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**Understanding Racial Issues through the Lens of Muslim American
Stand-up Comedy: The Case of Comedians Dean Obeidallah and
Ahmed Ahmed**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree in Language and Culture.

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Abstract

Following the 9/11 attacks in the United States, a hatred gap developed between Americans and Muslims in the United States. Many Muslim stand-up comedians began their efforts to reduce tensions by performing comedic acts and writing comedy movie plays. In addition, Muslim comedians reduce the impact of Islamophobia in the world by minimizing harmful social racism between Muslims and the rest of the world. The study's goal is to look into Muslim comedians' roles in their stand-up comedy videos. This research is a qualitative content analysis of comments on videos by two Muslim American comedians from the United States, Dean Obeidallah and Ahmed Ahmed. Muslim comedians play an important role in helping the Muslim community cope with the effects of prejudice. The study also examines whether Muslim stand-up comedians help to reduce stereotypes and negative remarks about Muslim identity around the world. It is found that humor has aided in reassuring audiences that Arabs and Muslims are not unpatriotic or hateful to the United States or the rest of the world.

المخلص

بعد هجمات الحادي عشر من سبتمبر في الولايات المتحدة، نشأت فجوة كراهية بين الأمريكيين والمسلمين في الولايات المتحدة. بدأ العديد من الكوميديين المسلمين جهودهم لتقليل التوترات من خلال أداء أعمال وكتابة مسرحيات أفلام كوميدية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يقلل الكوميديون المسلمون من تأثير الإسلاموفوبيا في العالم من خلال تقليل العنصرية الاجتماعية الضارة بين المسلمين وبقية العالم. تهدف الدراسة إلى النظر في أدوار الكوميديين المسلمين في مقاطع الفيديو الكوميدية الارتجالية. هذا البحث عبارة عن تحليل محتوى نوعي للتعليقات على مقاطع الفيديو من قبل اثنين من الكوميديين الأمريكيين المسلمين من الولايات المتحدة، دين عبيد الله وأحمد أحمد. يلعب الكوميديون المسلمون دورًا مهمًا في مساعدة المجتمع المسلم على التكيف مع آثار التحيز. بحثت الدراسة أيضًا ما إذا كان الكوميديون المسلمون يساعدون في تقليل الصور النمطية والملاحظات السلبية حول الهوية الإسلامية في جميع أنحاء العالم. لقد وجد أن الفكاهة ساعدت في طمأنة الجماهير بأن العرب والمسلمين ليسوا غير وطنيين أو مكروهين للولايات المتحدة أو لبقية العالم.

List of Abbreviations

ATF: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms.

BAM: Black Arts Movement.

FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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Introduction

Racism still exists in American society, but people have learned to deal with it more respectfully. Despite the fact that the goal of comedy is to make people laugh, it has frequently hidden meanings and uses humor to convey political, economic, or social critique. People from affluent social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds have a long history of making fun of marginalized communities and disparaging them. This has begun to change in recent decades, comedians from racialized minority groups began to use stand-up comedy to battle negative stereotypes, express their identities and experiences, and criticize society.

Blackface minstrel shows were among the first examples of race being used as a source of amusement in comedy. These early, overt versions are becoming less common, but they paved the way for more subtle racist undertones in modern comedy. Several scholars argue that racism, stereotypes, or racist terminology can be used in acceptable ways in today's humor because they are simple 'jokes' with no seriousness or malice.

Muslim American stand-up comedy arose like a distinct response to negative societal bias in the aftermath of 9/11, in which socially critical comedians examine misconceptions and realities of Muslim American life. Stand-up comedy analysis is based on functionalist theories of the sociology of humor in order to identify the intended social messages of jokes that are meant to entertain and to educate. It demonstrates how Muslim American comedy seeks to change not only people's perceptions of Muslims, at the same time their own opinions, implying that stand-up comedy is a new and distinct analytical site that investigates how Muslim Americans deal with the prejudices and realities of being both Muslim and American in the post-9/11 era.

Race and ethnicity are two such sensitive topics that are frequently addressed in comedy performances. Not only do comedians tackle race, but they frequently do it in what may be considered obvious and inappropriate ways. The increased popularity of stand-up

comedians indicates that the audience is open to and accepting of statements that would normally be considered cruel and unacceptable. People have always been put at ease by comedy, which allows them to receive messages that make them aware of their prejudices without hurting them. Arab and Muslim American stand-up comedians use humor to confront Islamophobic stereotypes and preconceptions circulating in post-9/11 American society.

The majority of graduate work on stand-up comedy dates from the last twenty-five years or so. Many of these promising works focused on how stand-up comedy can be used to promote a cause or advocate for a group by admitting complexity into socio-cultural discourse, and sometimes one mode of discourse in a multi-modal examination.

In his book *Laughter in Revolt: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in the Construction of Stand-Up Comedy*, Matthew Daube focuses on Lenny Bruce, Bill Cosby, Dick Gregory, and Richard Pryor when it comes to stand-up comedians from the 1960s and 1970s. Daube examines the histories and careers of these comedians, how their stand-up routines dealt with issues of race, ethnicity, and identity. He goes into detail on each comedian, but he does not go into detail about how they dealt with issues other than race. He mentioned comedians that had a unique perspective on current events, including politics and the economy, stories about prejudice and race.

In *The Teeth Are Smiling: The Persistence of Racism in Multicultural Australia*, Stephen Castles goes on to suggest that modern forms of racism are closely related to globalization's reality. While certain ethnic and racial targets remain the same, new ethnic groupings have emerged to challenge racism's traditional white/black divide. "Racism is either an anomaly or a symptom of particular disease," he continued. It's a set of activities and discourses based on modernity's history, traditions, and culture."

Elise M. DeCamp in her dissertation "The Color Line as Punch Line: Negotiating

Racial Discourse in Midwestern Comedy Clubs” shows how stand-up performance methods combine with the enjoyable medium of humor to re-inscribe, criticize or joyfully promote audience racial stereotypes. She examines how racial jokes and laughing in the permissive club, in the social media, or in any stage or space may be utilized to destroy racial stereotypes.

Lawrence E. Mintz in his article “Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation” attributes the origins of stand-up comedy to the Middle Ages, when jesters and clowns entertained the king and nobility by donning colorful costumes and executing humorous actions with a mix of acrobatics, comedy, music, and magic. However, nineteenth-century minstrelsy is the closest art form to modern-day stand-up comedy. Mintz argued that stand-up comedy, as opposed to situation comedies, film comedies, or funny literature, is an important, if not crucial, social and cultural phenomena, and that it is the most sociologically fascinating of all types of humor in popular culture.

The first live stand-up comedy events were introduced to the public in the late 1970s by Alina Bodgan in her article “Racial Issues in American Stand-up Comedy.” This type of humor, which is focused on creativity, tackles a wide range of topics, including the comedians’ personal life, religion, politics, and racism. These are just a few of the commonly discussed subjects in comedy. It is strange how a serious topic, such as racism, can be used to make people laugh. For many years, audiences have been attracted by humor, which is represented by jokes or puns, but this time the attention is on a different sort of comedy, stand-up comedy.

Stand-up comedians have had to cope with negative remarks made by their audiences. Muslim comedians are attempting to portray Muslims in a positive light around the world by using dialogues that encourage global collaboration and peace, ultimately fostering a positive image of Muslims. Mo Amer, Azhar Usman, MazJobrani, Maysoon Zayid, Ahmed Ahmed,

Aron Kader, Preacher Moss, and Dean Obeidallah are just a few of the comedians who are presenting a combination of self-critical comedy and critique of Muslim biases in America, and their comedies are proving to be quite popular with audiences. They are actually using humor to raise awareness about issues that affect their religious and ethnic communities.

The importance of this study derives from the fact that racism in stand-up comedy is a subject that needs to be explored further. This research is essential because the increase of anti-Muslim prejudice demands creative solutions. The topic was chosen because it needs more understanding about the relationship between stand-up comedy and racism, which rises scholarly interest.

This study is conducted to gain better understanding of racial issues in the United States through the lens of American Muslim stand-up comedy. It is necessary to construct a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon. It examines whether stand-up comedy addresses racial issues to solve problems, evaluates its effectiveness in American society, and attempting to resolve the heated debate over whether Muslims in the United States are fully Americans. More importantly, it seeks to define how stand-up comedy is performed in the United States, whether it protects people's rights or simply causes them to pause. The purpose of this research is to uncover and explain the importance of stand-up comedy in addressing racial issues in the United States.

The present dissertation seeks to demonstrate the understanding of racial issues through the lens of American Muslim stand-up comedy, and profoundly examines the following inquires: What is the main relationship between stand-up comedy and racism? Why are comedians using racism in this type of conversation? When dealing with such a sensitive subject, are there any unique rules to employ? Is it possible to use humor to address racial issues? Is it funny to tackle such sensitive topics like racism? Why is it that comedians can get away with making obvious racial, even racist commentaries, and people still enjoy it?

How is the Muslim identity represented in stand-up comedy shows? All these questions will be discussed additionally to other different concepts that will appear during the process of developing the subject matter of this research.

The qualitative method is adopted to examine the influence of American Muslim stand-up comedy in dealing with racial issues. It is critical for the exegesis of the study because it allows for the understanding of the topic. In the process of developing the recent work, this study is based on the analytical method to go deeper in explaining the relationship between “stand-up comedy” and “racism”, and the purpose of using such art to represent the Muslim identity. However, the analytical method highlights the influence of humor in changing the image of Muslims in American society. The goal is to present a comprehensive understanding of the topic, of books, papers, journals, and case studies. Secondary sources are explored to gain a more comprehensive knowledge of the topic.

The first chapter titled “Race and Stand-Up Comedy,” focuses on two fundamental elements: race and stand-up comedy. It begins with a brief history and a general introduction to the topic. It then goes on to discuss the relationship between racism and humor, and how a serious issue like racism can be approached in a humorous manner. The focus of this dissertation is stand-up comedy, which is highlighted with its rules and conditions, and if it is amusing to use stand-up comedy to reduce prejudice about Muslims.

The title of the second chapter is “The Representation of Muslim Identity in American Humor.” This part concerns the Muslim American identity and how it is represented in the American stand-up comedy whether performed by Muslim or non-Muslim comedians. Some symbols used by those comedians are going to be mentioned such as the hijab which is totally related to Islam religion. Most Muslim stand-up comedians use their own background to design the themes they will deal with in the performance. The comedic approach to addressing such a topic allows Muslim comedians to normalize the idea of defending their

position in American society after they were labeled terrorists in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Although the topics are sensitive, the manner they are exposed makes them more acceptable and permissible.

The final chapter examines two stand-up comedy cases by assessing two videos, one for “Dean Obeidallah” and the other for “Ahmed Ahmed” from the same show, “The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour.” The biography of the two comedians is presented first, followed by information about the performance. The comedians’ jokes and the hidden meanings behind each one are then discussed. Finally, the chapter discusses the comedian’s style during the show.

Chapter One

Race and Stand-up Comedy

Race and stand-up comedy are two separate elements but seem to be linked to each other because many racial issues have been raised in forms of comedy. The chapter opens with a brief history where the topic is generally introduced. It then discusses the relation between racism and humor and how a serious issue like racism is treated in a humoristic way. Stand-up comedy, which is the main concern of this dissertation, is highlighted with its rules and conditions, without forgetting that it remains a funny art to be used to minimize stereotypes against Muslims.

1.1. A Brief History

Ethnic humor “comedy about race or ethnic situations, similarities, and contrasts” has its roots in racial conflict in the past. The history of American humor is intertwined with racial conflicts (Green). Beginning in the decades leading up to the Civil War and continuing into the post bellum period, the humorous expression has paralleled white-black relations in particular.

Mintz traces the art to the Middle Ages jester and clown performances which took the form of donning colorful clothes and performing humorous actions with a variety of acrobatics, comedy, music, and magic to entertain the king and the nobility. However, the closest art to modern day stand-up could be seen in nineteenth-century minstrelsy. Blackface minstrelsy was popular in the United States from the early 1800s until a few decades after the Civil War. White performers used to dress up as black people to amuse white audiences by mocking them and staging clichéd negative representations of African American culture. Jerry Zolten, associate professor of Communication Arts & Sciences and American Studies at Penn State Altoona, confirms that “Minstrelsy was... a source for much of the stereotype that still remains today about African Americans culture a population more mistreated in the

name of entertainment than any other” (qtd. in Selim), in these minstrel shows, white performers employed what is called a “stump speech” in which they stood a top tree stump and parodied black vernacular while giving commentary on social and political taboos.

Once the Civil Rights and Black Power movements emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, ethnic comedy had all but vanished from white comedy clubs, but had taken on a more revolutionary tone in minority societies, particularly among African Americans. During this time, racial and ethnic comedy spawned black comedians who were more outspoken, rebellious, and honest in their public comments of race relations (Green). The comedians of this era were especially motivated to exposing white people’s history and present mistreatment of black people.

Alina Bodgan in her article “Racial Issues in American Stand-up Comedy” mentions that the first live stand-up comedy events were introduced to the public in the late 1970s. It was at this time that stand-up comedy was born. This sort of comedy, which is based on creativity, covers a wide range of issues, including comedians’ daily lives, religion, politics, and racism. These are just a few of the topics that are frequently used in comedy. It is strange how a serious issue like racism, for example, can be utilized to make people laugh. Humor has captivated audiences for many years, symbolized by jokes or puns, but this time the spotlight is on a different type of comedy, stand-up comedy. This type is unique, the artist must remember that the nature of the subjects he or she uses account for nearly half of the success, while the other half is accounted for by the artist’s relationship with the audience, the manner in which the message is delivered and then perceived by the audience.

Thus, in the nineteenth century, American stand-up comedy was used to mock ethnic and racial groups, primarily African Americans; this can be seen not only in stand-up monologues by performers, but in various minstrel shows, where the majority of African American characters were played by White actors (Aidi). Whereas previous racial comedy

mocked minorities, new-age comedy saw minorities use humor to fight oppression and celebrate their blackness. Beginning with Dick Gregory and Richard Pryor's cohort, racial and ethnic comedy became a contradiction in the sense that it highlighted the dividing nature of racial tensions and disparities while also drawing people of all races through its new frame of "integrated humor" (Watkins 495).

Performers from marginalized groups entered the art of stand-up comedy and reversed the trend by contributing to issues from their own unique views and by experimenting with different performing approaches (Aidi). This is the beginning of "ethnic" stand-up comedy, which comedian and author Joanne Gilbert defines as a way of addressing marginality through the creation of rhetoric and the use of props that demonstrate "us against them" mentalities that affect minorities in her book *Performing Marginality: Comedy, Identity, and Cultural Critique*.

Similarly, Muslim comedians are entering the conversation, assisting the Muslim community in dealing with the fallout from 9/11, and working to change the public impression of Arab and Muslim Americans seen unpatriotic and antagonistic to the US (Zulqarnain et al. 92). Despite the fact that religious scholars have rarely taken comedy's cultural significance seriously, there is clear evidence to imply that humor is a significant social force. All of the recent Arab and Muslim American comedians have used comedy to highlight injustices faced by the Muslim community. Dean Obeidallah, co-founder of the Arab-American Comedy Tour, states, "For all the comics I know that are of Middle Eastern heritage, the idea of using their craft as a way of activism is a thread that unites all of us."

After September 11, 2001, Arab Americans realized the importance of stand-up comedy in addressing issues of race, ethnicity, and identity. If early American stand-up comedy rose out of the Civil Rights era and minorities' quest for recognition in America (Selim 5), Arab American stand-up comedy appeared after the traumatic experience of

9/11 to question the Arab American identity and its location within the American mosaic.

1.2. Racism

Racism has existed from the dawn of time. It can be characterized like someone's hatred for another person or the notion that another person is less than human because of his skin color, language, customs, or birthplace, or any other trait that apparently betrays their underlying nature (Lopez 20). Racism, referring to Castles, is a global issue that manifests itself in a variety of ways (20). Castles goes on to say that modern forms of racism are inextricably linked to the reality of globalization. While certain ethnic and racial targets remain the same, new ethnic groups have formed to challenge racism's classic white/black dichotomy. He adds that "Racism is not an aberration or a result of individual pathology. It is a set of practices and discourses, which are deeply rooted in the history, traditions and culture of modernity" (qtd. in Nurmuttaqin 9). Racism exists in various forms in all modern communities, and it plays an important role in the consolidation of nation-states by serving a means of defining belonging and exclusion.

Berdichewsky describes the term racism by saying that it is the acts of discrimination motivated by "racial prejudice." Discrimination is actual conduct, the practice of treating other people differently and unequally, usually along racial, religious, or ethnic lines. Prejudice, aggression, discrimination, and oppression are all synonyms for racism. Prejudice is a term that describes negative sentiments toward other individuals that are founded on stereotypes that are inaccurate and rigid, which was highly developed by Nurmuttaqin in his Master thesis: Racism in Chris Rock's Stand-up Comedy Show "Kill the Messenger".

Elam Harry examined how people reproduce or disrupt established gestures, behaviors, language patterns, cultural attitudes, and social expectations associated to race by conceptualizing race like a behavior. Winant puts it, "race creates paradox" 'Not only is race real, but it is also illusory. It's not only common wisdom, but also common nonsense. It not

only establishes our identity, but it denies it.” Although race is unreal in the sense that it has no biological basis, racism has a very real and material impact.

Nurmuttaqin said that this concept could be seen in a variety of ways, each of which is strongly debated. Racialism is a similar phrase that is occasionally used to avoid these negative connotations. Racism in the Oxford English Dictionary is a belief or idea that all members of each racial group have characteristics or skills unique to that race, especially to differentiate it as superior or inferior to other racial groups (12). Although racism is frequently used interchangeably with prejudice and discrimination, oppression and power are the social characteristics that distinguish it from these other categories. “The systematic institutionalized abuse of one group of people by another” is what oppression is defined (qtd. in Nurmuttaqin 12).

Racism and prejudice are conceptually comparable at the individual level. Individual racism refers to a person’s attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward others of a different racial group. Individual racism, for example, is exemplified by specific European Americans who believe that African Americans are somehow inferior. Positive engagement and contact between members of the two groups have the potential to transform attitudes.

Discrimination can take many different forms. Discrimination ranges from the most extreme forms of segregation and apartheid to prejudices in housing, work, education, economic resources, personal safety, and legal protections (Nurmuttaqin 11). Biases and manifestations of discrimination are frequently motivated by a strong affinity for and devotion to one’s own culture rather than by open antagonism toward another group.

1.3. Humor

People laugh at different things and have diverse backgrounds, thus humor can be received in a variety of ways. What is seen amusing in one context may be regarded cynically in another. The most influential setting in determining comedy is one’s cultural heritage. It is

defined as anything that makes people laugh or is amusing, or the ability to recognize what is amusing about a situation or person in a simple way (Hadiati). A different generation may find humor in a different way. Despite several ideas of humor from various fields such as psychology, linguistics, anthropology, and medicine, determining, how it works remains practically impossible.

Athena Murphy in her Master's thesis "Socially Corrective Humor in American Literature and Popular Culture" has said that humor became a way for people to connect with one another on a human level. Aristotelian humor mocked what was judged incorrect, indecent, or otherwise out of the ordinary. However, if what marked us unusual was a positive trait, being out of the ordinary was no longer automatically amusing. Comedy evolved from being antipathetic, laughing at someone, to sympathetic which means laughing with someone. Instead of being a harsh display, it changed laughing into a statement of solidarity. This paved the way for comic book characters to serve moral experts, able to speak authoritatively about society issues.

1.4. Racial Humor

What exactly is racial humor? It is one of those things that seem to recognize when it is seen. The simple answer is that it is about race and racism. Humor, like anything with cultural significance, evolves with the times. Because of their near-taboo status in the public domain, some topics emerge as prime material for amusement, while others appear banal and uninteresting. Since its inception, race has been a contentious social issue in the United States.

Comedy can be used for or against, to deny or affirm, to oppress or to liberate, and racial comedy, in particular, polices social interaction while also undermining authority. Racial comedy supports the status quo while discrediting conventional practices. Jonathan Paul Rossing claimed that racial comedy both promotes and subverts antidemocratic beliefs.

Racial comedy both weakens and enriches liberal-democratic practice. It represents the “Great American Joke” and animates significant contradictions between the promises of democratic principles and the realities of poor democratic practice. Racial comedy is well-suited to investigating and addressing the difficulties and inconsistencies of racist judgment in democratic culture.

Racial humor has been a mark of American stand-up comedy from its beginning in the nineteenth century, with blackface performances in minstrel shows (Parker). It is still an element of stand-up comedians’ performance of marginality and cultural critique in the twenty-first century (Gilbert). While Jewish stand-up comics dominated the 1960s (Limon), this popular cultural phenomenon has had a strong impact on American audiences, influencing and changing worldviews, transforming culture, and giving birth to its current form towards the end of the millennium (Zoglin). The shows have progressed from stand-up comedy clubs in Los Angeles and New York to global blockbuster productions on global streaming media platforms (Johnson). The artists, like their audience, are varied and intersectional, encompassing people of all colors and ethnicities, diasporic communities with a history of immigration from atypical nations.

1.4.1. Types of Humor that Employ Race

Sociologist Simon Weaver highlights a few types of humor that exploit race in his brief essay “Humor and Race.” The first is referring to racist comedy. This is the kind that makes people laugh by using stereotypes. Minstrelsy is a classic example of this type of performance shows like Amos ‘n’ Andy, in which white performers, and later black actors, used blackface to create funny stereotypes of black people and black life, are now widely seen as plainly racist in the United States (Mooney et al. 3). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Minstrelsy was the most popular form of entertainment. People’s obsession with blackface as a sort of fun endures, proven by several conflicts over its persistent use in

Halloween costumes, despite widespread condemnation.

Moreover, the second type satirizes racism with race in humor. This sort of racial humor targets racism or racial stereotypes in order to not only entertain an audience, but also to subvert or undermine detrimental social views toward race and members of racial groups (Mooney et al. 3-4). The third form of humor identified by Weaver is that created by racial and ethnic minorities, with the emphasis on racial and ethnic identity rather than the content of the work.

1.5. Stand-up Comedy

After all, the phrase “stand-up comedy” was only coined in the 1950s. The United States lacked specialized venues for the performance of humorous monologues until the latter half of the twentieth century (Daube 3). Instead, there were a variety of venues, ranging from vaudeville to burlesque, where solitary joke telling coexisted with music, sketches, dancing, juggling, magic, animal acts, and more.

For Robert A. Stebbins, the term “stand-up” was first used in 1966. Hence, the categorical distinction of “stand-up” is a recent historical development, most stand-up revolves around the comic’s persona, and stand-up is a comic in front of an audience and attempting or being viewed as acting funny, whether on purpose or by chance (Wilson). Accepting the full of what comics do would, however, subsume the definition into a broader category, that of comedy in general. The use of the term “humor” to refer to a broader character of action, speech, or writing that amuses; strangeness, jocularity, facetiousness, comicality, and fun.

Mintz proposes a “strict, restricting definition” of stand-up comedy; “an encounter between a single, standing performer behaving hilariously and/or uttering funny things straight to an audience, unsupported by much in the way of costume, prop, scenery, or dramatic vehicle” (71). While comedians may use such basic guidelines while presenting

stories, they are not required to do so, and relying on such a formula for critical interpretation is to prescribe a solution before analysis. Stand-up is mostly verbal, even though theatrical embellishments are used and often memorized. The performer is free to improvise, and delivered in a conversational way (Robert). The stand-up routine tends to be a one-sided dialogue with the prospect of more extensive audience engagement than the comic's expected laughs but this interaction is not always welcomed by the comic. Finally, the routine is usually written and hence owned by the performer, which is not the case in most other kinds of entertainment, for example, television and film.

Wilson added that this definition includes anecdotes, narrative jokes, one-liners, slapstick, impressions, satire, and comedic monologues all fall under this umbrella of humor. There may be a reason to allow duos, as long as they do not deteriorate into improvisation or sketch comedy, minimal props, and performers who like to sit. Besides, understanding the delineation and deployment of symbolic space is strength of rhetorical critique and a requirement for comprehending language's rhetorical efficacy. The context should not be ruled out as affecting comedy. Along with the setting, there are the consequences of mediation. So, many people nowadays are exposed to stand-up comedy through the media.

Mintz contends that stand-up comedy is a significant, if not essential, social and cultural phenomenon, and that it is the most sociologically fascinating of all forms of humor in popular culture, as opposed to situation comedies, film comedies, or hilarious literature. From his view, Mintz defines stand-up acts as a barometer of a society's values, attitudes, dispositions, and concerns, indicating what we are talking about and hence what we are concerned about. Specifically, he states that stand-up is arguably the oldest, most universal, basic and deeply significant form of humorous expression, excluding perhaps truly spontaneous, informal social joking or teasing. It is the purest public comic communication, performing essentially the same social and cultural roles in practically every known society,

past and present (71). This point is clearly quoted in Nathan Wilson's Doctoral thesis: "Was that Supposed to be Funny? A Rhetorical Analysis of Politics, Problems and Contradictions in Contemporary Stand-up Comedy."

Individual performers employ a narrative consisting of fictional and semi-autobiographical jokes and stories to talk to audiences about various themes in stand-up comedy. Although the term "comedian" was not established until the 1890s, stand-up comedy began in America in the 1840s, when minstrel performances featured Jim Crow, a theater character created by Thomas D. Rice, in blackface monologues. Rice was an actor who studied the culture of African American slaves through dance and music. In his 1830s theater performance of Crow, a slave who sang while laboring in the fields, he paints his face and hands black and sings "Jump Jim Crow," a song he wrote (Aidi). Following minstrel shows based on the Crow figure in the 1940s did not incorporate song and instead consisted only of speech. Despite being inspired by a singing figure created for the stage, stand-up comedy in the United States began with the spoken word in the nineteenth century.

1.5.1. Conditions of Stand-up Comedy

Because stand-up comedy is not generated only by the performer, but rather as a collaborative production involving the artist, the audience, the venue, and the producer, the performer of stand-up comedy follows those parameters in order to achieve the show's purpose (Bloomfield). This chapter discusses the various situations in which a stand-up comic may find himself or herself. The venue and general setting of the show will be reviewed first, and then followed by issues concerning the audience.

1.5.1.1. The Venue and the Setting

The venue where the performance is taking place has a lot to do with it. The comedian must work with the provided venue and how it is set up, the size and seating of the audience and the space's general nature (Quirk). According to Lee, comedy venues, such as night

clubs, encourage the illusion of honest dialogue. Since this setting stimulates the feeling of intimacy and one-on-one communication between the audience and the comedian, the venues support the perception of proximity between the audience and the comic. Because stand-up shows occur in many shapes and sizes (Quirk), larger venues, such as sports arenas, use jumbotrons or other screening systems to catch the comedian's emotions and mimicry so that even those in the farthest seats may feel close to the action (Lee). However, the size has a minor impact on the interaction dynamic.

Quirk added an effective room will display evidence of an attempt to affect the audience's attention, if not their behavior because the theater is designed to draw the audience's attention to the performer and heighten anticipation for the performance. The shape of the venue can sometimes influence people's perceptions of business success (Říčný 13). The audience is kept from becoming lazy by minimizing the amount of dead space in the room, allowing energy to flow more freely into laughing. These efforts are typically understated, and audiences are rarely aware of how they and the place have been set up to facilitate responding. These activities are common techniques designed to influence audience behavior.

1.5.1.2. The Audience

Mackellar claims that there should be a typology of audience types that may be used for categorization. He proposes numerous classification systems for additional sorting based on size, purpose, and level of interest. Mackellar established and categorized five sorts of event audiences: mass event audiences, special interest audiences, community event audiences, incidental audiences, and media audiences.

The phrase "mass event audiences" refers to a group of people who frequently visit large cities during artfully broad festivals of some form. The folks who make up the audience could be there for a variety of reasons. Among the most well-known examples is the City of

London. Special interest audiences are looking for a more specialized experience of a recreational or leisure activity (Říčný 14). This audience frequently attends events that are focused on a single theme. Fan conventions, jazz festivals, birding festivals, film festivals, motorbike shows, and so on are just a few examples.

Community event audiences, according to Mackellar (5), “are focused on celebrating the special characteristics of their community life, which may have a historical or traditional background.” This basically refers to anything that a community might commemorate. Parades, dances, feasts, flairs, and historical combat re-enactments are all types of community events that an audience might attend.

Incidental audiences are those who attend events while having no purpose of doing so. It could happen while pursuing a primary goal, like as visiting a city and discovering a city festival that is now taking place (Mackellar). The accidental audience, unlike the other sorts of audiences outlined, does not involve any prior commitment from organizers or individual planning and preparation. The media audience is the final component of this typology. This type of audience is essentially not present at the event, but rather follows it via media such as television broadcasts or the internet.

1.5.2. Rules of Stand-up Comedy

Here are the rules for writing stand-up comedy, which is possibly the most difficult of all the performing arts.

1. The first joke, and hence the first impression, is the most crucial. The audience is made up of the judge and jury. They must laugh to express their agreement. Anything else is a complete failure and torturous experience for the aspiring comedian. The audience’s unspoken challenge is to “make me laugh, funny guy.” If you do not deliver, and deliver quickly, you will be blown out of the water and into a performer’s nightmare. It is impossible to recover from a bad start.

2. The second most essential joke is the last one. The majority of people will only remember your most recent joke. It will most likely be the one they tell other people about you while they are talking about you. Make it one that will entice listeners to want to hear more.
3. Make a powerful first impression and a strong closing impression, with nothing in between. Get off the stage if you have run out of great jokes. With only an opening and close, and often only 3-4 minutes on stage, some stand-up comedians become well-known and successful. People will want more of a comedian if they laugh the entire time he or she is on stage, regardless of how short it is.
4. Carefully construct your middle material by taking an idea and getting as much value as possible from it. You might have a great imagination about where it goes, but if others did, they'd be comedians. Bring them to the water and encourage them to drink. Don't leave them in the middle of the desert with an ice cream map in their hands.
5. Your facial expressions and appearance are a part of your everyday routine. Only around 30% of communication is done through words. The tone, loudness, timing, and look of facial expressions, among other things, make up the rest. If you're fat, thin, well-dressed, scruffy, black, white, yellow, or brown, your accent will be a vital comedy weapon for you to use when you start speaking. In reality, some of the best comedians make an effort to appear unique and have exceptional physical and facial storytelling abilities.

These first five of ten comedy rules will get you started (Allan). This second installment of the ten secrets of comedy will assist you in achieving your goal of becoming a comedian.

6. Comedians do not create jokes; they write intelligent observations, ideas, opinions, and arguments with killer punchlines. You have the item that will make them laugh the most if you know what disturbs them.
7. People laugh in funny situations. They laugh the hardest if they can picture the scene

because they have been there or experienced it. When the circumstance is exceedingly uncomfortable or upsetting, they laugh the hardest. Soldiers respond well to situational jokes, whereas activists respond well to politics.

8. Just like good magic or great screenplays, a good joke can be just as good. It is frequently about deception. Persuade your audience to think in a certain way. Turn the tables in the last second, the key joke. Then, at the very end, give them a surprise.

9. While material is crucial, a comedian must also be honest about who they are and what they believe. No one will take them seriously as a funny man if they do not believe the message in their material, and material with a message is better. On the comedy stage, an audience can spot a fake sooner than on any other stage. As a comedian, you may be anything and anyone, but you cannot be ignorant or dishonest. This brings us to the final mystery.

10. The best comedians are the most outspoken. If the audience does not know anything about the comedian's personal beliefs by the time they leave, then nothing worth hearing was stated, and they will forget about him. Nothing is off bounds in comedy, just as nothing is off limits in life. Not everyone will agree, but those who do will be the most loyal supporters, and those who disagree will almost certainly still discuss it. Our fight with our illogical, politically incorrect selves gives rise to comedy.

A stand-up comic has done their job effectively if they can make an audience forget about their difficulties by having them laugh (Allan). When a comedian helps the audience think about other people's problems after making them laugh, he or she has done more than just a good job; he or she has made a difference.

1.6. The Relation between Race and Stand-up Comedy

In retrospect, it seems only natural that stand-up comedy, with its focus on the performer's personal life, would become a medium for ethnic expression. In today's society, stand-up comedy has grown in popularity (Wilson). New locations dedicated to stand-up

comedy have emerged. These locations previously comprised not just comedy rooms in hotels, restaurants, and resorts, but well as mediated venues like 45 records, long-play albums (LPs), radio, and television (Gallo et al). From the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, there was an explosion of both physical and mediated venues, including the launch of Comedy Central, a cable channel dedicated to comedy, and the debut of the stand-up concert film.

Depending on the type of fun utilized and the topics selected, stand-up comedy can be a vehicle for disseminating knowledge about other cultures and identities. Muslim American comedians, working primarily after 9/11, have thus created a space for their audiences to construct new understandings of Muslims that position them in social and cultural contexts that are different from what they might have anticipated (Aidi 19). By emphasizing the absurdity of common perceptions, perspectives as the Other place audiences in a position where they hopefully begin to question their own assumptions about the stereotyped group (Aidi).

Comedy is an incredibly effective weapon for dealing with taboo topics like race and prejudice since we now expect individuals to talk honestly and not be “politically correct.” The stand-up comedian’s performance welcomes what cannot be spoken in newspapers or in the aftermath of tense political campaigns. Because the popularity of stand-up in the United States, it reaches a wide enough audience to be considered capable of causing significant societal change. Studying and comprehending the form of stand-up comedy can aid in determining what aspects of it are capable of altering people’s ideas of race. It can be understood that the unique settings in which stand-up comedy can be most socially useful by concentrating on the roles of pedagogy, aggression, and community in stand-up comedy. Additionally, clearly defining these parameters for socially progressive comedy will assist in the creation of more informed audiences, who will be better able to critically evaluate the performances they see and judge for themselves whether the comedy they are watching is

doing the social work that they want it to (Manwell). This chapter presents knowledge that has the potential to make stand-up comedy more socially acceptable as a whole.

There was some heterogeneity between and across groups when it came to see comedy a beneficial technique for resolving racial differences. Some people believe that ethnic humor is ineffective at correcting racial misconceptions. Simply put, they thought race was “too sensitive a topic.” Others saw ethnic comedy a weapon have the potential power to enhance racial debate and/or dispel racial misunderstandings. For them, comedy was a safe haven where controversial things could be discussed. Racist jokes can assist educate folks who are not conscious of racial inequity. Comedy is a terrific method to do that because it lightens things up and makes it less weighty; comedy can both break down and reinforce racial barriers (Green 24). It is worth noting that racial jokes are not nearly as funny when they are told outside of a comedy context. African Americans, for example, expressed concern that using racial comedy in everyday situations, particularly when engaging with nonblack, would exacerbate racial tension.

The constraints of ethnic comedy’s utility pose difficulties. When it comes to regular race interactions, comedy may not be enough to reduce racial dissonance and improve racial relations. The findings show that this sort of humor may actually worsen racial tension. The anxiety of openly discussing race outside of a humorous environment tends to diminish the soothing effects of humor when outside of a comic situation, especially during a time of colorblind ideology combined with a wish to be a post-racial society. Ethnic comedy has the ability to open the floodgates for less acceptable types of race discourse from out-group members, which could be harmful to black people (Green 26). For white people, ethnic comedy is reserved for comedic professionals whose motives are less likely to be questioned.

Racial comedy is both engaging and funny. More crucially, no matter which racial group is targeted by the joke, comedy about race may be enjoyed by people of all ethnicities.

This agreement shows that in a comedic group context, stand-up comedy is successful in making the topic of race more digestible and approachable. Ethnic comedy is used to lighten the topic of race in a comedic situation, but it is thought to be of little use in everyday life. In terms of stereotypes and perceived facts, however, there are racial disparities in reactions to ethnic humor (Green 27). In a time when colorblind ideology and racial indifference are the norm, ethnic comedy succeeds in making the topic of race less taboo.

When compared to users of elite discourse, stand-up comedians can be viewed using stereotypes in a somewhat different way. Stand-up comedians, rather than building stereotypes, are said to employ stereotypes and racial comedy to mitigate stereotypes' detrimental consequences (Jakoaho and Marjamäki 29). The fact that many stand-up comedians are of ethnic minorities, minorities that have traditionally been targeted by elite discourse, distinguishes stand-up comedians from elite discourse consumers.

1.7. The Purpose of Using Stand-up Comedy in Racial Issues

First, compared to most other art forms and public arenas, stand-up comedy allows for more open and critical discussion of race and prejudice. In terms of what performers can and do say on stage, it is possibly the least regulated or filtered of the performance arts, with the music industry a notable exception. Second, comedians discuss themes that are important to them, which for comedians of color include their racial and ethnic backgrounds. There is a lot of "race talk" going on (Pollock and Myers). Third, stand-up comedy relies on performers exploiting and poking at discursive gaps, contradictions, and points of friction in everyday life, all of which abound in hegemonic racial discourses, and making these visible through their performance. Fourth, good comics keep up with current events in American politics and pop culture, and many of them offer witty commentary from a race-conscious standpoint. Fifth, comedians are great observers of human behavior and have a talent for zeroing in on the worst of what we have to offer, one of which is racism (Katja 8-9). Stand-up comedy

provides an observable dynamic interaction between performers and spectators that may be studied socially. Because stand-up comedy shows draw a racially and ethnically diverse crowd, ethnographers can examine naturally occurring interactions between comics and a broad racial and ethnic demographic that is not achievable in many other social and cultural contexts.

Ethnic comedy is a useful tool for improving communication, albeit there is still the possibility of misunderstandings (Jakoaho and Marjamäki). Racist jokes can be used to challenge stereotypes. Another characteristic of ethnic humor proposed by Leveen (33-34) in Jakoaho and Marjamäki's thesis is that it is the use of comedy to criticize society. For example, in a circumstance where both the joke teller and the joke receiver are members of the same ethnic group, a joke allows them to express their displeasure and fury at the system and its injustice. A stand-up comedian, for example, can criticize societal concerns to an interethnic audience while also criticizing his or her own ethnicity to non-members. However, it can be used to describe societal issues that affect other members of a certain ethnic community. One reason for utilizing this type of subject is the influence it has on others, the fact that it attracts attention and prompts an immediate response from the audience (Bogdan). It is vital to note that whether the reaction is positive or negative is irrelevant because it is how the performer will know how to proceed with the issue.

Muslims have a long history of minority groups in the United States adopting public humor to address and contest the terms of American social life and national belonging. This comedy interestingly is intended not only to entertain, but to address certain outsider attitudes toward Muslims and insider attitudes among Muslims, the social messages delivered in jokes, which provide opportunities for comedians to promote social cohesion and provoke social conflict through laughter that can both encourage and ridicule (Michael 130). Although these jokes have the capacity to communicate crucial social messages to both non-Muslims and

Muslims, their critical impact is undermined by the ambiguity of humor and the social conditions that influence how they are received.

Muslim stand-up comedians are working in communication to assist Muslim society in dealing with the aftermath of the September 11 attacks; to dispel the notion that Muslim Americans and Arabs pose a threat to the United States and the rest of the world. Following the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, many Muslim comedians were subjected to stereotypical and hateful remarks about their Muslim identity; Muslim comedians think that humor can help to dispel suspicion and fear of the Muslim community (Kausar and Zulqarnain 120-121). Following 9/11, Muslim stand-up comedy became a unique response to unfavorable societal inequality, with social critic comedians debating the stereotype and reality of Muslim existence. It further stated that Muslim comedy has an impact on both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Humor has always been used to put people at ease and open them up to receiving messages that make them aware of their prejudices without hurting them, says Jack Shaheen, emeritus professor at Southern Illinois University and author of *“Reel Bad Arabs.”* It is a fantastic approach to help people break preconceptions because actual laughter, especially in open-minded people, brings great regeneration and enlightenment.

Stand-up comedians use specific platforms, types of humor, and topics to spark social change in a way that requires a repertoire of comedic techniques and skilled artistry, much like intellectuals use specific media and rhetoric to share knowledge relevant to Orientalism and racism with their audiences (Aidi 20). Because comedians have greater versatility in their delivery than academics, they can engage with a wide range of audiences on a variety of themes and in a variety of tones. Stand-up comedians simultaneously perform self and culture, offering an often-acerbic social critique sanctioned as entertainment because it is articulated in a comedic context (Gilbert), with a license to serve as a “spokesperson, as

a mediator, as an articulator of culture, and as a contemporary anthropologist” (Mintz).

Stand-up comedy, which is deeply entangled with the performance of race and spotlights individuals questioning their identity within large social categories, gives a perfect chance for just such an analysis. Before 9/11, Muslim stand-up comedians simply used humor for the sake of humor; however, after the occurrence, Muslim comedians began to use humor with the explicit goal of debunking preconceptions about Muslims. They used gallows comedy, which is a type of comedy, to counter the unfair treatment they received. Muslim and Arab comedians began employing comedy as a cultural critique soon after the 9/11 tragedy. Maysoon Zayid, a Palestinian American Muslim comedian, and Dean Obeidallah, an Iranian American stand-up comedian, launched the Arab American Comedy Festival in 2003 (Mansoor et al. 360). Later tours, such as Allah Made Me a Funny Tour, Arabs Gone Wild, and Evil of the Axis, continued to challenge the deeply ingrained prejudices about Muslims in the United States.

1.8. Is it Funny?

When people come across comedy about racial issues with which they have no personal experience, they may feel uneasy about finding it funny. A person’s delight at such comedy can create suspicion. Typically, this means that various people find different things amusing. The remark appears to be true, given the difference of opinion on the subject of hilarity. Consider the various types of humor available and how people react to them. People appear to be generally accepting of such a wide range of tastes. You are under no obligation to share my sense of humor.

Comedy reveals something about a person’s personality and the world in which they live. They read the world in different ways depending on their social backgrounds, and this influences how they understand it. They interpret the world through their experiences and make distinctions in terms of what they find amusing based on the social groups to which

they belong. For example, if someone has been a victim of government corruption, they may find the joke amusing. Others, including politicians, may find it offensive. The person who speaks or tells jokes and the audience that listens define the level of humor (Neria 15).

What makes people laugh is determined by the social environment at the time and place. That is why comprehending stand-up comedy requires context, and it is also why humor can be used to analyze a society (16). Audiences who belong to the same group that faces racism or other forms of prejudice find a joke or a racist joke funny the first time they hear it, but the surprise wears off and they do not find it as funny the second time. However, once they have figured out the pattern, their enjoyment will diminish as the unexpected becomes predictable. People laugh at what appears to be a slightly weird version of themselves, almost as if they were looking into a distorting mirror at a fairground, and exaggeration is one way to achieve this distortion (Neria 35). The comedian or person telling the joke expresses stressful or forbidden concepts. The listener is temporarily removed from or detached from a real-life scenario that would clearly be stressful, uncomfortable, or insufferable for social actors in reality during this act of comedy.

To conclude, the concept of “racism” can be discussed through humor. Stand-up comedy is one of the ways used by Muslim Americans to stop the prejudice they are facing in the American society due to the strong relationship that Muslim comedians depicted in their shows and it is evidence which illustrates the purpose behind the use of this art for serious issue.

Chapter Two

Muslim Identity Representation in American Humor

Muslim identity, the Muslim American identity and how they are represented in the American stand-up comedy is the main concern of this research, either performed by Muslim or non-Muslim comedians. Some symbols used by those comedians are going to be mentioned such as the Hijab which is closely related to Islam. One of the most popular forms of humor utilized in everyday life is sarcasm. The comedians say something and adopt a sarcastic or ironic tone of voice to show that they disagree with the literal interpretation of the words. Sarcasm makes use of irony to contrast the textual and intended meanings (Marks). Most Muslim stand-up comedians use their own background to design the themes they will deal with in the performance. The comedic approach to addressing such a topic allows Muslim comedians to normalize the idea of defending their position in American society after they were labeled terrorists in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Although the topics are sensitive, the manner they are expressed makes it more acceptable and permissible.

2.1. Muslim Identity

Identity is a complicated concept. Identity, according to Merriam Webster, is “sameness” in essence or character, even in various situations. That similarity “constitutes the objective reality of a thing” while also distinguishing one person or group from another, which means to differentiate one individual from another in terms of its existence and its reality. Lori Peek defined Identity that it is generally used to define an individual’s sense of self, group affiliations, structural positions, and ascribed and achieved statuses. Identity results from internal subjective perceptions, self-reflection, and external characterizations in which he means that everything that is related to one individual to characterize oneself from the others, because each one has a different view either for him/herself or to the outside world.

In the same line the Oxford dictionary defines identity as “distinguishing features” and “determining characteristics.” The former can include a person’s name, photo, or signature, while the latter can include gender, race, nationality, religion, and other factors (Derya and Yucel). For a group of second-generation Muslim Americans, religion is the most important source of personal and social identity (Peek). The effects of September 11 and how a crisis event can push a particular identity, in this case, religious, to become even more fundamental to a person’s sense of self. Religion became a powerful base of personal identification and collective association for these young Muslims by asserting the primacy of their religious identity over other forms of social identity. Muslim identity is a type of religious identity that can be shaped by religious institutions, organizations, and associations. It should be seen as an individual’s acknowledgement of the Islamic faith and principles (Kapustina). Muslim identity is the ways in which a Muslim observes the religion’s norms and rituals.

2.1.1. Muslim American Identity

The first major wave of Muslim immigration to the United States occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Arabs primarily from Syria and Lebanon began flocking to the country. Following 1965, there was a steady flow of Muslim immigrants, largely professionals and small business owners, from the Middle East and South Asia. Their financial resources enabled them to build mosques and establish institutions such as Muslim student associations on college campuses, which spawned the Islamic Society of North America and other organizations (Leonard). Despite the rise of the Muslim population and the expansion of these groups, Muslims were essentially invisible up to 9/11 (Abdelhadi).

Muslim American identity is transformed from the immigrant parents, Muslims, to their children who were born Americans. They teach them tradition and native culture which is attributed to Islam and converted to children in relation to American culture, to get a

Muslim American identity that is entirely American and entirely Islamic, which means that there are some things changed while others remained the same. The remained things were their beliefs of their religion like the belief of the five pillars of Islam, their belief of all prophets and scriptures, Day of Judgment heaven and hell. What was changed was their way of practicing their religion; for example, some Muslim women wear hijab as there are others who dress American (Rehman). From her view, Sabeeha Rehman has said in her YouTube video that the Muslim American identity is built on the principles of Islam that are inherited from their ancestors, the only different thing is that each one has his own way and method to practice those principles.

Following the events of 9/11 Islamophobia has been raised rapidly among the Center for American Progress, aptly titled “Fear, Inc” as “Exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from America’s social, political, and civic life” (Ali). The overstated feelings of fear and anger towards Muslims lead Americans to neglect and prejudice Muslims and Islam as well; Muslims become marginalized and excluded from the American society.

Islamophobia is known as an “ideological formation” that is established based on historical, political, social, religious, and racial relationships, as it is an ideologies inherited image, ideas, beliefs, values and principles (Sheeni). Simply Americans use the events of September 9 as the main cause to justify their racist view and their hatred against Muslims (Micu). The 9/11 attacks, unsurprisingly, not only put Muslims into the focus, but caused them great difficulty (Abdelhadi 7). Government policies, individual attacks and mistreatment, and stereotypical media portrayals made Arab Muslim Americans feel uncomfortable in the United States in the years after 9/11.

Islamophobia is a widespread ideological construction in American society,

perpetuated by political discourses and reinforced through a variety of news media narratives and popular culture representations. The victims of Islamophobia, on the other hand, are not passive receivers. For example, there are “ways in which Muslim immigrant youth themselves understand, challenge, resist, or rework different notions of cultural citizenship and experiences of belonging and exclusion in relation to globalization, multiculturalism, and political dissent” (Maira 115). Twenty years after the 9/11 events, Islamophobia still exists in the United States. Despite the fact that there is deeper understanding of Islam, Muslims claim they continue to encounter discrimination and stereotype (Mineo). All of the strategies previously employed by other immigrant groups to find a place in American society were put to use by American Muslims and Arabs. One of these instruments has emerged in recent years: stand-up comedy (Micu).

Muslim American stand-up comedy emerged as a unique response to negative social prejudice in the aftermath of 9/11 as it is claimed, in which socially critical comedians discuss stereotypes and realities of Muslim American living. The analysis of stand-up comedy depends on functionalist ideas of the sociology of humor, to discover the intended social messages of jokes that are designed to delight and educate. It demonstrates how Muslim American comedy aims to impact not only perceptions about Muslims, but opinions held by Muslims themselves, which means that Stand-up comedy is a new and different analytical site that examines how Muslim Americans deal with the prejudices and realities of being both Muslim and American in the post-9/11 era (Mineo). This comedy is intended not simply to entertain, but to address certain outsider perceptions of Muslims and insider perceptions of Muslims. These difficulties strengthened Muslim institutions and individuals. While invisibility led to a defeated tolerance about the bad pictures of Muslims circulating in the American mind before to 9/11. Muslims were left with little alternative but to try to refute these images and assert their rights after 9/11.

2.2. Muslim American Stand-up Comedy

The events of September 11 had a negative effect on the Muslim community, the

Americans started to see that all Muslims are terrorists. Muslims were supposed to stop the prejudice they are facing every day and not to stay watching. Preacher Moss, one of the co-founders of “Allah Made me Funny Comedy Tour”, was one of those who decided to defend his identity; he claims that he was watching how people are defending their Muslim American identity where he realized that they must be hand in hand not each one alone but it needs every Muslim. Moss explained that it was an idea to start defending their identities inside the American society using different way that is mostly preferable to normalize the situation and to restate their image.

The idea needed some efforts to be established that is why Moss took advantage of his friends who are of the same Muslim community to develop the idea of developing their voices and speaking loudly to create what is called stand-up comedy shows. He added, “So fortunately, I was blessed to reach out to Azhar and originally Azi Muhammad, who is with the Nation of Islam. And then we brought in Mo Amer, and you know, this was the theme. This was literally the history of Islam in the United States, and you could see it on stage in a 90-minute show”. On the other hand, there is Obeidallah who decided to be a comedian to introduce his identity when he began doing stand-up comedy in the late 1990s. Then he launched the “Arab-American” Comedy Festival following 9/11 and began using his Arab name in his shows on purpose. In the light of the previously presented idea Obeidallah said: “My last name is Obeidallah, and I know many of you can identify. For non-Middle Easterners, do you know what it's like to be of Arab heritage with a Muslim last name living in America for the past few years?” “I’m in need of a hug.” “I thought to myself, maybe I can be a comedy ambassador and introduce America to my culture.”

There is no precise definition for Muslim standup comedy. Likewise, Bilal Hussain in his Master’s thesis “Muslims Never Bomb on Stage: Audience Perceptions of Muslim Stand-Up Comedy” defines the term as stand-up comedy in which Muslims poke fun at themselves,

other Muslims, and non-Muslims. Essentially, Muslim standup comedy involves a Muslim performing standup comedy on stage. The comedy explores various aspects of Muslim social life.

Mucahit Bilici sees “Muslim ethnic comedy” as a community occupation that arose in the aftermath of September 11th, an event that gave Muslim comedians a common language to unify “like every other ethnic group” and perform in front of mainstream audiences. This is what unites organizations like the Allah Made Me Funny Tour and the Axis of Evil Tour, which feature comics like Azeem Muhammad, Preacher Moss, Mo Amer, Maz Jobrani, Dean Obeidallah, Aron Kader, and Ahmed Ahmed who are otherwise racially diverse.

Muslim American stand-up comedy started as a result to the social prejudice and stereotypes of the American society towards American Muslims (Michael). Muslim comedians use this type of humor as a new analytical way that examines how Muslim Americans deal with the preconceptions and difficulties of being both Muslim and American in the post-9/11 era.

Muslim standup comedy is referred to as “ethnic comedy” (Bilici 196). It is a form of code-switching in the face of situations when the language of reason is dominated by a faulty common sense or common wrong sense (207). When Muslims perform standup comedy, according to Bilici, they are aiming to build a bridge between Muslims and the rest of American society. This bridge takes the form of comedy and laughter, and it is open to both Muslims and the rest of Americans (196).

Many Muslim American comedians suffered from anti-Muslim slurs because of their Muslim identity. So, they have understood that humor can be utilized to bring attention to issues that impact their ethnic and religious groups. These also are other reasons for using stand-up humor by Muslims in the United States; they profit from humor in two ways: mentally and socially. Melinda claims that humor helps people stay emotionally healthy since

it has the ability to change moods and lift people out of sadness. In social situations, humor promotes relationships by eliciting pleasant emotions, since when people share humor; they form a positive relationship (Ziv 176). In this way Muslims are paving the way to be more accepted in the American society and they are decreasing the amount of being stereotyped by those who are not Muslims.

Stand-up comedy was first performed by other minorities, such as Jews and African Americans, as a strategy to negotiate assimilation and positive acceptance into the American “melting pot” (Micu 1). This strategy gained success for different ethnic comedians because they combine the social commentary and what is found in the American society of criticism and self-deprecation. The comedians relate the social life and the racist view of Americans towards Muslims when they form their jokes and written forms of their stand-up. Some of the aspects of Arab and Muslim American stand-up comedy are similar to those of the long-standing American ethnic comedy tradition. However, Arabs and Muslims in the United States have different integration challenges than other communities in the post-9/11 socio-political climate. Among these issues, the impact of recent geopolitical events is critical. Islamic terrorism, Middle East political issues, US engagement in these conflicts, and post-9/11 attitudes of Islamophobia sustained by a substantial number of Americans and supported by political measures such as the PATRIOT ACT (Micu), which defines the battle of the Muslim Americans to get acceptance in the US society.

In other words, these comedians are always trying to repaint their image and the public perception of the Muslim Americans as unpatriotic or hostile to the United States after the events of September 11. Dean Obeidallah stated: “Our hope is that like other ethnic groups and races before us, we can use comedy to foster understanding about who we are and redefine ourselves in an accurate, positive way” (qtd. in Amarasingam). The sense of Islamophobia has highly increased among Americans and stand-up humor was an interesting

strategy to redefine the Muslim identity and to provide a deep understanding of being both Muslim and Americans at the same time and the same society.

After his first time when performing his first stand-up show Obeidallah claimed that it was as a session of therapy, he loved the way the audience was laughing at his jokes. He said: “The audience laughed loudly and inappropriately. It was a counseling session, not a comedy show. With their laughter, it felt like they were hugging us. I’ll never forget how the crowd laughed in ways that were unrelated to how funny the jokes were, but more too how much they needed the release, and how therapeutic it was for them on some level” (qtd. in Fox). These words carry a strong meaning of what does the comedy to the audience, it helps them to feel at ease.

2.2.1. Muslim American Comedians

Comedians in what is now known as a Muslim American comedy genre come from a variety of backgrounds. When asked if they are Muslim, most comedians said they identify with Islam because they come from a Muslim family. This was the response of a group of comedians who were interviewed on the subject, some of whom were practicing and others who were not (Aidi). Dean Obeidallah said in the interview that he was largely raised as a Christian, but that his Muslim father taught him about Islam. Obeidallah has stated before: The manager at the time said to me as a friend, “I don’t think you should use your real last name onstage.” Obeidallah is a very Muslim name. “Servant of Allah,” “serving God,” is what it means in English. He goes on, “I don’t think you should do any jokes about being Arab onstage.” I thought about what he said for a couple of days before I went up, and at the time, there were people getting attacked. My own cousin was attacked. I went onstage using “Dean Joseph” for like a week there and a couple other places. Then after a week of doing that, I went back to Dean Obeidallah.” Aron Kader, a Palestinian American, revealed that one of his parents is Mormon and the other is Muslim. Jobrani and Ahmed, like Ramy Youssef,

who appeared on The Late Show with Stephen Colbert in 2017, said they were raised Muslim (Aidi).

Arab and Muslim comedians are becoming more common in American stand-up comedy, and their jokes poke fun at some of the country's repeated Islamophobic stereotypes (Micu) as it has already been mentioned to mix both social prejudice and humoristic jokes in order to express sensitive topic like racism in an interesting and funny way to catch the public awareness. Many Arab and Muslim American stand-up comedians have discovered that confronting the stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims that are rapidly spreading in American society nowadays and the media is both a suitable and beneficial chance for political activism in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

The benefits of media are illustrated as Amarnath Amarasingam states in his article "Laughter, the Best Medicine": "For example, during a CNN roundtable discussion focusing on whether the Canadian sitcom Little Mosque on the Prairie would be successful in the United States, many participants noted that comedy could be enormously useful in combating ignorance, intolerance, and suspicion of Muslims". In simple words Muslims comedians took advantage of the social context by creating a new form of art which is stand-up humor that is based on producing jokes but with a hidden meaning to tackle issues they face in everyday life in forms of discrimination and prejudice.

Comedy tours like "Allah Made Me Funny", "The Axis of Evil", and "Arabs Gone Wild", as well as artists like Azhar Usman, Mo Amer, Ahmed Ahmed, Aron Kader, Preacher Moss, Dean Obidallah, Maz Jobrani, and Maysoon Zayid, are gaining popularity due to their unique blend of self-deprecating humor and critique of prejudices against Arabs and Muslims in American society. Confronted with challenges, Arab and Muslim comedians in the United States have learned that they may use humor as a platform to speak on difficulties influencing their ethnic and religious groups (Micu). It is always the same reason behind creating this

type of discourse which is to talk about the social challenges facing them as Muslims and trying to be more accepted in the American society and not to be seen as unpatriotic as they are American citizens. Some of the comedians are both Arab and Muslims; others are Arabs who either follow a religion apart from Islam or have openly announced or alluded to having no religious beliefs at all; and still others are Muslims of a non-Arab ethnicity (Micu). Muslim comedians are successful in using humor to challenge Islamophobia, yet they are unable to remove it from American culture. Nonetheless, American Muslim comedians' attempts to highlight and counter Islamophobia using comedy discourses should not be ignored.

Obeidallah in one of the shows stated that he did not mention his Arab heritage for perhaps six or seven months, he did not know how to talk about it in a way that would contribute to any conversation about the anti-Arab response at the time, and he was not really in touch with his background at the time. He staged a one-man show at the Fringe Festival five years later on how, on September 10, his life completely changed from being an American white man and become an Arab. He was explaining that the incident of September 11 was completely a change for their social life (Fox). This was a turning point to Obeidallah to start using his ethnicity as a Muslim as a means to react on the prejudice he is facing as a Muslim in American society.

To sum up what was said above, each of these artists was personally affected by the events of 9/11. At a time when people of Middle Eastern background were told to keep quiet. They all chose to stand up and tell jokes; they are all responding to 9/11 in their own unique ways, but they are all using humor to define who they are.

2.3. Stereotyping Muslims through Humor

Ethnic comedy and stereotypes are strongly intertwined. The majority of jokes concerning ethnic groups are based on social preconceptions; ethnic humor plays a vital role

in reflecting social interaction among various civilizations (Jakoaho and Marjamäki). The terms of humor and stereotypes seem to be intertwined since comedians are talking about such a sensitive topic which is racism but using an ironic way, because humor or comedy has less negative effects when tackling this type of topics more than challenging them through serious discourse. Comedians tend to use their own culture and own ethnicity to defeat and reduce racism. Lamiae Aidi in her article about Muslim stand-up comedy in the US and UK, mentions that it may seem weird that a non-humorous incident like 9/11 might provide inspiration for comedy. Nonetheless, writings on the subject argue that the event marked a turning point in the Muslim American subversion of Islamophobia, and scholars on the subject, such as Bilici, Amarasingam, and Michael, argue that the post-9/11 backlash is the driving force behind the creation of a Muslim American stand-up comedy.

Although stereotypes can help to identify and relate to specific groups, they are not always beneficial. Stereotypes can be positive or negative impressions about people or groups (Mindiola 36). The accuracy of these impressions can vary greatly. This viewpoint is shared by McGarty who adds that stereotypes can be useful in comprehending diverse groups, but they can also lead to misunderstanding of groups and their features (4). As reported by Niemann, stereotypes are mainly negative, preconceptions can contribute to marginalization of ethnic minorities on a group or individual level (103). One could argue that stereotypes simplify the world while simultaneously justifying discrimination and hate toward various out groups (Jakoaho and Marjamäki). As an example is the subject of “white face” in the broader joke that Murphy asserts in the comedy. Eddie Murphy was, and continues to be, known for his race humor, and in this skit, he is dressed as a white man who goes around New York City viewing life through the eyes of a white man. On his tour, he discovers that if you are white, other white people covertly offer you everything for free (Jones); for example, when he entered a newspaper shop, a white store employee whispered to him, “There’s no

one around. Take it now, take it now.”

Jack Shaheen, professor emeritus at Southern Illinois University and the author of *Reel Bad Arabs* says: “Historically, humor has always been used to put people at ease and sort of open themselves up to receiving messages that make them aware of their prejudices without offending them.”. In his opinion, comedians used this type of discourse to make the audience happy and feel comfortable to give the chance to acquire some knowledge and to be aware of the serious situation they are living.

It is typical for stand-up comedians to use their ethnic identity as a foundation for their performance, using self-disparaging humor and telling jokes about oneself or of one’s own ethnicity shows that a person can enjoy a little self-ridicule (Rappoport), this type of humor is often expressed in an ironic manner (40). Toikka and Vento suggest that an ironic attitude is an essential part of stand-up comedy (Jakoaho and Marjamäki) even more comedians took benefit of the sensitivity of the racial topics that cannot be often accepted openly to be discussed in a joking manner, it becomes easier to tackle serious issues held in the American society in an ironic way.

Arab Americans, like other ethnic groups, are frequently subjected to harsh stereotypes masked in the form of “comedy.” When they complain, they are told that the remarks were “not meant to be taken seriously.” Today, there should be a wider public knowledge and acceptance that failing to respect the individuality of others is a type of racism. Since there is an announcement that there are different groups which must be respected it is simply declared that there is a kind of racist view toward those groups.

Muslim American stand-up challenges post-9/11 preconceptions of Muslims by portraying Muslims as Americans who, like African Americans, are part of a racial, gendered, and religious imagination. For Muslim American stand-up, a genre of stand-up influenced by racial and religious prejudice, the Black Arts Movement (BAM), which is

oriented on social justice, is an appropriate source of inspiration. The fundamental preoccupation of artists in the civil rights movement and the Black Arts Movement is to focus on being Muslim and being a minority (Aidi). The Muslim stand-up comedy was established to make things clear for Muslims themselves who are suffering and for the Americans to stop the stereotypes against the Muslim community.

The most obvious reason for ethnic and racial joking is that it allows people to express their hostility and superiority. Mintz stated that the observation raises the question of whether such expression tends to lead to or justify actual acts of hostility, or whether it might neutralize or soften anger by providing alternative channels of expression or perhaps by providing some sort of “safety valve” for letting off the steam generated by people of various cultural backgrounds.

When the white comic John Roy was questioned if stand-up comedians who had taken an equal opportunity approach to stereotyping numerous ethno-racial groups still reinforce preconceptions, he answered: “Absolutely. You’re strengthening it from above. I don’t believe it will persuade people to change their opinions, but I believe it will encourage them to use stereotypes more freely.” In his point of view, discussing this serious issue which is racism and stereotyping Muslims through humor, will not stop the problem but rather fortify the racist people to stereotype and prejudice them more comfortably.

2.4. The Muslim Identity Represented in Stand-Up Comedy

The Muslim identity is well represented in the American stand-up comedy. The comedians are trying to show that Muslims are a part of the American society; they use humor and jokes even on themselves in order to change the others views and preconceptions on Muslims and Islam. Muslim comedians are highly present in this type of art; most of them are trying to reflect what is happening and what they are facing in their everyday life in the American society.

Performers from marginalized groups entered the art of stand-up comedy and reversed the trend by contributing to issues from their own unique views and by experimenting with different performing approaches. This is the start of “ethnic” stand-up comedy, which comedian and author Joanne Gilbert defines as “a way of addressing marginality through the creation of rhetoric and the use of props that demonstrate “us against them” mentalities affecting minorities in her book *Performing Marginality: Comedy, Identity, and Cultural Critique*. Most of the comedians get used to the social life they live in United States to create their own way of performance on stage.

The post-9/11 backlash has an everyday impact on people’s lives, and many comedians’ decision to self-identify as Muslim and discuss that identity in their work is a conscious response to those circumstances. Because negative stereotypes affect Arabs and Muslims in everyday life, stand-up comedians of various Muslim backgrounds who were not addressing topics related to being Muslim previous to 9/11 felt obligated to turn to humor relevant to Muslim Americans in the aftermath of the terrorist attack and backlash (Aidi). Their feeling to protect their identity, which is stereotyped every day, encourages them to create a unique way like comedy to talk about this problem, a way that can reach everyone in order to spread their word.

In the light of what has already been mentioned, the events of 9/11 have a great effect on what is known as stand-up comedy. “Meet Dean Obeidallah. At a stand-up comedy open mike night, he’s quick to tell his audience that he was always ‘just a white guy in a white guy’s life’ from New Jersey. Then 9/11 happened and suddenly, he became...an Arab.” (Marks). Obeidallah is whose father is Palestinian and his mother is American, he means that these events change the social view of the Americans to the Arabs and Muslims as well. So it was difficult for Muslims at that time, after 9/11 to avoid prejudice, to handle the situation that they still American citizens of an American identity and how they receive hard racism

from the Americans. Obeidallah adds, “And people would say, ‘Hey, hey, hey, don’t take this the wrong way, but if you hear of any terrorist attacks coming up, will you warn me’ and then they say, ‘Only kidding! But, ah, seriously, will you warn me?’” So they are facing verbal discrimination; it means that it was clearly announced to prejudice those who were Muslims and Arabs, comedy was one of the ways that were used to challenge social norms and stereotypes and reinforcing the idea of their American identity.

2.4.1. Symbol of Muslim Identity in Stand-up Comedy

Following the attacks on September 11, many American Muslims took attempts to hide their Muslim identification in public areas, which typically included changing patterns of observable “Muslim” behavior like clothing or speech. Muslims started not to disclose their own identity in public in terms of words or behavior with others because of the social prejudice. Some of Muslims have opted for living with the situation when they try to hide their identity and whatever represents it, while others refuse that extent of the stereotypes they are facing and they like to speak up and to stop the Americans from prejudicing them. Comedians did the same and try to speak up as much as possible in order to show their Muslim identity; they use many symbols to represent Islam and Muslims. These are some of those symbols.

2.4.1.1. The Hijab

Alexandra Marks in her article “‘Get your Arab on’: Comedians Chip away at Ethnic Fears” explains that Muslim viewers used to see veiled and hijabi women in a variety of professions, and because the stereotype of the veiled and voiceless woman is one of the most common clichés of Muslims, comedy subversion of the image appeals to both female and male Muslim viewers. “Muslim guys won’t marry me because I speak,” Shazia Mirza said, mocking the notion of the “veiled and quiet” lady. Mirza and Hami both perform while wearing veils and hijabs, and female Muslim spectators and interviewees who wear the hijab

express a strong affinity for the two comedians, describing their work as “a whole new genre of comedy” that Muslim women can relate to:

A male interviewee was asked about female comedians wearing the hijab, he remarked: It’s not an issue for a woman to wear a hijab and do any profession. I think it actually helps break stereotypes in my opinion you know. To people who see Muslims as very uptight people you know and they don’t really see Muslims right? It shows the diversity of Muslims you know? It shows here’s the Islam but Islam doesn’t mean a bunch of very strict people. Some people are not so strict, some people are very strict.” (Hussain)

The veil and hijab are permissible in stand-up comedy as long as the artists are aware that they are representing the Muslim community.

In comedy, dealing with religion, or at least Islam, has its limits. While both Mirza and Hami wear the veil and wear the hijab throughout their performances, there have been some harsh comments to Mirza in particular. Because of the nature of some of her jokes, she has received hate mail from male Muslim viewers and has been verbally and physically assaulted during performances (Marks). It was not easy for Muslim female comedians to perform some kinds of topic that are viewed as taboo. Openly, they would be harshly criticized but to counter stereotypes of Muslim women, she purposely uses a veil in her performances.

In accordance with Aidi, performativity entails repeatedly performing the same activity until it becomes normalized and accepted. Performativity is utilized by notably female Muslim comics to poke fun at the assumption that all Muslim women are required to wear a veil and be submissive to men, for example, based on Judith Butler’s views on transgender behavior (Patrick). “The absurdity of the notion is revealed by the fact that these women do wear a hijab in comedy clubs where alcohol is offered,” She explains.

2.4.1.2. Greeting

Greeting is a significant symbolization of Islam religion, because it varies from the

other religious greetings or at least it differs from the western ones. Comedians intend to use the greeting words of their Muslim heritage in order to highly represent their identity in the American society, to prove that they are proud of being Muslims.

In “Allah Made me Funny” comic Preacher Moss tells a series of jokes about how American Muslims should respond to the perception that all Muslims are to blame for the events of 9/11. As he tells the joke, Moss comes onto the platform and greets the audience with a loud “salaam.” “I enjoy it when Muslims make a strong salaam,” Moss says after hesitating to hear any response from the crowd “It improves my self-confidence. Have you ever been in the awkward situation of giving salaams to a Muslim and finding out that he or she isn’t ready, or worse—that they aren’t comfortable?” Moss then performs a scene on stage in which two Muslims greet one other; one says, “As- salaam alaykum (peace be upon you)!” to which Moss, as the recipient, responds, “Shh!!” The terrified Muslim requests that the greeter accompany him to the side stage; Moss exclaims, looking to his right and left. “Wa alaykum as-salaam (and peace be upon you)!” (Michael). He preferred to use the word “As- salaam alaykum” instead of using the American word of greeting “Good Morning” or “Good Evening” for the purpose that he wants to show up his Muslim background.

To sum up, stereotypes and racism towards Muslims did not appear only after the events of 9/11, Muslims really suffered from discriminations before but it was not declared openly until this date. So, stand-up comedians create their own way to defend their belonging to the Islamic community. Muslim identity is highly represented in the Muslim American stand-up comedy, most of the comedians used characteristics related to their religious background.

Chapter Three

Reflecting a Common Challenge: Dean Obeidallah and Ahmed Ahmed

Comedy must be used to teach, not only to laugh at insignificant things. An evaluation of two videos is raised in this part, one for “Dean Obeidallah” and the other for “Ahmed Ahmed” from the same show, *The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour*. It starts with the biography of both comedians, followed by some information about the performance. Then there is focus on their jokes and the hidden meanings behind each one, why the comedians use humor to express their feelings of being stereotypes. This chapter discusses the comedian’s styles during the show.

More than a decade after the terrorist attacks on September 11, Arab-Muslim stand-up comedy is flourishing. While comedians like Obeidallah and Ahmed Ahmed use different approaches, and there are some differences among them, they are all aiming to do more than just mock themselves or their subjects for laughter. When Dean Obeidallah opened a recent set at Michigan State University, he made one thing clear: “Tonight, it’s not Islam 101.” For every joke about his Arabic heritage or Muslim faith (Euro-islam.info).

Muslim stand-up comedians claim that their work serves to portray Islam and Muslims in a new light. Dean Obeidallah and Ahmed Ahmed are the two comedians that talked about Muslim standup comedy. Obeidallah says in an interview “For all the comics I know who are of Middle Eastern descent, the idea of using their profession as a method of activism is a thread that unites all of us” (qtd. in Amarasingam 467). In another interview, Ahmed discussed how Muslim comics are portraying Islam and Muslims in a fresh light, “On a serious point, we can’t describe who we are because nobody will listen,” he says. So the only way to do it is to make it funny” (474), he means that comedy is used as a weapon to speak up. Muslim stand-up comedians, according to Obeidallah, have a common consciousness about their humor, a shared understanding or awareness of the Muslim

experience, and they mobilize by performing comedy to challenge inequality.

3.1. Dean Obeidallah

Dean Obeidallah is a lawyer, journalist, and radio talk show host in addition to being a comedian. From 1993 until 1998, he worked in the New Jersey legal firm Beattie Padovano, where he received his law degree from Fordham Law School (Obeidallah). He was born to a Sicilian Catholic mother and a Palestinian Muslim father in New Jersey (Micu). He is currently a columnist for the *Daily Beast*, an opinion contributor and analyst for CNN, where he writes about Arab and Muslim American issues and current events.

Dean Obeidallah, a Muslim Palestinian and Italian-American, was the first comedian. The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour featured Obeidallah. He made jokes on terrorist stereotypes, Arabs and Muslims being mistreated in airports, Homeland Security, George W. Bush's reading ability, and being Palestinian and Italian in a non-diverse part of New Jersey. Obeidallah is chosen because he makes jokes about Muslim, Islam, and Arab stereotypes (Hussain 14). His jokes are aimed at non-Muslims and their misconceptions about Muslims, Islam, and Arabs. Following Obeidallah was Ahmed Ahmed, who makes racist comments about Muslims.

In the year 2003, Palestinian Americans Dean Obeidallah and Maysoon Zayid launched The New York Arab-American Comedy Festival, which is still running this year online. The New York Arab-American Comedy Festival brings together Arab American comedians from all over the country and was founded to combat "negative images and prejudices of Arab culture in post-9/11 America." Instead of "Muslim American," the festival is specifically "Arab." There appears to be a lack of awareness that there are non-Muslim Arabs, mostly Christians, and the New York Arab-American Comedy Festival's focus on Arab comedians is an attempt to change perceptions of Arabs as "evil," and the stereotype that "Arab = Muslim," which is highlighted by Jack Shaheen, himself an Arab of Christian

background, and other critics (Aidi 4). Sammy Obeid, for example, is a Christian performer who is part of the festival. *Get Funny or Die Trying* is an original work by Obeid.

Obeidallah often notes throughout his shows that there are some aspects of Arab culture that differs from American culture, which is a manner of criticizing his own people. For example, he once stated that when Arab families go out to dinner, they always fight over the bill and refuse to allow anyone else to pay for their meal. “When the check comes at a restaurant, this is the biggest cultural gap between Arab males and American white guys,” Dean explained. When you hand a check to four white men after they have just finished dinner, they act like accountants, saying, “You pay for this, he’ll pay for that, and we’ll be fine.” Giving the check to four Arab men is like giving meat to a shark. I will never speak to you again unless you allow me to pay for this. I’m going to defriend you on Facebook right now, despite the fact that I haven’t used it in like six months” (Obeidallah). That analogy is spot-on because it appears to be unique to Arab society, where males compete to be the most generous. It is fascinating to see Arab guys argue with one another because they want to demonstrate their generosity in a loud and embarrassing manner that draws the attention of everyone in the restaurant. That is not necessarily a terrible thing, but it is the manner in which they go about it that is amusing.

3.2. Ahmed Ahmed

Ahmed was born in Helwan, Egypt, on 27 June 1970. When Ahmed was one month old, his family moved to Riverside, California. Although he did not spend much time in Egypt, his parents reared him in a Muslim and Egyptian-cultured home. Many of his classmates chastised and questioned his way of life because he was surrounded by different cultures while living in America. According to the Skavlan Talk Show interview, however, these questions would only drive his comedy scripts later in life (Farley). Ahmed traveled to Hollywood at the age of 19 to seek a career as an actor and stand-up comedian. He decided to

focus on stand-up comedy after only getting parts as terrorists in big films.

Ahmed Ahmed took part in the comedy tour Axis of Evil. Ahmed talked about the Muslim community's hypocrisy throughout his comedic routine. He talked about Muslims approaching him and expressing their displeasure with him making jokes about Islam. They are, nevertheless, the same people who commit specific sins (e.g. drink, gamble). He goes on to state that a Muslim knows she or he is a Muslim when she or he drinks, gambles, and does not consume pork during this period (Hussain 15). Ahmed's jokes, unlike Obeidallah's, were not about stereotypes, but rather about a common contradiction in the Muslim community. The inconsistency involved Muslims "sinning" yet not eating pork.

Because of his Egyptian background, Ahmed's comic style is particularly unusual. His writings mainly deal with racism, Islamophobia, Egyptian and Arabic culture, and being a Muslim from the Middle East in America. After the tragic events of 9/11, Ahmed's distinctive comic style, combined with his deft execution, played a crucial part in reducing anger and hatred toward American Muslims.

Ahmed Ahmed, Palestinian American Aron Kader, Iranian American Maz Jobrani, and Dean Obeidallah are on the Axis of Evil Comedy Tour. For the comedians, they hope that their work portrays Muslims in a more truthful and favorable light. Indeed, the Axis of Evil has been described as "crossing borders" by reaching out to non-Muslim audiences and fostering a stronger sense of Muslim solidarity (Aidi 5).

Jobrani explains the difference between Arabs and Iranians: "When I tell my American friends that I'm Iranian, they assume I'm Arab. No, we're not the same, I say. We're not Arabs, although we share some characteristics. One thing is that we're all being shot at. But Iranians, ethnically we're white. So, stop shooting."

The two comedians "Dean Obeidallah" and "Ahmed Ahmed" are selected because

they address a variety of sociological topics. Gender, race, culture, and religion are among the sociological topics noted in the videos.

3.3. The Axis of Evil

If timing is everything in comedy, it is about time we got some Middle Eastern humor. The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour, which has garnered those fans all over the world, began in 2005 and took its name from George W. Bush's famous moniker for rogue states. However, the tour offers much more than Bush's jokes (Tarnowski). It is clever, smart, and capable of cutting to the bone. Their success in the West is a welcome contrast from Hollywood's depictions of Arabs as either terrorists or oil-rich sheikhs.

Ahmed Ahmed, Aaron Kader, Maz Jobrani, and guest performer Dean Obeidallah make up the Axis of Evil. They are all half-Middle Eastern comedians from the United States. The comedy company focuses on life in America after September 11 for persons of Middle Eastern descent. There are many airplane jokes, and each comedian begins his show by walking through a metal detector and being gently harassed by a security agent. "Most people would prefer fly with snakes on a plane than Middle Easterners," Obeidallah continues (Tarnowski). This may be painfully true, but jokes like these help to combat preconceptions, no matter how hidden or underlying they are.

3.4. The Analysis of "The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show"

There is no denying that terrorist acts generated a climate of fear in the United States that was difficult to overcome. There have been many attempts to reduce the suffering caused by stereotypes against Middle Eastern residents, but comedy may have been the most effective. People tend to identify them for their unreasonable and inflated character once they are able to laugh at their anxieties. The Axis of Evil must have been the play that helped to perpetuate the image of Middle Easterners as bright, witty, and, most importantly, not a threat to American citizens' safety (Micu). The participants of the show succeeded to cause a

positive influence in the perception of Middle Easterners in the US community by showing their acute sense of humor combined with high levels of self-awareness.

The Axis of Evil begins with a farce mocking Orientalist depictions of the “other” in the Middle East. Kader, Obidallah, Ahmed, and Jobrani are smoking a hookah in this comedy, which is situated in an environment that contains many of the aspects that Western culture connects with the Arab world. As the four comedians sit on a Persian rug, there is music playing in the background that conveys Oriental sensuality. Red tones are present in the illumination. Obeidallah and Kader are wearing traditional Palestinian scarves on their heads (Micu 32). A conversation between Kader and Obeidallah on the one hand, and Ahmed and Jobrani on the other hand, adds to the situation’s hilarity.

This scene, with its obvious exaggeration of Eastern characteristics like the Persian carpet and the names of classic Middle Eastern foods, communicates the oversimplified idea of the Middle Eastern “Other” that mainstream America holds (Micu 33). This opening scene’s placement says it is a framing technique, a declaration that this will be a show that plays with and confronts ethnic and religious prejudices.

3.5. “Dean Obeidallah”

Specifically, the show openly mocked the concept of terror against anyone of Middle Eastern origin. Dean Obeidallah at the very beginning of the show asked: “How many people have middle eastern Heritage here tonight?” the audience: Screamed (large number) to show their agreement of being Middle Eastern descent. Then he reacted by saying: “It’s great to see so many Middle Eastern people coming together in one place voluntarily” (“Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show” 00:01:32-00:01:35). Although he knows that, he would see many of them from different Muslim nationalities attending the show. He adds, “Really we want to thank everyone who has come out to support us there the Iranian, Persians, Arabs, white people, FBI, ATF, and Homeland Security” (“Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full

Show” 00:01:36-00:01:53), according to this quote Obeidallah wants to show that even the different groups which prejudice Muslims; they attend the show in the same place where the Muslims are, and the performance discusses the Islamic issues.

When Obeidallah was flying from New York for the event, he said that he had to go through the new security check, which requires individuals to put all of their liquids in a little plastic bag because terrorists are supposedly going to mix fluids together on the plane and make a bomb. After the attacks of September 11, the United States established a new security system in order to minimize the liberties of ethnic groups, especially when they know that they are from a Muslim community.

After that, he ironically questioned the audience: “Let me ask this, don’t you think you’d get a little bit suspicious if you’re sitting on the plane you look next to you the guys got 10 bottles with different fluids on his trade table he’s got goggles on and gloves and a Bunsen burner he keeps pouring and closing his eyes and he looks at you like do you have any lemon juice or turpentine or something?” (“Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show” 00:02:23 - 00:02:53). However, the speech above seems to be a funny “joke” the intended meaning of the performer was about very serious issue which is the ridicule view of the American government towards anyone who have Muslim identity, because normally people would rather fly with some snakes not with the fluids to make bombs; they are in trip not in war. The events of 9/11 have happened in one day but Muslims still suffering from it until nowadays which made their lives more difficult. In other terms, the power of the terrorists and the fear of future attacks gripped the American people, causing a range of psychological disorders.

In agreement with what Obeidallah has said in his performance that it is important to stop terrorism because they are a source a fear for both native Americans and those Americans of different backgrounds; he said: “You know what’s amazing look I got to say

this honestly as someone of Middle Eastern heritage it's really important we catch terrorists as Americans and also it makes our lives obviously so much more difficult if someone's Middle Eastern does something" ("Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show" 00:03:11-00:03:18).

The show has the potential to change how Middle Easterners view the United States. By portraying it as extremely anxious and paranoid, the creators of "The Axis of Evil" were able to create an image that was both understandable and sympathetic, despite being irrational and absurd. "You truly think guys in al-Qaeda are going to public libraries and taking books out," the narrator says in an imagined scenario ("Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show" 00:03:31-00:03:34), painting an image of a worried and slightly paranoid but ultimately sympathetic figure. He jokes again: "Omar will you go to the library... do you have a pocket how do you say waging a jihad against the infidel dog eyes... do you really think there are books in the library titles that would give guys and al Qaeda away like I'm al-Qaeda you're al-Qaeda or Chicken Soup for the terrorist zone it scares me" ("Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show" 00:03:57-00:04:33); now he is mocking the Americans way of thinking to foolish people's mind because the terrorists might not appear in public libraries to read about making bombs or how wage their operation.

Obeidallah continues: "But he is funny at times as a president I mean he says I don't know how most people say al Qaeda or Al Qaeda, with different pronunciation, right listen to President Bush I'm not exaggerating he now says al Qaeda al Qaeda it's got him a Middle East terrorist group to a Mexican restaurant" the audience laugh" ("Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show" 00:05:22-00:05:35). Obeidallah employed political comedy in this section of his speech to calm viewers' anxieties of terrorists and terrorism in general. This has such a powerful message, not only because it portrays the United States as an angry, driven group, but also because it portrays terrorists as minor issues. It did not stop there; it reached

out to white people, specifically Mexicans, as evidenced by President Bush's pronunciation of the word al Qaeda to sound like a Mexican word as a name for a Mexican restaurant; because of the hostile connection with non-native.

The performer's last name is Obeidallah. During the show he was narrating some of the difficulties of being an Arab and Muslim in the American society for those who are not Middle Eastern, he relates to his friends' names which are completely Americans like Monica, Chandler, Joey, and Ross, and he is simply a white guy living a typical white guy life with a Muslim name. Then his life changed after 9/11 attacks, he was seen as an Americans but later he became an Arab. This claim can be supported by some of the real comments mentioned by Obeidallah in his performance "...Oh you're Arab Wow I love hummus...oh you're Arab why are people so angry all the time...oh you're Arab but you look so nice" ("Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show" 00:07:26.-00:08:00) each time he meets Americans he hears the same word "oh you're Arab". That represents that all the Americans have a negative view about the Arabs since 9/11.

Obeidallah's life changed after 9/11 as America did. He was not expecting anything to happen. He did not want to change in the first time. There are certain advantages to being white. He goes on to enquire about how he feels about not being white anymore. To express it plainly, he summarized by telling people that he slept as a white person on Sept 10, 2001. He awoke an Arab on Sept 11, 2001. A Muslim was awakened in his own country (Powell). It expresses what the post-9/11 United States has to offer Muslim and Arab American comedians: both the discomfort of Islamophobia and the humorous chance to confront specific historical and political factors that shape Islamophobia in the US (Micu 33).

In the light of what Obeidallah has said, his name means "servant of Allah" or "serving God," which has a deep connection to his Islamic heritage. It causes him problems, such as when his manager ordered him to change his name, which he did and utilize his

second name “Joseph Dean”; he did not mention his Arab ancestry for several months. He was a stand-up comic at the time, and in the first performances after 9/11, he did not stop using his middle name, “Joseph,” instead of his last name to remove himself from the prejudices he was facing (Obeidallah). “The first time I went on stage, about three or four days after 9/11, at another comedy club, the club manager said, ‘You know, don’t talk about being Arab on stage. I don’t think it’s a good idea,’” Obeidallah says. “And he meant it as a friend. He didn’t mean it to censor me, he goes. And in fact, he got so in my head that the first time I went on stage, the first few times after 9/11, I didn’t use Obeidallah. I was worried, so I used Joseph, Dean Joseph” (qtd. in Obeidallah).

Obeidallah’s name caused him so many problems in his life, he illustrated that in his travel reservations he used to be treated in a specific way: “Just for Arabs at this time I could turn on TVs like hello are you depressed because no one wants a fly in the same plane as you are you anxious because you resemble several people on the government’s most-wanted list are you angry because every time you go to the airport you are randomly selected for extra screening” (“Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show” 00:09:16-00:09:44). This represents one of the racial issues that Muslims face in their everyday lives. He showed that in a highly ironic way, the joke itself seems so funny even the audience react with it however it has a deep meaning to show how the American airlines system deals with Muslims. They are always treated like they are outsiders not Americans. Not only the American government which is racist against Muslims but rather all the Americans as well, the Muslims are always neglected, as it is mentioned by Obeidallah in his performance, when he said: “Are you angry...you are randomly selected for extra screening” they are always in the list to be under extra screening.

Middle Eastern people were judged firstly by their accent simply because they grew up in Arab society and would not acquire the language and the accent of those who

are natives. So, Obeidallah was telling his audience about an incident that happened to him when he was a kid. Some of his friends criticized his father's accent. They said it is a weird accent during the show he narrates: "my father that was the town and my dad is an accent... kids from Jersey... they meet my dad like you Mr. Obeidallah what's going on ...my dad looks at them I don't know what is going on my wife tells me nothing Dean what is it are things going down please somebody tell me what it is and the Jersey kids were look at me your dad is such a freaking weird accent we see from well he was born in Palestine" ("Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show" 00:10:46-00:11:16). Every time Obeidallah used a humoristic way of narration to tell the audience a very sensitive problem, the story above made the audience laugh because it was told as a joke, however, for Obeidallah it has a negative impact as a child and this last remains until he grew up and decided to change their minds about Muslims using different ways that would be more accepted among every one which is stand-up comedy that attracts so much people's attention. His idea is spread to convince much more Americans to stop thinking that way about Muslims. Those innocent children have shown to what extent the Muslims are facing stereotypes and prejudices.

Muslims are always welcoming the other cultures and they mostly accept the other religions, which is shown in this quote: "My father is Muslim and my mom is Christian and I was raised exposed to both religions and my dad this flea tree would come to church with us on Christmas and Easter to be part of the family" ("Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show" 00:11:29-00:11:33). Obeidallah claimed that even though the Americans considered the Muslim community as their first enemy and as terrorists, Muslims always accept the differences. It seems like he sends a hidden message about Islam as the religion of peace, terrorism's face is not the actual Islamic religion that is the case with Islam. Islam promotes peace. These terrorists are not peacemakers, they stand for evil and War.

Apart from that, Obeidallah proceeds to inform the audience about how Americans

perceive Arabs, describing them as gunmen and terrorists. It was the only story about Muslims that was known. The significant issue here would affect every Middle Eastern audience member, who makes up the majority of the show's audience; no one wants to be called a terror, so the performer must rewrite the scenario. The sort of humor used as a kind of critique, and how it is delivered could have an impact on its persuasive skills.

Dean noted that other cultures feel more at ease and free while honoring their rituals and heritage without interference from the US government, whereas Muslims encounter challenges in doing so, which is why Obeidallah declared openly that he was "jealous". The accent, he continued, posed major problems for most Middle Eastern people, and even open-minded people were affected by the media, which contributed to the spread of discrimination among Americans. Obeidallah explained this by giving an example of how the accent affects the meaning of a sentence. "Hey wait till Friday night we've been planning this for months people be talking about this for year" ("Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show" 00:12:50-00:13:05). This was the performer's example, which he delivered in various accents. He began with an American accent, which may be interpreted as a party preparation. When he spoke with a Middle Eastern accent, it sounded as if he was saying something frightening. "It's scary because sadly are all racists okay and so our world is chain" ("Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show" 00:13:05-00:13:09), the Americans were quite racist in their interpretations when the dialect is not entirely American. Non-native speakers cannot learn the true American accent because they already have one.

It is once again alleged that the American people are racist because of their skin color; yet, white is more than a color; it is a status; they consider every white person to be an American while others are not. He said, "White to me in America is not skin color it is status it's the way you're treated in society" ("Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show" 00:13:23-00:13:26). This means that white people are constantly seen as superior to others,

and they often have much more opportunities than the others.

Another example of racism depicted in this episode through humor is when he talked about not including religious identity in their passports, therefore mocking the method they would know whether or not a person follows the Islam faith. The comedian used irony to add, “If I drew a cartoon of Mohammed, would you get mad? When I say Mecca, do you think of a holy place or urban clothing?” (“Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show” 00:14:21-00:14:30). The two terms “Mohammed” and “Mecca” signify Islam and are regarded as red lines for Muslims. Everyone knows that Muslims are religious fanatics, thus they do it to cause harm to Islam in order to reveal their true identity.

At the last part of his performance, Obeidallah says, “Arabs are the new blacks.” It was announced on TV, and even American children began to act like Arabs physically with their friends dressed in traditional Arab headdresses tilted to the side to be cool with open shirt and gold chain smelling like lamb walking up to each other and saying, “What’s up Mustafa, we’re my Arabs.” He pronounced the word “Mustafa” with an Arab accent. Arabs were enemies at this time. In his opinion they had replaced the Soviet Union. Then, towards the conclusion of his act, he begged for Middle East peace.

3.5.1. Obeidallah’s Style

Obeidallah’s Arab ethnicity is barely visible on his face (Micu 52). When the security guard character who monitors Obeidallah’s passing through the metal detector declares, “You look like no Arabic,” this is exploited to humorous effect at the start of his debut in the show. His style is remarkable and his work earns him a place among the Axis of Evil’s co-founders. Dean is both funny and informative, showing biases by being the live manifestation of the idea that “race is a social construct in America.” Dean explains his unique experience as a Muslim in America, addresses unfavorable misconceptions about Muslims, and delivers profound conclusions about how to overcome the biases, all while using facts and comedy.

He exposes how Muslims have always fought strongly over politics since politics has always been personal to Americans. In this entertaining and insightful non-partisan discussion he provides practical insights into our history that lead to more interesting and respectful political discussions (Micu 60). His jokes are ambiguous and have multiple layers of significance. In the most literal sense, he indicates that Arabs are still a long way from reaching the favorable portrayals that other communities have achieved over time.

3.6. “Ahmed Ahmed”

When he first came on stage, he introduced himself and his colleagues, then asked the audience how many Middle Eastern people were present, similar to what Obeidallah did: “I read a statistic on cbs.com that said right after 9/11 hate crimes against Arabs and Middle Eastern people and Muslims went up over a thousand percent yeah which apparently still puts us in fourth place behind blacks, gays, and Jews” (“Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show” 00:19:09-00:19:27). Ahmed wanted to say that Americans hold Muslims in bad status. The level of hostility directed toward Arab-Americans, Muslims, and Middle Eastern immigrants appears to have shifted dramatically around 9/11, although these feelings have not been reinforced.

Because of his name, Ahmed had several challenges. He displays his comedy persona to be the symbol of westerners’ prejudice against Arab Americans with his joke. His appearance on stage as a humorous Arab American serves as a living criticism of the western notion of the dangerous Arab American. The rest of Ahmed’s story highlights the same point; he is taken off the plane for additional security checks just because of his name, which was depicted at the start of the concert before he reached the stage while a woman was performing additional checks for him.

True story: “I was sitting on the plane, flying United Airlines and they pulled me off the plane. I had my seat belt on, the engines were already running, I thought we were,

like, on our way. Somebody from the ticket counter came up to me and said, ‘Mr. Ahmed?’ “Yeah.” “We have some questions we want to ask you, and we’re going to have to pull you off the plane.” “I got here a month and a half ago; you couldn’t have done it then? I can fly; I know what’s going on in the world.” I take off my seat belt and I’m getting out of my seat and the two white guys next to me were like... (Laughter),” I thought he was a Mexican! We were sitting next to al Qaeda the whole time!” I’m like, “I’ll be right back, just save my seat. I’ll be right back.”

Ahmed recognizes that he hates traveling for months because of the problems he encounter. The major issue is that his name sounds like one of the Middle Eastern terrorists. He only found out when he googled his own name. Then Ahmed said that if he were misunderstood to be seen as a terrorist, people would ask him to tell them a joke since he is humorous. “I’m not a comedian, I’m a terrorist, and you instructed me to prove it to you, therefore I’ll blow myself up right now” (“Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show” 00:20:10-00:20:13). This would be the reaction of the real terrorist.

At certain time of the show, Ahmed Ahmed was exaggerating when he hesitates the way that the middle eastern news is represented, he said that most if the news started each sentence with “eeeeeeeeeeeeeeee”, voice, the audience were hysterically laughing at that. The aim of Ahmed here is not to stereotype Arabs he rather uses the self-deprecating technique, first to make his audience laugh, then to highlight the negative view received from the Americans. He really knew how the deliver this message without referring to the real source.

He then goes on joking about his work trip to Dubai, which he enjoyed and characterized as heaven. Then he was surprised to see Muslim women wearing hijab on the beaches while men dressed inappropriately in an Islamic country. “It’s a schizophrenic place because you walk down to the beach and see a Muslim woman wearing hijab then you see European men in speedos,” Ahmed states (“Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show”

00:22:53-00:23:00). On the other hand, one of the most surprising things he discovered in Dubai is the contradiction of mosques and nightclubs, as he demonstrated by showing that you can hear Adhan and music at the same time. In the Muslim community, this is completely unacceptable. “I don’t know I’m so confused, should I go play or should I go dance” (“Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show” 00:23:27-00:23:32) it is really a confusing problem. Another noticed contradiction within the Muslim community is that they contradict themselves, saying one thing while doing the exact opposite. For example, Ahmed has received messages telling him to stop making jokes about Islam because it is Haram, forbidden, yet they do things that are also Haram, such as gambling and drinking, but they refuse to eat pork.

One of the major reasons that made Ahmed Ahmed stop being an actor and becoming a comedian is that he was faced by a great amount of racism most of the role he took were as terrorist. He proclaims: “I stopped doing acting a long time ago and I got into comedy because in the acting world they always stereotyped you like I was always cast to play the terrorists” (“Axis of Evil Comedy Tour ENG Full Show” 00:23:38-00:23:48). So, stand-up comedy was the best solution where he feels free to express his ideas and to stop the prejudice against him, his religious, and the Muslims living the same situation. As an example, when he was in casting for a film and for sure, the role was playing a terrorist, the director chose him because of his dialect and the anger that Middle Easterners have and this is itself a form of anti-Muslim racism.

Ahmed discusses the expectations that casting directors had for him when he auditioned for the role of a terrorist in a film. This discovery in Ahmed’s story puts him in a position of power over individuals whose expectations on him are based on prejudices about his ethnic/religious background (Micu 39). He also used irony to elevate himself above his interlocutors, implying to the audience that he recognized the absurdity of the angry Arab

image but took the job for financial reasons.

After he finishes his jokes, he becomes more serious, stating that they are performing “fake comedy,” implying that everything he said could be incorrect at some point or at the very least, that in order to shape what happened in the Middle East through humor, Muslims must laugh about themselves or their activities, which appear unacceptable or contradictory.

3.6.1 Ahmed’s Style

Because of his Egyptian heritage, he has a distinct humor style. His writings mainly deal with racism, Islamophobia, Egyptian and Arabic culture, and being a Muslim from the Middle East in America. After the tragic events of 9/11, Ahmed’s style, combined with his skillful performance, plays a crucial part in reducing anger and hatred toward American Muslims (Jay). To make his jokes strong and clear, he focuses far more on his body language, facial gestures, and sounds.

To conclude, “The Axis of Evil” has served as a cultural shock to American citizens due to its use of humor and sharp wit to point out the absurdity of discrimination against people from the Middle East and Muslims in general. Members of “The Axis of Evil” appeal to the core emotions of American citizens by making them laugh, encouraging them to accept the idea of Middle Eastern people as peaceful and worthy of their respect and trust. Laughter has a therapeutic and nearly curative impact, allowing Americans to accept the humanity of people from different cultures, particularly those from the Middle East.

Another topic that occurs throughout all of the comic pieces is incongruity. Through its use, the makers of the jokes are able to express to the public a weakness of the terrorists. Incongruity is employed to create a contrast between the terrifying images of terrorists that the public is exposed to seeing and the new mortal and vulnerable terrorist depicted in the products.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to see if stand-up comedy could help to change racial (mis)understanding. It focused on the influence of stand-up comedy in dealing with serious issues such as racism. However, a large body of previous research has examined situational comedies in order to investigate racial and ethnic comedy. The concept of “racism” can be discussed using humor. Due to the strong link that Muslim comedians showed in their performances, stand-up comedy is one of the ways used by Muslim Americans to prevent the discrimination they face in American society, and it is evidence that demonstrates the objective behind the usage of this art for serious purposes.

The findings suggest that, regardless of race, ethnic and racial humor is entertaining and humorous. Comedy about race can be enjoyed by people of different ethnicities, despite which racial group is targeted by the joke. Stand-up comedy is effective at making the topic of race more acceptable and approachable in a comedic group setting. Ethnic comedy is used to lighten the topic of race in a comedic setting, but it is thought to be of little use in everyday life. However, there are racial disparities in reactions to ethnic comedy when it comes to stereotypes and perceived realities.

Arab and Muslim American stand-up comedy draws on and reinterprets the use of humor by American minorities to negotiate national belonging. It is a way for Arab and Muslim American comedians to negotiate and perform their identities on stage. It engages with Islamophobia that creates and exploits it as a reflection of the social forces in post-9/11 America. Arab and Muslim American stand-up comedy and Islamophobia are competing narratives that fight for definitions of Arab and Muslim American identity through contrasting representations of those identities. Arab and Muslim American stand-up comedy has developed from overtly political to more self-deprecating humor, demonstrating that the style is adapting to new social and political circumstances encountered by Arabs and

Muslims in the United States.

The post-9/11 backlash has a daily influence on people's lives, and many comedians' decision to self-identify as Muslim and its discussion in their work is a deliberate response to those conditions. Because unfavorable perceptions affect Arabs and Muslims in everyday life, stand-up comedians from various Muslim backgrounds felt obliged to switch to humor relevant to Muslim Americans in the aftermath of the terrorist attack. Although stereotypes and prejudice toward Muslims did not emerge just after the events of 9/11, Muslims have long been subjected to discrimination, but it was not openly acknowledged until the attacks happened. Stand-up comedians create their own ways of defending their membership in the Islamic community and in American society. Muslim identity is well-represented in Muslim American stand-up comedy, with the majority of comedians employing religiously-related traits.

As the preceding case elucidates, "The Axis of Evil" is a cultural shock to American citizens due to its use of humor to point out the absurdity of discrimination against people from the Middle East, and Muslims in general. Members of "The Axis of Evil" used dramatic irony to appeal to Americans' core emotions, encouraging them to accept the idea of Middle Eastern people as peaceful and deserving of their respect and trust. Laughter has a therapeutic and nearly curative effect on Americans, allowing them to accept the humanity of people from all cultures, particularly those from the Middle East. Comedians exploit a lot of material from a time when politicians and the media are biased against anything related to, or perceived to be related to, Islam and the American public was subjected to a constant stream of (mis)information about Muslim identity.

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