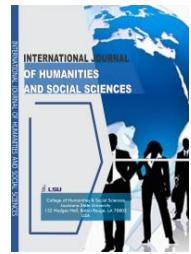


# From Vilification to Celebration: Arab American Comedians and their Alternative Representations of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood



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## Abstract

*This article explores how Arab American comedians use humor and satire to challenge and subvert Hollywood's negative stereotypes and portrayals of Arabs and Muslims. Drawing on the theory of Jack Shaheen, who analyzed and contested Arab and Muslim stereotypes in American media, the article uses qualitative content analysis to examine stand-up shows, films, and television series featuring Arab American comedians and other ethnic comedians in Hollywood. The article identifies common misconceptions and stereotypes, examines the techniques of humor and satire, and compares the impact of Arab American comedy with that of other ethnic comedies. The article argues that Arab American comedians successfully challenge Hollywood's stereotypes and create alternative representations that celebrate their identity, culture, and diversity. The article contributes to existing literature on humor, satire, representation, stereotyping, resistance, empowerment, identity, culture, diversity, Arab Americans, Muslims, Hollywood, and the media.*

**Keywords:** Arab American Comedy, Humor and Satire, Hollywood Stereotypes, Representation and Resistance, Identity, Culture, and Diversity.

## I. Introduction

Humor and satire are potent social commentary and critique tools, particularly for marginalized groups that confront oppression and discrimination in dominant cultures. Arab Americans have been subjected to negative stereotypes and portrayals in Hollywood and American media, particularly after the events of September 11, 2001. Arabs and Muslims are portrayed as villains, sheikhs, maidens, or buffoons by these stereotypes, which deny their complexity, diversity, and humanity. However, some Arab-American comedians, actors, writers, and producers have challenged and subverted these stereotypes through the use of humor and satire in their works. By making light of themselves, their own group, or others, they expose and resist the prejudices and biases that influence Hollywood's portrayals of Arabs and Muslims, while also creating alternative depictions that celebrate their identity, culture, and diversity.

Based on the theory of Jack Shaheen, who analyzed and contested stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in American media, this article seeks to investigate how Arab American comedians use humor and satire to challenge and subvert Hollywood's negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims. Shaheen was a professor, author, and consultant who devoted his career to identifying and challenging Arab and Muslim stereotypes in American media. He discovered that the vast majority of films and television programs featuring Arab and Muslim characters were negative, distorted, and dehumanizing. Additionally, he advocated for more accurate, varied, and humanizing depictions of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood.

This article uses qualitative content analysis to analyze stand-up shows, films, and television series featuring Arab American comedians and other ethnic comedians in Hollywood. It aims to identify common misconceptions and stereotypes, examine their techniques, and compare their impact with that of other ethnic comedians. It will assess the success of Arab American comedians in challenging Hollywood's stereotypes and creating alternative representations celebrating their identity, culture, and diversity. It will also contribute to existing literature on humor, satire, representation, stereotyping, resistance, empowerment, identity, culture, diversity, Arab Americans, Muslims, Hollywood, and the media.

## II. Literary Review

Humor and satire are potent instruments for social commentary and critique, particularly for marginalized groups that are subject to oppression and discrimination in dominant cultures. Arab

Americans are one such group, as they have been subjected to negative stereotypes and portrayals in Hollywood and American media, especially after the events of September 11, 2001. Arabs and Muslims are frequently portrayed by these stereotypes as terrorists, antagonists, sheikhs, maidens, or buffoons, denying their complexity, diversity, and humanity. However, some Arab-American comedians, actors, writers, and producers have challenged and subverted these stereotypes by using humor and satire in their works. By making light of themselves, their own group, or others, they expose and resist the prejudices and biases that influence Hollywood's portrayals of Arabs and Muslims, while simultaneously producing alternative depictions that celebrate their identity, culture, and diversity.

Based on the theory of Jack Shaheen (Shaheen 2001; Shaheen 2009), who analyzed and contested stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in American media, this literature review will examine how Arab American comedians use humor and satire to challenge and subvert Hollywood's negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims. Shaheen devoted his career to identifying and challenging Arab and Muslim stereotypes in American media. He discovered that the overwhelming majority of films and television programs featuring Arab and Muslim characters were negative, inaccurate, and dehumanizing. Additionally, he advocated for more accurate, diverse, and humanizing portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood.

The literature review will concentrate on the three primary humor and satire techniques employed by Arab-American comedians: self-deprecation, reversal, and Parody.. Self-deprecating humor consists of making fun of oneself or one's own group in order to contend with or deflect the criticism of others (Boskin 1986; Davies 2011). Reversal is a type of humor in which something is turned inside out or upside down to create contrast, astonishment, or cynicism (Attardo, 1994; Elia, 2010). Parody is a form of comedy that imitates or parodies something or someone in order to satirize or disparage it (Hutcheon 1985; Dentith 2000). The literature review will examine how Arab American comedians use these techniques to challenge and subvert Hollywood's stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims, as well as to create alternative representations that celebrate their identity, culture, and diversity. Additionally, the literature review will contrast and compare the humor and satire strategies used by Arab Americans with those of other ethnic comedians in Hollywood, such as African Americans (Gray 1995; Watkins 2012), Asian Americans (Eng 2001; Wong 2010), and Latinos (Davila; Belton 2016). This will assist in illustrating the similarities and differences between these groups, as well as how they use humor and satire to challenge stereotypes and create alternative representations.

The literature review will analyze stand-up performances, films, and television series featuring Arab American and other ethnic comedians in Hollywood using qualitative content analysis. It will examine their techniques and compare their influence to that of other ethnic comedians. It will evaluate the success of Arab-American comedians in challenging Hollywood's stereotypes and creating alternative portrayals that celebrate their identity, culture, and diversity. In addition, it will add to the existing literature on humor, satire, representation, stereotyping, resistance, empowerment, identity, culture, diversity, Arab Americans, Muslims, Hollywood, and the media.

### **III. Methodology**

Arab American comedians contribute to the diversity and representation of ethnic minorities in Hollywood, or how their humor and satire can influence the public perception and discourse on Arabs and Muslims in American society. Following the theory of Jack Shaheen (Shaheen 2001; Shaheen 2009), this study will analyze how Arab American comedians use humor and satire to challenge and subvert Hollywood's negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims. The particular goals are: 1) to identify and evaluate the misperceptions and stereotypes that Arab American comedians critique in their works. 2) to examine the techniques and strategies employed by Arab American comedians to make their quips funny and effective, and to compare and contrast their techniques and strategies with those of other ethnic comedians in Hollywood.

This study's data sources will include different stand up comedies by the Arab American comedians Ahmed Ahmed, Maz Jobrani, Dean Obeidallah, Mayssoon Zaid, Mayssoon Zaid, and Remy Munasifi. The data sources presented adhere to the following criteria: 1) produced between

2001 and 2021, 2) featured at least one Arab American comedian or one comedian from a different racial or ethnic group as a main or supporting performer, 3) humorous and satirical elements that address issues pertaining to Arabs, Muslims, and other ethnic groups in Hollywood and American society.

#### **IV. Results and Discussion**

##### **Common Misperceptions and Stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood**

As the most influential and prevalent source of entertainment and media in the world, Hollywood has a substantial effect on how people perceive and comprehend diverse cultures, religions, and ethnic groups. Hollywood has been frequently criticized for its inaccurate, distorted, and dehumanizing depictions of Arabs and Muslims, who are frequently portrayed as antagonists, terrorists, sheikhs, maidens, or buffoons. Decades of films and television shows, ranging from action and adventure to comedy and animation, have perpetuated these stereotypes. These stereotypes not only reflect the prejudices and biases of the filmmakers and audiences, but they also reinforce them by creating a negative image of Arabs and Muslims that influences public opinion, policy formation, and intercultural relations.

Since 1896, Hollywood has produced over 1,000 films featuring Arab and Muslim characters, according to Jack Shaheen (2001; 2009), esteemed professor, author, and consultant who has dedicated his career to identifying and challenging Arab and Muslim stereotypes in American media. He discovered the vast majority of Arab and Muslim depictions in these films were negative, distorted, and dehumanizing. He also created a typology of stereotypes that divides Arab and Muslim characters into four primary categories: the villain, the sheikh, the maiden, and the buffoon (Shaheen, 2001; Shaheen, 2009). The villain is the most prevalent and harmful Hollywood stereotype of Arabs and Muslims. Typically, the antagonist is a terrorist, abductor, hijacker, bomber, or torturer who despises America and the West and seeks their destruction. Frequently, the antagonist's motivation is political or religious extremism. Typically, the antagonist is depicted as vicious, ruthless, irrational, fanatical, violent, barbarous, and malevolent. *True Lies* (1994), *Executive Decision* (1996), *The Siege* (1998), *Rules of Engagement* (2000), *The Kingdom* (2007), *Iron Man* (2008), *American Sniper* (2014), etc., all feature Arab or Muslim antagonists (Qumsiyeh; Lalami). The sheikh is a common Hollywood stereotype of Arabs. Typically, the sheikh is an affluent energy magnate who resides in an opulent estate in the wilderness. The sheikh is frequently avaricious, corrupt, decadent, lavish, and exploitative. Typically, the sheikh is encircled by harems of exotic women who are his spouses or captives. Frequently, the sheikh engages in illicit or corrupt activities, such as smuggling, wagering, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. The films *Network* (1976), *Protocol* (1984), *Syriana* (2005), and *Sex and the City 2* (2010), among others, feature Arab sheikhs (Qumsiyeh; Lalami). The maiden is another common Hollywood stereotype of Arab women. The damsel is typically the daughter or companion of an Arab sheikh or a villain. She is typically attractive, youthful, innocent, and submissive. Male counterparts frequently oppress, mistreat, or enslave the damsel. Typically, a Western hero rescues, romances, or liberates the female, exposing her to freedom, democracy, and modernity. Typically, the damsel is depicted as exotic, erotic, or oriental. *The Sheik* (1921), *Harem* (1985), *Not Without My Daughter* (1991), and *Aladdin* (1992), among others, feature Arab maidens (Qumsiyeh; Lalami). The imbecile is another common Hollywood stereotype of Arabs. Typically, the imbecile is a comic relief character who is inept, foolish, or cowardly. Typically, the buffoon is naive, retrograde, or primitive. By other characters or the audience, the imbecile is frequently derided, taunted, or degraded. Typically, buffoons are depicted as incompetent, ineffective, or irrelevant. *Cannonball Run II* (1984), *Delta Force 2: The Colombian Connection* (1990), *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* (2008), etc. are examples of films that feature Arab buffoons (Qumsiyeh; Lalami). These Hollywood stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims have negative effects on Arab Americans and Muslims in daily interactions and current events. In addition to denying the complexity, diversity, and humanity of Arabs and Muslims, these stereotypes also justify their discrimination, marginalization, and violence. Additionally, these stereotypes hinder the recognition, appreciation, and celebration of their identity, culture, and diversity. Therefore, it is essential to challenge and subvert these stereotypes through the use of accurate, diverse, and humanizing alternative representations.

## **Humor and Satire Techniques Used by Arab American Comedians**

### **Self-deprecation**

Ethnic comedians who use humor to contend with their marginalization and discrimination in dominant cultures frequently employ self-deprecation. Mintz defines ethnic humor as a form of communication that enables members of an ethnic group to express their feelings about themselves, their group, and their relationship with the larger society (quoted in Elia 492). Ethnic humor can serve multiple purposes, including reinforcing group identity, relieving tension, resisting oppression, and fostering social change (Elia 492). However, ethnic humor can also reinforce negative stereotypes, alienate outsiders, and offend insiders (Elia 492). Therefore, ethnic comedians must strike a balance between being humorous and respectful, critical and constructive, and genuine and inclusive. Self-deprecation, a form of humor that involves making light of oneself or one's own group in order to contend with or deflect criticism from others, is one way ethnic comedians accomplish this balance. It permits ethnic comedians to acknowledge the stereotypes they encounter in dominant cultures while also subverting them by highlighting their absurdity, exaggeration, or contradiction. Self-deprecation also permits ethnic comedians to assert their autonomy, dignity, and humanity by seizing control of their own image and narrative. Self-deprecation also enables ethnic comedians to connect with their audiences, both insiders and outsiders, by fostering a sense of closeness, empathy, and unity.

Arab American comedians are among the ethnic comedians who use self-deprecation to challenge and subvert Hollywood's stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims. Based on orientalism, a system of representation that depicts the East as exotic, primitive, violent, and inferior to the West (Said), these stereotypes exist. Hollywood and the American media have perpetuated and exacerbated these stereotypes, particularly after the events of September 11, 2001, which created a climate of dread, hostility, and suspicion towards Arabs and Muslims.

According to Jack Shaheen (2001; 2009), a professor, author, and consultant who devoted his career to identifying and challenging Arab and Muslim stereotypes in American media, Hollywood has produced over 1,000 films that feature Arab and Muslim characters since 1896. He found that the vast majority of these films were negative, distorted, and dehumanizing. He also developed a typology of stereotypes that classify Arab and Muslim characters into four main categories: the villain, the sheikh, the maiden, and the buffoon.

For instance, Ahmed Ahmed makes quips about his name being on a terrorist watch list, which perpetuates the stereotype of Arabs and Muslims as antagonists or terrorists who threaten the security and peace of the West (Ahmed Ahmed - Let Freedom Laugh! The Bill of Rights Comedy Concert). The comedian talked about how his journey was long and how his name was an obstacle to going through a fast check-in. During his stand-up in the Hook Comedy Club, he joked —How many Middle Eastern people do we have here? That's great, we can organize our own little terrorist organization! (Ahmed Ahmed - Let Freedom Laugh! The Bill of Rights Comedy Concert). This jest reveals the illogical and irrational nature of the preconception that equates Arabs and Muslims with terrorism, thus subverting it. It implies that having a Middle Eastern name or origin does not necessarily make a person a menace or a target. Through the use of self-deprecation, Ahmed Ahmed asserts his identity and agency and establishes a rapport with the audience based on humor and empathy. He also reveals the ignorance and prejudice of those who adhere to this preconception, such as the audience member who called the police after hearing this joke.

In addition, Maz Jobrani is another example; he makes quips about his Iranian accent and culture, which are stereotypical depictions of Arabs and Muslims as exotic or primitive. In his stand-up show We Had a Persian Empire, the comedian tries to imitate the Persian accent of his father, and he makes fun of him for the way he brings all the family to pick him up from school (We Had a Persian Empire - Maz Jobrani (Brown and Friendly)). By making jokes about his accent and culture, Jobrani acknowledges the stereotype while subverting it by highlighting its contradiction or absurdity. The same stand-up tells the story of how his father thinks that his country is an Empire, yet now it is remodeled (We Had a Persian Empire - Maz Jobrani (Brown and Friendly)). The comedian demonstrates his autonomy and dignity by taking pride in his own identity and culture and refusing to allow preconceptions to eradicate or diminish them.

Moreover, Dean Obeidallah is a third example; he makes quips about his Italian-Arab heritage and appearance, which are stereotypical depictions of Arabs and Muslims as either wealthy, powerful, and exotic sheikhs or maidens who are either impoverished, oppressed, and subservient(Dean Obeidallah - Stand up Araba (Sub Ita)). In his stand-up show Araba, the comedian even goes further by making fun about the way he looks white, having a white people's name, yet his family name makes him an Arab (Dean Obeidallah - Stand up Araba (Sub Ita)). By making jokes about his ancestry and appearance, Obeidallah acknowledges the stereotype but subverts it by highlighting its exaggeration or distortion. Once he is seen or called by his name, the comedian feels comfortable within society, however once his last name is recognized, he always witnesses troubles. The comedian demonstrates the use of humor to celebrate his own identity through his family name. Despite his european looking, it is obvious that having an Arab name put him under the umbrella of Arab American culture Based on Shaheen's theory, these examples demonstrate how Arab American comedians use self-deprecation to challenge and subvert Hollywood's stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims. Arab American comedians expose and resist Hollywood's stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims through self-deprecation, while also creating alternative depictions that celebrate their identity, culture, and diversity. These comedians not only entertain their audiences, but also educate, empower, and motivate them to reconsider their preconceived notions and biases regarding Arabs and Muslims. Arab American comedians use self-deprecation not only as a form of entertainment, but also as a form of activism, resistance, and empowerment.

Ethnic comedians use humor to address marginalization and discrimination, balancing humor with respect and inclusivity. Arab American comedians challenge Hollywood's stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims, asserting identity, dignity, and autonomy.

### **Reversal**

Reversal is a comedic device used to emphasize paradoxes or contradictions by swapping the positions of two objects or individuals. Arab American comedians, according to Selim Fouad's article *Performing Arabness in Arab American Stand-up Comedy*, use reversal as a form of satire to challenge the stereotypes, prejudices, and expectations that Americans hold about Arabs and Muslims. By doing so, they subvert the dominant narratives and images that negatively portray their culture and religion. In addition, they use reversal to perform their identity and critique the political and social issues affecting their community, such as racism, discrimination, conflict, and terrorism.

To point to the idea of reversal, Ahmed Ahmed mentions, I'm not a terrorist. I'm not even a good Muslim. If you don't believe me, did you see me drinking on stage? During Ramadan? The use of reversal by Ahmed Ahmed the arab american comedian. In this comedy, Ahmed Ahmed employs reversal to challenge the perceptions and expectations of Arabs and Muslims held by the American audience. He begins by declaring, "I am not a terrorist," a common allegation leveled against Arabs and Muslims in the post-9/11 era. He then adds, "I'm not even a good Muslim," implying that he does not adhere to the stringent religious regulations, such as abstaining from alcohol and fasting during Ramadan. He then invites the audience to verify his claim by observing that he was imbibing on stage, which is prohibited in Islam, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan. By doing so, he contrasts the anticipated image of an Arab Muslim with the actual image of one. As an Arab American, he also subverts the dominant narrative of Islam as a violent and oppressive religion and demonstrates his own individuality and agency. In addition to using humor and self-deprecation, he communicates with his audience by demonstrating that he shares some of their values and practices, such as imbibing and having fun. Thus, he employs reversal to perform his identity in a manner that resists the negative representations and assumptions frequently associated with his culture and religion.

In her stand up, Maysoon Zaid, the Palestinian Muslim woman with cerebral disability, brings her race and religion to light by saying I'm Palestinian, which is a very sexy nationality to be right now. I'm also Muslim, which is even sexier. And I have cerebral palsy, which makes me downright irresistible. (Robertson). Maysoon Zayid employs reversal in this comedy to challenge the stereotypes and expectations that the American audience may have about Palestinians, Muslims, and individuals with disabilities. She begins by saying, "I'm Palestinian, which is a very sexy nationality

to have right now," a facetious remark that contrasts with the reality of Palestinians as an oppressed and marginalized group in the Middle East and the United States. She continues, "I'm also Muslim, which makes me even sexier," which is another sardonic statement that contradicts the common perception of Muslims in the American context as repulsive and undesirable. She then discloses that she has cerebral palsy, a condition that affects her movement and speaking, and says, "Which makes me absolutely irresistible," a comical exaggeration that mocks the stigma and contempt that people with disabilities frequently face. In doing so, she establishes a contrast between the anticipated and actual image of a disabled Palestinian Muslim woman. She also subverts the dominant narrative of Palestinians, Muslims, and people with disabilities as victims, terrorists, and burdens, demonstrating her own self-assurance and pride as an Arab American. She communicates with her audience through the use of humor, self-empowerment, and the demonstration that she does not allow her identity identifiers to define or limit her. Thus, she employs reversal to perform her identity in a manner that resists the negative representations and assumptions that are frequently associated with her culture, religion, and condition.

Like Ahmed and Massoun, Aron Kadar also used a reversal technique to shed light on Islam by saying, I'm half Palestinian and half Scottish. So basically, I want to blow up your house, but I'm too cheap to buy the dynamite. (Salim). In this joke, Aron Kader uses reversal to challenge the stereotypes and expectations that the American audience may have about Palestinians and Scots. He starts by saying I'm half Palestinian and half Scottish, which is a rare and unusual combination of ethnicities that may arouse curiosity or confusion in the audience. He then says So basically, I want to blow up your house but I'm too cheap to buy the dynamite, which is a humorous statement that plays with the stereotypes of Palestinians as violent and suicidal bombers, and Scots as stingy and frugal. He then creates a contrast between the expected and the actual outcome of his mixed heritage. He also subverts the dominant narrative of Palestinians as threats and enemies, and Scots as allies and friends, and shows his own ambivalence and complexity as an Arab American. He also connects with his audience by using humor and self-mockery, and by showing that he is aware of and can laugh at the clichés and prejudices that his culture and ethnicity may evoke. He thus uses reversal to perform his identity in a way that resists the negative representations and assumptions that are often associated with his culture and ethnicity.

Three of the comedians used reversal as a technique to challenge the Orientalist stereotypes that Shaheen identified and criticized in his work. Their humoristic presentation of their culture and religion subverts power dynamics between the West and the East and it creates a space for alternative narratives and identities that resist the dominant media images. Selim Fouad explained in his article *Performing Arabness in Arab American Stand-up comedy* that reversal is the use of satire to challenge stereotypes, prejudices, and expectations regarding Arabs and Muslims in the American context. Through the performance of their identity, Arab American comedians use reversal to subvert the dominant narratives and images of their culture and religion. Moreover, they employ reversal to critique the political and social issues influencing their community, such as racism, discrimination, conflict, and terrorism. Edward Said coined the term Orientalism to characterize the Western depiction of the East as exotic, primitive, and inferior. These dominant narratives and images are examples of Orientalism. Jack Shaheen, an American scholar and activist who was influenced by Said's work, examined how Orientalism influenced the depiction of Arabs and Muslims in American media, particularly Hollywood films. Arabs and Muslims were frequently portrayed as antagonists, terrorists, zealots, or fools, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes and prejudices. Arab American comedians challenge these Orientalist stereotypes and contrast the expected and actual image of an Arab Muslim through the use of reversal. In addition, they subvert the power dynamics between the West and the East and demonstrate their autonomy and complexity as Arab-Americans. They also communicate with their audience through the use of humor, self-empowerment, and the demonstration of shared values and experiences. Thus, they use reversal to perform their identity in a manner that resists the negative representations and presumptions frequently associated with their culture and religion.

Arab American comedians use reversal to challenge stereotypes, prejudices, and expectations about Arabs and Muslims in the American context. They use humor, self-deprecation, and shared

values to challenge dominant narratives and images of their culture and religion. Examples include Ahmed Ahmed, Maysoon Zaid, and Aron Kadar, who use reversal to connect with their audience and resist negative representations. Reversal also creates a space for alternative narratives and identities that resist dominant media images.

### **Parody**

Parody is a form of comedy that imitates or parodies something or someone for the purpose of ridiculing or criticizing it or them. Parody can be utilized to expose the faults, contradictions, or eccentricities of the original target, or to make a social or political statement. By exaggerating or misrepresenting the original's characteristics, parody can also be used to generate humor and entertainment. Arab American comedians use parody to impersonate or ridicule various aspects of their culture, religion, ethnicity, and identity, as well as the prejudices and stereotypes they confront in the American context. In addition, they use parody to imitate or ridicule American culture, politics, the media, and society, and to emphasize the differences and similarities between Arabs and Americans. Arab American comedians challenge the frequently negative, distorted, or inaccurate narratives and images of Arabs and Muslims in American media through the use of parody. In addition, they establish a space for alternative identities and narratives that resist the marginalization and discrimination they face as a minority group. They also communicate with their audience through the use of humor and self-expression, demonstrating the ability to chuckle at oneself and others (Selim 77-92).

Remy Munasifi is an example of an Arab-American comedian who employs caricature; he became an Internet celebrity after posting Arab-themed comedy segments under the name "GoRemy" on YouTube. As of June 2021, his videos have received over 98 million views. Munasifi is well-known for his rap compositions that parody diverse Arab and Muslim-related topics, including hummus, hijab, terrorism, Ramadan, etc. Additionally, he parodies American subjects such as politics, economics, taxes, etc. Munasifi uses parody to challenge the preconceived notions and assumptions that Americans may have about Arabs and Muslims, such as that they are violent, oppressive, or primitive. In addition, he uses parody to critique the political and social issues affecting his community, such as racism, conflict, immigration, etc. As an Arab-American with Iraqi and Lebanese ancestry, he also employs parody to demonstrate his own complexity and diversity. Using wit and originality, he employs parody to entertain and educate his audience ("Remy Munasifi").

Maysoon Zayid is an additional example of an Arab-American comedian who employs parody. She is a founding member of the New York Arab-American Comedy Festival. She uses pastiche to imitate or make fun of various aspects of her identity and experiences, such as her disability. She employs pastiche to imitate or make fun of various aspects of her identity and experiences, such as being disabled, female, Arab, Muslim, etc. She also uses pastiche to imitate or make fun of various aspects of American culture and society, including aesthetic standards, media representation, politics, etc. Zayid employs parody to challenge the preconceived notions and assumptions that Americans may hold about Palestinians, Muslims, women, and people with disabilities. In addition, she uses parody to subvert the dominant narratives and images of these groups as victims, terrorists, oppressed, or pitiful. She also employs parody to demonstrate her confidence and pride as a disabled Arab-American woman. She uses humor and self-empowerment to empower and inspire her audience through parody. She also employs mimicry to demonstrate that she does not allow her identity identifiers to define or restrict her. She employs parody to demonstrate her ability to chuckle at herself and others (Amos).

She also uses parody to subvert the dominant narratives and images of these groups as victims, terrorists, oppressed, or pitiful. She also uses parody to show her own confidence and pride as an Arab American woman with a disability. She also uses parody to empower and inspire her audience by using humor and self-empowerment. She also uses parody to show that she does not let her identity labels define or limit her. She also uses parody to show that she can laugh at herself and others. In her TED talk, she parodies the typical introduction of a speaker by saying: I got 99 problems... palsy is just one.|| can you explain this parody. This pastiche is based on the 2004 release of the popular rap song "99 Problems" by Jay-Z. The song's chorus refrain, "I've got 99 problems, but

a b\*tch ain't one," indicates that the performer has many problems in his life, but a woman is not one of them. The song also discusses coping with rap detractors, police officer racial profiling, and an aggressor. Ice-T's earlier song about erotic conquests served as inspiration for this song. This song is parodied by Zayid by altering the word "bitch" to "palsy" to allude to her movement and speech-impairment cerebral palsy. By doing so, she contrasts the song's original meaning with her own interpretation of it. In addition, she employs a humorous exaggeration to imply that her disability is not a significant issue compared to the other 99 problems she may have. She also subverts the stigma and pity that people with disabilities frequently encounter, demonstrating her own confidence and pride as a disabled Arab-American woman. She communicates with her audience through the use of humor and self-empowerment, and by demonstrating that she does not allow her condition to define or limit her. She also employs parody to demonstrate her ability to chuckle at herself and others.

According to Shaheen's theory, allowing such parody would harm Arab American culture and prove its inferiority. Yet, these Arab American comedians use parody to imitate or mock various aspects of their culture, religion, ethnicity, and identity, as well as the stereotypes and prejudices that they face in the American context. They also use parody to imitate or mock American culture, politics, media, and society, and to highlight the differences and similarities between Arabs and Americans. By using parody, Arab American comedians challenge the Orientalist stereotypes that Shaheen identified and criticized in his work. They also subvert the power dynamics between the West and the East, and show their own agency and complexity as Arab Americans. They also connect with their audience by using humor and self-expression, and by showing that they can laugh at themselves and others. They thus use parody to perform their identity in a way that resists the negative representations and assumptions that are often associated with their culture and religion.

Parody is a comedy technique that imitates or ridicules aspects of culture, religion, ethnicity, and identity, challenging negative narratives and stereotypes. Arab American comedians use humor and self-expression to connect with their audience, highlighting differences and similarities between Arabs and Americans.

### **Comparison and Contrast with Other Ethnic Comedians in Hollywood**

Arab American comedy is a relatively recent phenomenon in Hollywood when compared to other ethnic comedy traditions that date back decades. While other ethnic comedians, such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Jewish Americans, have achieved mainstream recognition and acceptability, Arab American comedians continue to encounter obstacles in entering into the industry and reaching larger audiences. The lack of representation and diversity in Hollywood, the negative stereotypes and prejudices against Arabs and Muslims in the media and society, and the political and cultural sensitivity surrounding the issues of the Middle East and Islam all contribute to this situation (Abdul-Jabbar & Derman-Sparks, 2015).

Arab American comedy has distinct characteristics and advantages that set it apart from other ethnic comedy forms. One of them is the variety of backgrounds, countries, religions, languages, and experiences among Arab-American comedians. This diversity enables them to provide diverse perspectives and insights on their identity and culture, as well as to appeal to various audience segments (Robertson, 2020). Arab American comedy is also notable for its relevance, as it addresses timely and significant issues that affect not only the Arab American community but the entire world. Among these subjects are terrorism, conflict, immigration, human rights, democracy, and social justice. Through the use of humor and satire, Arab American comedians can raise awareness and stimulate conversation about these issues in a creative and engaging manner (Zayid, 2014). A third characteristic of Arab American comedy is its resilience, which demonstrates the fortitude and bravery of Arab American comedians who have surmounted adversity and oppression with humor and optimism. Arab American comedians can challenge the status quo and create alternative representations of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood by using comedy as a form of resistance and empowerment (Amer, 2018).

Ethnic comedians in Hollywood frequently use self-deprecation to pacify the audience and poke fun at themselves before anyone else can. Self-deprecation can also serve as a means of grappling with discrimination and adversity, as well as a means of asserting one's identity and pride

(Greene & Linders, 2016). Awkwafina, an Asian American comedian, makes jokes about her own name and appearance; George Lopez, a Hispanic American comedian, makes jokes about his own family and culture; and Sarah Silverman, a Jewish American comedian, makes jokes about her own religion and sexuality.

In Hollywood, ethnic comedians frequently use reversal to subvert the stereotypes and expectations imposed upon them by the dominant culture. Reversal can also be used to expose the absurdity and injustice of bigotry and discrimination, as well as to empower oneself and one's group (1931, Rourke). Richard Pryor, an African-American comedian, reverses the roles of white people and black people in his sketches; Margaret Cho, an Asian-American comedian, reverses the stereotypes of Asian women as submissive and exotic; Carlos Mencia, a Hispanic-American comedian, reverses the stereotypes of Hispanic people as lazy and illegal; Sacha Baron Cohen, a Jewish British comedian who plays an Arab character named Borat, reverses the stereotypes of Arabs as backwards and intolerant; A third similarity among ethnic comedians in Hollywood is that they frequently use parody to ridicule the dominant culture and its oppressive or exclusive institutions. Parody can also be used to critique and question the status quo and its norms.

Arab American comedy is a relatively recent phenomenon in Hollywood, with challenges such as lack of representation, negative stereotypes, and political sensitivity. However, Arab American comedians have unique characteristics, such as diverse backgrounds, countries, religions, languages, and experiences. They address timely issues like terrorism, conflict, immigration, human rights, democracy, and social justice through humor and satire. Arab American comedians use comedy as a form of resistance and empowerment, using self-deprecation, reversal, and parody to challenge and question the dominant culture.

## **V. Conclusion**

This article examines how Arab American comedians use humor and satire to challenge and subvert negative Hollywood stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims. The article analyzes stand-up shows, films, and television programs featuring Arab American comedians and other ethnic comedians in Hollywood based on Jack Shaheen's theory. The article examines how humor and satire techniques, such as self-deprecation, reversal, parody, and irony, are used to expose and combat common misconceptions, such as Arabs and Muslims being terrorists, oppressors, zealots, or exoticized. Comparing the impact of Arab American comedy to that of other ethnic comedies, such as African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, and Jewish American comedy, the article concludes that Arab American comedy is distinctive in its diversity, relevance, and resilience. The article argues that Arab-American comedians successfully challenge Hollywood's stereotypes and create alternative portrayals that celebrate their identity, culture, and diversity. This article contributes to the existing body of literature on humor, satire, representation, stereotyping, resistance, empowerment, identity, culture, diversity, Arab Americans, Muslims, Hollywood, and the media. The article analyzes the stand-up performances of Arab American comedians Ahmed Ahmed, Maz Jobrani, Dean Obeidallah, Maysoon Zayid, Mo Amer, Ramy Youssef, Bassem Youssef, and Remy Munssifi using qualitative content analysis.

Humor and satire are potent instruments for social commentary and critique, particularly for marginalized groups that confront oppression and discrimination in dominant cultures, as demonstrated by the article. Arab-American comedians have employed humor and satire to challenge the status quo and generate alternative narratives that reflect their own experiences, perspectives, and values. In doing so, they have both entertained and enlightened their audiences about the complexity and diversity of Arab and Muslim cultures. In addition, they have participated in intercultural dialogue and promoted social change. Arab American comedy is a form of cultural expression that deserves greater recognition in Hollywood and beyond.

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