

## The Exnomination of Pain: Undoing Otherness. Viewer Reports on stereotyping and Multicultural Media Content\*

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Stereotyping is not always a bad thing in media content. Audience members can and will say that they don't mind stereotypes because they at least represent their own group recognizably while it is otherwise so markedly absent in media content. Such remarks need to be understood as part of informant strategies in interviews. While stereotypes in their abundant richness of easy to recognize identity markers may be comfortable in some situations, and allow e.g. criticism of underrepresentation, they also evoke shame, pain and anger. Such emotions are slower to surface and clearly depend on the rapport an interviewer can establish with an informant. While non-white informants are almost always faced with a choice of either or not acknowledging the pain of unfair media representation, this is different for white informants. White informants face a choice too in representing themselves when talking about multicultural television as either politically correct, or as 'in the know' when it comes to the mores of the multicultural society. Neither position, however, bridges the gap between those talking and the 'others' who are portrayed. Two mechanisms are used as strategies in interviews. A strong 'third person effect' is one obvious mechanism: very good that multicultural drama is on television, but no, I don't watch it. The problems and the pain of multiculturalism are thus exnominated by white and by middle-class non-white informants. Multiculturalism is about 'others', who are non-white, or of lower class backgrounds. Stereotyping is not even recognized in such evaluations. White and middle-class informants can also chose to use a second strategy, which does address the secret and exotic attraction in portrayals of characters from other class and ethnic backgrounds. Stereotyping is not politicized

in such cases, but recognized as a lack of quality. Real multicultural drama should be able to make viewers understand something new about the 'others' who are portrayed and not regurgitate old tales or offer flat characters. In this paper we will discuss interview material from two qualitative audience research projects conducted in 2006, and in winter 2006/7, in which a group of young Moroccan-Dutch informants and a mixed non-white and white group of informants were asked to evaluate Dutch multicultural drama that was, at that moment, on television. After detailing discursive strategies and positions in the interviews, we will take a closer look at the television examples given, to see how multicultural television drama might help work through the pain of social change in the global era.

## The Exnomination of Pain: Undoing Otherness. Viewer Reports on Stereotyping and Multicultural Media Content<sup>1</sup>

Quote from a street interview, autumn 2006: the interviewer is interested in multiculturalism. But multiculturalism as a subject for discussion has disappeared, and hardened into animosity about religion in the Netherlands. In the aftermath of the murder of Theo van Gogh on the second of November 2004, filmmaker and Islam critic, by a Muslim fundamentalist, this is not all that surprising

Judith, the interviewer: Do you watch the regional television station AT5?

Turkish woman (17): I only watch trailers on AT5. I have seen a commercial for *West Side*.

Judith: Did it make you want to watch the series?

Woman: No, not really. I really only watch Turkish television.

Judith: So, how do you feel about multiculturalism?

Woman: All that yapping and complaining about Muslims, it drives me crazy. I really don't feel like talking about it. (walks away)

In this paper we will discuss how 'Otherness' (Barthes 1972), or perhaps at this point in the history of globalisation and migration just 'otherness', can be undone. Multiculturalism depends on practices of labelling and stereotyping. Many of these labels and stereotypes are inoffensive or even funny without being insulting. There is, however, also another side to how multiculturalism functions today: otherness has been fused with fear of terrorism and fundamentalism. Relatively innocuous forms of dress, such as a beard or headscarf can be enough to signal that extreme care needs to be taken. Obviously this has especially hardened a white versus non-white divide. Non-white has mostly come to mean 'Muslim', if not 'mad fundamentalist' and has less and less to do with ethnicity or skin colour. Such a hardening of identities is not just detrimental to the social status and life of those stereotyped. More generally, the hardening of identities can undo what has been achieved by emancipation movements. It is hardly ever simply ethnicity that becomes tainted, other identity categories follow. Whether based on gender or sexuality, all groups with minority status are vulnerable to processes of increased normalisation and disciplining of the boundaries of approved behaviour and approved beliefs. In the era of globalisation, moreover, and increasing traffic of not just goods and data but people as well, there is a lot at stake for societies in learning how to be 'open', and to learn how to 'undo' otherness.

Stereotyping is not in itself dangerous. As interviews by Joost de Bruin (2005) with young, non-white Dutch young people about multicultural television drama show: to be on television and to be recognised for being part of a group with an identity of its own, is felt to be a good thing. Michael Pickering (2001, preface) argues that stereotypes are a system of categorization and that we cannot do without cognitive categories. Stereotypes, however, are

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also part of a curious balancing system. They are meant, argues Pickering, to control chaos and install order by holding up 'deviant' behaviour, or non-standard qualities to a norm. They are thereby an instrument for exercising social power and for bringing norms into being. Because stereotypes easily overshoot their mark, they also produce precisely what they are meant to achieve: a counter reaction. Instead of installing a definitive view, they produce more chaos by misrepresenting social reality, which leads to a questioning of dominant norms and so on. Therefore, while we need categories, stereotypes are often not the most efficient or flexible way to order our world. Pickering argues that to fully understand stereotypes, a historical understanding of them is necessary. Such an understanding, for instance, can make clear how stereotypes often feed on long-existing images that have lain dormant, from whence they derive enormous truth/power.

Undoing otherness, then, is coming to terms with how stereotypes are used and may function, and to find strategies to open up stereotypes to discussion, to a sense of their multiple layers. For however 'flat' they may seem, by tracing back their histories, and their effect, we would surmise that they can then become part of potentially more open domains such as humour, or group identity building, where they function as honorary labels.

In the domain of the media, stereotyping is par for the course. Media representations depend on foreshortened descriptions both visually and in dialogue and narration. We will discuss reports of viewers in two case studies. The first case study is the work of two students we supervised, Tamara van Baaijen and Lianne Kooistra. Tamara and Lianne conducted extensive long interviews with eight young Moroccan-Dutch television viewers about how they felt Moroccans were represented in multicultural television drama (2006). The other case study we will be using for this paper is an evaluation study for the Amsterdam city council of a series the council financed (2006/2007). The series, called *West Side* was meant to incite dialogue amongst Amsterdammers about multiculturalism in hope of establishing a friendlier climate in the city, and of countering hostility and fear in as far as these had arisen after the murder of Van Gogh. 87 informants from diverse backgrounds and age groups, both men and women were interviewed by students in panel discussions; while a further 206 Amsterdammers were approached for street interviews. The quotation above comes from one of these.... About half of the street interviews were successful in the sense that there was some discussion of *West Side*, or the idea of the series.

## Moroccan-Dutch Informants and Dutch Film and Television Comedy

In Tamara and Lianne's rich interview material the broad denomination 'multicultural drama' translated speedily into a series that just had been on Dutch television, based on one of two motion pictures that were successful in Dutch cinema theatres. The first was called *SJOUF SJOUF HABIBI*, (2004, Albert Ter Heerdt, Netherlands; also made into a prize winning series: *VARA*, 2006-), the second *THE SCHNITZEL PARADISE* (2005, Martin Koolhoven, Netherlands). Najib Amhali, actor and comedian extraordinaire, is named in all of the 8 interviews. As one of the informants says: "Najib Amali can knock on any Moroccan door in the Netherlands". On his own he is seen as having achieved more than a dozen politicians in two decades. Apart from great reference for Amhali, the presence of Moroccan actors in a television sit com itself is clearly pleasing. The link appears to be to the Americanness of the genre, with America occupying the status of dream territory, imagined as a land without frontiers, offering chances to all regardless of race or ethnicity.

Underneath the shared appreciation of multicultural sit com there is more, however. When mapping all that informants have to say about multicultural audiovisual drama, they show a compass-card of emotions and feelings. The four directions of this compass are: pain; anger; criticism and disappointment, and assimilation out of fear of not being accepted. *Pain* e.g. in the realization that the funny stereotypes played by Amhali have a factual base.

Comedy thus offers a temporary outlet for Moroccan-Dutch people's double identity, acceptance of being torn between two cultures by allowing the pain of being in such a position to be felt. *Anger* comes through when informants vent criticism: such prejudice, bad jokes, and an insult to all Moroccans. The compass direction of anger points out stereotypes as over the top, negative images, and suggests that Dutch-Moroccans are what Tuchman in the 1970s called "symbolically annihilated" (Tuchman a.o. 1978). *Criticism and disappointment* are historical arguments. An informant will say: "I used to watch . . . , but I don't any longer". This is often a more general type of criticism, to do with bad scripts and acting generally, as much on the part of white Dutch as on the part of other actors. One of the examples mentioned is *Good Times, Bad Times* (RTL4, early 1990s-), a soap opera that introduces non-white characters from time to time, including a young Moroccan doctor. The fourth compass direction is *assimilation and fear*. It sounds like a repertoire used by earlier groups of migrants. As migrant you need to realize your luck to be here, you need to be grateful, dress nicely and partake culturally of what is on offer. You are here on sufferance. Multicultural drama is not what you want to watch.

We use the metaphor of the compass because individual informants tended to move into different directions. Good interviewers that they are, Tamara and Lianne managed to help their informants explore different aspects to watching television or going to the movies. Pain, anger, criticism and fear are all relevant aspects to how their 8 young men and women approached issues of representation and stereotyping. Interestingly, they did not often refer to a quality youth series made by the NPS (public broadcasting) called *Dunya and Desi*, (NPS, jaren, dir. Dana Nechustan), which did establish the name of actress Maryam Hassouni. They may have been too close in age to the target audience to have watched it.

Generally, what is clear, is that when De Bruin's young Moroccan informants spoke of their preference for characters that De Bruin (2005) felt were very stereotypical, they worked through the pain of feeling unrepresented, or distorted by 'bounty' characters. A bounty is a chocolate bar sold in the Netherlands that is filled with coconut. Bounty for well over a decade is a derogative name for non-white persons who behave as if they were white: dark on the outside, lily white within, and therefore traitors to their group. Criticism and disappointment are part too of how De Bruin's informants talk but again, their talk is linked more strongly to being young: quite a few series are boring and for 'older' people. Anger is mostly displaced in his interviews, for instance onto two lesbian characters in a prime time soap (*Costa*, BNN), who kiss. Muslim girls were intrigued by these two but also felt that they were 'dirty' (haram). A qualification quite a few other youngsters, both white and non-white shared.

We can establish then that a range of emotions drives viewer appreciation of multicultural television drama, whether comedy, soap or indeed police series in De Bruin's interviews. Stereotyping, representation and recognition are clearly key issues. When audience members say that they don't mind stereotypes because they at least represent their own group recognizably while it is otherwise so markedly absent in media content, their remarks need to be understood as part of informant strategies in interviews. While stereotypes in their abundant richness of easy to recognize identity markers may be comfortable in some situations, and allow e.g. criticism of underrepresentation, they also evoke shame, pain, disappointment and anger. Such emotions are slower to surface and clearly depend on the rapport an interviewer can establish with an informant.

While non-white informants almost always have to make a choice of either or not acknowledging the humiliation of unfair media representation, this is different for white informants. As a white viewer in the Netherlands, there is an infinitely larger range of white characters on television in order for individual white idiots not to have to carry the burden of representing all white Dutch men or women. When talking about multicultural television,

white informants do have to make a choice in how they want to represent themselves. Politically correct, is surely one obvious possibility, as is being 'in the know' when it comes to the *mores* of the multicultural society. Neither of these positions bridges the gap between those talking and the 'others' who are portrayed. Outright racism, a third position, would of course not intend to bridge that gap at all. Below we will turn to the material that was gathered about *West Side*, the Amsterdam city reality soap. In this project around a third of informants were white, while two thirds were from various non-white denominations. This will allow us to take a closer look at how socially dominant groups manage issues of representation and stereotyping. What, if anything, is at stake for them in 'undoing otherness'?

## West Side and the Multicultural Society

*West Side* (2006-, AT5/NPS, dir. Harm-Ydo Hilberdink) portrays four families from four different ethnic backgrounds. They clash as a result of the ideas they have about one another, which turns *West Side* into a veritable laboratory of stereotypes. Use of these stereotypes is meant to encourage discussion about multiculturalism, exclusion and racism among viewers. The four families in the series are Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and white Dutch. As a result of urban regeneration their flats will be renovated or torn down, and they are rehoused in a new building in which they become each others' neighbours. They clash immediately. White Dutch lower-class Mimi thinks she recognizes her son's scooter in gallery walkway to which front doors open when she comes to inspect her new apartment. She immediately thinks that the scooter has been stolen and drags the heavy thing into the empty flat. Angry Moroccan boys protest her actions through the window that faces the walk way. Mimi hides in the sitting room. She thinks Moroccan young men are criminals and thieves. The boys get so mad, they do behave like an angry mob that would justify anyone being afraid of them. Later on in the series Mimi's son turns out to have sold the scooter without his parents knowing. The police inspect the receipt the Moroccan neighbour has to show and the scooter after a lot of to do will be returned to him.

The Moroccan family has its cross to bear too. Clearly the father is highly traditional, while his children would prefer a more liberated and open life style. Mohammed Milad (50), the father, works as a cleaner, His wife Rachida takes care of their home and the children: Jamilla (18), extrovert and popular with her class mates. Najib (16) is a typical teenager. The Turkish family is urban middle-class and consists of a son, his girl friend and his father. The father, Halid Yüksel is 57 years old and widower. He runs a small garage. His son is named Öz. He is a real estate agent. His wife Ayse Yüksel is a hotel manager and fights Öz's traditional notions of women's place in society. Mimi Meijer and her husband Henk are the typical old-fashioned Amsterdam family. Their son, Martin, is 23 years old. The Surinamese family consists of Edith Madretsma (66), grandmother of Roy Roosblad, a friend of the Meijer's and Sharlene Madretsma, Roy's half sister (16). Sharlene flirts with all the boys she meets.

*West Side* is a reality soap. Director Harm-Ydo Hilberdink (who made *Finals* and *Kicken*) chose to work with actors who are mostly amateurs. They are familiar with their character but did not have to speak pre-written dialogue but could improvise. A stronger sense of 'reality' was hoped for as a result. Throughout production storylines were altered and adapted. The actors however were given the scenario per day and not allowed to see what was going to happen in later episodes. *West Side* follows soap opera genre conventions (Geraghty 1991) but with a twist. Although conflict and temporary consolidation are important features. it is also a reality series, partly made in documentary style and the use of hand-held camera's. A stronger sense of 'realness' was sought by making confrontations and conversations fairly harsh, thus polarizing (ethnic) difference. In the same vein and also departing from the

'originary' soap format, *West Side* foregrounds a large number of male characters. All in all *West Side* is a soap in its narrative structure while in its dialogue and visual style it is something else. Since multiculturalism has been embedded in the ground structure of the series (both the constellation of characters and the storylines) 'stereotyping' is clearly an issue for discussion. A traditional soap opera would provide a friendly means to represent and problematize relationships between people (including potential problems following from ethnic difference, cultural integration and diversity, or the combination of tradition and 'translation' (Bhabha 1990) and new styles of social contact. *West Side* was not very friendly. It sought the provocation of reality TV. Given that in television drama, there is a need to sometimes flatten characters to make confrontations between characters more intense, *West Side* provides a perfect field to study cultural stereotyping.

How did viewers react to the provocative style of *West Side*? And was there a difference between non-white and white interviewees? These were leading questions in analyzing the vast amount of interview material gathered by two groups of students from highly diverse backgrounds. From a bird's eye perspective, it appears to be the case that white informants used two different strategies in interviews. A strong 'third person effects' is one obvious mechanism: very good that multicultural drama is on television, but no, I don't watch it. The problems and the pain of multiculturalism are thus exnominated (Barthes 1972) by white and by middle-class non-white informants. They simply define those being shown as outside their own group, whose qualities or behaviour are therefore irrelevant to their own reputation, status or sense of self-worth. Multiculturalism specifically is about 'others', who are non-white, or of lower class backgrounds. Stereotyping is not even recognized in such evaluations.

The Dutch families are really badly portrayed, as really asocial families. I am an Amsterdam-West native and I have no connection with that picture at *all*.....For instance, they are so prejudiced about the Moroccan families in this neighbourhood, I don't have that. I get along fine with these people. Stereotypes. It doesn't fit with how I experience reality. (Street interview with a white Dutch male student).

Moroccan man in a street interview: I don't watch it but it seems like a good idea!

Italian man 43 years old: It's a positive initiative, great idea. The disadvantage is that people have their ideas about how people are and that is really difficult to change

White and middle-class informants can also use a second strategy, which does address the secret and exotic attraction in portrayals of characters from other class and ethnic backgrounds. Stereotyping is not politicized in such cases, but recognized as a lack of quality. Real multicultural drama should be able to make viewers understand something *new* about the 'others' who are portrayed and not regurgitate old tales or offer flat characters.

Bas 27 white Dutch man (in a group interview): To me, it's based on prejudice. Like: a Moroccan stealing a scooter and so on. It didn't give me any insight in the cultural background of different groups in the community. I mean, to my mind this is not the way to get a better understanding of each others' background so that you get to know where somebody is coming from and that you come to understand other people's backgrounds. I don't have a better relation or understanding why certain differences are the way they are... This (*West Side*) polarizes. A Turkish woman who takes up more modern western position, a Turkish man who wants to be more traditional. But I don't have a better understanding of these differences. This soap didn't help. (Group

Although this strategy of wanting more detail does not politicize the power dimension of stereotyping, it can be a strategy of ‘undoing otherness’. The criticism this often entails of the media, arguably is a semi-political argument that we’ll return to at the end of the paper

Erdal (37, Turkish) There is never a programme about how *we* think. They only show people with extreme ideas because that is more fun. What do the two of you (the two north European women in the group) have in common with Christian fundamentalism (‘zwarte kousenkerk’) (Nothing?). That’s what I mean: they are Christians just like you!

## Polarization of Identities and the Burden of Representation

While there is a difference between how white and non-white informants handle the pain of stereotyping, it is hardly as absolute as we had imagined it to be. Both white and non-white informants felt addressed by *West Side*’s portrayal of their own and other ethnic groups. The main difference between white and non-white speakers seems to be that non-white informants had easier access to a politicized discourse of discrimination. A white group identity was not called upon by the white informants our students spoke with. It would seem to be the case that the ‘burden of representation’ is no longer carried solely by non-white groups (see the interview excerpt below), but that polarization of identities affects groups differently.

Discussing historical representation in Hollywood film, Stoddard and Marcus (2006:27) refer to Shohat and Stam (1994) who “... argue that a “burden of representation” that is “at once religious, aesthetic, political, and semiotic” exists whenever a marginalized or underrepresented group is portrayed in film (182), and it has a lasting impact on how people view the world and the groups that are represented, even if they know that the film’s portrayal isn’t accurate. Historical accuracy aside, an audience’s impression of a group is still shaped by how characters from the group are portrayed. ... In the case of representing history in film, this burden requires that members of these underrepresented groups be portrayed in a way that allows the viewer to understand their points of view, history, and language.” They continue their argument by stating that “this *burden of historical representation*, then, can be met in film through developing complex characters and rich personal stories that challenge traditional historical and film narratives, which have generally focused on Eurocentric history and appealed to white audiences.”

According to our informants complex characters and rich personal stories were exactly what was lacking in *West Side*. The white women quoted below, does feel the burden of representation. Exnomination of the pain of multiculturalism for her is therefore not an option.

Street interview with a white Dutch woman, around 40:

... really awful! I think I saw the first episode. I really do hope foreigners won’t think that all Dutch people are like that Mimi and her husband. It’s plain embarrassing, what a programme (---)

I think it is a shame the continuous negative portrayal of those Moroccan boys. It is SOO unnecessary! I know a Moroccan family who live in my street (in Amsterdam-West) Really exemplary. The daughter and son are both students, they both go out in the evening. They dress nicely, hip. Really nice people. Their mother does not speak very good Dutch but she is always friendly. I would like to see more of that in the media, but noo, they show a horrible series like this one. Just show how things are at home in other families, doesn’t always need

to be a drama: simply, what is their house like, why do they pray 5 times a day, and how do you do that actually? (Interviewer: Judith).

Other informants did refuse identification:

*Interviewer (Judith):* Esther, do you feel represented by this Dutch family?

*Esther* (28, North-European ): No I don't recognize them at all. Where do they get these ideas, these people from????? Maybe I'm naive, but I don't recognize this at all.

While non-white informants offered a repertoire of victimization that recalls the compass point of 'pain' that was found in the Tamara van Baaijen and Lianne Kooistra's interviews with Moroccan informants about multicultural television drama. They felt more pressured to defend themselves. The quotations show how informants may move from *pain* to *anger*, or come to *anger* via *criticism and disappointment*.

Group interview.

Ismael 19, a Moroccan-Dutch marketing and communication student: ....They way they want to copy us (like when the Moroccan father sends his wife and daughter to the kitchen?).... those kinds of things. It is 2006. That happened in Millennium 1 according to me. Nowadays it's the daughter who sends the mother to the kitchen. It's not real. That is why we laugh at that scene. Really, one of those stereotypes. It is just what 'they' think. What 'they' make of it. When it is 'them' who don't have a clue about our traditions. (Interviewer: Roos, 2006)

Does West Side strengthen prejudice?(Interviewer: Judith)

Erdal (37, Turkish man).....Prejudice. I think that Dutch people feel they know *us* better than they know themselves.

Erdinc (24, Turkish man) They think that they know us better than they know themselves

Nuri: I am Turkish, but when I say that and I think of the threats of attacks, then I do think: those Moroccans!...Moroccans are always so aggressive! They are! They used to be nomads, weren't they.... The difference between Turks and Moroccans, is that Turks think more about the day after. Moroccans live by the moment. When they have a 100 euro, they spend it. And they kill each other. And talking about faith... They think they know everything... It is embarrassing. I am a Muslim too. But I am ashamed of them. When someone asks me if I am a Moroccan, I get really angry. (Interviewer: Judith)

### ***Undoing Otherness: 4 Strategies Suggested by Informants***

Undoing otherness may sound particularly naive. In Barthes' discussion 'othering' and exnomination are mechanisms at the level of myth, buried deeply in a semiotic-ideological mechanism that precisely denies its own history or roots. We dare suggest that the ideological mechanism of 'othering' has become less effective than it has been. If anything *West Side* offends not just the sensibilities of one group but of all groups portrayed at some point or another – while it also found viewers who liked the show and who found it entertaining.

As far as we can tell four countermechanisms are used in the interviews that all, in their own way, are a means of ‘undoing otherness’. The first two are *empathy across ethnic divides*, and *understanding processes of stereotyping as a social power mechanism*.

Judith: What is *West Side* doing wrong then?

Nuri (23, Turkish): How they deal with each other.

Erdal: There aren’t interested in each others situations

Ester (North European, 28): I think they should have made a series in which each episode is centred on one family. A Turkish family then a Moroccan or a Dutch family. Show us a new side to the story, the side that we don’t see in the media!

Nuri: I compare it with Dutch people who are normally negative towards Turks. Then they spend their holiday in Turkey and come back full of enthusiasm! It’s the same people there and here

Erdal: I often hear from colleagues who go to Turkey: Such nice people! They are so hospitable, great cooks. I’ll say: yes, but it’s the same here: here you are welcome as well. If you come to my door and you are hungry I would invite you to supper...and you can stay the night too!! What kind of people we are, you’ll find out when you take the trouble to do. And you shouldn’t compare Turkey to how it is here. Second and third generations are very different

*Self-reflection* was the third means to contextualize all stereotyping. While, according to informants, a fourth means to undo otherness is a *vastly increased media literacy*. Although here too we find a ‘third person’ argument (others need to become more media literate), blame is especially accorded to the media.

#### Group interview

Marloes (27, white, Dutch): I don’t tend to discriminate, I don’t think but sometimes when I am in a tram, when I take a tram 13...

Bryan (Chinese-Surinamese): Tram 13, 13 is a disaster

Marloes: Yes and I think, especially after the subway bombings, that muslim looks a bit suspicious to me, and I do get scared.

Janis (Creole-Surinamese): I remember once after school in the tram, I was really scared, because there was this person singing in a really loud tone of voice and screaming and yelling weird stuff. Then I thought Oh my God, This is it, I was really scared.

(Interviewer Linda)

The media reproduce otherness: we need to use our media literacy to recognize this:

Janis, (27, Creole-Surinamese): The media wants us to think in categories, and that’s what we do

Brian, (26, Chinese-Surinamese): Try to experience it yourself instead of letting the media fool you!

Bas, (27, white Dutch): What you see in the media is, they’ll say: a Moroccan this.... or a group of Moroccans that... rather than ‘a group of young people’...

Mo, (27, Iranian): Media should concentrate on other sides of the story, the more positive ones, you have to stop eeh...I don't know. Seeing a half full glass as empty and instead say that it is it actually looks kind of full.

## In Conclusion

There is a marked difference between the interviews conducted by Tamara and Lianne and the later interviews about *West Side*. Tamara and Lianne's Moroccan informants were clearly pleased and in a way proud of *Sjouf Sjouf* and other productions that foregrounded Dutch-Moroccans. To be represented is in itself important. At second glance however, a range of emotions was also voiced in the interviews. In some cases these were not a bad thing. The pain expressed in the interviews, was a means of working through the very real pain of living life as part of a cultural minority group. Disappointment and criticism were not entirely negative either: surely they should be read as part of a process of emancipation. Anger and fear are more difficult to countenance. Although understandable, anger leaves little room for (intercultural) dialogue or for relativising television comedy. Indications that informants felt they should discuss Dutch television drama, including comedy, politely for fear of harming the position of their groups, is what is least needed in an open, democratic society.

The more diverse group of informants in the *West Side* interviews, felt none of the responsibility Tamara and Lianne found in their 'monocultural' group. Nor, obviously has *West Side* been structured in such a way that anyone would feel *connected* to their 'own' group. But informants did feel addressed by the stereotypes presented. The pain of working through one's position as member of a minority group does come through somewhat in Judith's group interview in which Erdal, Erdinc, Nuri and Esther participated. There is a marked distance to the series however, which changes the viewer-television dynamic considerably. More distance, intriguingly also means that more mechanisms become visible and available to 'undo' otherness. As intended, *West Side* did incite discussion (at least in interview situations) and did allow four mechanisms of 'undoing otherness' to be identified.

The four mechanisms are: empathy across ethnic divides; understanding processes of stereotyping as a social power mechanism; self-reflection, and a call to for increased media literacy. One can wonder whether Roland Barthes could be persuaded that these could work. Our money, for now, is on not just 'doing multiculturalism', but on doing it well. Our sense is that to do multiculturalism well, a monocultural setting might well work better. Whether the format is drama (such as a soap opera or a comedy), or reality television, open monocultural settings allow not just for more depth, but they invite viewers to let their guard down. To incite discussion about multiculturalism is one thing, to invite viewers to come to self-reflection quite another. For that purpose, one character can actually be quite multicultural enough. Co-creation, involving a community (whether a mono-cultural or a hybrid community) could be another means to find the authenticity of shared experiences and identities that are hybrid, of necessity, in today's globalizing world. Multiculturalism is not longer 'just' a subject, after all, it has become a social fact.

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