urban cosmopolitan position when the appeal was expressed by a black woman:

Annie: Yeah, I feel less committed to someone when their own identity is really outspoken. Like the model on this poster, she is a very obviously a Surinam woman and I am clearly not a Surinam woman, so...

Moderator: But, if this Surinam lady asks, Annie what are YOU doing for the city, what do you think?
Annie: Then I don’t think too much of it. Nice that you are doing it, but it doesn’t really motivate me to start doing something myself immediately.

On the particular posters Annie is responding to in this quote, the inclusive urban community is explicitly represented through a black woman who claims to be doing something for her city. Annie takes issue with the explicit representation of her ethnicity (she is ‘obviously a Surinam woman’) and feels that it positions her as essentially different (‘I am clearly not a Surinam woman’). Instead of embracing a notion of a multicultural urban community, she dissociates herself from the calls to solidarity with her fellow urban dwellers based on the mere salience of ethnic differences.

The accounts shown above complicate the interpretation of the quotes offered at the start of this article by Fritz (‘I don’t feel American; it’s more a piece of paper. Also don’t feel Dutch ...but I do feel like an Amsterdammer’) and Azar (‘saying [I’m] British Pakistani sort of limits me to that, so I just say I’m a Londoner’). These cosmopolitan appropriations of the city therefore need to be appreciated as efforts to position oneself in a very dynamic discursive field in which such claims are frequently and easily contested. Moreover, the kind and degree of effort required may be different depending on how subjects are positioned in terms of race, class or national identity. Such positioning might also affect the availability of particular discursive resources in particular contexts.

Claims to cosmopolitan identities thus need to be understood as situated, temporary and contested performances that are intimately connected with the workings of power in urban daily life. One clear example of this situated nature of such performances was the effects of the attacks on the city’s public transport system in 2005. In some of the London focus groups, the memories
of the 7/7 attack *temporarily* produced a discursive field in which particular shared constructions of urban identity were highlighted that clearly enabled the performance of urban cosmopolitans. Their discussion centred around their agreement that Londoners were members of a unified community of equals in which there was no place for conflicts or racial discrimination, as is illustrated by the following rather lengthy but informative quote:

Moderator: what do you think this campaign is trying to do?
Mary: I think it makes people think
Mitzi: I think about fanaticism. I think that we have got to tackle fanaticism
Mary: it will not get us down, whatever you throw, we will unite.
Others: yeah
Evelyn: unite. No matter what colour or race we are, you throw the bombs at us and we will unite. This is what happens
Mitzi: yeah, more than anything, unification.
Tony: I mean the bus driver [of the bus that was blown up, FM], he was coloured wasn’t he? He said, I’m not gonna stop bus driving,
Evelyn: but did you notice there wasn’t any 'don’t touch coz you’re black' 'don’t touch me coz you’re this' that day everybody was one. And this is what Londoners are about, no matter what we do everyday, [when] it’s all about I don’t like you because your skin is different colour.. push us in a situation, and we’re there for each other.

In the interaction above, the unity of Londoners is constructed as one that specifically crosses racial and ethnic divides through comments such as ‘*no matter what colour or race you are (...) we will unite*’ and ‘*there wasn’t any don’t touch me coz you’re black (...) everybody was one*’. As the quote also illustrates, however, this unity was temporary and depended upon the presence of an external threat to the city. At the end of the quoted discussion, Evelyn acknowledges the temporary nature of this unity by stressing that everyday London life is actually ‘all about’ racism. Thus, their endorsement of a collective urban community was to a large extent dependent on the London bombings that allowed for a manifestation of a shared external enemy to the otherwise diverse and divided inhabitants of the city. This example illustrates the situated, temporal and contingent nature of urban cosmopolitanism in London and Amsterdam as it was encountered in the focus group discussions. It shows how particular cosmopolitan meanings surrounding urban identity and belonging are constructed in particular historical and social spaces, using the discursive resources that are available through an active negotiation between urban dwellers.
**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have sought to analyse the role of urban identities in the performance of cosmopolitanism. The responses to the appeals to urban cosmopolitanism of the campaigns ‘We are Londoners, we are one’ and ‘We Amsterdammers’ showed that urban identity at times served as a resource to supersede the parochialisms of national, ethnic and religious identities and produce a sense of equality amongst urban dwellers. At the same time, however, the urban identities of Londoners and Amsterdammers did not necessarily serve as a resource for the performance of urban cosmopolitanism. Amongst the diverse and contradictory ways in which urban identities were used in these discussions, they also, for example, were used to exclude people on the basis of length of residence, ethnicity, race and class.

These results contribute to the emerging literature on a critical, grounded understanding of actually existing cosmopolitanisms (Çaglar, 2002; Lamont & Aksant, 2002, Skbris & Woodward, 2007). They show how cosmopolitanism based on an urban identification is a situated performance. This performance is dependent on and shaped by the discursive resources that differently positioned subjects have access to in different social and historical contexts. Moreover, they illustrate how the performance of urban cosmopolitanism is, at present, very vulnerable to contestations by less inclusive discursive constructions of urban identity and belonging.

This study of urban cosmopolitanism also demonstrates the viability of a more grounded, empirical approach to the study of ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism more in general. The discursive approach taken here enables an investigation of the ways in which power, discourse and subjectivity play a role in the emergence, performance and obstruction of particular forms of cosmopolitanism. The outcomes of this study suggest that theories of cosmopolitanism cannot afford to focus merely on the normative sides of this debate. Instead, efforts need to be exerted to understand how such normative theories maybe reflect and potentially inform ‘ordinary’ everyday performances of cosmopolitanism. The analysis demonstrates that cosmopolitanism cannot be envisaged as an unproblematic transcendence of the everyday workings of power and national, ethnic and religious identities. Instead, the situated performance of cosmopolitanism involves a negotiation of the existing identities and power relations that are assumed to be transcended. It is our understanding of these negotiations that may hold the key to the
constructive integration of cosmopolitanism in the fabric of our multicultural societies. If anywhere, such ‘urban alchemy’ takes place in the messy, down to earth reality of everyday life.