Communicating anti-racism

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CHAPTER 6
The performance of cultural citizenship
Audiences and the politics of multicultural television drama

Introduction
The growing presence of cultural 'others' in Western Europe has made the question of cultural citizenship an important one in debates about integration, cultural identity and belonging. As cultural difference continues to function as a cause for social exclusion in everyday life, it cuts across traditional citizenship regimes that officially guarantee equality of rights and obligations (Baban, 2006, Gilroy, 2000, Jaggar, 1999, Rosaldo, 1999, Yuval-Davis, 2002). This situation reflects a lack of cultural citizenship, which can be defined as the right to be culturally different within a community and the obligation to engage respectfully with the difference of others (cf. Jaggar, 1999, Kymlicka, 2003, Miller, 2006, Ong, 1999, Pakulski, 1997, Rosaldo, 1999, Stevenson, 2003, Turner, 1994).

Cultural citizenship, like all other forms of citizenship, is constituted by a process of continuous performance rather than a set of abstract legal rules (Isin & Turner, 2002). The performance of cultural citizenship can be defined as the struggle over the norms, practices, meanings and identities through which groups and individuals are socially included and excluded in society (Ong, 1999, Rosaldo, 1999, Stevenson, 2003). In short, it involves the negotiation of the role of cultural difference in everyday life. Given the deficit of cultural citizenship faced by multicultural societies mentioned above, there is an urgent need to develop interventions that might facilitate and democratis the performance of cultural citizenship. At present, however, very little is known empirically about the performance of cultural citizenship, let alone about the ways in which it might be stimulated.

In this paper, we address the (potential) role of mass mediated popular culture in the performance of cultural citizenship (Hermes, 2005, Morley, 2006). A number of arguments have been made in this regard. First, mass mediated popular culture plays a central role in everyday

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processes of identity construction, the reproduction of (imagined) communities and the dissemination of ideology (Ibid.). Depending on their particular content, the consumption of these media texts may incite various forms of reflection upon the role of cultural difference in everyday life (Hermes, 2005). Second, it is consumed by a wide range of social groups and their audiences are often made up of multiple ethnic groups (Costera Meijer & de Bruin, 2003). Reflections about the role of cultural difference in everyday life stimulated through popular culture may therefore have a more democratic and cross-ethnic reach. However, while these arguments are well rehearsed in the literature, the relation between popular culture and the performance of cultural citizenship has not been studied empirically. Thus, it is unclear under what circumstances popular culture may facilitate or democratise such a performance. The main question that will be addressed here then is: When and how does popular culture serve as a resource in the performance of cultural citizenship?

This paper starts from the assumption that the media text, although always open to various interpretations, remains a determining factor in the kinds of readings and appropriations that viewers can make (Michelle, 2007). As a consequence, we agree with writers like Miller (1999) and Hartley (2006) that some texts may have more potential to support the performance of cultural citizenship than others. The argument in this paper is constructed around an empirical case study of audience reactions to one particular multicultural television drama. The series called *West Side* was selected as a case study because it was expected to be an exceptional resource for the performance of cultural citizenship. *West Side* was explicitly designed to promote discussions on the role of cultural difference in the Netherlands, through dramatized depictions of the daily lives and struggles of four families from different ethnic backgrounds in a multicultural neighbourhood in Amsterdam (AT5, 2006). In order to engage viewers with locally relevant issues of cultural identity and difference, each family was made to represent one of the four largest ethnic groups in the Netherlands (i.e. white Dutch, Surinamese, Turkish and Moroccan), and part of the problems they face deal explicitly with their cultural backgrounds and their integration into Dutch society. By focusing on the reactions by the audience, which is highly relevant for issues of cultural citizenship, we maximized our potential to analyse how the content of the media text mediates and moderates cultural citizenship processes. Two questions were central in our investigation of the audience reactions to *West Side*. First, what are the audience reactions to the multicultural drama series *West Side*? Second, can some of these reactions be
distinguished as constituting the performance of cultural citizenship and, if so, what role does the content of the series play in these performances?

In part, our analysis of the relation between audience reactions to *West Side* and cultural citizenship will build on the rich tradition of audience studies that has consistently shown how audiences appropriate media content and deploy its images and discourses in symbolic struggles in their own daily lives (e.g. Fiske, 1989, Gillespie, 1995). However, it also seeks to contribute to the ongoing critical reappraisal of some of the implicit assumptions about audience reception (Barker, 2006). Specifically, it seeks to demonstrate the need to avoid viewing audience reactions as always/already containing some form of ‘interpretative resistance’ or subversion of hegemonic values (Barker, 2006; Michelle, 2007). In so doing, the ability to distinguish between politically relevant engagements with popular culture and other, more common audience reactions is lost. Moreover, it becomes impossible to assess the relationship between these more common audience reactions and more politically relevant engagements such as the performance of cultural citizenship. Therefore, in our analysis, we specifically focus on the ways in which the performance of cultural citizenship is related to and emerges from other, more common audience reactions.

In the following, the contents and production context of *West Side* are briefly sketched. Next, the method used to analyse the audience reactions to the show is presented. This is followed by an analysis of the audience reactions to *West Side* in which we distinguish different modes of reception and their relation to the performance of cultural citizenship. The paper then returns to the theoretical discussion about the relationship between popular culture and cultural citizenship and argues for a sharper theoretical delineation between common audience reactions to popular culture and processes of cultural citizenship.

**West Side: A multicultural drama series**

The first season of the reality soap *West Side*, which aired in 2006 and 2007 on local (AT5) and national television (NPS), was taken as the topic of the audience research conducted for this paper. *West Side* can be described as a combination of a traditional soap series with a reality format based on multicultural issues and dilemmas. The show’s storyline deals with the ups and downs in the lives of four families of different cultural backgrounds and is set in the western part of Amsterdam, which is known for its high concentration of Muslim immigrants and repeatedly makes the news with stories of social unrest. The four families are white Dutch, Turkish, Surinam
and Moroccan. Some of the vagaries of their lives are the same as in regular television soaps, such as love interests, infertility or the threat of terminal cancer. However, the writers of the show also intentionally inserted storylines that concern the difficulties of multicultural cohabitation and integration. For instance, the Moroccan father is presented as a rather traditionalist Muslim in the show who, at first, refuses to give his daughter permission to join a dancing school. His daughter struggles with her loyalty to him and her own desires and ends up lying to her father and the dancing school in order to be able to participate. Other themes in the show concern issues of male honour in the Turkish community, prejudice about adolescent males of ethnic backgrounds that hang around in the streets and white Dutch racism. The show was supplemented by an internet site where people could find background information about the series, watch previous episodes and leave comments on 25 forums. Forums were available to talk about each of the characters as well as about each of the 13 episodes of the series.

The show was produced by the local Amsterdam television station AT5 and was directed by a professional director who had previously made a number of commercially successful entertainment programmes for other broadcasters. Most of the actors were professional actors, although a couple were still enrolled in drama classes and others had no previous acting experiences at all. The show was filmed mostly using hand- or shoulder held cameras which gave it a realistic documentary feel. The realism of the show was furthermore enhanced by relying completely on improvised dialogue. Even though the general storylines had been worked out, the actors did not know until the day of shooting what scenes they would be playing and were left to improvise their own lines. In so doing, the show was set up to play out the strength of a reality format that gives people the feeling that they were actually given a look inside the lives of people from other cultural backgrounds.

**Methodologically**

Our analysis of *West Side* is based on material gathered by an ethnically diverse group of students from two Dutch universities. Data was collected through focus group interviews (group size on average 5, 103 informants), street interviews in the part of Amsterdam where *West Side* was shot and its narrative is located (184 street interviews) and in-depth interviews with mostly casual viewers of the show as part of their course requirements (18 interviews). Additionally all traffic within the *West Side* discussion forums located on its website were analysed (877 postings retrieved on March 7th 2007). While focus group interviews were organized in two rounds and
focused more strongly on social cohesion in the second round; the in-depth interviews followed up on those respondents who offered strong reflection on their own identity and ethnic identity in general.

Both the research process and the analysis of the interview material followed the logic of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1974; Strauss and Corbin, 1980). This means that data was collected and analysed using the procedure of analytical induction. In analytical induction, no hypotheses are formulated before data collection and analysis starts and the empirical data themselves are used to formulate new theories and hypotheses. The relevance of the analysis for theoretical and societal interests is guaranteed by narrowing down the focus of empirical enquiry using a number of ‘sensitizing concepts’ derived from the literature (Ibid.). In this analysis, the main sensitizing concept was ‘the performance of cultural citizenship’ which we defined earlier as the negotiation of the role of cultural difference in everyday life. In the case of the audience reactions to West Side, we therefore focused our attention on those discussions in which the theme of cultural diversity appeared to be salient to viewers.

A further sensitizing concept was suggested during the process of analytical induction itself. It became clear that viewers showed diverging patterns of interpretation that were closely related to two dominant modes of reception repeatedly documented (cf. Liebes & Katz, 1990). Various terminologies have been proposed (Michelle, 2003), and we have chosen to use the terms ‘critical’ and ‘referential’ reading proposed by Liebes and Katz (1990). ‘Critical’ reading involves the highlighting of the constructed nature of the text and expressing the awareness of its ideological content. This mode of reception was more present in the discourse of viewers who had been invited to watch one or a few episodes of the programme. ‘Referential’ readings consisted of personal engagement with the content of West Side and were more common in the discourse of habitual viewers. However, it has been consistently shown that individuals cannot be categorised in terms of ‘reading styles’. Instead, people can (and frequently do) ‘shift’ (Michelle, 2003) or ‘slip’ (Thomas, 2003) between referential and critical modes of reception over the course of their viewing experience as well as in their accounts of this experience during an interview. Most viewers thus construct multiple and possibly contradictory interpretations of the same media text and cannot be identified with any single mode of reception. Consequently, our interest in the analysis below was not to identify types of individual viewers through their mode of reception, but instead to develop an understanding of how different types of contingent
engagements with a media text (as expressed through these different reading styles) were related to the performance of cultural citizenship.

All transcripts were fully transcribed and systematically coded using software for qualitative data analysis (MAXQDA, 2005). Techniques of constant comparison were used in order to seek out deviant cases that could deepen our interpretation of the data (cf. Seale, 1999). Analysis of the material followed a standard coding procedure. First, the interviews were coded generally for all relevant key words to do with, for example, West Side, the media, multiculturalism and ethnic identity found by different coders. The key words were thematically clustered. The clusters were confronted with existing literature and research in the field to yield theoretical insight. By using such procedures as the strategic use of constant comparison and deviant case analysis, the widest possible variety of feelings and feelings about West Side and multiculturalism was captured in our coding and analysis scheme (Seale, 1999, Miles and Huberman, 1984).

Results
The analysis of the audience reactions to the show West Side quickly demonstrated that the show did not generally incite viewers to start negotiating the role of cultural difference in everyday life. However, such performances of cultural citizenship did emerge occasionally under certain specific circumstances. In the following, we will first discuss the nature of the common audience reactions to West Side. Next, we discuss under what kinds of circumstances performances of cultural citizenship emerged out of these usual audience reactions to West Side. Then we present data to illustrate what the performance of cultural citizenship in the domain of popular culture looked like. As was mentioned in the method section above, audience reactions to West Side could be usefully interpreted as either ‘critical’ or ‘referential’ engagements with the content of the show (cf. Liebes & Katz, 1990). Both are discussed here in turn.

Common reactions I: critical readings
Critical readings were often expressed by viewers who had watched the show once or twice. Such viewers had either come across it when flicking through the channels or had been invited by the researchers to watch an episode. They argued that the show had little relevance for them personally and distanced themselves from the content of the programme. They generally avoided any association with the community of committed viewers of West Side. For instance, one young
white woman, who had just watched an episode for the first time, argued that she thought it was stupid, poorly acted, annoying and probably most suited for people of lower educational background:

That was a stupid show (laughs). I thought the acting was bad and that annoyed me, basically, and ... I can imagine why people, I mean I think it’s good that this show exists, because I think it might help like less educated people, I mean it’s acceptable for all kinds of people, maybe young people really like that, so...

By constructing the target audience of the show as ‘less educated people’ who might be ‘helped’ by its content, this account distances the speaker from the programme and its content. Against this backdrop, expressing judgements (‘it’s a stupid show’) as well as critical reasoning to back it up (‘the acting was bad’) serves to take the position of a critical, detached observer. In the accounts that viewers produced from this position, the content of the show served as a mere cue to engage in two distinct discursive practices that can be labelled ‘multicultural moralizing’ and ‘media-savvy moralizing’.

When viewers took to ‘multicultural moralizing’, the multicultural content of the show served as a starting point to begin expressing their own views on a multicultural Dutch society. For example, one viewer ended up expressing his own views about the reality of multicultural reality after having criticized the show for not being realistic enough:

My sense is that in [West Side] they have tried to project something about how people are in society together. But it isn’t always like this. Not everyone, not every Surinamese, Moroccans or Dutch will see thing this way, as it were. Usually it’s really the older people who think this way but I think that youth today, or kids, don’t. I think that everybody just interacts with each other and that they accept one another, but what they want to project is something of the past, and I really don’t think it’s still like that.

‘Media savvy moralizing’ was slightly different. In this case, the show functions as a trigger for people to express their thoughts on the role of the mass media in society and its powers to distort reality and common sense. In many cases, informants stressed their own insight in how the mass media function to influence other less media-savvy people’s opinions. Some used this repertoire to criticise West Side for going along with the media’s tendency to negatively represent multicultural society. Their concern in this respect was usually with the effects that the media might have on social relations, as is illustrated by the next quote:
On the one hand, I can understand the media because bad news sells better but on the other hand, you do create a certain atmosphere in society. All that spreading of negativity, all the time, will make all of us think negatively. If you don’t want society to polarise, you shouldn’t offer this type of reports. They have a duty to inform of course, but look at sides, the positive and the negative.

Once engaged in these discursive practices many people we interviewed in the focus groups and in-depth interviews went on for long periods of time expressing their own, detached and impersonal views of multicultural society or the power of the media. Importantly, the content of West Side appeared irrelevant to the opinions that people were expressing as ‘multicultural moralizer’. Their accounts quickly evolved into abstract moralistic discussions that reproduced dominant dualist discourses about multicultural integration (it is a success/it is a failure) or the power of the media (it is a threat/it is a solution).

As these discussions identified abstract notions of ‘the media’, ‘government’ or ‘individuals’ as the cause of multicultural problems, they offered little scope for a more personally engaged and critical negotiation of the role of cultural difference in viewers’ own everyday lives. While these accounts are ‘critical’ in the sense that they expressed social criticism, they do not critically engage with the role of cultural difference in the lives of the viewers themselves. Moreover, they do not lead to an exploration of the pleasures, problems and dilemmas that the current role of cultural difference in everyday life presents to them personally.

Common reactions II: Referential readings
The second common reading of West Side involved a more personal and engaged reflection on the content of the series. In contrast to the moralising accounts presented above, referential readings of West Side tended to emphasise the relation between the viewers’ own identities and the content of the series. Accounts posted on the website of the programme illustrate this clearly as these generally contained forms of self-identification through reference to the show and its community of fans.

Really an awesome soap. I am from Amsterdam and I lived in Rio de Janeiro for three years and now in London. But nothing beats Amsterdam. This will always be my city. Wherever I am. Top soap. Greetingz…
Through self presentations such as the one above, viewers not only expressed their appreciation for the content of *West Side*. They also defined their relation to the community of viewers of the show differently. The account above expresses an engagement with this community of viewers by combining an expression of appreciation of the soap (‘top soap’) with communications directed towards other viewers of the programme (‘greetingz’) and information about one’s own identity (‘I live in London... but Amsterdam will always be my city’). From this initial positioning of positive association with the content and audience of *West Side*, viewers used the content of the programme as a resource to communicate a variety of meanings to other members of the audience of *West Side*. Importantly, the content of the *West Side*, being a multicultural soap, allowed viewers from ethnic minority backgrounds to articulate their cultural identity. For instance, one Turkish man reflected on the soap in the following way:

Hi, first of all, I have to say I think the soap is very beautiful. And thank you Halid. You reflect true Turkish man [sic] with your calm, even character. I think you are very talented and successful. I wait impatiently for the next episode.

In the account above, a viewer uses the content of *West Side* as a resource to express his own ideals about Turkish identity. This is evident in the ways in which he expresses appreciation for the character of the Turkish father through a parasocial address (‘thank you Halid’) and the subsequent references to the ways in which he represents his personal ideals about what a ‘true’ Turkish man should be (i.e. possessing a ‘calm, even character’). By referring to characters in the show to express certain ideals of Turkish identity and representation, this account illustrates how multicultural drama in particular may serve as a resource that facilitates the expression of one’s cultural identity. In this case, for example, the shared image of Halid facilitates the communication of an ideal of a ‘true Turkish man’. In another context, where *West Side* was unknown, such a reference would be meaningless. The expression of an ideal about Turkish identity would require more discursive work as it would involve constructing it without the help of such a clear shared image.

At this point it could be argued that these public performances of cultural identities already constitute a rudimentary performance of cultural citizenship, especially since they occur in contexts in which this cultural difference is normally invisible. Such an interpretation, however, reduces the notion of the performance of cultural citizenship to the mere expressions of
referential readings of a programme and expressions of ethnic identity. Instead, the performance of cultural citizenship in the domain of popular culture needs to be limited to those audience reactions that reflect a more personally engaged, critical negotiation of the role of cultural difference in viewers’ own everyday lives. Audience reactions to *West Side* suggest that these performances are constituted through an unfolding, interactional process. This process emerges from the ‘referential’ reading discussed above but can not be reduced to it.

**Emergences and performance of cultural citizenship**

The performance of cultural citizenship, understood as the negotiation of the role of cultural diversity in everyday life, depended on the surfacing of ideological dilemmas from viewer’s everyday lives during their reflections on *West Side*. These ideological dilemmas appeared to emerge specifically from referential readings of *West Side* as they prompted reflections about viewer’s own everyday struggles. While the content of the programme did not determine these kinds of audience reactions, it was clearly a necessary condition. For example, one girl recognized herself in the storyline of a Moroccan girl who was forbidden to take dancing lessons by her father. Writing directly to the Moroccan character, this viewer reflected on the dilemma between loyalty to the values of one’s traditional parents and the desire to participate in Dutch society through a parasocial address:

> Hey Jamilla, can I say something I know how it feels to have a father like that because I have one like that and I am also not allowed to go to dancing lessons either I am Moroccan too you know half Surinamese.

In the account above, the conflicts that a young girl can experience with a traditional Muslim father are explicated in a public space. In a mix between a public statement and a confession, the emotional charge of this particular dilemma is expressed (*I know how it feels*). Note how the content of the show is crucial for the meanings and emotions that this account conveys as it only refers to a parental prohibition (*I am also not allowed to go to dancing lessons*) but in so doing relies on the audience’s knowledge of the narrative in which the character Jamilla and her father clash to infer the exact nature of the problems and emotions involved. As such, the expression of certain views and experiences are both triggered and enabled by content of the show.
Other Muslim viewers adopting a referential reading style with regard to this particular scene in *West Side* were also led to reflect on their experiences of this particular dilemma. However, the position they took up and the accounts they produced were not identical and reflected differences and similarities between individuals of the same community. Furthermore, the role of the content of *West Side* in their engagement with these cultural dilemmas also differed. For example, the show could also serve as a resource to identify forms of conduct that should not be tolerated in the Muslim community.

If this soap is real than you are doing a wrong thing. You should have listened to your father, I would die for my parents I do everything for them. I will never do wrong things never I will never embarrass them. Youth today only think about themselves but if what happens on [West Side] is true, and that your father is proud of you for dancing on a stage. Well if I were him shame on you.

Ibrahim

In the account above, a Muslim man articulates what he considers appropriate behaviour in relation to the dilemma faced by Muslim children towards their parents by using the content of the show as a discursive resource. Dismissing the conduct of the Moroccan daughter in the show as immoral (‘you are doing a wrong thing’, ‘youth today only think about themselves’) he juxtaposes it to his own unquestioned altruistic behaviour (‘I would die for them’). Of course it remains unclear in what ways being prepared to ‘die for your parents’ is a sufficient solution to the dilemmas of growing up with traditionalist parents. In this account, nonetheless, the content of *West Side* figures as a resource to express certain feelings and personal experiences as well to explicate perceived group norms.

When participants reflected referentially on the programme with their peers or members of their ethnic community, these dilemmas and group norms could subsequently be explored further. The kinds of collaborative negotiations and explorations that followed can meaningfully be considered performances of cultural citizenship. This is illustrated below through a more lengthy exchange between two viewers. The exchange starts off with a comment on a particular scene in which a young Turkish couple in the show is drinking alcohol during a dinner with white Dutch friends. When the couple is asked by their table guests why they drink alcohol, and
whether it is prohibited in ‘their culture’, they reply that it is ‘allowed’. On the website, a viewer called Cher comments on this exchange by attacking the Turkish couple as follows:

I think you are downright despicable. You pretend to be a Muslim in the series but you merrily drink wine. As a Muslim you then say ‘We Muslims are allowed to drink alcohol’. Don’t you know Muslims are not allowed to drink alcohol? You are a disgrace to Muslims. A downright disaster you are. And that also goes for your soap wife/girlfriend!!

Cher

In this excerpt, Cher strongly expresses her disgust with a specific part of the content of *West Side*. She thereby foregrounds the rules around drinking alcohol in the Muslim community. Although Cher’s account is moralizing and has some resemblance to the accounts of the casual viewers discussed earlier, her emotional engagement with the content of the show (‘you are disgusting/ you are a downright disaster’) foregrounds her subjective and emotional investment in the representations of Muslims. Furthermore, by engaging with the characters, Cher simultaneously presents her views on Muslims who drink alcohol to the rest of the participants of the forum. In responses to Cher’s comments, a discussion erupts in which this shared dilemma is explored further by a group of Muslims that visit the site:

To Cher, I’m sorry but, I am Muslim myself and I don’t drink, but I know enough Muslims that drink.. Both Turks and Moroccans. Have a look around you in clubs and bars and even at weddings. This series shows the reality and not the stereotypes. It’s officially not allowed by the faith but there are enough people who drink despite their religion. So to each his own.. Because you probably won’t be holy yourself either and that doesn’t matter because nobody is perfect! By the way Sinan, don’t worry about it you are doing great, you are an example for everyone.

Supplexx

As Supplexx confronts Cher with her moralization of the issue of Muslims and the consumption of alcohol, she first makes sure that her own identity as Muslim is established and that she herself does not drink alcohol (‘I am Muslim and I don’t drink’). Consequently, however, she asserts that Muslims do drink alcohol and that this is a fact of life that should be accepted based on liberal principles (‘to each his own’). She then confronts Cher with the improbability of her own moral
high ground (‘you probably won’t be holy either’) and, through addressing the drinking Turkish character in the show, declares that this behaviour in the show is acceptable in their community (‘you are role model for everyone’). In her subsequent response to Supplexx, Cher acknowledges the fact that many Muslims do in fact drink alcohol and then adjusts her position to Supplexx’s criticism.

Of course I know that a lot of Muslims drink, even though it’s not allowed. But then you shouldn’t merrily start telling people, on TV of all places, that Muslims ARE allowed to drink. It’s a reality soap, but what kind of soap wants to project this kind of image, excuse me, which MUSLIM wants to project such an image about Muslims? Muslims are NOT allowed to drink. It is PROHIBITED! Then you shouldn’t say, because you happen to be starring in a TV show, that Muslims can drink and express some sort of approval for it (…)

Cher

In the account above, the dilemma of the representation of the Muslim community is further explored as Cher draws attention to the ethics involved (‘what kind of image should be projected about Muslims’?). By expressing her disdain for the representation of what she acknowledges to be a reality of the Muslim community, she explicates another group norm to ‘keep up appearances’ and to make sure that immoral behaviour is not condoned either within the community or to the outside world. After these exchanges between Cher and Supplexx, others also join in the discussion and further explore their experiences with the ideological dilemma inherent in the representation of Muslims in the media. In the contributions above and the discussion in which other viewers also participated, new resources are generated and shared that expand participant’s critical vocabulary and carry the potential to change the ways in which they negotiate these issues in other domains of their daily lives as well. For example, one participant produced an argument that wearing a headscarf is also not worn by all Muslims and therefore is not a defining property of being Muslim. Another participant argued that a good Muslim can also be defined as one who tries to live rather than one who perfectly follows all the rules.

**Cultural citizenship**

The analysis of audience reactions to *West Side* suggests that the performance of cultural citizenship in the domain of popular culture is a contingent process. It emerges in particular
discursive contexts and unfolds in interactional exchanges as several people find themselves positioned and articulated as engaged and personally invested viewers. Thus positioned, they come to reflect on the show referentially (i.e. they exchange their experiences of the programme and relate the content of the show to their own lives). Within these contingent spaces of personal, invested reflection, ideological dilemmas related to the role of cultural difference in everyday life can be expressed and negotiated. The ensuing shared negotiation of the various experiences and perspectives that members of a group have in relation to such a dilemma, we would argue, addresses the ‘meaning and scope of the membership of the community in which one lives’ (Hall & Held, 1990: 175). Moreover, it involves a more personally engaged critical negotiation of the role of cultural difference in viewers’ own everyday lives and may therefore be considered a performance of cultural citizenship.

The contingent emergence of performances of cultural citizenship from referential readings of a media text demonstrates their ‘insurgent’ nature in the domain of popular culture (cf. Keith, 2005). Moreover, the contingency of these insurgences suggests that individual viewers may become involved in multiple performances of cultural citizenship as they engage with various kinds of popular culture in different domains and episodes of their daily lives.

However, despite the fact that its content appeared especially conducive to performances of cultural citizenship, alternative moralizing discourses about the do’s and don’ts of multiculturalism or the power of the mass media were a much more dominant audience reaction to West Side. Thus, it is important to stress the distinction between the ‘active viewer’, as is commonly described in audience studies research, and the ‘active citizen’ that figures centrally in contemporary citizenship literature. The analytical ability to make this distinction is crucial for the development of the field of audience studies. The analysis above may be read as an attempt to avoid overstressing viewers’ agency and ‘interpretive resistance’ (Barker, 2006; Michelle, 2007). Even though all viewers are ‘active’ in the sense of being active participants in processes of making meaning, they are not all equally actively engaged in negotiating the role of cultural difference in their public and private lives. The distinction between common forms of meaning making and those forms that are related to cultural citizenship becomes clear when common audience reactions are contrasted to those specific instances where personal engagements with the show evolve into the performance of cultural citizenship.

The analysis also illustrates the need for a theorisation of the spaces of the performance of cultural citizenship in the domain of popular culture. The ‘public sphere’ of cultural citizenship
may best be regarded as a set of temporary, contingent discursive spaces in which people are articulated in committed yet critical ways through their personal experiences, shared cultural identities and social concerns. Such spaces may temporarily open up amongst friends, colleagues or family in various domains of everyday life – not least, perhaps, while sitting on a couch watching television with friends or family in the comfort of one’s own home. This argument corresponds to a certain degree with Habermas’ notion of the ‘episodic’ public spheres that may temporally and unpredictably open up in everyday life and conversation (cf. Habermas, 1996). However, a number of important differences between this concept and the perspective we are espousing need to be noted. First, the kinds of discursive practices that constitute the performance of cultural citizenship are not necessarily of a rational-critical nature. The results above illustrate how they can take on many other more emotional, intuitive and contradictory modes of discourse. The performance of cultural citizenship may be more constructively conceptualised as an emergent collaborative, social practice rather than the rational activity of an individual citizen. The critical potential of this social practice does not lie in its ability to secure the rights of an individual to assert their cultural identity. It is rather found in the ways in which the role of cultural difference in the relations between these individuals is explored, negotiated and transformed.

Second, much mainstream deliberative theory has been accused of ignoring the processes through which people become engaged with politics (Dahlgren, 2006; McGuigan, 2005). The analysis above illustrates that at least one pathway into the performance of cultural citizenship lies beyond the domain of formal politics. It problematizes any simplistic notion of citizens entering the public sphere purely as a result of a rational decision to participate in rational-critical deliberation. Even if this would be the ideal form of political participation, there is currently a lack of insight into the ways in which it is related to, or how it might evolve from, the more emotional, intuitive engagements with cultural citizenship found in this study. The conditions and processes of the emergence and submergence of the performance of cultural citizenship therefore ought to be on our research agendas as much as its performance itself. These different pathways offered by popular culture may be especially important since they have the potential to draw people into the performance of cultural politics that rarely do so through formal, rational ways.
Conclusion

The reactions of audiences to the show West Side reveal that multicultural television drama may serve as a resource for the performance of cultural citizenship. However, these performances need to be separated from the vast majority of audience reactions. While most viewers enthusiastically and creatively elaborate on their expert views and criticisms of multicultural society and the powers of the media, their accounts were mostly concerned with presenting themselves as detached but knowledgeable experts who comment on the problems facing others and society at large. As a consequence, the bulk of audience reactions to West Side reproduced only a superficial layer of meaning about West Side and failed to develop into critical negotiations of the ideological dilemmas of everyday life in contemporary multicultural societies. Those reactions that could be characterised as a performance of cultural citizenship in the domain of popular culture can be distinguished from common audience reactions by the personalized, committed engagement with particular content in a programme that is related to ideological dilemmas surrounding the role of cultural difference in everyday life.

Given its relatively infrequent occurrence, it is important to acknowledge that the performances of cultural citizenship in the domain of popular culture discussed in this paper are relatively limited in scope. The bulk of audience reactions appear to be rather inconsequential to the negotiation of the role of cultural difference in everyday life. Moreover, the isolated performances of cultural citizenship have little potential to generate meaningful social change on their own. The impact of such insurgent performances of cultural citizenship will depend on their articulation to other processes of change and stagnation. In direct response to the content of a multicultural drama series like West Side, some viewers appeared willing to engage with the role of cultural difference in society from a position of personal engagement. However, this initial emergence should not be mistaken for the endpoint of the process of cultural citizenship. At best it is a potential for change, which begs the question of its mediation. At least two questions therefore remain unanswered. First, how are these processes supported or contained, restricted and fixed in place by social actors, like the local or national government, independent social actors like the media, community organizations or commercial enterprises? Second, how can they be carried further into greater momentum or lead to collective social actions that can challenge the presence of such ideological dilemmas themselves? These are clearly matters for further
investigation. The role of popular culture for cultural citizenship needs to be taken seriously in this regard, but should not be idealized.