

Identity investment in stand-up comedy and online sketches

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Abstract

The article focuses on identity investment in stand-up comedy and online sketches performed by Romanian (or of Romanian descent) comedians acting abroad (France and United Kingdom). It aims at highlighting various humorous strategies that could be construed around a shared feature: the importance of the performer's stage identity (persona). The analysis is based on a theoretical framework which combines stance(taking) studies and discourse approaches to humour. Immigrant's (as marginal performers) humour reveals subversive humour: a means of coping with reality, aimed to expose and challenge power structures. The comedians explore stereotypes regarding Romanian or Eastern European immigrants in France and the UK. The differences in staging the stereotypes depend on the comedian's identity investment in the persona he creates during the humorous performance, as well as on the degree of marginality he assumes for that persona.

Keywords: humour, persona, stancetaking, identity investment.

1. Introduction

The article focuses on identity investment in stand-up comedy and online sketches performed by Romanian (or of Romanian descent) comedians acting abroad (in France and in the United Kingdom). Identity investment is a result of positioning, considering how social actors are situated with respect to the identity they create for themselves and to the ethnic stereotypes they are confronted with. The aim of the analysis is to highlight various humorous strategies (excerpted from a small sample size) that could be construed around a shared feature: the importance of the performer's stage identity (*persona*). Immigrant's (as marginal performers) humour reveals subversive humour: as already stated in various studies, subversive humour is a means of coping with reality, aimed to expose and challenge power structures. The comedians explore stereotypes regarding Romanian or Eastern European immigrants in France and the UK. The differences in staging the stereotypes depend on the identity investment of the comedian in the *persona* he creates during the humorous performance, as well as on the degree of marginality he assumes for that *persona*. The theoretical basis of the analysis combines stance(taking) studies and discourse approaches to humour.

The structure of the article is the following: section 2 discusses stance and the humorous/comic persona, humorous strategies frequently used in stand-up comedy are presented in section 3, while the connection between marginal comedians and subversive humour is analysed in section 4. Section 5 provides a brief presentation on Romanian migration after 1989. The main section of the article is section 6, illustrating humorous discursive strategies of the first- (subsection 6.1.) and second-generation Romanian emigrants (subsection 6.2.). The concluding remarks are presented in section 7.

2. Stance and the humorous/comic *persona*

In this article du Bois's (2007) stance definitions will be taken into account: stance is a *public act*, in a *dialogical* setting, an act performed by a person – a *social actor*, with three dimensions: the evaluation of objects, the positioning of various subjects, and the alignment with other subjects, “with respect to any salient dimension of value in the sociocultural field” (Du Bois, 2007, p. 169). Although the stance triangle put forward by Du Bois (2007) emphasises evaluation, in this article the emphasis is on positioning: more precisely, on positioning with regard to stereotypes.

Positioning is based on a socio-cognitive relation considered not only subjective (Du Bois, 2007, p. 170), but also intersubjective (like in the case of alignment), as the positioning of a subject is influenced by and influences the position(ing) of others. The reason behind considering this double subjective-intersubjective relation relies on the by-product of positioning: the creation of an identity/*persona*, a process which has been seen both as individual and interpersonal (Bolander & Locher, 2015, p. 101), as well as an emergent product of intersubjectivity in interaction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

In this article, positioning is understood as the process which includes, among other aspects, the creation/consolidation of a subject's public image in interaction – a *persona*, which is recognisable (has a certain “identity”), fixed, including past stances (cf. Du Bois, 2007, p. 145, 147; Johnstone, 2009, p. 29); the subject's stances reveal identities which are constant in time or a certain type of preferred ethos, but also *personae* – that is identities or facets of identities (Jaffe, 2009, p. 4), attributed to self or to others (figures animating the discourse). During their performances, comedians can animate various characters (*personae*) which may be seen as strategic projections, instrumental for the comedians in reaching their aims. The characters animated reflect “existing social stances and stereotypes” (Park & Takanashi, 2011, pp. 186-187). The *persona* or *personae* are of course created through several discursive practices (Davies & Harré, 1990). For this analysis, identity investment¹ represents positioning that results in the creation/consolidation of an onstage *persona* or *personae*.

The stancetaker in Du Bois's model covers multiple layers (implicit and explicit): in the case of comedians, the identity created onstage (the onstage *persona*) is distinct from the “real” identity. The explicit stancetaker is the onstage *persona*. Comedians need to create an onstage identity/*persona* that can be used in humorous settings, a form of self-presentation which is highly important during the performances (Mintz, 1985; Sinkeviciute, 2019; Evans Davies, 2019). The *persona* could be considered a mask, “a socially constructed person-image, which may well be a strategic projection rather than a reliable index of the speaker's ‘real identity’”

¹ In various articles, Kiesling (and collaborators) mention three dimensions of stancetaking: affect (evaluation), alignment and investment (Kiesling, 2018; Kiesling *et al.*, 2018, Kiesling, 2020 etc.). *Investment* (as defined by Kiesling) seems to be the equivalent of *engagement* from Martin and White's model of appraisal theory (2005): “the strength of an utterance, although theoretically it is the alignment of the actual speaker with the speech uttered. Investment thus includes things like to what extent a speaker is likely to defend the claim subsequently, how epistemically certain they are, and so forth”, having multiple linguistic cues (Kiesling *et al.*, 2018).

(Coupland & Coupland, 2009, p. 227). Comedians usually create “relatively enduring *personas*” (Kiesling, 2009, p. 174), using some cumulative patterns (Jaffe, 2009, p. 19) and individual “footprints” (like vulgar lexis, irony, sarcasm, etc.). The “enduring *personae*” reveal retrospective and prospective implications of stancetaking (Jaffe, 2009, p. 9). In the case of stand-up comedy, Gilbert (1997, p. 39) considers the onstage *persona* “an “autobiographical” self that was at once cultural construction and cultural critic, participant and observer, performer and performed”: in various genres, like stand-up comedy or TV/online sketches, the performance is based on “a pastiche of observations and characters both real and imagined” constructed on the autobiographical self – “a multifaceted, protean entity that encompasses both onstage and offstage *personae*” (Gilbert, 1997, p. 317; cf. Mintz, 1985).

In commenting the various layers of stance in humorous performances such as stand-up comedy or YouTube sketches, Constantinescu’s (2022) work on humorous press will provide some suggestions. Similar to a journalist, the comedian creates onstage *personae* (characters/figures), which become explicit stancetakers² (deceptive first subjects) who are responsible for evaluation, knowledge, agency, etc. Creating a *persona/personae* indicates a stance lead (Du Bois, 2007). The audience (at the comedy venue or online) aligns or disaligns with the onstage *persona/personae*. The audience could bear in mind previous stances of the comedian (the implicit stancetaker), thus the onstage *persona/personae* is/are construed in alignment or not with the comedian. It is important to mention that “the performance of stances by social actors ASCRIBES or ATTRIBUTES paired or complementary stances to the stancetaker’s interlocutors. Thus, stancetaking engages in processes of both individual and collective identity production” (Jaffe, 2015, p. 164). The audience (second subject) construes the position of the implicit stancetaker towards that object of evaluation, sometimes taking previous stances (“critical resources for the interpretation”, Jaffe, 2009, p. 19) into consideration. The audience’s inferences represent the stance follow (Du Bois, 2007), which can have as effect (or not) the alignment between audience and comedian (cf. identification or “dis-identification”, Gilbert, 1997, p. 324; the alignment is instrumental for the construction of the audience’s identity: the audience may identify with the stancetaker, becoming a subject in the interaction, or may reject the identification, thus becoming the object – the target of the joke).

As already mentioned by Yus (2004, pp. 332-333), “humour is not an inherent property of texts but, rather, is derived from the mental processes that the hearers have to go through in their search for an optimal interpretation of the utterances.” These mental processes of the audience are based on shared cultural representations (Sperber, 1996, p. 82; Yus, 2002, 2004), that are made manifest by the humorous performances. The audience realises that what was believed to be private is regarded as publicly shared and cultural (Yus, 2002, 2004). Consequently, the linguistic stimuli from the humorous discourse could modify the public’s cultural representations (the effect would be reinforcement, challenge, erasure, addition, etc. of some cultural representations) (Yus, 2002, 2004). At the same time, the general laughter could reveal not only the appreciation of a humorous remark, but also the mutual trust within the audience (Rutter, 2001).

For some humorous performances, the main effects are triggered by “the contrast between the comedian’s words and the audience’s individually held assumptions about the world we live in” (Yus, 2004, p. 317); there could be an incongruity between the humorous discourse and some of the cultural representations of the audience.

In anthropology, humorous activities are seen as *rite* and *anti-rite* (Douglas, 1978, *apud* Mintz, 1985, p. 73) since “the *experience* of public joking, shared laughter, and celebration of agreement on what deserves ridicule and affirmation fosters community and furthers a sense of

² Cf. Kiesling (2020), the use of Goffman's division of speakerhood into author, animator, principal, and figure.

mutual support for common belief and behaviour (hence *rite*)” (Mintz, 1985, p. 73, italics in the original).

3. Humorous patterns

Stand-up comedy and humorous YouTube sketches have been attracting scholarly attention at least since mid-80s (Mintz, 1985; Rutter, 1997, 2001 etc.); if the first studies analysed (American and British) mainstream performers, in the last 10 years attention starts to be also given to female stand-upers (Ruiz-Gurillo & Linares-Bernabéu, 2020), to first- and second-generation migrant performers (Chun, 2004; Da Silva, 2015; Koven & Simões Marques, 2015; Vigouroux, 2015), to humour targeted at migrants (Perrino, 2015), to expats’ stand-up (Dore, 2018) etc.

Although there is a difference between asynchronous and synchronous humorous communications, online sketches share various similarities with stand-up comedy and sitcoms with regard to the main humorous strategies employed (a comparison between these genres is not the purpose of this article). Two studies provide a useful synthesis on humorous topics, strategies, cues, etc. to be found in various discursive forms. The first study, of Ruiz-Gurillo and Linares-Bernabéu (2020), comments the recurrent topics, main targets, discourse strategies, linguistic and nonlinguistic cues, and functions of stand-up comedy which, in this study, are considered also illustrated by online sketches (cf. Mintz, 1985, for the means to obtain “creative distortion”; see also Rutter, 2001). The second study, by Juckel *et al.* (2016), drawing on previous studies on sitcoms (for example, Berger, 1976), presents broad humorous categories and their specific techniques.

As regards the recurrent topics, Ruiz-Gurillo and Linares-Bernabéu (2020) notice that taboos and deviant themes are preferred by the comedians (to which one could add “the negotiation of the comedians’ interactional and background identities”, Sunday & Filani, 2018); the main target is represented by the social hierarchy. As far as discourse strategies are concerned, following various studies (Rutter, 1997, 2001; Hay, 1995; Holmes & Marra, 2002; Veale *et al.*, 2006 etc.), the list presented by Ruiz-Gurillo and Linares-Bernabéu (2020) includes: quip (“a short, witty, and often ironic, comment about an ongoing action or the topic under discussion”, p. 33); wordplay; role-play³ (“a stand-up technique in which the comedian quotes another person, typically by using direct speech and paralinguistic signals to parody their speech style”, p. 33); insult (“jocular abuse”, p. 33); trumping (“a form of multi-agent language game that generates its humorous effects through subversion of the linguistic forms of the exchange”, Veale *et al.*, 2006, p. 306); self-deprecation (self-inflicted insult, a defence strategy); anecdote (“amusing stories about the experiences or actions of either the speaker or someone they are acquainted with”, p. 34); canned jokes; fantasy (“the construction of humorous imaginary scenarios or events”, p. 34; collaborative activity); callbacks⁴ (“introducing a subject that was already mentioned earlier in the show at a later point”, p. 34); terms of address; taboo (toilet humour, sexual humour, etc.). Humour can be indicated by paraverbal cues (intonation, pauses), nonverbal cues (gestures), verbal cues (discourse markers, evidentials; polysemy, phraseology, hyperbole, simile, etc.); two of the specific techniques discussed by Rutter (2001)

³ Rutter (2001) calls it “character footing”; see also Holmes and Marra (2002, p. 79): “a discourse strategy which distances the speaker from the person whose words are ‘quoted’, thus emphasizing boundaries between the speaker and the butt of the parody”.

⁴ For Rutter (2001), re-incorporation: “the reappearance of one element of a joke (usually not a punchline) in a stand-up performer’s routine. That is, a comedian will introduce a topic at some point during their performance and then drop it only to return to it later in the act. The thematic reappearance of a line, idea or comment becomes a signposted point for laughter and is recognised by the audience as an appropriate spot for laughter to follow.” (Rutter, 2001, p. 311).

can be included in this category: alliteration and assonance and intonation. The functions will be discussed below (section 4.), as Ruiz-Gurillo and Linares-Bernabéu (2020) focus on subversive humour.

According to Juckel *et al.* (2016), the basic categories of humour are: language (verbal humour), logic (ideational humour), identity (existential humour), and action (physical or nonverbal humour). The techniques (rather the mechanisms) subsumed by verbal humour are allusion, irony, puns, repartee, ridicule, and wit (cf. Ritchie, 2004); as regards logic, the techniques are absurdity, coincidence, conceptual surprise, outwitting, caught out, and misunderstanding (cf. Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 2001 etc.; Veale *et al.*, 2006 etc.); the identity category includes parody, rigidity, malicious pleasure, condescension, deceitful behaviour, and self-deprecation. The category based on paraverbal and nonverbal techniques includes peculiar face, peculiar music, clumsiness, and repulsive behaviour. The typology could be, of course, subject to critique, but this is not the aim of this study. In the following section of the article, the connection between self-deprecation/disparagement and identity (i.e., the *persona/personae* created during the performances) is discussed.

4. Marginal comedians and subversive humour

It has been observed that stand-up comedians belonging to dominated groups (women, African Americans, members of sexual minorities, migrants, Jewish ethnics, etc.) – what is called by Gilbert (1997) “marginal humour” – often resort to self-deprecation: Walker (1988, p. 123) and Levine (1977, p. 336) draw attention to the fact that self-deprecation through exploiting stereotypes represents a subversive act (*apud* Gilbert, 1997, p. 319, 323), which has become a norm in stand-up comedy. Gilbert (1997, p. 323) points to the connection between stereotypes and objectification at the centre of stand-up comedy. Marginal humour is considered a form of usually covert aggressive response to the social imbalance that could be seen as cultural critique (Gilbert, 1997, p. 326). In anthropology, it is considered that the comedian has in fact a “traditional *license* for deviate behavior and expression”, which is part of the public ritual of the humorous performances (Mintz, 1985, p. 74).

Holmes and Marra (2002, p. 72) draw a distinction between *reinforcing humour* (humour that maintains the *status quo*), and *subversive humour* (humour that challenges or subverts the *status quo*), stating that: “Subversive humor challenges existing power relationships, whether informal or formal, explicit or implicit; it subverts the status quo. Furthermore, this type of humor tends to be conveyed through discourse strategies which create social distance with the target of the humor and may strengthen bonds with the public.” (Holmes & Marra, 2002, p. 73)

Self-deprecation is a subversive act that can function as “a coping tool, which humorists may use to create an alternative perspective and even to alter normative power structures” (Ruiz-Gurillo & Linares-Bernabéu, 2020, p. 30). The various functions of this type of humour include triggering the amusement of the audience, creating an in-group rapport, enhancing the individual status, teasing, challenging taboos, power and the status quo, promoting awareness as regards social problems and offering a coping solution (Ruiz-Gurillo & Linares-Bernabéu, 2020, p. 34).

However, self-deprecation remains “safe entertainment” and a “critique with impunity”: it does not aim to abuse or offend, impunity being granted by the same status quo it challenges (“Ironically, in the context of public comic performance, the status quo is perpetuated because it has institutionally “allowed” a potentially subversive discourse to be voiced.” Gilbert, 1997, p. 327; see also Mintz, 1985, pp. 72-75). The various contextual constraints (for example, synchronous vs asynchronous performances) reveal different degrees of subversiveness and different discursive strategies (Ruiz-Gurillo & Linares-Bernabéu, 2020).

Migrants' performances, especially when discussing membership to an ethnic stigmatized group, reveal a political component which challenges the prominent ideologies and hierarchies, both linguistically and socially. As the examples will show, some comedians who notice their (potential) inclusion in a stigmatized group challenge the dominant perception, while other comedians reinforce conventional perceptions on mainstream and marginal identities (Jaffe *et al.*, 2015, p. 136).

Similar to Portuguese migrants' sketches or stand-up comedy, Romanian comedians sometimes construe Romanian migrants as a backward *alter*, and first-generation migrants appear as less competent *personae* from a linguistic or social point of view, while second-generation migrants align very well with the sociolinguistic environment of the receiving country, their way of speaking bearing no hybridity cues (Koven & Simões Marques, 2015; Da Silva, 2015).

As already noticed, comedians of migrant descent create "relevant *polycentric versions of a modern/nonmodern contrast*" (Koven & Simões Marques, 2015, p. 215): polycentricity (Blommaert, 2010) refers to the way communicative behaviour is oriented to multiple evaluative centres/authorities or with the way people allow their communicative behaviour to be evaluated by multiple centres/authorities. Migrants' humorous performances are evaluated both in the host country (by nationals and other migrants) and in the country of origin (by nonmigrants or former/seasonal migrants).

There are many definitions and connotations of multiculturalism depending on the country or even continent, as it regards the relation between nationals (or a national majority) and new and old minorities (immigrants, refugees vs. historical national minorities) (Kylimcza, 2007, p. 16). The term is usually used as an umbrella term for various policies meant to improve the lives of minority ethnocultural groups, resting on "the assumption that policies of recognizing and accommodating ethnic diversity can expand human freedom, strengthen human rights, diminish ethnic and racial hierarchies, and deepen democracy" (Kymlicka, 2007, p. 16, 18). According to Parekh (2000, p. 338), "a multicultural perspective is composed of the creative interplay of [...] cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, and the internal plurality of each culture".

The dominant image of immigrants in France and the UK is that of persons needing to modernise and integrate, who come from countries that are not only geographically remote, but also backward. As regards France, integration sometimes equals the erasure, in the public sphere, of salient cultural and linguistic differences (Koven & Simões Marques, 2015, pp. 218-219). Minority comedians are more visible in France since the mid-2000s. Voicing marked non-native French accent in public performances is seen either as a sign of the rise of *communautarisme* (a "fragmentation of France's sociocultural space into ethnic and sociopolitical subspaces marked by their peculiarities", Vigouroux, 2015, p. 245), a type of humour with a divisive potential, or indexing the speaker's foreign origin⁵. It is considered that France is dominated by a republican secularist ideology which favours monoglossia (Vigouroux, 2015, p. 246).

As regards multiculturalism in the UK, it is considered that multiculturalist discourse spread in the 1960s, grew into a political ethos in the 1980s, had different moments of crisis in late 1980s and early 2000s (Farrar, 2012; Mason & Dandeker, 2009; Brighton, 2007 etc.). At the basis of multiculturalism is the idea of integration as a for cultural diversity and tolerance, concerning processes "seen both as two-way and as working differently for different groups"

⁵ There are "receiving societies where personhood remains solidly attached to speakerhood" (Márquez Reiter & Martín Rojo, 2019, p. 1), and France seems to be one of those societies. Migrants in general are "confronted with the norms, requirements and the values that define who is considered to be a speaker of the "language" or "languages" of the receiving community and being assessed in accordance with a given measure, that is, a canon of speakerhood in a particular community" (Márquez Reiter & Martín Rojo, 2019, p. 2).

(Modood, 2005). In early 2000s, the critics of multiculturalism accused that it brings segregation, isolation for ethnic and religious communities (Farrar, 2012; Mason & Dandeker, 2009). Some scholars state that there was a “retreat” from multiculturalism in the UK, especially after 2005 (London bombings), which others disagree (Uberoi & Modood, 2013).

5. Romanian migration

While “European, Christian, and white”, with no former colonial ties with the receiving countries, as the Portuguese (Koven & Simões Marques, 2015, p. 218), Romanians have sometimes been viewed as a “problematic” migrant group (unlike the Portuguese). While the vast majority of the Romanian migrants seems invisible to public attention, there are some Romanian micro-groups of migrants who have been the highlight of attention in various occasions in Italy, Spain, France, or the UK, especially when involved in criminal activities (beggars, pickpockets, thieves, prostitutes, etc.). Similar to Portugal’s image in France or Canada (Koven & Simões Marques, 2015; Da Silva, 2015), Romania’s image is rather negative: a conservative former communist country that ranks (among) last within Europe or EU in all that regards social, economic, cultural, educational, democratic, etc. development.

After 1989, various waves of emigration from Romania are registered: immediately after the Revolution, in late 90s (to US and Canada), in early 2000s and after the admission in the EU (2007). The Romanian diaspora was second in fastest annual growth (7,3% per annum) between 2000 and 2015, after the Syrian one. Of all the EU states, Romania has the highest number of emigrants in the EU in 2017 (87% from the total). The top destinations are Italy, Spain, Germany, UK, and France (Nica & Moraru, 2020, p. 410). An OECD report from 2017 mentions 3,58 million Romanian emigrants, 18,2 % of the entire Romania’s population (Nica & Moraru, 2020, p. 411). The Eurostat 2020 data indicates 19,4% of Romania’s population living in various EU countries (“the largest national group among EU mobile citizens”) (Nicola *et al.*, 2021, p. 2); a Eurostat demographic report from 2021 mentions that “3 million or 24% of all EU citizens living in another EU country” are Romanians. They work in sectors such as construction, housekeeping, social and health assistance, food services, hotels, transportation, etc. (Fic, 2013).

Romania has, as well, one of the highest numbers of high-skilled emigration (“brain drain”) in the EU (Nica & Moraru, 2020, p. 411). Between 2009 and 2019, the number of migrants with university education (“tertiary educational attainment”) increased from 12,5% to 15% (Eurostat, 2020, *apud* Nicola *et al.*, 2021, p. 3). For example, according to an OECD 2019 report, 20.000 Romanian doctors live and work abroad (Nicola *et al.*, 2021, p. 4).

In France, in the 90s and early 2000s, half of the long-term residence permits asked for Romanians were given to students (undergraduate, graduate, PhD) (Toader, 2015). In the early 2000s, more than 2000 Romanians applied for a residence card in France every year (long term migration). There is no data for short term migration. While in 1990 there were less than 15.000 Romanians living in France, in 2006 there were more than 45.000 Romanians with French residence (Toader, 2013), and now there are around 120.000. Although the Romanians represent a small number in the immigrant population of France, media attention has been given to them, especially promoting a negative image (for example, *le salut roumain*, Jonathan Lambert sur France 2, April, 17, 2010). There is also a positive attention, for example, in 2020, Bruno Tessier published a book devoted to two centuries of Romanian immigration to France (*Ces Roumains qui font la France*, BiblioMonde).

In 2013, UK was the fourth destination country for Romanian migrants (before the opening of the labour market). According to official statistics, there were 80.000 Romanian residents in the UK in 2009, 125.000 in 2012 (Fic, 2013, p. 6). According to a BBC news from 24.05.2018, “People with Romanian nationality have become the second most non-British population living

in the UK”, after the Poles. The total number of Romanians in the UK was around 400.000 in 2017-2018, while the applications for EU Settlement Scheme are more than 1,3 million in 2022⁶. A report of the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford (Vicol & Allen, 2014) presents a quantitative analysis of 4000 texts (articles, letters, comment pieces, etc.) from 19 British newspapers, tabloids and broadsheets (1.12.2012-1.12.2013), regarding Romanians and Bulgarians: their image in the press is predominantly negative⁷ (for example, the Romanians are associated to crime related actions and nouns like *gang*, *criminal*, *beggar*, *thief*, or *squatter* appear frequently, mainly in the tabloids).

According to Eurostat 2020 data: “Romanian, Polish, Italian and Portuguese citizens were the four biggest groups of EU citizens living in other EU Member States in 2019.” If one looks at the employment rate by citizenship (“% share of population aged 20 to 64 years”, 2019), in the Eurostat report, data shows that EU migrant citizens have a similar or slightly higher employment rate than national citizens of France and the UK. Therefore, one can consider that Romanian migrants have a similar employment rate as the average of EU migrant citizens. Thus, according to statistics and against some media presentations, the vast majority of Romanian emigrants is employed, with a much smaller number of (very) low-skilled persons in France and the UK than in Italy or Spain, and a high rate of tertiary education (in Germany, about 20% of the Romanian emigrant population).

6. Humorous discursive strategies in first- and second-generation emigrants

In order to test the hypotheses, a small size sample was used, as the examples are excerpted only from the performances of two comedians, that is from four videos (one created as a video for the YouTube channel of the comedian, the other three being sequences from live stand-up performances, recorded and uploaded on YouTube). For the aim of this article, the small size sample chosen is relevant as a test bed.

In the case of the second-generation emigrant comedian, the choice was determined by the popularity in the “adopting” country and by the popularity of the video on Youtube (see *infra*, 6.2.). In the case of the first-generation emigrant comedian the criteria have been the following: to perform in a different country than the second-generation comedian (in order to grasp potential discursive differences due to the differences between the “adopting” countries), to have visibility in the country of their choice (the comedian selected appeared in various BBC programs), and also to be popular in the home country (invited to present his career abroad in podcasts, morning radio programs, invited to perform in humorous TV shows, etc.).

As a result, Cyprien Iov was the second-generation emigrant comedian chosen: he is born and raised in France, from Romanian parents who emigrated from Romania in late 1980s, while

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/eu-settlement-scheme-quarterly-statistics-september-2022/eu-settlement-scheme-quarterly-statistics-september-2022> (accessed January 2023).

⁷ I have selected some of the results, which concern mainly Romanians, in order to highlight the general perspective of the British press as regards Romanian migrants: “Language used by tabloid newspapers to describe and discuss Romanians as a single group was often focused on crime and anti-social behavior (*gang*, *criminal*, *beggar*, *thief*, *squatter*). This was less prevalent in broadsheet newspapers.”; “Where Romanians and Bulgarians were discussed together this was consistently in the context of immigration, across both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers.”; “Verbs used to describe or discuss Romanians and Bulgarians together, across both broadsheets and tabloids were frequently related to travel (*come*, *arrive*, *move*, *travel*, *head*) and in tabloids these included metaphors related to scale (*flood*, *flock*).”; “Words appearing before mentions of Romanians and Bulgarians as a unit in tabloid and broadsheet newspapers were frequently related to prevention of movement (*stop*, *control*, *block* in tabloids; *deter*, *restrict*, *dissuade* in broadsheets).”; “Romanians and Bulgarians were regularly associated with travelling to the UK for work across both tabloid and broadsheet publications.”; “Those words that are consistently used to describe Roma or Gypsies in both tabloid and broadsheet publications are generally related to either crime and antisocial behaviour, persecution or settlement.”

Radu Isac was preferred to represent the first-generation emigrant comedians: he immigrated to the UK in 2015, after his career as a comedian had already started in Romania. Radu Isac appeared in: Comedy Central's Extra – "Stand Up Express", 2014; BBC World Service – "What makes the world laugh", 2016; BBC Radio 4 – "Fresh from the fringe", 2017; BBC World Service – "The arts hour", 2017 (<http://raduisac2.com/about>). The comedians explore stereotypes regarding Romanian or East European emigrants in France and the UK (for a detailed analysis on auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes concerning Romanians see David, 2015).

The differences in staging the stereotypes depend on the identity investment of the comedian in the *persona* he creates during the humorous performance, as well as on the degree of marginality he assumes for that *persona*: if Radu Isac is a first-generation emigrant who constructs the *persona* of an outsider with marked marginality, Cyprien Iov – as a second-generation emigrant, constructs the *persona* of an insider with "exotic" roots and a minimal marginality.

For both comedians materials available on YouTube were used: Cyprien Iov has a channel where his videos are uploaded, being a popular vlogger in France; Radu Isac is a stand-up comedian who shares some moments from his shows on YouTube. Considering the fact that one has mainly asynchronous performances and materials which are edited to fit the requirements of online sketches, while the other has mainly synchronous performances that are later on made available online, the public's reaction to the humorous performances (in the venues, as well as in the comments sections) or paralinguistic (except for accent) or nonverbal cues will be ignored, the analysis focusing on the comedians' discursive techniques.

6.1. A first-generation emigrant

Being a first-generation emigrant, Radu Isac presents his *persona* as an outsider, with distinct marginality in the UK. One of the indirect means to suggest it is by his strong Romanian-influenced English accent, by his "bad" English, and by using some words or expressions which are American English and not British English (for example, *dude*). Unlike Iov, Isac creates his *persona* as nonmodern and dominated by various home country practices. Sometimes he constructs his *persona* as a victim of stereotypes or social imbalance, but also as an offender (a negative comic *persona* – Mintz, 1985, pp. 75-77); in this second situation he exploits socio-economic stereotypes, especially in the Brexit context. His *persona* is less Romanian and more East-European, maybe in order to gain a wider audience and/or to strengthen his bonds with a community of comedians performing Eastern European Comedy in the UK (see <https://www.facebook.com/eecomfest/>). In his shows, Isac creates a *persona* that seems to violate taboos (racism, feminist ideology, etc.), that considers some Western practices as hypocritical. Positive reactions of the audience to this negative comic *persona* derives from "ritual violation of taboos, inversion of ritual, and public iconoclasm frequently encountered in cultural traditions" (Mintz, 1985, p. 77).

Isac's frequent discursive strategies are self-deprecation and quip (irony). Since most of the YouTube videos containing parts of his performances are relatively short, fragments from three videos have been used (some jokes repeat in several shows, with minor variations): *English people are too polite* (performance from November 2018, Brighton Komedia; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJzK0ppiTCg>, 8,380 views, uploaded on Apr 2, 2019, 262 likes), *The racist* (from 2016; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVWvrHaWFRs>, 6,598 views, uploaded on May 3, 2019, 125 likes), and *Live at Hot Water Comedy Clubs* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Elki-ToprEA>, 113,931 views, uploaded on July 27, 2017, 1.2K likes).

Self-deprecation could be related to the evaluation of discursive and non-discursive practices, in a comparison between the UK and Romania, in order to flatter the UK public and to create the comedian's non-modern *persona*. Self-deprecation represents a way to evaluate which are the audience's cultural representations (Yus, 2004; cf. role-play for Iov).

Self-deprecation regards several aspects like communicative style, familiarity with different ethnic or racial groups, the country of origin, etc. For example, the comedian draws a comparison between a more direct communicative style and (apparently) less politeness, indexing an East European communicative style, and indirectness, frequent use of polite formulae, indexing Western Europe or the UK communicative style:

People are nicer like in Western Europe than they are in Eastern Europe ((pause)) but I don't necessarily appreciate that ((audience laughter)) ((pause)). Sorta not for me. People here are a little bit too nice ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) People do too many thank yous and pleases ((audience laughter)) And just sorta stresses me out ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) It does. I wake up in the middle of the night like "did I thanked everybody?" ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) Never finishes ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) I think you're linguistically nice, you know how to put flowers into sentences when you talk to people ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) I speak English, but I don't have like putting flowers and sentences powers yet ((audience laughter)) ((pause))

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJzK0ppiTCg>)

The constant appeal to polite formulae observed in the UK: *People here are a little bit too nice. People do too many thank yous and pleases* (which accounts for a more modern, civilized society), appears as causing problems for an emigrant (*I don't necessarily appreciate that; And just sorta stresses me out*). Indirectness and the use of standard English is metaphorically presented as putting "flowers into sentences", "putting flowers and sentences powers", collocations adapted from a colloquial Romanian expression (could be less comprehensible for the British public? There is a secondary meaning of the adjective *flourish* to account for the meaning intended by the comedian). But the compliments addressed to the public may give way to an indirect critique, which relates to the social hypocrisy of rejection letters/messages:

[...] you guys are amazing, I'm a total fan, I follow you, guys ((audience laughter)) You have reached a level when you can say no to somebody ((pause)) by just using 3 yes-es ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) "Really happy to inform you that we think you would be a great addition to somebody else's team ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) Congratulations! ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) Well done for trying"

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJzK0ppiTCg>)

British communicative style is the target of irony (quip) for the ability of avoiding negative evaluations when rejecting someone. This ability is lampooned in the quoted message (a form of role play/character footing), constructed in a parody-pastiche.

There is also a negotiation regarding the evaluation of racism:

That was a racist laughter [...] I'm ok with racism ((pause)) I am ((pause)) basically it only means Romanians so far [...] I don't have like a problem with ((pause)) Australians, but I should give it time, maybe it they'll get to me ((audience laughter)) I'm in the learning period [...] if I'm speaking with an Asian dude ((pause)) I have no idea what nationality he is ((pause)) I just don't know and I think that's normal. If you've met under 200 Asian people ((pause)) you shouldn't be able to place their nationality ((audience laughter)) If you can do that, that just means you stayed home and studied Asian people's faces ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) That's way weirder ((audience laughter))

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVWvrHaWFRs>)

Racism is used as a hypernym for racism and xenophobia. In the first part of this fragment, the word is used instead of xenophobia, when mentioning his ethnicity and that of Australians. Stating that he's "ok with racism" could mean accepting to be discriminated based on his origin and also displaying racism and xenophobia against others? If this is the case, that could be part of his non-modern (backward) *persona*, as an aggressive outsider who challenges the norms of the receiving country. At the same time, he acknowledges the adaptation to the new rules – *I'm in the learning period* – and also the difficulties of this adaptation. The ethnic diversity and multicultural environment are very different in Romanian and in the UK. Romania has a less diverse ethnic and multicultural structure than the UK, and this influences the ability of Romanians to recognise the ethnic background of persons from different Asian countries, for example: *if I'm speaking with an Asian dude, I have no idea what nationality he is. I just don't know and I think that's normal. If you've met under 200 Asian people, you shouldn't be able to place their nationality.* Not being able to place somebody's nationality is presented as a result of little social interaction with persons from a certain continent (in this case Asia), not with racism: the situation would not involve disrespect for someone's origin, but lack of knowledge.

Another trait of a non-modern (backward) *persona* is lacking respect for women. Playing on feminism and feminist norms is also an opportunity to challenge some aspects which are considered exaggerations or forms of social hypocrisy.

I'm not western European trained yet ((pause)) I haven't learned all the rules over here ((pause)) [...] moving to the UK I started to respect women ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) We don't have the feminist movement back home ((pause)) it's more of an idea so far ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) it's gonna grow.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Elki-ToprEA>)

The line "moving to the UK *I started to respect women*" contains a presupposition trigger that offers the public the information that the comedian didn't respect women previously. In his defense, the comedian provides the information that feminism in Romania "is more of an idea" (abstraction), which by contrast means that in the UK it is rather a concrete, solid thing.

Sometimes, mentioning his country of origin offers the possibility to mock British socio-economic sensitive issues. At the beginning of one of his performances, Isac mentions his country of origin and then exaggerates in line with British tabloids, naming only Romania as a country of origin for immigrants in the UK:

So a couple of things about me before we get [it] going ((audience laughter)) I know I don't really look it, but I'm an immigrant ((audience laughter)) I am. I'm from I'm from Romania, that's where the immigrants come from ((audience laughter)) So assuming that's someone here from Belgium or like Sweden, but yes, they are called expats ((audience laughter)) It's because that's different. Now Romanians get to be expats too ((pause)) but only when would travel to Albania ((audience laughter))

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Elki-ToprEA>)

The comedian also compares the situation of Romanians to other persons, of Western or Nordic origin, in order to draw attention to the stereotype that influences who is called *expat* and who is called *immigrant*, based on the country of origin, the two words being ideologically loaded. It can be inferred from these lines that the choice of words depends on the country's status in international hierarchies and not on the reality of a person's situation and reasons to leave his/her

home country. Ironically, following the stereotype (quip), Isac mentions that Romanians can be expats if they go to Albania, a non-EU country with a standard of living lower than Romania's.

Maintaining his aggressive *persona*, Isac uses some sensitive socio-economic issues for his British audience, starting with the fact that UK is not the dream country of the immigrants, unlike USA:

I do like being here in the UK. I do. Ever since they cancelled my visa for America ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) I'm loving the UK ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) I was here last year to the Brexit vote. I don't know why the whole country sort of assumed ((pause)) that immigrants like it here ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) We don't ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) Really. Nobody ever heard of the British dream ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) It's not a thing ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) Just harder to go to America ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) so we've settled for the UK ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) We don't wanna be here either ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) We don't [...] scraping toilets with no dream behind you ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) The dream makes the toilet brush lighter ((audience laughter)) ((pause))

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Elki-ToprEA>)

UK is presented as a second-best alternative to the US and lacking the appeal of the US. The beginning of the fragment illustrates a deceitful behaviour, since the individual positive appreciation of the UK appears as a result of the impossibility to go to the US: *I do like being here in the UK. I do. Ever since they cancelled my visa for America ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) I'm loving the UK.* What seemed to be positive evaluation unveils negative evaluation.

The collective negative evaluation of the UK is explicit: "We don't [like it here]", "Nobody ever heard of the British dream. It's not a thing.", "We don't wanna be here either." The comedian appeals to the stereotype of the East European low-skilled immigrant with demeaning jobs: "scraping toilets", "The dream makes the toilet brush lighter". Isac mentions the Brexit context and quotes/alludes again to recurrent messages in the British press or in the populist politicians' discourses concerning the Brexit vote:

Companies that are hiring back home they're still all western owned companies. What I'm trying to say is that one way or another ((pause)) we're still gonna steal your jobs ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) Just a matter of where we're going to do it from ((audience laughter)) We have politicians in both parties that want us to have your jobs ((pause)) It's not us, it's like us, the Chinese and robots ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) We're all competing for your jobs ((audience laughter)) ((pause)) We don't know who's gonna get them ((pause)) we just know you're going to lose them ((audience laughter)) ((pause))

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Elki-ToprEA>)

The comedian repeats the idea that many British jobs will belong to the foreigners (either immigrants or not) with some variation: "we're still gonna steal your jobs", "[they] want us to have your jobs", "you're going to lose them". In the "we" appears a widening of the foreigner referent: "us, the Chinese and robots", which gives way to another stereotype concerning job losses. Still, this fragment of the stand-up performance contains the clearest opposition *we/us – you* (in the fragment above, it is *we – here* (which via metonymy implies *you*)), which is typical for marginal humour and its subversiveness.

6.2. A second-generation migrant

In this section, a sketch by Iov, titled *Je suis roumain* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDfl78d26U4>), uploaded on YouTube on October 17, 2014, gathering 33,091,540 views, and more than half a million likes (by August 10, 2022), will

be analysed. The video is in French, and it has transcripts available in various languages, including French, English, or Romanian. The discourse in French has been transcribed, and the English translation of the video provided on YouTube was also used, corrected only when there is something that could alter the comprehension. Only some of the most important strategies and sequences from the video will be presented, those which allow for a comparison with the strategies found in Radu Isac's stand-up moments.

One of the most frequent strategies Iov employs in this video is role-play (character footing): the comedian creates various *personae* he animates for short periods of time: his mother and cousins, school colleagues or friends, his teacher, French employers/public employees. These *personae* are often voicing/illustrating different French stereotypes concerning Romanians. Thus role-play (character footing) appears as a way to assess "the quality and extent of the cultural representations held by the audience" (Yus, 2004, p. 320), which represents an important humorous strategy.

When animating his mother's *persona*, the comedian uses a type of stylisation which seems common for second-generation emigrants (Chun, 2004; Da Silva, 2015; Koven & Simões Marques, 2015; Vigouroux, 2015 etc.): his mother's *persona* speaks Romanian-influenced French, thus nonstandard French (she has a "marked nonnative Hexagonal French accent", Vigouroux, 2015, p. 245). It is considered that "Accent shifting to index a character's ethnic group or social background [...] or as first-generation migrant [...] has become a canonical form in stand-up comedy, although its meanings and functions vary across contexts." (Vigouroux, 2015, p. 263). At the same time, mother's *persona* behaviour is presented as emanating from the non-modern and "deviant" practices of Romanians who consider their children as small children their entire live, which explains why the mother speaks with him while he's having a shower:

Je suis roumain. Enfin, je suis né en France, mais ma mère m'a dit un milliard de fois « Tu sais, Cyprien, ton père et moi nous sommes roumains, donc tu as du sang 100% roumain. » « Oui, mais pourquoi tu me dis ça quand je prends une douche, exactement ? » « Ah, pardon »

[I am Romanian. Well, I was born in France, but my mother told me a billion times: "You know Cyprien, your father and I are Romanians, so you have 100% Romanian blood." "Yeah, but why are you telling me this while I'm taking a shower, exactly?" "Huh? Oh, sorry."]

Another mention of Romanian parenting abroad is the fact that the parents use almost exclusively French when speaking to their children born in France (which alludes to the "erasure" of linguistic differences), except for swearing formulae (the one that is quoted is among the most frequent in Romanian):

Malheureusement, je ne parle pas roumain, parce que mes parents parlaient essentiellement français chez moi, sauf pour dire des insultes. Du coup je ne sais dire que des insultes. « Vorbești românește ? » «***»

[Unfortunately, I don't speak Romanian, because my parents mostly spoke French at home... except to say insults. So I can only say insults. "Do you speak Romanian?" "***".]

The portraying of the mother (and implicitly father) is strategic, as it allows creating his own *persona* as modern, with non-hybrid practices: he has a native Hexagonal French accent, he distances himself from his parents' practices, the short phrases spoken in Romanian (the question about speaking Romanian and the swearing) reveal the French accent. The way he speaks French highlights a de-ethnicised *persona*, a member of the French majority, an insider (see Da Silva, 2015).

However, there are traces of his hybridity, starting with his name, which triggers for French natives the inference of his having foreign roots. At this point, there is also the possibility to observe how the “victim” characteristic of the *persona* (Gilbert, 1997, p. 317) is displayed. In Iov’s case there is not an explicitly “victim” label, but an implied one. Speaking about his origin allows access to French stereotypes regarding Romanians. His Romanian origin is presented as something which a person cannot be proud of, due to the frequent incorrect assimilation of Romanians to Roma/Romani people (an ethnic minority in Romania and in other neighbouring countries), a stigmatised group by media and public opinion in various European countries:

Il m’a fallu du temps pour l’avouer, c’est pas l’origine mega-stylée à la base. C’est cool quand tu dis ‘je suis américain’ ((la photo de Barack Obama))... ‘je suis italien’ ((les images de Leonardo Da Vinci et de Mona Lise))... mais euh... ‘je suis roumain’... ((la photo d’un homme appartenant à la communauté Roma, sur une chaise, un accordéon sur la poitrine))

[It took me a while to figure it out [to admit it], it isn't really [the most] stylish [origin]. It's cool to say: I am American. ((picture of Barack Obama))... I am Italian. ((images of Leonardo Da Vinci and Mona Lisa)). But uh, I am Romanian. ((picture of a man belonging to the Roma group, sitting on a chair, holding an accordion))]

Victimization appears by contrast: the other two origins mentioned (American, Italian) are depicted by assimilation to leading political or artistic figures (Obama, Da Vinci respectively); his own origin is assimilated to an ethnic group he does not belong to (Romani group) and who has a rather negative image in various European countries. Many persons with a Romani origin are from Romania, the home country of the comedian’s parents. The negative image of the Romani incarnates the stereotype of the thief, presented in the context of the school, with other animated *personae*:

ça s’est particulièrement vérifiée quand j’étais à école. « C’est marrant ton nom de famille. T’es de quelle origine? », « Je suis roumain ». ((les deux collègues et la professeure commencent à retirer tous leurs objets de la table et de les mettre dans leurs sacs, bien fermés))

[And it was particularly true when I was at school: “Your last name is funny, where are you from?” “I am Romanian.” ((the two colleagues and the teacher begin to gather all their objects from the table, to put them into their bags and to close the bags))]

The stereotype of the thief is inferred from the gestures of the other *personae* (gathering their things and putting them in bags that are immediately closed). At the end of the video, there is a call-back (or a re-incorporation) of the Roma stereotype, in the topic of the beggar, but inferred from the verbal behaviour of a French *persona*:

Finalement, avec le temps je me suis rendu compte qu’on a les origines qu’on a et faut pas en avoir honte et considérer ça plutôt comme une richesse. Abonnez-vous. «Ah, il mendie des abonnés, le roumain! »

[Eventually over time I realized, we cannot choose the origins we have, and we must not be ashamed of it, moreover consider it an asset. Subscribe. “Ah! he begs for subscribers, the Romanian.”]

While the comic *persona* seems to embrace the Romanian origins, by contrast with the first mention of this not so stylish ethnic origin, another French figure re-enacts the assimilation of Romanian and Roma and the Roma stereotype with another characteristic attributed to the group (beggars). Call-backs or re-incorporations are based on “the audience’s short-term memory store of assumptions arising from their processing of the comedian’s already communicated

utterances” (Yus, 2004, p. 323) and represent a recurrent discourse strategy in humorous performances.

The comedian focuses on the exoticism of his name to French natives:

Mon nom de famille c'est Iov. I-O-V, trois lettres, ce ne sont pas des initiales, c'est dingue parce qu'il n'y a que 3 lettres et pourtant depuis que je suis né je suis tombé que sur des gens qui n'arrivent pas à l'écrire. « Votre nom, s'il vous plait ? » « IOV, I-O-V », ((Yov)) « non, I-O-V » ((Iove)) « il y pas de e » ((Yop)), « Non » ((artichaut)) « IOV » ((Iov)) voilà, voilà c'est ça... ((Yov)) Et, au plus de mon nom chelou, mes parents ont eu la très bonne idée de me donner un prénom presque inconnu. Alors, la euh... « Cyprien Iov... Tu... tu fous de ma gueule. Sans blague ? Tu vas t'appeler Nicolas Pichard comme tout le monde... Cyprien Iov (gné gné) C'est nul, tu t'appelles gné gné gné et bah voilà »

[My last name is Iov. I.O.V, three letters that are not initials. And it's crazy because there are only three letters, and yet ever since I have been born, I only met people who've been unable to write it. “Your name, please.” “Iov. I.O.V. [...] No, I.O.V. [...] No, there is no E. [...] No, I.O.V. [...] There, there, there, that's it!” And in addition to my weird name, my parents had a great idea to give me an almost unknown first name. So then, uh... “Cyprien Iov? You're kidding me? This is a joke, right? You will be known as Nicolas Pichard to everyone now [You are going to be Nicolas Pichard, like all the others]. Cyprien Iov (nied nied) it sucks to hear. It sucks. And there.”]

The situation involves exaggeration, especially as regards the spelling of the name (at some point the French native writes something completely inadequate – *artichaut*), and hints to the erasure of distinctive cultural features, like the name: *Tu vas t'appeler Nicolas Pichard comme tout le monde* [You are going to be Nicolas Pichard, like all the others].

7. Concluding remarks

What seems common in the performances of the two comedians is exploiting British or French stereotypes targeted at Romanian or Eastern European immigrants: low-skilled, stealing jobs, non-modern – racist, anti-feminist, etc. (in the UK); thieves, beggars (incorrect assimilation Romanian-Roma), non-modern (in France); questioning international hierarchies and their effect on the evaluation of various nationalities. As concerns the preferred discursive practices, the differences are important, and they seem to dwell less on the type of channel used and more on the comic *persona* created during the performances as a result of the degree of marginality perceived/assumed by the comedian (which is influenced by the public discourse of the host/receiving country).

As a first-generation migrant, Isac uses self-deprecation/disparagement, quips (ironical or sarcastic comments), and deceitful behaviour in order to create a non-modern (backward) *persona*. The comic *persona* acts simultaneously oppressively and transgressively with regard to the negotiation of racism or xenophobia (for example, who can be considered an expat and who is always perceived as an immigrant based on nationality), (anti-)feminism, and social hypocrisy. When tackling social hypocrisy, role play (character footing) is used as an illustration (the rejection text). Isac's *persona* is sometimes aggressive (and unsympathetic), a characteristic that seems in line with a negative public image promoted by British media and populist politicians as regards Romanian/Eastern European migrants when labour market opened, in 2014, and in the (post-)Brexit context: he negatively evaluates the host/receiving country and explicitly places it as a second-best option, he emphasises the opposition between British nationals and immigrants or foreigners (*we-you*), and tackles sensitive socio-economic issues (job losses).

As a second-generation migrant, Iov prefers role-play (character footing), as this mechanism allows to animate various *personae* who can, on the one hand, confirm some of the stereotype (the mother *persona*) – non-modern, “bad” French, etc., and on the other, challenge various other stereotypes, which are more uncomfortable for the comic *persona* (the school colleagues and friends, the teacher, employers/public employees *personae*) – thief, beggar, a person whose name is incomprehensible and needs changing (“erasing” the cultural differences). As already noticed for female comics, performing his minimal marginality Iov acts both oppressively, through the demeaning stereotype in constructing his mother’s *persona*, and transgressively, through the challenge of the main uncomfortable stereotypes in constructing different French *personae* and indirectly placing himself as the victim. The oppressive dimension of the discourse could be construed as an indirect form of self-deprecation/disparagement, which is subordinated to the *persona* which appears as a French insider, member of the dominant group.

Iov chooses to create a comic *persona* with positive traits that can have the public’s empathy due to the scenes in which he appears as victim of negative stereotypes, as a result of his “exotic” origins. Nevertheless, he is part of the French majority. Isac creates a rather negative *persona*: sometimes aggressive, unsympathetic, unmodern; there are parts of the performances where his *persona* appears as victim of negative stereotypes, but there is an alternation between these parts and parts in which the negative *persona* is dominant. His *persona* is part of a new minority in the UK.

Due to their *license* for verbal and nonverbal behaviour within the public ritual of the humorous discourse, the comedians perform what can be broadly called cultural critique. The comic *personae* are presented as belonging to stigmatised groups (or assimilated to those groups), mainly challenging the dominant cultural representations in both host countries, while sometimes also reinforcing the cultural representations of the majority as regards (new) minority groups. In both cases, the identity investment is highly important in creating the comic *persona*. The “episodes” presented offer the comedians the possibility to align or disalign with other *personae*, from the mainstream or the marginal community, thus allowing the audience to align/identify or disalign/des-identify with/from the comic *persona* according to the effect of the humorous discourse on their cultural representations.

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