Humoring the Other

Humoring the Other:

Comedy and the Mitigation of Colonial Discourse

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INTRODUCTION

Entertainment discourse functions as an anesthetic spray that dampens the critical senses and serves to program the unconscious mind; it negates the brain's cautious approach. This transforms the individual into a "black box" that absorbs every detail of the attitudes they are exposed to from humorous frameworks. It is clear that there is no shame in using comedy to communicate ideas in a smooth and uncomplicated manner, but the problem arises when comedy is used as a means to poison the audience's mind through the dissemination of destructive notions that serve the negative agenda of its producers. Comedy deploys the spontaneous voices of ordinary people and, therefore, provides a breathing space for the masses that struggle to overcome and forget their daily sufferings. Therefore, comedy discourse has become co-opted by authoritarian systems in order to control and monitor society.

Comedy discourse has become a staple of television and frequently provides bestselling productions, which means that many critics have become increasingly interested in this primetime television genre. This fact has encouraged the producers to remodel this work of art based on mechanical reproduction, in order to make it more sophisticated, ubiquitous and, therefore, increasingly necessary to society. This "discourse of laughter", so to speak, does not draw upon the boundaries of interdiction or taboo and, because of this, it turns its audience into unintentionally subservient followers and believers through every single skit played through mass media channels. The consumption of whatever message is being disseminated via these skits degrades the individual into a state of inertia and they then become immersed in the ideas promoted in these "funny spectacles". The audience enters the state of oblivion and become unconcerned over whether something is true or false, and the viewers are, therefore, caught up in a state between allowance/interdiction and joviality/seriousness. In this sense, the viewer is duped by their enjoyment and remains unaware of the real players behind these scenes of ideological production.

By tracking its influence, it is possible to show that entertainment discourse has played a key role in various fields, including political,

economic, cultural, and religious domains. Politically speaking, comedy is rated as an effective outlet that is employed by some politicians in order to defeat their political adversaries. It has been also used by countries in conflict to discredit *l'un et l'autre* by tarnishing the other's reputation. Countries have been known to take advantage of such discourses to overthrow parties, syndicates, and other oppressive institutions. Likewise, entertainment discourse is brought into play by economists in order to advertise their companies' trademarks and to seduce people into consuming their commodities through the deployment of amusing and relaxing entertainment. Utilizing comedy techniques remains a viable and successful strategy for advertising products, which is why companies often sign up comedians to promote their goods.

Moreover, comedy has played a vital role in introducing and representing various cultures as a means to assert that the Self is invariably "superior" and "noble", while the Other is a pariah whose identity contains many stigmatizing labels, such as blackness, backwardness, and inferiority. Undeniably, racism is an unacceptable practice among people but, even today, racist jokes are disseminated through entertainment discourses can create amusement and, therefore, become acceptable. Bowers believes that this is because they are constructed with a "clever extrication and ironic reversal that is shared with others" (Bowers 1). Entertainment discourse, in this sense, uses laughter in order to hide their powerful and negative effects. Amusing the audience becomes a strategy designed to "point out human weaknesses and to attack the high and mighty" (Oesterheld 64).

Generally, comedy is an effective mechanism for attacking both high cultures and low ones; however, in colonial discourse comedy does not target high cultures and is, instead, used to deride low and marginal ones. This is clearly apparent to those living in the "Third World", as centrality is clearly attributed to the West. In the course of history, colonial discourse has restricted the construction of identity, gender, and race. This discourse is framed within a fixed image that circulates among some Westerners in their attempts to preserve the notion of the center/periphery duality. As a reaction to such modes of thinking, postcolonial critics, who mainly descend from the ex-colonies, have challenged this notion of Western centrality that creates and circulates "knowledge" around the world.

The use of entertainment discourse in colonial enterprise lies in constructing the image of Others, such as Arabs, through employing a cynical style and contempt for stereotypical images of whichever Othered

group they are targeting. In many cases, Western entertainment discourse is accused of looking down on Others and this derision has not changed as time passes by. The stereotypical images of Arabs have become "instinctive" knowledge that is fixed in the Western memory and repeated historically in colonial discourse; as Bhabha avers, "[a]n important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" (Bhabha 66).

In this context, it is no exaggeration that "laughing Arabs" in entertainment discourse are still an ongoing depiction in Western narratives. The choice to present laughing Arab characters in a manner that contradicts their real cultural aspects is a choice made by discourse creators in order to, as Bhabha states, "meet the demand[s] of colonial discourse" (Bhabha 82). Therefore, this "stereotyped" discourse aims to inscribe the power and the presence of Western superiority over natives; this extends as far out as clothing, facial appearance, and other so-called trivial descriptions. Furthermore, the infusion of such triviality functions more authentically in entertainment discourse and therefore becomes an effective strategy. This enables humorous features to become imbued with serious statements regarding the Other's cultures and identities, since every "small talk" is always pragmatically speaking "big talk". (Thurlow and Adam 246)

This information should be enough to prove that comedy is not an innocent discourse and that one should seriously consider the ideologies integrated in every humorous skit. This study aims to decode the implicit social and cultural meanings expressed through such entertainment. It will also explore the extent to which this reading develops our understanding of the nature of the constant struggle between East and West. Comedy discourse surpasses the expectations of critics and is not solely for entertainment purposes because it goes beyond its initial humorous function and becomes invested with political and ideological power.

This study is an attempt to investigate how entertainment discourse can amalgamate different political backgrounds and social principles. It considers the ways it stages multifarious images that still link the Third World and, in particular, Arabs to the past. The study also aims to detect the extent to which entertainment discourse may contribute to creating binaries and fuelling discourses of hate. This study analyzes several different American entertainment discourses: a Hollywood movie *Road to Morocco* (1942), a Disney cartoon *Sahara Hare* (1955), a popular stand-up comedy show entitled *Achmed the Dead Terrorist* (2008), and *Achmed*

Saves America (2014). *Road to Morocco*, starring Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, and Dorothy Lamour, is considered to be one of the most hilarious American comedies ever made. My interest in this movie lies in the fact that it is saturated with an Orientalist flavor. *Sahara Hare* is an animated film that contains strong representations of Arabs. The reason behind the inclusion of a Disney film is because it possesses a powerful discourse that has a great influence on the audience. This audience is mainly made up of children, whose ideological background can be perceived as innocent and who are also easily sidetracked and redirected. Another discourse can be found in Jeff Dunham's *Achmed the Dead Terrorist*; this is a stand-up comedy that has gained wider popularity because it deals with "terrorism", which is a theme that is commonly associated with Arab and Muslim people. This show has actually attracted many viewers, as evidenced by the fact that it has achieved more than 350 million views on YouTube (O'Brien). The focus in these entertainment discourses is centered on how space, racial identity, and gender are relevant to the construction of difference. The purpose behind this examination is to lay bare the different characteristics, attributes, and levels of influence embedded within a humorous formula in order to reduce the power of these negative stereotyped portrayals.

The last one is an American cartoon, *Achmed Saves America* (2014), which is an animation that uses the same character from "Achmed the Dead Terrorist", but who is now experiencing a different journey in *Achmed Saves America*. Moving between the imaginary cities of *Mizpakmanistan* and *Americaville* helps to provide a cultural context and the latter is where Achmed is introduced to the American life. This last movie attempts to transcend the colonial construction of the Other by going beyond the traditional identity formation. *Achmed Saves America* tries to give each race its due and aims to stand in a critical space where both the colonizer and the colonized are both innocent and guilty. In addition, this movie functions as a bridge to a milder discourse that advances peace and the tolerance of difference; thereby providing a model for intercultural dialogues.

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUALIZING VISUAL CULTURE AND THE EFFECTS OF ENTERTAINMENT

Identity Formation and the Question of Difference

Every society is focused on establishing its own identity and struggles to perpetuate its own difference, which it eulogizes, cherishes, and venerates. This encompassing concept of identity draws on a number of features that demonstrate a "taken-for-granted" common sense approach. This belief illustrates the need people have to "belong" and their desire to establish a sense of affiliation to a specific culture. This cultural identity is what creates the commonality between certain groups of people while marking out their differences from others. With this picture in mind, one might say that identity is either given or simply inherited from the society one is born into. However, in a globalized world, human identification has become a construction characterized by mobility and flexibility. That is, the question of fixed identity has become increasingly implausible and unjustifiable, while the idea of mobile and flexible identity has become an overused catchphrase. In this sense, identity is continually redesigned to create new social surfaces that satisfy the demands of social changes.

Due to the fact that identity has been restyled, it means that the mechanisms and the processes are equally changed. In this sense, media, as one of these mechanisms and processes, remains effective and has a potent effect on its audience that borrows from and constructs their sense of identity. Undoubtedly, people in every spot of this world spend several hours a day on visual pleasure in the form of television, the Internet, and/or magazines. This fact crystalizes media as the virtual source that constructs and reconstructs both the outside and inside scope of human identification. The effect of media has, therefore, shifted the perception of identity from its quality of being fixed and solid to the one that is more mobile, miscellaneous, personal, and subject to change and innovation (Kellner 231). In this sense, the media has contributed to the formation of multiple identities leading to an identity crisis. This causes the individual

to lose his or her sense of "personal sameness and historical continuity" (quoted in, Friedman 159). This crisis is generated by a passive absorption that transforms the individual into a "black box" that absorbs every detail of the performed cultural image and its accompanying attitudes.

Following the same line of thought, Morley and Robins, in their *Spaces of Identity*, have averred that, "the creation of culture and identity in common would have been impossible without the contribution of print and subsequently broadcast media" (Morley and Robins 196). Media, in this sense, contributes to the formation of its audience's identity "by the ways in which it represents them" (quoted in, Morley & Robins 196). Therefore, the audience that consumes visual pleasure experiences a schizophrenic reaction to the messages and attitudes that are framed within this visual communication. This fact constructs the audience as a unstable identifiable species and removes their social identification. Media is viewed as the source of knowledge that provides the audience with "more information and more direct access to event[s]" (Morley and Robins 196). In so doing, the audience is made to believe that they are essential parts of this media communication but in fact, they are pushed behind the curtain of manipulation that controls the contents presented to them. In this regard, the audience absorbs every performed media image in silence.

Moreover, the construction of identity relies on outside effects that mitigate the condition of its existence. In other words, identity is established by what is not: to be Moroccan is to be "not Algerian"; to be a Muslim is to be "not Christian"; to be masculine is to be "not feminine". In this regard, identity is constructed across differences and in relation to other identities. Media discourse constructs identities as they derive from these differences and, also, as they are determined to be in reality. The audience, thus, is not entitled to stand up against the established ideologies because these exist under the guise of truth, authenticity, or scientific knowledge. This itemized perception has buoyed up Stuart Hall's claim that identity must be seen as a fluid phenomenon; Hall states that, "[p]erhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact…we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 222). Identity, as understood by Hall, is regulated by a system of cultural representation whose power relations dominate cinema and media production.

Furthermore, the construction of identity in media manifests itself as a complex process. This complexity is generated, not only from media

production, but also from the fact that identity distinguishes every individual from each other and makes every human being unique. This approach is solidly defended by Amin Maalouf, who states in *On Identity* that, "[m]y identity is what prevents me from being identical to anybody else" (Maalouf 10). According to this perception, identity is an individual project rather than a community endeavor. However, the individual may experience conversions and alterations in his day-to-day activity. Maalouf has provided an imaginary example of a person with a shaky sense of their own identity in order to reveal that, "the view of religion and mother country will never again be what it was before" (Maalouf 11). Maalouf states:

> Let us observe a man of about 50 whom we in the street. In 1980 or thereabouts he might have said proudly and without hesitation, "I'm a Yugoslavian!" Questioned more closely, he could have said he was a citizen of the Federal Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and, incidentally, that he came from a traditional Muslim family. If you had met the same man twelve years later, when the war at its height, he might have answered automatically and emphatically, "I'm a Muslim!" He might even grow the statutory beard. He would quickly have added that he was a Bosnian, and he would not have been pleased to be reminded of how proudly he once called himself a Yugoslavian (Maalouf 11)

The identity of the individual, for Maalouf, is made up of different elements that "may be found separately in many individuals, the same combination is never encountered in different people, and it is this that gives every individual richness and value and makes each human being unique and irreplaceable" (Maalouf 10). He declares that identity "changes with time, and in so doing brings about fundamental changes in behavior" (Maalouf 12).

Maalouf's description of the cause of identity change does not oppose prior ideas defining the construction of identity in relation to difference. He, in contrast, supports this approach when he proclaims that, "the identity a person lays claim is often based, in reverse, on that of his enemy" (Maalouf 13). This fact is a natural conclusion for him, since the difference is already considered to be a naked truth. He states that, "[i]dentity is a special case. Mankind itself is made up of special cases. Life is a creator of difference" (Maalouf 17). The difference for Maalouf exists within the community that shares the same religion, the same language, and even the same culture. He clears up this confusion by saying the following:

what I'm trying to say is...not that all human beings are the same, but that each one is different. No doubt that a Serb is different from a Croat, but every Serb is also different from every other Serb, and every Croat is different from every other Croat. And if a Lebanese Christian is different from a Lebanese Muslim, I don't know any two Lebanese Christians who are identical, nor any two Muslims...People are interchangeable, and often in the same family...we find between two brothers who have lived in the same environment, apparently small differences which make them act in diametrically opposite ways in matters related to politics, religion and everyday life. These differences may even turn one of the brothers into a killer, and the other into a man of dialogue and conciliation (Maalouf 18)

Maalouf zeroes in on this point in order to reject the generalizations used to define people and to accuse them of "collective crimes, collective acts and opinions." He elaborates on this, arguing that,

The Serbs have massacred...", "The English have devastated...", "The Jews have massacred...", "The Blacks have torched...", "The Arabs refuse..." We blithely express sweeping judgments on whole peoples, calling them "hardworking" and "ingenious", or "lazy", "touchy", "sly", "proud", or "obstinate". And sometimes this ends in bloodshed. (Maalouf 18)

The ideologies disseminated in media discourse, especially in comedy performances that are steeped in stereotypes and preconceived ideas, are not innocent; therefore, the construction of other's identities can never be innocent. Maalouf once more emphasizes this idea when he asserts that identity is constructed but that it also changes throughout an individual's lifetime. This construction, however, does not influence any innate physical facts, such as gender or skin color. The social environment can never determine these facts, but it can determine their significance (Maalouf 20). Maalouf insists that "to be born a girl is not the same in Kabul as it is in Oslo: the condition of being a woman, like every other factor in a person's identity, is experienced differently in the two places." (Maalouf 18)

In this age of technology, it is easy to influence identity through the use of social networks and the advances in the cinema industry only serve to enhance this and this has led to a "metamorphosis" of identity. This easy-going connection between such differences fundamentally remodels the behavior and attitudes of the individual, who might even adopt an identity beyond their current self-image. One might argue that what is screened on digital apparatus stems from social values and attitudes. Still, psychologically speaking, people feel the need to belong, which gives them "even more reason to feel threatened because they feel that the

qualities that are specific to their culture are coming under attack by this homogenization of world culture. This fear, this desperate need to belong, causes many people to commit fanatical and murderous crimes in the name of their identity" (Boudreau 29). It is strange that an individual can commit such crimes in order to protect their identity, when identities are by nature a fluctuating and fluid construct. To illustrate this point, Amin Maalouf explains that the individual does not distinguish between what they are and what they think they are. He insists that,

> On the one hand, there is what we are in reality and what we are becoming as a result of cultural globalization: that is to say, beings woven out of many-colored threads, who share most of their points of reference, their ways of behaving and their beliefs with the vast community of their contemporaries. And on the other hand, there is what we think we are and what we claim to be: that is to say, members of one faith rather than another. I do not deny the importance of our religious, national or other affiliations. I do not question the often decisive influence of our "vertical" heritage1. But it is necessary at this point in time to draw attention to the gulf that exists between what we are and what we think we are (Maalouf 86).

In this sense, it is not surprising to hear of an immigrant, for example, defending the identity created by their origins, despite the fact that they may be a citizen living in another part of the world with diametrically opposed cultural norms. Therefore, one's identity, is made up of "number of allegiances, some linked to an ethnic past and other not, some linked to religious tradition and others not" (Maalouf 26). These different allegiances and affiliations make identity a complex matter. It is "easy to imagine…how it can drive people to the worst kind of extremities: if they feel that "others" represent a threat to their ethnic group or religion or nation" (Maalouf 27).

For exactly the same reasons, people, especially those who have undergone racist abuse, colonialist supremacy, and other forms of tyranny, might react in legitimate self-defense against those images disseminated in media discourse that mocks and generalizes their identity. This representation of identity in the media is projected as a performance of the self in relation to others. That is to say, the ideologies adopted in media

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[1] Maalouf has distinguished between two heritages: "vertical" and "horizontal". "Vertical heritage" refers to what is inherited from ancestors, religious communities, and popular traditions. "Horizontal heritage" comes from people's life experiences.

discourse adhere to the binary oppositions of Us/Them, West/East, White/Black, Civilized/Uncivilized, and so on. However, this binary-division is framed within a discourse that circulates ready-made images among its audience in an attempt to preserve the center/periphery duality. Securing this duality and supremacy is defined as "a system of statements within which the world can be known. It is the system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges, disciplines, and values upon dominated groups" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 42). Edward Said views this definition of discourse in the same way as Michel Foucault who considers it to be "valuable for describing that system within which that range of practices termed 'colonial' come into being" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 41). In *Orientalism*, Said perceives colonial discourse to operate as an "instrument of power" that aims to create a social reality that reflects the interests of its monitors. Binary oppositions, identity, and difference are introduced, collected and disseminated through colonial discourses. It is at that point, to quote Bill Ashcroft, "a system of knowledge and beliefs about the world within which acts colonization take place" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 42).

In the same vein, comedy discourse, within which acts of colonization take place, provides an arena where acts of inclusion and exclusion are played out. In "Humor and Satire: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial", Christina Oesterheld avers that comedy discourse operates in a convincing manner by "picking out some of the main misconceptions of these representatives of an urban, Western-educated élite, highlighting and exaggerating their follies and thus catapulting them into absurd, hilarious situations" (Oesterheld 80). Comedy discourse, in this sense, hides a powerful effect behind the laughter. Amusing the audience becomes a strategy designed to "point out human weaknesses and to attack the high and mighty" (Oesterheld 64). Comedy was originally focused on attacking people from the higher classes; however, in colonial discourse, the case is quite different because it is not meant to attack the high status groups and is, instead, used to deride the low and marginal living in the "Third World" while attribute centrality to the West.

As a reaction to such discourses, a host of cultural and literary critics, descending, mainly, from the ex-colonies, have challenged notion of Western centrality as a point where "all kinds of knowledge" emerge. They have managed to open up a space to bring into question existing assumptions in order to deconstruct and reconstruct all compartments of knowledge disseminated in colonial discourse, as an attempt to maintain their heritage and to create racial equity.

Rethinking Race in Comedic Discourse

It is evident that identity is part and parcel of colonial discourse, and that the notion that the "other" is different from the "self" is deeply embedded with this discourse. That is to say, the self is invariably visualized as "pure", "superior" and "noble", while the other is perceived as a pariah whose identity contains many stigmatizing labels, such as blackness, backwardness, and inferiority. It might sound ludicrous to divulge that the construction of this "other" pivots around the idea of skin color, but this fact has made countless Jamaican people, for example, bleach their skin with illegal products. The privileging of a light skin color in the former British colony has resulted in the mutilation of the Jamaican body and, as a result, the government has created a campaign using "Don't Kill the Skin" as a slogan. This practice is not simply associated with fashion and beauty, because its impact on self-image is deeply rooted in its colonial legacy.

The Jamaicans have accepted the notion that to be "white" is privileged and socially advantageous, while to be "black" is not. Whiteness in racial discourses is mostly linked to Western history and traditions, while blackness is affixed to the "rest of the world". Skin color, in this sense, is means to categorize and classify people. In *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action 1780–1850*, Philip Curtin asserts that this form of racial classification is "a simple system based on skin color, with a white, red, yellow, and black race, each of them placed on one of the four major continents" (Curtin 38). Color, in this regard, creates an opposition between white and black: black connotes evil and disgrace, while white is associated with decency and purity (Longshore 183), This construction of black skin in relation to white has led to Jamaicans attempting to "kill" their skin color. Thus, black people have a fixed image in the Western mindset due to the wide dissemination of racist stereotypes in colonial discourses.

Exploring such conceptions in media outlets is a lucrative venture, as it introduces its audience to what Edward Said called "the imaginative geography" wherein, to use Bakhtin's terminology, "a polyphony of voices" interact with one another in an attempt to assert a fixed hegemonic conception of the Self. This interaction of voices aims to picture the "self" in contrast to the construction of the "other" and it occurs at what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "contact zone", which is where "disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other" (Pratt 4). Within this zone, discriminatory discourse is assembled in "highly asymmetrical relations of

domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (Pratt 4). In such discourse, black people are negated and doubly victimized, in the sense that they have to emulate colonial cultural forms and, at the same time, play subordinate roles in order to conform to nations of colonial supremacy.

At the present time, racism is a formally unacceptable practice. In the world of football, for example, there is an understanding of the need to fight racism: football players are involved in the campaign, "Let's Kick Racism out of Football," (The Football Association, 1993) and stadiums are threatened with closure if their fans behave in a racist manner. However, one might still observe that these same people making monkey noises at black players, the same players involved in the campaign might be accused of being racist on the pitch, the same people in charge might expel a black player from a competition for his reaction to racist abuse. In the way, racism is, "predominantly anathematized by states, politicians and populations as a stain on civilized society. And yet, it is also virtually endemic. The discourses which vilify racism are more than amply countered by the many other discourses through which racism is made invisible, normative and even virtuous" (Downing and Husband 1). This ubiquity of racism in both general and media discourse derives "its power partially from the social psychological dynamics of social-categorization *per se*, but also from the powerful taken-for-granted legitimacy which race categories have acquired in their historical formulation" (Downing and Husband 2). It has become unmanageable and quite impossible to imagine a change in people's behavior, especially because race cannot be removed from the discipline of discourse. It is unreasonable and irrational to announce the need for change in people's attitudes, while discourse still uses race as a means to retain the social and political power, as well as classifying people based on their biological and social characteristics.

However, in "The Crisis of 'Race' and Raciology", Paul Gilroy argues that the position of race as a major factor in shaping power relations had become less clear since the world became governed by technology, consumerism, and mobility. He insists that, "the meaning of racial difference is itself being changed as the relationship between human beings and nature is reconstructed by the impact of the DNA revolution and the technological developments that have energized it" (Gilroy 15). Gilroy declares that there is a "crisis of race", and that it has created a perfect opportunity where everyone "must try to take possession of that profound transformation and somehow set it to work against the tainted logic that produced it" (Gilroy 15). Gilroy admits that "raciology has

saturated the discourses in which circulates" (Gilroy 12), but the demand for the extrication from racist abuse is "an especially urgent matter for those peoples who, like modern blacks in the period after transatlantic slavery, were assigned an inferior position in the enduring hierarchies that raciology creates." However, he continues to assert that:

> This opportunity is not theirs alone. There are very good reasons why it should be enthusiastically embraced by others whose antipathy to race-thinking can be defined, not so much by the way it has subordinated them, but because in endowing them with the alchemical magic of racial mastery, it has distorted and delimited their experiences and consciousness in other ways... they too have suffered something by being deprived of their individuality, their humanity, and thus alienated from species life. Black and white are bonded together by the mechanisms of "race" that estrange them from each other and amputate their common humanity (Gilroy 15)

Accordingly, the need to stand against raciology has become urgent for both the self and the other, for the black and the white, for the west and the "rest". They all suffer from this division based on race, each from its position. Gilroy has reiterated Frantz Fanon remarks to underpin his arguments about the ramifications of racism and enslavement: "The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation" (Quoted in, Gilroy, 2000, p. 15). Gilroy's deduction is that nothing good results from racism, and the yearning for nonracial humanism "might begin to take shape" (Gilroy 15). Therefore, people need to reserve a space for themselves within this transformation by engaging with differences in the worlds of mobility and immigration; he considers this to be the most effective countermeasure to neutralize this "poisonous ideology and… destructive practice" (Downing and Husband 1) as well as destroying the the virtual endemic, raciology.

This engagement of differences into the world of interaction has somehow reduced the circulation of stereotypical discourse and racial abuse, as the old hierarchies that differentiate between "high culture" and "low culture" are pushed into the dim and distant past thanks to the emergence of visual culture. Gilroy asserts that,

> The appearance of a rich visual culture... allows blackness to be beautiful also feeds a fundamental lack of confidence in the power of the body to hold the boundaries of racial difference in place. It creates anxiety about the older racial hierarchies that made that revolutionary idea of black beauty oxymoronic, just as it requires us to forget the political movement that made its acknowledgment imperative. It is as though these images of

nonwhite beauty, grace, and style somehow make the matter of "race" secondary (Gilroy 22)

One might feel pleased to see that racism has now become blurred with introduction of revolutionary technology and that "blackness" is no longer perceived as a sign of inferiority because as Gilmore indicates,"[b]lack bodies are now being seen—figured and imaged—differently" (Gilroy 23). However, this shift in representing the other does not necessarily mean a thorough change in Western mindsets, but it has helped to produce a better image within Western democracy and modernity. Moreover, Western audiences may still not welcome the idea of a dark skinned hero in a Hollywood movie. As an example, Christopher Rosen wrote an article for *The Huffington Post* two years ago, entitled "Hunger Games' Racist Tweets: Fans Upset Because Of Rue's Race", which was about audiences being bitterly disappointed at movie that cast black actors. Rosen wrote, "some fans of the blockbuster young adult trilogy by author Suzanne Collins were upset by the decision to cast an African-American actress as Rue, one of the supporting characters. Never mind that she's described as having "dark brown skin" in the original book" (Rosen). In fact, it is shocking to discover that racism is a problem in a so-called democratic society in 2012. People have expressed their disappointment in the form of racist Tweets sent directly to the twelve-year-old black girl who plays "Rue". These Tweets have been collated and published on the *Jezebel* website (Stewart). Some people felt that this "ruined" the movie: "why does rue has to be black not gonna lie kinda ruined the movie". Others accused the producer of making all the good characters black: "why did the producer make all the good characters black." Some refuse to watch it for one simple reason: "rue is black?? I'm not watching." While another person does not care for being called racist: "call me racist but when I found out Rue was black her death wasn't as sad." (Stewart)

These are only some examples of explicit racism in contemporary American society. In this regard, the possible change that Gilroy discussed is still questionable. The reason why Jamaicans bleach their skin color might now be seen as being based on common sense and could be justified. From the racist reaction against casting a black actor to play a character who was actually black in the original book, one might come to the conclusion that the Western mindset is still inherently governed by colonial legacies. In this regard, it is not surprising to notice the popularity of racially prejudiced discourses. These types of discourses are frequently found in comedy shows and films, especially those that respond to the colonial project. Additionally, comedy remains the outlet that "combines

perceived distress with clever extrication and ironic reversal that is shared with others" (Bowers 1). No one can deny the fact that comedy is a double-edged platform that might denounce or reinforce a stereotypical discourse using its dominant attribute of mockery in order to construct images of the other.

Moreover, the demand for integration, freedom, and equality from the black population also presents an issue because they should recognize their differences, by being proud of their skin color and by claiming their right to remain different. The right to be different is a claim that is sometimes also called for by Westerners. Amin Maalouf has sketched out a story of some of his French friends who reject the idea of globalization because they perceive this to be synonymous with Americanization. He explains that,

> In recent years in France, I've noticed some of my closest friends tending to speak of globalization as if it were a catastrophe. They are not as thrilled as they used to be at the idea of "the global village"; they are cool about the Internet and the latest advances in communication. This is because they now see globalisation as synonymous with Americanisation, and they wonder what future there will be for France in an increasingly standardised world, and what will become of France's language, culture, prestige, influence and way of life. They are vexed when a fast food store opens in their neighborhood, they inveigh against Hollywood, CNN, Disney and Microsoft, and comb the newspapers for anything resembling an Anglicism (Maalouf 61–62)

German, Italian, and even Soviet people adopt the same vision, especially following the end of the World War Two. Dell'Orto states in his *The Hidden Power of the American Dream*: "France, Germany, and Italy never believed America's professions that it was up to a different play" (Dell'Orto 20). They all consider Americanization as a modern form of American imperialism, and globalization as "nefarious project of U.S. hegemony, the devious attempt to win the world's consent to its own subordination through the shining little rewards of merchandise made in the U.S.A." (Dell'Orto 23). This modern form of overpowering the world has made turned the United States into "not only the first world power, it is the world" (Dell'Orto 23). In reaction, European critics believe that "outright resistance is the only way to prevent that every nation loses its own identity under Americanization. Resentment and resistance breed a form of anti-Americanism that grows side-by-side with the worldwide spread of American customs and products" (Dell'Orto 22).

Following the same principle, Amin Maalouf declares that if this is the reaction of the West then:

> It is all the easier to imagine the reaction of the various non-Western peoples whose every step, for many generations, has already been accompanied by a sense of defeat and self betrayal... their language now studied only by a handful of specialists, while they had to learn other people's languages if they wanted to survive and work and remain in contact with the rest of mankind. Whenever they speak with a Westerner it is always in his language, almost never on their own. There are millions of people south and east of the Mediterranean who can speak English, French, Spanish and Italian. How many Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards or Italians have thought it worthwhile to study Arabic or Turkish? (Maalouf 62)

Moreover, the coexistence of difference of races has been, from the onset, the aspiration of Frantz Fanon, as Bhabha states: "[t]he time has come to return to Fanon; as always, I believe, with a question: how can the human world live its difference; how can a human being live Other-wise?" (Bhabha 64). However, admitting racial difference or cultural difference might be perceived, on the one hand, as the prop for distinguishing west from east, or white from black, through instigating the project of multiculturalism believed to serve the political agenda of the West. On the other hand, however, cultural difference might rather create a subtle integration of minorities into the world of majorities with the perpetuation of the clash between "Culture and culture", since the world is inextricably made up of different cultures and races and it is impossible to gather humankind under one race/nation. In this sense, the question of "understanding" imposes itself as a "lost cause", as Terry Eagleton insists when he states that "I do not understand you by ceasing to be myself, since then there would be nobody to do the understanding" (Eagleton 49). In this regard, the West has failed to understand this difference between other cultures and other races, which means that its project of multiculturalism has failed as well. Eagleton avers, "[i]n one sense, to be sure, multiculturalism is simply a later ironic turn of the same history" (Eagleton 62).

Following the same line of thought, comedy discourse that echoes a colonial legacy is not innocent in the sense that it privileges the image of one culture over others. Difference dismantles this racist discourse as well as the colonial hegemony hidden behind the laughter that aims to imply that Western cultural superiority is the embodiment of "civilization". However, culture can never be discriminated against because it is a way of life that differentiates one's values, traditions, and beliefs from others.

Civilization, in this sense, can be assessed as another Western euphemism that strengthens the argument for binary oppositions. Civilization, thus, "played down national differences; whereas 'culture' highlighted them" (Eagleton 9). After all, the main distinctive feature of comedy that could be perceived as the privilege of humankind is, as Mikhail Bakhtin puts it, "the right to be 'other' in this world, the right not to make common cause with any single one of the existing categories that life makes available" (Bakhtin 159).

The Reaffirmation of Traditional Gender Attitudes

It is pointless to explore questions of identity and race without alluding to the gender issues that exist within the cultural context as well. The construction of gender occupies an important space and is an influential mechanism that reinforces the position of men and women in Western and Eastern media discourse. It is generally agreed today that men and women should have formal equal rights. However, one might questions whether this equality is actually present in the discursive productions of colonial discourse. The "women of color" movement has partially focused on questioning the representation of woman in such discourses; women of color struggle against being doubly victimized because of their race and color and are forced to challenge both racism and gender discrimination. Abena P. A. Busia has stated "Silencing Sycorax: On African Colonial Discourse and the Unvoiced Female" that,

> The question of the (re) presentation of black women in colonial discourse is problematic on many levels. The problematic, for the purpose of interpreting or decoding the master's text, arises from the place of black women as receptors of two paradigms of alienation and otherness within this dominant discourse: that of femaleness and that of blackness... the question of gender is much more submerged... when conducted in the language of the master (Busia 84)

Women from the "Third World" are essentially constructed in colonial discourse as victims of social barbarism, ignorance, and male-domination. One might think that this representation is nothing but a sympathetic expression from the West towards the trials and tribulations of women from the "Third World". However, gender depictions within colonial discourses have been manipulated to reinforce the superiority of the Western "Self" over the inferiority of the Eastern "Other". That is, the question of gender in colonial discourses lays bare the disparities between a rationalized West that offers respect to women and the freedom-

restricting East, where the female body is seen as a site of mere sexual excitement and recreation.

However, one might consider that the information given in colonial discourse about the situation of women functions as a form of truth telling. Many women agree that women from the "Third World", and especially Arab societies, are subject to sexual harassment and male violence, and they suffer the most within their society. Moreover, these sufferings have formed the foundations of the "feminist movement", which serves to fight against these types of discrimination. It is worthwhile to consider this movement when examining postcolonial discourses because,

> Both patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate. Hence the experience of women in patriarchy and those of colonized subjects can be paralleled in a number of respects, and both feminist and post-colonial politics oppose such dominance (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 102)

The feminist movement, in this sense, opposes the "social constructionism" of gender because, as Simone de Beauvoir states, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 273). That is, women are not born as women but are made women by the pressures and expectations of the patriarchy. In a patriarchal society, Beauvoir observes, men are considered independent, free, and essential subjects and, thus, men represent all that is positive about human creation, while women are considered dependent beings controlled by circumstances. Men can act in the world, change it, give it meaning, while women are only given meaning in relation to men. For Beauvoir, the word "woman" has the same implications as the word "other". A woman cannot be defined concretely or positively, but only as the indefinite side of "man". In a nutshell, in a patriarchal world woman are seen as man's "other"; she is only "*wo*" which has no meaning without "*man*" (wo/man), and she is only "*fe*" which has no meaning without "*male*" (fe/male).

These Western feminist inquiries into the Eastern patriarchal societies might be considered in one way or another truthful. However, this has contributed to the circulation of stereotypical assumptions in colonial discourses about the East, in general, and Eastern women, in particular. Moreover, Western feminists have posited the notion of binarism; Marnia Lazreg declares in "Feminism and Difference" that "the political attitudes of 'center' states are mirrored in feminist attitudes toward women from 'peripheral' states" (Lazreg 88). That is, women on the "periphery" also need also achieve the freedom and liberty that the West offers. However,

in Western discourse, such an achievement is viewed as unlikely in societies where women are considered the weakest link. In the same vein, Lazreg states, "Arab women are represented as being so different that they are deemed unable to understand or develop any form of feminism. When Arab women speak for themselves, they are accused of being 'pawns of Arab men'" (Lazreg 88). These accusations and the degradation of non-Western women within Western discourse serve to indicate that the women's movement is only applicable to the "First World."

Furthermore, the issues surrounding "writing women" from Third World societies are uppermost in Western minds. However, the task of writing and representing women is not that easy, owing to the fact sources of information within the Oriental space are limited because Westerners are unable to penetrate this private sphere. Thus, the use of imagined images creates the foundation of colonial discourses and this, of course, reinforces the stereotyped representations of natives. Moreover, this imaginary discourse is essentially based on the pre-existing images of Oriental women that have been widely disseminated in works such as *The Arabian Nights*. This process of "rewriting identity" in Western discourse is a part of their desire to, as Homi Bhabha states, "emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry—through a process of writing and repetition" (Bhabha 88). This repetition is an attempt to give authority to these representations, and to create the impression that these images of Oriental women are both real and familiar. In contrast, Clifford Geertz argues that Western imaginations both "reveal and reproduce the emotional and political disenfranchisement of women, through the manipulative strategies of capital, as well as through oppressive representations of dominated women" (Berlant 346). In this regard, providing knowledge about the "other" is not meant to increase understanding because, as Foucault states, "knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" (M. Foucault 88). Foucault statement's examines the question of knowledge in relation to power and he reveals that no knowledge is produced without a connection to authority.

With this in mind, the images of Arabs have been predetermined in the Western media industry. In "100 Years of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim stereotyping", Mazin B. Qumsiyeh confirms that, "Hollywood has had a consistent record of Arab stereotyping and bashing" (Qumsiyeh). That is, Arabs are fixed in a consistent image that is repeatedly circulated in Western minds because "Arabs in TV and movies are portrayed as either bombers, belly dancers, or billionaires" (Qumsiyeh). Therefore, Arab men have no other image in the West than that which echoes barbarism and

terrorism, while women are stereotyped as sexual and domestic, whose primary function is the production of desire. These images were also circulated, though it may seem strange, in the pre-colonial era. Qumsiyeh presents an example of how Arab women are represented in a short 1897 film made by Thomas Edison where they appear as characters "with enticing clothes [and] dance to seduce a male audience" (Qumsiyeh). In the same vein, Jack Shaheen presents in "Reel Bad Arabs" scenes that confirm these stagnant images in the Western media; for example: "David visits the Bedouin, Abou ibn Kader (Topol). Inside the Arab's tent, some musicians accompany an attractive belly dancer. Abou grabs handfuls of foodstuffs, forcing the reluctant David to digest edibles. Abou slaps the dancer, hard, then dispatches her and the musicians" (Shaheen 127). In another scene from a different film: "At a bar, a lovely Arab dancer performs. One legionnaire places a key into a slingshot and fires, striking the dancer's navel and injuring her. No one cares" (Shaheen 140). In addition, there is this scene: "The men come across an Arab wedding ceremony, complete with Arab food, music, and dancing. Cohen dances with a young Palestinian woman" (Shaheen 146). He also states that, "[t]he camera displays a souk, cave, mosque, and coffee shop. Inside Ahad's palace, belly dancers perform" (Shaheen 162). For Shaheen, these representations of Arabs are unjustifiable because they are negative repetitions. He states, "I am not saying an Arab should never be portrayed as the villain. What I am saying is that almost *all* Hollywood depictions of Arabs are bad ones. This is a grave injustice. Repetitious and negative images of the reel Arab literally sustain adverse portraits across generations" (Shaheen 11). Shaheen assertion concurs with Bhabha's erstwhile comment that insists that colonial discourse emerges "through a process of writing and repetition" (Bhabha 88).

However, Hollywood discourse has succeeded in redirecting the meaning of terrorism from "killing and using violence against innocent people" to a concept that is explicitly associated with Arabs. That is, the act of killing in a movie, and even in reality, could be seen as an act of "saving the world" when conducted by a westerner, but when Arabs do it, it is considered to be "terrorism". When the U.S. president declared the war against "terror", even a child of 10 years old would understand that this war was directed towards Arab or Muslim people. Shaheen reveals that, "Arabs trying to rape, kill, or abduct fair-complexioned Western heroines is a common theme, dominating scenarios from *Captured by Bedouins* (1912), to *The Pelican Brief* (1993)" (Shaheen 6). In the same manner, women in Arab societies are constantly and frequently portrayed as victims of male violence, the patriarchy, and/or Islam; they are depicted

as being hidden within society but sexually available. Malek Alloula states: "the odalisque is the very symbol of the harem, its highest expression. She fills it with a presence that is at once mysterious and luminous. She is its hidden, yet available, core, always throbbing with restrained sensuality" (Alloula 74). While, Western women are rated as free, educated, independent and civilized. Shaheen has advocated that the world should be understood with reason because, for him,

> All groups contain some Attila-the-Hun types; some Israelis and Latinos are militant zealots; some Irishmen and Arabs are terrorists; some Italians and Indonesians are gangsters; some Asians and Africans are rapists; and some Americans and Englishmen are child-abusers. Every group has among its members a minority of a minority committing heinous acts (Shaheen 11)

Moreover, the aforementioned feminist's claims indicate the situation of women in the West; that is, women of the "First World" have been, and still are, the victims of patriarchy. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, has criticized French women for their own subjugation and some women adopt the French saying "*sois belle et tais-toi*" ("they always want to be beautiful in the eyes of men"). Beauvoir says, "[i]f woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change" (de Beauvoir 18). Beauvoir believes that the reason for this failure is because,

> Women lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own... They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men (de Beauvoir 18)

In this sense, the situation of Western women is indistinguishable from that of women from the "Third World". However, women from the West are *still* viewed as different from men and are merely seen as a body in movies and broadcasts. Woman in the West, like the East, are subjects of men's jokes and they are treated with denigration and contempt. In "The Joke on Us", Susan Carlson announced that there are "differences between male and female generated humor" (Carlson 574–575). Some other people magnify this issue when they see "feminists and comics as natural enemies, since stereotypically speaking, feminists can't take a joke and comedians can't take criticism" (Pozner). This debate over comedic anecdotes demonstrates how much power the world of comedy holds. If this is the case in the West, then resistance undertaken by postcolonial

women can be seen as a common sense approach and this is even more reasonable when jokes contribute to racist abuse.

Comedy provides a forum where racist abuse can be produced freely and directly. That is, in other forms of discourse—such as, documentary films, drama or action movies—one might express his or her resentment at the presentation of racist abuse; while, in comedy discourse, most people, if not all, may consider this racist abuse merely as an entertaining performance. The image of Eastern women in comedy shows is created in accordance with certain signs that distinguish women from the East and those from other parts of the world. As an example, the appearance of Muslim women has frequently been discussed in western discourse and this obsession is a repetitive and archaic notion that is created by the Western imagination. Moreover, the dress of women in colonial discourse has essentially linked sexuality and fetishism; for example, depicting Arab men as oil tycoons brings with it images of women as concubines, odalisques, or belly dancers. Depicting a Muslim man as a terrorist is associated with the concept of "sexual Jihad" on earth and the promised 72 virgins in paradise. The image of the veiled Arab woman is stigmatized in the West as a sexual object and subject to men. This insistence of affixing an image to a specific human race has become "the conditionality of the colonial discourse" (Bhabha 114). This conditionality contributes to the construction of discriminatory knowledge that has come to be recognized as a "common knowledge" in the Western memory.

However, some people can perceive these signs and symbols differently: some understand that the veil worn by Muslim women is not a sign of imprisonment and is, instead, a sign of resistance to the male gaze. Billie Melman states,

> The veil is divested of its sexual, erotic meanings and is associated with privacy, autonomy and the inviolability of the female body. In the big cities veiling protects females from harassment…The veil no longer symbolises *subjection* and sexuality but autonomy or, freedom from sexual exploitation (Melman 121)

In addition, the veil does not merely provide security from sexual harassment and exploitation, but it is also matter of identity. In *Media Gender and Identity*, Gauntlett insists that, "any aspects of the physical body can be relevant to self-identity: for example, whether one is seen as overweight or underweight, tall or short, hairy or shaven or bald, or wearing spectacles, unusual clothes, or piercings" (Gauntlett 15). Amin