Shalom alikoum! Challenging the Conflictual Model of Jewish-Muslim Relations in France through Stand-up Comedy

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Introduction

Younes and Bambi are a young Jewish-Muslim stand-up comedy duo of Maghribi heritage who began playing in comedy clubs in France in 2012. The two comedians, who often greet their audiences by shouting, 'Shalom alikoum',[1] have gradually gained a degree of prominence in France through televised performances on Canal+'s *Jamel Comedy Club* and the comedy festival *Marrakech du rire* ['Marrakesh of Laughter'], both initiated by the French-Moroccan comedian Jamel Debbouze, thus concretely underscoring the Maghribi genealogy of their comedy. Indeed, Younes and Bambi are not the first Maghribi Jewish-Muslim comic duo in France. Throughout the 2000s, multiple collaborations between celebrated French-Moroccan comedians Jamel Debbouze and Gad Elmaleh provoked audiences to think about Maghribi self-identification, banlieue life, racism, cultural clashes, and hybridity. In addition, an earlier antecedent to Younes and Bambi can be identified a decade earlier in the French stand-up duo Élie and Dieudonné. From 1990 to 1997, Élie Semoun (of Moroccan Jewish heritage) and Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala (of Breton and Cameroonian heritage) enjoyed commercial success toying with issues of racism and

[1] 'Shalom alikoum' combines the Hebrew greeting *Shalom aleichem* with the Arabic *As-salamu alaykum*, both meaning 'peace be upon you'.

antisemitism on stage.[2] While some aspects of Younes and Bambi's work may be reminiscent of Debbouze and Elmaleh (or Élie and Dieudonné), unlike them, the younger Franco-Maghribi comedians display a more sustained focus on relations and interactions between Jews and Muslims as ethnic categories. At a time when the categories of 'Jews' and 'Muslims' are increasingly thought of as inherently mutually exclusive and conflictual, the duos' focus on the question of Jewish-Muslim relations is unlikely to be a coincidence. Rather, it can be read as a corrective.

Especially since the 1960s and 1970s, the immigration of Muslims from North and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as their supposed lack of integration into French society, has provoked much debate in French politics and media. Such continued debates take place in the inflamed contemporary context of anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish discourse and acts of violence, bombings and terrorist attacks, sometimes related to Middle Eastern conflicts; the growing electoral success of the far-right political party Front National; and a series of legislations and rulings on (both legal and illegal) immigration, racial discrimination, and the public display of religious symbols mostly affecting Muslim women who veil. During the same period, relations between Jews and Muslims in France have been increasingly depicted in binary and conflictual terms. Historians Maud Mandel (2014: 80–124) and Ethan Katz (2015: 242–78) have carefully charted how, over several decades in the mid-twentieth century, Jewish and Muslim activists and communal leaders as well as, more importantly, French authorities and media professionals blurred the lines between domestic Jewish-Muslim interactions and international conflicts, encouraging North African Jews and Muslims to identify with Israel and Palestine, respectively. Conflict increasingly became the primary framework for understanding Jewish-Muslim relations, especially in the wake

[2] In the early 2000s, however, Dieudonné's comedy veered towards overt antisemitism. In December 2003, on the TV show *On ne peut pas plaire à tout le monde* ['You Can't Please Everyone'] Dieudonné performed a sketch dressed as an orthodox Jewish Israeli settler. Dieudonné's character invites the audience to join the 'American-Zionist axis' and ends the sketch with a Nazi salute, while shouting 'Isra-heil'. Since then, Dieudonné has frequented far-right figures, such as Jean-Marie Le Pen and Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson. Dieudonné has also become known for the *quenelle*, a gesture that involves keeping one arm down by the side of the body and the other touching the shoulder. Originally performed as a visual demonstration of symbolic sodomization – the gesture was first performed to these words: 'il va nous la foutre jusque-là' ['he's gonna fuck us right up the ass'] – in a sketch in 2005, Dieudonné's *quenelle* has, at least since 2013, been widely interpreted as a reverse Nazi salute. See Altglas (2012) and Jikeli (2015) for an assessment of Dieudonné's antisemitism.

of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. This 'narrative of polarization' (Mandel, 2014: 7) obscures a more nuanced history and on-the-ground reality of interactions between Jews and Muslims in France. In the course of my research on representations of Jewish-Muslim relations in contemporary France, I have found that this narrative of polarization, which consists of constructing Jews and Muslims as homogenous and exclusive communities with tense and conflictual relations, still wields considerable influence in news reporting on Jewish-Muslim relations in France in the contemporary period. Younes and Bambi's comedy is situated within and, in part, responds to this polarized socio-political context.

Stand-up comedy about race or ethnic/ethno-religious identification often plays on and with stereotypes. However, when does highlighting stereotypes become a way of challenging these very stereotypes, and when does it become an endorsement of them? How do comedians rely on essentialized representations, while highlighting the constructed nature of such representations, if this is indeed their intention? How do they 'reuse stereotypes' (Rosello, 1998: 9) without merely repeating and reinforcing them, bearing in mind that the survival and longevity of stereotypes are premised on repetition and 'iterativity' (Rosello, 1998: 37)? These are the driving questions of this chapter. Whether or not a comedian challenges these stereotypes is largely dependent on two factors. First, the intentions, performative style, and content of the performance: following Rosello, it is crucial that the comedian is aware of the iterativity of stereotypes and seeks not to merely critique them, but to 'decline' them, that is, to interrogate and undermine the very structure of the stereotypes in question. Second, the audience's social experience of stereotypes, as well as their familiarity with the comedian. In other words, whether or not stereotypes are challenged in stand-up comedy depends on both the comedian and the context in which they are performing, that is, audience reception. While research on audience reception is clearly important, this chapter focuses on the first factor: how Younes and Bambi encode their message for their audience, in such a way that stereotypes are 'reused' and 'declined'. My exclusive focus on the content of their stand-up comedy is justified because this chapter represents the first academic appraisal of Younes and Bambi's work. Further research might place content analysis in relation to reception analysis.

Analysing YouTube clips of stand-up shows by Younes and Bambi,[3] this chapter examines the extent to which Younes and Bambi's stand-up comedy

[3] These include clips from seasons 7 (2014), 8 (2015), and 9 (2016) of the *Jamel Comedy Club* (JCC), the comic duo's 2015 appearance on the Canal+ TV show *Le Before du Grand Journal*, and the international comedy festival *Marrakech du rire* (televised by M6) in 2016.

allows them to 'decline' widely held stereotypes of Jews and Muslims in France *as well as* of Jewish-Muslim relations. I argue that Younes and Bambi's stand-up routine echoes American comedian Jerry Seinfeld's understanding of stand-up as dialogue and not monologue (Borns, 1987: 16).[4] Through their comedy sketches, Younes and Bambi put forward their ideal model of Jewish-Muslim relations, namely one of collaboration, *complicité*, empathy, humour, and, most importantly, dialogue. The comedians subtly draw upon a nuanced history of Maghribi Jewish and Muslim interactions in postcolonial France and, for the duration of their sets, construct a convivial socio-cultural space based on shared histories, religious affinities, and marginality, expressed through North African Jewishness and Muslimness. In this intimate setting, Younes and Bambi identify, exaggerate, and attempt to decline various (negative) stereotypes about Jews and Muslims and their intergroup relations in a way that potentially invites their audiences to reimagine contemporary Jewish-Muslim interactions beyond the conflictual model that dominates discussions in contemporary French political and media discourse.

Muslims and Arabs: A Note on Terminology

Younes and Bambi subtitle their stand-up comedy routine 'l'arabe et le juif' ['the Arab and the Jew']. The comedians, however, use the terms 'arabe' ['Arab'] and 'musulman' ['Muslim'] in an interchangeable manner. While the term 'Muslim' properly refers to a follower of Islam, it extends beyond the purely religious in contemporary France. Politicians, media professionals, and the public often have a specific group of individuals in mind when they use the term 'Muslim'. In general, they are referring to North African 'Arabs' and not, for example, South and Central Asian Muslims, 'black' Muslims, or 'white' Muslims from countries like Albania, or 'white' French-European converts.

[4] While stand-up comedy can sometimes seem to be a monologue, Jerry Seinfeld argues, 'Comedy is a dialogue, not a monologue – that's what makes an act click. The laughter becomes the audience's part, and the comedian responds; it's give and take. When the comic ad-libs or deals with a heckler, it gets an explosive response because it's like, "Hey, this is happening now! This isn't just some preplanned act." So whatever lends itself to that feeling is what makes comedy work – that live feeling. That's why comics ask, "Where are you from?" It brings a present moment to the show' (cited in Borns, 1987: 16). In the case of Younes and Bambi, the dialogic nature of stand-up comedy is even more pronounced due to the fact that their entire show is premised on conversations between the two comedians as well as with the audience.

Thus, the interplay between 'arabe' and 'musulman' in Younes and Bambi's stand-up comedy reflects the racialization of Muslimness in France. Racialization is 'the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group' (Omi and Winant, 1994 [1986]: 64). When religion is racialized, then, it is perceived as an innate trait or linked to a specific ethnicity or 'race'. In France, Islam and Muslims are racialized and associated with a particular ethno-national group. In such contexts, Islam and being Muslim almost cease being purely religious and become associated with phenotype, culture, and heredity. Research on the racialization of Islam and Muslims in Europe and North America suggests that the religion and its followers are racialized as being generally and abstractly non-'white' and 'foreign' (Davidson, 2012; Meer, 2012; Moosavi, 2014; Galonnier, 2015). This is even the case when the Muslims in question are 'white' and natives. White French Muslim women who wear the hijab encounter racial slurs and are told to return to their country of origin, demonstrating both how Islam has been racialized as 'Arab', which in turn mostly refers to 'North Africans', and how the hijab in particular is a powerful gendered marker of racialized difference (Galonnier, 2015).

A Short History of Stand-up Comedy in France

There exists a distinction between 'one-man/woman show[s]' and 'stand-up', which is a newer category in France used by 'the younger generation of comics of North and sub-Saharan African origins' (Vigouroux, 2015: 244). The longer-established category of one-man/woman shows generally consisted of impersonations and sketches, and these were less interactional than contemporary stand-up routines, where comedians give the perception of speaking *to* and *with* the audience in a seemingly extemporaneous manner. There were, of course, exceptions; Pierre Desproges, who incarnated the character of an angry intellectual ranting about life and death, politics, and racism in the 1980s, certainly falls within the framework of extemporaneous, interactional stand-up comedy. In general, however, Desproges was an exception to French one-man/woman shows.

Moreover, there is a fundamental difference in the way ethnicity has been represented in older one-man/woman shows versus newer stand-up performances. First, in France, one-man/-woman show comics were largely white and of Christian heritage (an important exception is Smaïn, a French comedian of Algerian descent who gained popularity in the 1980s and possibly represents the transition from one-man/woman shows to stand-up comedy), while contemporary stand-up is highly diverse and, in fact, mainly non-white. Second, the older generation of one-man/woman show comics tended to

caricaturize ethnic minorities in problematic and racist ways.[5] Consider, for example, comedian Pierre Péchin's imitations of Maghribis in his 1975 sketches *S'il vô plait !* ['Please!'] and *La Cèggal è la foôrmi* ['The Grasshopper and the Ant'], and actor-comedian Michel Leeb's imitations of Africans, for example in his 1980 sketch *L'Épicier africain* ['The African Grocer']. In both cases, the punch line is simply the foreignness and intellectual inferiority of Maghribis and Africans and their 'funny'-sounding, unintelligent accents. This is not to say that all one-man/woman shows represented ethnic minorities in a racist manner. Sophie Daumier and Guy Bedos's 1975 sketch *Les Vacances à Marrakech* ['Holiday in Marrakesh'] ridicules the quotidian anti-Maghribi racism in French society. Yet, here again, such sketches represent the exception to the rule.

In this context, Vigouroux argues that the stand-up comedy of French comedians of Maghribi or sub-Saharan heritage, which emerged in the mid-2000s, represents a way for minority ethnic performers to collectively claim 'a new space of visibility and hearability' (244). Stand-up comedy in France only begins (as something identifiable as *stand-up*) in the mid-2000s, and was notably popularized by the *Comic Street Show*, the first televised stand-up show in France, followed by Jamel Debbouze and his *Jamel Comedy Club*, featuring a number of promising young comedians of immigrant background, which was broadcast on the French television channel Canal+ beginning in 2006.[6] Stand-up increasingly became a way for minority performers to claim a visible space to challenge external, stereotypical, negative representations, and to project more diverse and positive self-representations.[7] One of the factors accounting for the emergence of stand-up *qua* stand-up as a minority performance genre in the 2000s is the fact that French theatre and television in the 1990s were overwhelmingly white. With theatre and television excluding minorities – and minorities

[5] This is not to assume that contemporary non-white French comedians are never themselves guilty of racism in their performances. Dieudonné's unambiguous antisemitism is the most prominent example, but there are also other examples of ethnic minority comedians invoking racist stereotypes to laugh *against* and not *with*, including Sephardi comedians Gad Elmaleh and Kev Adams's 2016 'les chinois' ['the Chinese'] sketch that invoked a number of racist East Asian stereotypes and involved 'yellowface'.

[6] See Ervine (2019) for a more detailed discussion of the origins of the Jamel Comedy Club.

[7] See Quemener (2013) for an analysis of how ethnic minority comedians in France, from Smaïn in the 1980s to Jamel Debbouze in the late 1990s and 2000s, have used humour to combat dominant negative stereotypes.

more often than not appearing in the evening news as rioters and criminals – stand-up, explicitly differentiated from the older one-man/woman shows by its minority performers, became a way for ethnic minority performers to assert a more nuanced and positive image, drawing on (African- and Jewish-) American comedians, such as Eddie Murphy and Jerry Seinfeld.

Narrative Structure: Dialogue, Conflict, and Resolution

In general, Younes and Bambi sketches share a common structure. The two comedians are usually introduced by a compère and then enter to generic hip-hop or RnB music. They then energetically greet the audience (for example, 'ça va le comedy club ou quoi?!' ['Comedy Club, how's it hanging?!']. They proceed to introduce themselves stating 'on s'appelle Younes et Bambi – un arabe et un juif' ['we're Younes and Bambi – an Arab and a Jew'], thereby explicitly reminding their audience of their ethnically marked stand-up comedy. They take care to clearly enunciate each syllable in 'un arabe et un juif', emphasizing to their audience the remarkable and unlikely nature of the duo. The emphasis placed on them being 'un arabe et un juif' also breaks the taboo of ethnic self-identification in the context of French republican universalism as the dominant political ideology. The order of the next two segments is interchangeable. The comedians might immediately tell their first joke, which is usually directed at a particular member of the audience. Alternatively, Younes might ask if there are any Moroccans, Algerians, and Tunisians in the audience. This is always greeted by loud cheers and applause. Bambi will then follow up by asking if there are any Jews in the audience. At most, only a handful will make themselves heard. The comedians will then proceed to make a joke about this, which will allow them to launch into other material about Jews and Muslims.

At this point, the comedians intentionally perform a point of contention that arises between them. This usually occurs around the topic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The conflict between the two comedians then intensifies to the point where it is no longer focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but just general assumed tensions within the Jewish-Muslim binary.[8] The conflict between Younes and Bambi is always resolved by the end of the sketch, either by a final joke that highlights the duo's friendship followed by a declaration such as 'on n'a pas du tout la même religion, mais on a la même passion' ['we don't share the same religion, but we have the same passion'] or by the intervention of a third party, such as Jamel who, during the duo's

[8] See Wieviorka (2005) and Hecker (2012) for an analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a language for the voicing of domestic discontent.

sketch at the *Marrakech du rire* festival in 2016, forces Younes and Bambi to embrace or face not being paid. Thus, by going from conflict to resolution where everyone is encouraged to laugh at themselves and with one another, Younes and Bambi's sketches provide a cathartic release for their mixed audiences who may encounter conflictual, oppositional representations of Jewish-Muslim relations in popular cultural, media, and political discourse.

Antisemitism and Islamophobia

Younes and Bambi highlight physical and behavioural Jewish and Arab-Muslim stereotypes to deconstruct both anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim racism through repetition and exaggeration, while promoting a sense of shared Franco-Judeo-Muslimness. The antisemitic stereotypes most commonly invoked in their sketches are a combination of physical features (long noses), behavioural traits (greed and miserly behaviour), professions (the stereotype of the Jewish lawyer), and broader generalizations of Jews as an influential people (controlling media and politics). The anti-Arab/Muslim stereotypes mostly relate to low educational attainment, accented language, *communautarisme*,[9] and terrorism. Unlike comedians like Michel Leeb and Pierre Péchin, who invoke stereotypes to ridicule individuals and groups of individuals, Younes and Bambi draw on a set of Jewish and Muslim stereotypes in order to ridicule, and thus challenge, the stereotypes themselves. In essence, by using these stereotypes, they are not laughing at those targeted by stereotypes, but laughing *with* them at the process of stereotyping, those who stereotype, and the stereotypes themselves.

Laughing-*with* can be achieved by having the comedian who might be ethnoreligiously associated with the stereotype embody an exaggerated version of that stereotype. For example, Bambi often pretends to be wealthy (even though his character also implies being from the same socio-economic background as Younes). In one sketch, after Younes accuses Bambi of acting as if he owns the theatre they are playing in, Bambi insinuates that he could buy the theatre if he wanted:

Younes: Tu crois que c'est le théâtre de ton père ?

[9] *Communautarisme* is a normative term used, often pejoratively, in France to refer to the making of political claims in the name of ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual minority groups that are considered to not be fully integrated into the nation. It can be translated as communalism or factionalism and refers to individuals and groups perceived to be acting in the interest of their particular communities over that of the national community.

> Bambi: Hé, ho ! Déjà, c'est pas le théâtre *de* mon père. Enfin, pour le moment hein…[10]

Representations of this variant of economic antisemitism (assuming all Jews to be rich) abound in their stand-up routine. In another sketch, Bambi 'reveals' the 'truth' behind the practice of placing notes in the Western Wall:

> Younes: C'est quoi les petits mots que vous mettez dans le mur?
> Bambi: C'est pas des mots, c'est des notes de frais – enfin non! C'est des vœux qu'on met à l'intérieur.[11]

In this way, the sketch places money (instead of, for instance, religious practice and the worship of God) at the centre of Judaism. Similarly, when Younes asks why French actor Danny Boon was able to convert to Judaism relatively quickly (Bambi earlier cited seven years as the length of time required for conversion), Bambi's reply highlights the actor's income:

> Younes: Ah bon, tu peux m'expliquer pourquoi Danny Boon il n'a mis que deux ans à se convertir?
> Bambi: Mais ça n'a rien à voir… Danny Boon, il a pratiqué la religion très vite. Il a lu beaucoup de livres sur la torah. Il a gagné 27 millions en 2008. [Audience laughs] Donc ça n'a rien à voir, monsieur.
> Younes: L'argent, l'argent. Money, money, money. [Mimes holding money.][12]

If the large nose remains the most prevalent physical Jewish stereotype, the most common character trait attributed to Jews throughout the centuries, especially in the West because money-lending was one of the few professions Jews were allowed to practise (as medieval laws prohibited Catholics from lending for profit), relates to money, greed, and avarice. Perhaps, the most enduring depiction of the moneyed, avaricious, and miserly Jew is the character of Shylock in William Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.[13] This

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[10] 'Younes: Do you think this is your dad's theatre?
Bambi: Hey! First, this isn't *my* dad's theatre. Well, for the time being…'

[11] 'Younes: What are those little notes that you guys put into the wall?
Bambi: They aren't notes… They are expense claims – well, no! They're wishes that we put inside [the wall]'.

[12] 'Younes: Oh really, can you explain to me why it only took Danny Boon two years to convert?
Bambi: Well, that's different… Danny Boon, he started practicing really quickly. He read lots of books on the Torah. He earned 27 million in 2008. [Audience laughs] So it's not the same, sir.
Younes: Money, money. Money, money, money. [Mimes holding money.]'

[13] See Anidjar (2003: 101–12) for a discussion of Shakespeare's *Merchant of*

stereotype still holds sway in contemporary popular representations of Jews, from the French trilogy of films *La Vérité si je mens* ['Would I Lie to You?'] (1997–2012) – in which, as Joseph McGonagle (2017: 171–72) notes, religion gives way to 'the worship of money' in a 'facile and cliché-ridden' depiction of Jewishness – to a recent street celebration in Belgium (March 2019) that featured a float of giant puppets of Orthodox Jews with large, hooked noses sitting atop bags of money. The association of Jews with money is not anodyne. The combination of Jewish greed for money and power (and the fear that Jews are everywhere and control the world) is a major component of modern and contemporary antisemitism.

Unlike comedian Dieudonné who perpetuates these physical and behavioural stereotypes, Younes and Bambi, like Desproges before them, perform these stereotypes ironically and thus help break them down. For example, while Bambi's character occasionally pretends to be wealthy, he also emphasizes that he grew up with Arabs – 'j'ai grandi avec des Arabes' – and suggests that he shares a similar socio-economic background to Younes. Thus, when Bambi performs the stereotype of the moneyed, miserly Jew, he is doing so ironically. Moreover, the format of a duo allows Younes and Bambi to trade and contrast stereotypes of Jews and Arab-Muslims. It is important to note that they do not overtly reject stereotypes and replace them with accounts that are more factual. Rather, as in Rosello's model of declining the stereotype, they 'refuse to replace the stereotype with a discourse of truth and prefer to push stereotypes around on the social chess board as if they were manipulating delicate symbolic weapons' (1998: 64). For example, when Younes jokes that Bambi is jealous because 'vous, les Juifs, vous avez pas l'option "partager" sur Facebook' ['you Jews don't have the "share" button on Facebook'], Bambi responds that it is, in fact, Younes who is jealous because 'dans vos iPhones, ils vous ont coupé le mode avion depuis 11 septembre' ['since 9/11, they have removed the airplane mode from your iPhones']. By trading insulting, generalizing stereotypes (the Jewish miser and the Muslim terrorist) in such a flippant and friendly manner – each insult is met with faux outrage from the comedians and laughter from the audience – Younes and Bambi neutralize the divisive power of these stereotypes, transforming them instead into elements of social bonding. In this way, the comedians are engaged in a 'conscious cultural reappropriation of ethnic stereotypes' (Rosello, 1998: 18–19).

Younes and Bambi's performance of stereotypes as a form of in-group banter that solidifies the bond between them (and by extension their

Venice in relation to his *Moor of Venice* in terms of the relational representation of Christianity's 'theological enemy' (Jews) and 'political enemy' (Muslims) through a set of stereotypes that have come to constitute these categories.

perceived ethnoreligious communities) depends on two elements: first, the at times dialogic, at times contrapuntal nature of their performance; and, second, the framing of their interactions as amicable. The duo frequently begin and end their sketches by saying 'on s'appelle Younes et Bambi' ['we are Younes et Bambi']. The use of the collective, neutral, and indefinite pronoun 'on', rather than two separate 'je' pronouns, performs a double collective identity that reflects the often contrapuntal nature of their performance, in which their independent *and* interdependent voices intertwine harmoniously. In addition, the very greeting 'Shalom alikoum' blends the Hebrew *Shalom aleichem* with the Arabic *As-salamu alaykum* to form a conjoined neologism representing an imagined future language of Hebrew-Arabic, Jewish-Muslim dialogue. Younes and Bambi suggest that, within this hybrid language of dialogue, the Jewishness or the Muslimness of its speakers would be difficult to determine.

However, they do not appear to wish to 'melt' Jewish or Muslim specificities away in a universalistic, republican *creuset.* After all, every time they begin their sketches with the words 'on s'appelle Younes et Bambi', they add 'un arabe et un juif'. The stand-up comedy hinges on the fact that they are Younes and Bambi, *l'arabe et le juif.* At the same time, however, they often play with the audience's perception of who is the Jew and who is the Arab:

> Younes: Bonsoir, messieurs, dames, on s'appelle Younes et Bambi.
> Bambi: Un juif [places hand on Younes's chest] et un arabe [places hand on own chest].[14]

In this way, their goal is neither to pit Jews against Muslims nor even to unite Jews and Muslims *qua* Jews and Muslims – that is, as a function of their ethnoreligious difference. Rather, the comedians suggest, like Yulia Egorova's study of Jews and Muslims in South Asia, that 'Muslims have always already been Jewish in the European imagination, while Jews have always already been Muslim' (2018: 168). While there are differences between the figure of the 'Jew' and the 'Muslim' throughout European history, their significant similarities allow for a conceptual rapprochement between the terms:

> Judaism and Islam share a similar fate in certain ways. First, they are both religions with, moreover, a troubled relationship to Christianity. Second, they were thrown together in the Enlightenment. Third, they are both part of the history of what Edward Said calls 'Orientalism'. These three

[14] 'Younes: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We are Younes and Bambi. Bambi: A Jew [places hand on Younes's chest] and an Arab [places hand on own chest]'.

> ways overlap and between them give rise to a number of affinities between antisemitism and Islamophobia. (Klug, 2014: 452)

Younes and Bambi highlight these 'affinities between antisemitism and Islamophobia' in two main ways. One, by switching between Jewish and Muslim identities (for example, in JCC 8). Two, by highlighting similarities between the traumatic historical events such as the Holocaust and the Paris massacre of 1961 (in JCC 9), ordered by Maurice Papon who was also responsible for the deportation of Jews during World War II. The comedians thus embrace a 'multidirectional' – and not a competitive – model of memory that recognizes 'the productive interplay of disparate acts of remembrance' (Rothberg, 2009: 309). In doing so, the comedians emphasize the liminal position shared by Jews and Muslims in modern and contemporary France, despite the fact that the former were separated from their Muslim counterparts in either politico-legal terms in Algeria (Crémieux Decree) or socio-cultural terms in Morocco and Tunisia (greater access to European acculturation via the protégé system or the efforts of the Alliance Israélite Universelle) by virtue of their Jewishness.

Le Vivre-ensemble and Conviviality

In Season 9 of the *Jamel Comedy Club*, the comedians begin their set as per usual by greeting their audience and stating their names. Younes declares that he is sure the audience must be wondering which comedian is Arab and which is Jewish. He clarifies that he is 'l'arabe'. Bambi then addresses the audience: 'Et très logiquement, messieurs, dames, vous aurez compris que si c'est lui l'arabe, eh bien c'est moi… le coproducteur du spectacle!'[15] As in an earlier sketch, when Bambi wrongly identifies Younes as the Jew and himself as the Arab, the comedians decentre assumptions of ethnoreligious identifications right from the beginning of their performance. This challenging of the centrality of their Jewishness and Muslimness – even as they perform stereotypes of Jewishness and Muslimness – is reflected in their self-description on their YouTube page: 'Bienvenue sur notre chaîne ! Le chauve c'est Younes, le bouclé, c'est Bambi… voilà les présentations sont faites'.[16]

Subsequently in their JCC 9 performance, Bambi declares that they are not just comedians, but rather 'nous sommes le vivre-ensemble' ['we are the

[15] 'And very logically, ladies and gentlemen, as you can well imagine, if he is the Arab, then I must be… the co-producer of the show!'

[16] 'Welcome to our channel. The bald one's Younes and the curly-haired one's Bambi… there you go, we've been properly introduced'.

vivre-ensemble'], at which point a song begins to play and the pair dance in coordination with each other:

> [Song lyrics] *Nous sommes le vivre-ensemble, l'amour est la seule loi, nous sommes le vivre-ensemble, c'est nous, c'est toi, c'est moi.*
> Bambi: Applaudissez le vivre-ensemble, messieurs, dames![17]

Following the song and dance routine, Younes and Bambi remark that they are heartened to perform in front of a diverse audience. Younes begins listing the different groups of people in the audience, while Bambi finishes his sentences:

> Younes: Il y a des Maghrébins…
> Bambi: …musulmans.
> Younes: Il y a des Français…
> Bambi: …musulmans.
> Younes: Il y a des gays…
> Bambi: …musulmans.
> [Younes looks horrified.][18]

The humour in this segment is derived from both the notion that the audience is not as diverse as it appears and from Younes's visceral reaction to the idea that there could be gay Muslims, which provokes Bambi to ask him if he has a problem with gay people. Younes considers this insinuation to be preposterous since he has gay friends, gay colleagues, and *des Portu-gays*. Younes's reply (especially with the addition of the *Portu-gays*) mocks the some-of-my-best-friends-are [insert minority group] defence often used by those accused of racism.[19] Bambi then asks what Younes would do if his son came out as gay:

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[17] '[Song lyrics] We are the *vivre-ensemble*, love is the only law, we are the *vivre-ensemble*, it's us, it's you, it's me.
Bambi: A round of applause for the *vivre-ensemble*, ladies and gentlemen!'

[18] 'Younes: We've got Maghrebi…
Bambi: …Muslims.
Younes: We've got French…
Bambi: …Muslims.
Younes: …We've got gay…
Bambi: …Muslims.
[Younes looks horrified.]'

[19] Consider, for example, French politician Nadine Morano, who responded to accusations of racism in 2012 by stating that she had 'des amis qui sont justement arabes' ['friends who are actually Arabs'] and that her 'meilleure amie [était] tchadienne, donc plus noire qu'une arabe' ['best friend was Chadian, so darker than an Arab'] (see *Le Monde*, 2012).

Bambi: Et si ton fils, il est gay ?
Younes: Non, non, non, non, c'était pas prévu ça! Et toi, tu réagirais comment?
Bambi: Mais moi, ça ne me dérange pas. [Pause] Si ton fils, il est gay, moi, ça me fait plaisir, ça.[20]

Bambi's remark immediately unleashes a heated, unintelligible argument between the two that only ends when the *vivre-ensemble* song begins to play and the two dance together again, following which they note 'c'est important, le vivre-ensemble' ['the *vivre-ensemble* is important']. The rest of the sketch plays out following this model of a conflict provoked by a seemingly minor remark that is then punctuated by *vivre-ensemble* song and dance routines.

As the sketch progresses, Younes and Bambi perform the *vivre-ensemble* dance with visibly less enthusiasm. Towards the end, they immediately start bickering right after the song fades. At this point, their compère shouts from the audience, 'oh, les gars, le vivre-ensemble là!' ['hey guys, the *vivre-ensemble*, come on!'] Younes and Bambi stop arguing and turn to hug each other. Almost immediately, however, Younes pulls out, accusing Bambi of jabbing him with his nose. Younes and Bambi start furiously arguing again:

[*Vivre-ensemble* song begins to play]
Younes and Bambi [in unison towards the DJ]: Ferme ta gueule avec ton vivre-ensemble!
Younes: Casse les couilles!
Bambi: Il est sérieux ? On adore s'engueuler, nous!
Younes: Ça fait des siècles qu'on s'embrouille!
Bambi: Ça va pas terminer aujourd'hui! [To Younes] Enfoiré!
Younes: [to Bambi] Banane!
Bambi: Connard!
Younes: Andouille! [Amical, almost amorous tone]
Bambi: Tête de citron! [Laughing]
[Younes and Bambi draw close, hold hands, hug, and giggle uncontrollably]
Younes and Bambi: C'était Younes et Bambi, merci beaucoup![21]

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[20] 'Bambi: And what if your son were gay?
Younes: No, no, no, no, that's not part of the plan! And you, how would you react?
Bambi: It wouldn't bother me. [Pause] If your son were gay, that would make me happy.'

[21] '[*Vivre-ensemble* song begins to play]
Younes and Bambi [in unison towards the DJ]: Shut it with your *vivre-ensemble*!
Younes: Piss off!

To understand Younes and Bambi's comic disdain for *le vivre-ensemble*, it is useful to contrast it with Paul Gilroy's use of the term 'conviviality', which he uses to describe 'the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere' (2004: xv). *Le vivre-ensemble*, on the other hand, is a political neologism that French politicians have increasingly used (along with other hollow signifiers such as *le métissage* or *le lien social*), since the end of the twentieth century, to refer to harmonious coexistence between different ethno-cultural communities in French society. Conceptually, *le vivre-ensemble* and conviviality invoke the need for something more than tolerance in multicultural contexts. However, in the Republican French context, politicians often use *le vivre-ensemble* synonymously for *intégration*, which, because it is a difference-blind assimilationist integration, merely hides the reality of racial discrimination and inequality. In this way, *le vivre-ensemble* is a top-down elite concept used primarily by politicians and media personalities who have found another word (other than assimilation and integration) to implore minorities to assimilate and 'get along' within the Republic. In the case of Jewish-Muslim relations, the deployment of *le vivre-ensemble* could be read as suggesting that Jews and Muslims would 'get along' better if only they ceased being so different from the universal (that is, white) French citizen. In this sketch, Younes and Bambi demonstrate their wariness of calls to *vivre ensemble*, while suggesting that Jews and Muslims already do *vivre* and *rire ensemble*. Thus, Younes and Bambi critically contrast the Republican universalism that underpins *le vivre-ensemble* with a more or less convivial multiculture. The comedians constant bickering does not represent division between separate groups, but rather strengthens social bonds. This in-group-bickering model of Jewish-Muslim interactions can be found more widely in other cultural productions, such as Farid Boudjellal's comic series *Juif-Arabe* (2006) and Joan Sfar's graphic novel *Le Chat du rabbin* (2011). Indeed, Younes and Bambi's comedy is reminiscent of the two main characters of Farid

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Bambi: Is he for real? We love arguing, us two!
Younes: We've been fighting for centuries!
Bambi: It's not about to end today! [To Younes] Bastard!
Younes: [to Bambi] Silly billy!
Bambi: Jerk!
Younes: Numpty! [Amical, almost amorous tone]
Bambi: You great noodle!
[Younes and Bambi draw close, hold hands, hug, and giggle uncontrollably]
Younes and Bambi: We're Younes and Bambi, thank you very much!'

Boudjellal's comic series *Juif-Arabe* who are constantly bickering while being, at the same time, quite fond of each other.[22]

Conclusion

Racially marked comedy can accomplish one of two things. It can demarcate group boundaries into an 'us' and a 'them', reinforcing differences (and possibly hierarchies of differences). Alternatively, it can defy stereotypes through caricature. In both cases, humour is derived from ridiculing someone or something deemed worthy of ridicule. In the first case, the physical or behavioural differences of an out-group is targeted, while the racial anxiety produced by these differences is navigated and mitigated through humour. In the second case, the perceived absurdity of rigid group boundaries is the target of ridicule. In this case, by parodying, through exaggeration and repetition, an oppositional 'us' and 'them' binary, the comedian highlights sameness over difference and the constructed nature of group identifications, while dissipating racial anxiety over differences through humour.

The content of Younes and Bambi's comedy firmly belongs to the second category. It satirizes antisemitism and racism – in the context of their impact on Jewish-Muslim relations – from *within* the logic of antisemitic and racist discourse. Younes and Bambi perform, to the point of ridicule, rigid categories of 'Jews' and 'Muslims' in a way that provokes audiences to laugh their way out of the dominant, politicized model of oppositional relations and towards a jovial reimagining of what it means to be Jewish *and* Muslim *together* in contemporary France. Their comedy not only parodies and challenges the 'us' versus 'them' binary, but creates a new 'us' through their sustained use of 'on' and hybrid Hebrew-Arabic neologisms. The comedians' critical engagement with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the symbolism of the Holocaust is an attempt to resist the decades-long political and polemical transformations of 'Jewish-Muslim relations'. They achieve this by evoking these rigid, mutually exclusive categories and ridiculing them in order to suggest the possibility for a more fluid form of Jewish-Muslim coexistence that is not defined by the loaded category of 'Jewish-Muslim relations'. Their performative embodiment of physical and behavioural stereotypes of Jewishness and Muslimness challenges these stereotypes and blurs the lines between Muslim and Jewish identities. In addition, the trading of insults and stereotypes in a dialogic or contrapuntal manner implies in-group bickering and not out-group dispute. The comedians also subtly highlight their shared liminality in white Western European imaginaries.

[22] See Vitali (2018).

Conceptually, the two possible endpoints of racially marked comedy are distinct. However, in practice, the distinction between the two can be subtle and, therefore, partly relies on the audience. In the case of Younes and Bambi, whose stand-up comedy emphasizes mutual respect and dialogue facilitated by their duo structure, how much of what they achieve is already determined by the prior, ingrained expectations and perspectives of the viewer? To understand this question, a different type of analysis is required: one that examines audience reception. While the above analysis of the content of their stand-up comedy demonstrates how the duo challenges rigid, homogenous categorization of 'Jews' and 'Muslims' and oppositional understandings of interactions, the effects of this on the audience is unclear. In interviews, Younes and Bambi themselves are keen to emphasize the limits of comedy in terms of its effects on broader political discourses. Following their performance on *Le Before du Grand Journal*, television host Thomas Thouroude asks, 'Est-ce que vous constatez les effets de ce que vous faites, de cet humour qui normalement est censé faire voler en éclats tous les clichés? Est-ce que ça marche vraiment?'[23] The comedians reply that, while they have dubbed themselves 'l'arabe et le juif', they do not see themselves as having a moralistic or political objective. Instead, 'on est là […] pour vraiment rigoler avec le public'.[24] In another interview, they seek to emphasize that there is no political objective to their comedy: 'Et le but du spectacle – c'est vrai que le spectacle s'appelle l'arabe et le juif – mais à la fin du spectacle, on montre aux spectateurs que voilà, il n'y a plus de rebeu, il n'y a plus de feuj. On est tous là pour rigoler ensemble' (MCE TV, 2015).[25] Yet, laughing *with*, as I have been arguing throughout this chapter, is an inherently political gesture in the contemporary French climate. The comedians might not see themselves as having a political objective, but their work, nonetheless, is politically inclined. Through their interplay, the comedians challenge the top-down republican model of *le vivre-ensemble* by contrasting it with a grassroots convivial model of *le rire-ensemble*. The effect on the audience of this laughing *with*, which challenges the troubled Jewish-Muslim binary, remains to be explored. Indeed, one could ask if Gilroy's *conviviality* – not the empty signifier of *le vivre-ensemble* – can truly exist in a contemporary political framework that invariably emphasizes tension and polarization and that presently remains a persuasive and dominant discourse

[23] 'Do you notice the effects of what you do, of your comedy that's supposed to break down stereotypes? Does it really work?'

[24] 'We are here to really laugh *with* the audience'.

[25] 'The goal of the show – it's true that the show is called the Arab and the Jew – but at the end of the show, the audience sees that there is no Arab, there is no Jew anymore. We are all here to laugh *together*'.

on Jewish-Muslim relations in the public sphere. In this context, what impact can any counter-discourse – or even actual, on-the-ground interpersonal and intergroup relationships – have on public discourse without the complete overhaul of such a framework itself?

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