

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Research Background

Humor is conceptualised as a communicative display that includes varying degrees of linguistic, gestures, the presentation of visual imagery, and situational management to produce an enjoyable experience in one's audience, often exemplified through expressions of pleasure such as smiling and laughing (Beeman, 1999). Dodds and Kirby (2013) argue that humor has the capacity to challenge established beliefs and conventional norms, incite critical thinking and opposition by employing absurdity, and foster unity and assistance for individuals and communities facing displacement and adversity. This thesis seeks to analyze the potential of humor in undermining dominant ideas about power, race, gender, class, and so on, through prominent women stand-up comics: Sakdiyah Ma'ruf, Fatiha El Ghorri, Shazia Mirza, and Shaparak Khorsandi.

Stand-up comedy is one way to convey humorous discourse. Stand-up comedy is undoubtedly the oldest, most universal, fundamental, and profound form of humorous discourse (Mintz, 1985). Humorous discourse has a rhetorical structure as Andrea Greenbaum (1999) stated in the *International Journal of Humor Research*, that stand-up comedy is an inherently rhetorical discourse; it strives not only to entertain, but to persuade. According to Aristotle, rhetoric comprises of three artistic proofs: Ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos relates to the speaker credibility that encourages the audience to listen to what is being said (Matsen et al, 1990). Pathos, the proof that deals with emotional appeals, supports the belief that in order to reach an audience, a speaker must move the soul of the listener, ultimately changing the frame of mind of the audience (Matsen et al, 1990). Logos appeals to reason. Logos can also be thought of as the content of the argument, as well as how well a speaker has argued his/her point. If the above artistic proofs are

carried out successfully, tension release in laughter should proceed during stand-up comedy performances.

Stand-up comics can act as an essential component in promoting public dialogue and social transformation, by carefully selecting topics that are pertinent to their individual identities and the experiences stemming from their identities. The content and the roles of several women stand-up comics in conveying a message in their contents: Sakdiyah Ma'ruf, Fatiha El-Ghorri, Shazia Mirza, and Shaparak Khorsandi are analyzed in this thesis. In Indonesia, Sakdiyah Ma'ruf has been identified by BBC as the country's first Muslim woman stand-up comic, who employs comedy as a means of confronting Islamic extremism and opposing violence against women. Sakdiyah's performances delve into topics such as religious freedom, religious conservatism, and women's rights, with a substantial emphasis on the family unit and grassroots community.

Sakdiyah Ma'ruf, as a person with multiple identities: woman, Muslim, Indonesian, Arab descent, often presents satires about her identity by describing her experience of being stereotyped by society. A stereotype is a widely held, simplified, and essentialist belief about a specific group. Groups are often stereotyped on the basis of sex, gender identity, race and ethnicity, nationality, age, socioeconomic status, language, and so forth (Stanford, n.d.). As a form of gender injustice, stereotyping is also associated with violence (Munti, 2022). Violence against women, specifically, is defined as any act imposed on a person solely because she is a woman that results in or may cause physical, psychological, or sexual harm/suffering.

In her work, Sakdiyah's comedy has been instrumental in disseminating information, rendering support, and strengthening the position of Muslim women within the discourse. In the United Kingdom, Fatiha El-Ghorri is a British-Moroccan Muslim woman with a perceptive intellect, offering incisive insights and clever commentary on the experiences of a British Muslim woman in contemporary society. Fatiha not only dismantles prevalent stereotypes surrounding Muslims but

also encourages individuals to reevaluate their preconceived notions about Islam, Muslim, and particularly Muslim women. The next one is Shazia Mirza, originally from Pakistan but raised in England, Mirza began doing stand-up comedy to challenge cultural expectations of what a Muslim woman is supposed to be. Her humor is often lost on her family and fellow Muslims, some of whom have sent her death threats. Another one is Shaparak Khorsandi, formerly known as Shappi Khorsandi, is an Iranian-born British comic and author. She is the daughter of the Iranian political satirist and poet Hadi Khorsandi. Her family left Iran for the United Kingdom following the Islamic Revolution.

Sakdiyah Ma'ruf is a prominent figure in Indonesian stand-up comedy who uses humor to challenge and critique various social issues related to her identity as a Muslim woman of Arab descent. Several studies have been conducted to analyze her comedy performance from different perspectives. Marianto (2019) explores how her comedy can influence public awareness and support for human rights issues in Indonesia, especially those related to religious conservatism, women's rights, and religious freedom. Roosyidah and Mahadian (2020) analyzes the discourse on Muslim women in her comedy and how it challenges the patriarchal ideology that oppresses them. Safira (2019) examines how she uses humor to resist and critique ethnic stereotypes and her own community, both from outside and within. Fatmawati and Cahyono (2018) analyzes the power of her comedy through the appraisal approach and how she controls and convinces the audience with her high-graded attitudes. Nashihah (2019) analyzes how her comedy acts as a preaching technique and provides insights into the methods and messages of her comedy. These studies show the intelligence and creativity of Sakdiyah Ma'ruf in using humor as a tool for advocacy, resistance, and social change.

Although the previous study is quite rich in discussing Sakdiyah Ma'ruf's stand-up comedy content, there is no study that analyzes and compares her content with the content of other similar stand-up comics. When viewed, there are also many Muslim women stand-up comics in various countries who are also vocal about women discourse, Muslim discourse, and the union of the two discourses. In this

study, the stand-up comedy material of Sakdiyah Ma'ruf is compared with that of other female comics from various countries, including Fatiha El-Ghorri, Shazia Mirza, and Shaparak Khorsandi. These comics were chosen because their comedy content is similar to Sakdiyah Ma'ruf. Each of them is vocal about their history or experience as a Muslim woman, the stigma attached to Muslim women, violence against women, Muslim family system, etc. The aim from comparing their contents is to identify any commonalities or differences in the issues they highlight in their performances, especially if it relates to gender-based violence or women oppression, and analyzing the issues using feminist criticism.

To address this, the writer employs incongruity theory to understand the humor contained in stand-up comedy, then employ stand-up comedy structure theory to understand what themes are actually conveyed in each bit of humor, then employ feminist theory to analyze common themes being discussed. Incongruity theory is well suited to analyzing humor in stand-up comedy because it explains why something is funny by highlighting unexpected, surprising, or illogical elements in a joke. This theory allows researchers to dissect how comics prime their jokes for laughs by creating one expectation and then delivering an unexpected punchline, making it an important tool for understanding the mechanisms of humor in studied routines. The structural theory of stand-up comedy is suitable for analyzing the specific techniques and formats that comics use to convey their material effectively. This also includes understanding the punchline structure of the setup. This structural analysis helps identify recurring patterns and techniques that are important to the thematic content of the show. Feminist theory is suitable for analyzing common themes in stand-up comedy, especially if the content discusses issues related to gender, patriarchy, and women's experiences. By applying feminist theory, researchers can uncover the deeper meanings and critiques embedded in comic narratives, and connect them to broader discussions of gender equality and social justice.

## 1.2. Research Questions

In light of the considerations above, the formulation of the problem revolves around two pivotal questions:

1. How does the structure of stand-up comedy reveal the theme in every bit?
2. How does feminist criticism reveal the common issues of women experiences from the theme?

## 1.3. Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is only on the transcription of the stand-up comedy performances under these titles:

1. The bravest coward | Sakdiyah Ma'ruf | TEDxUbud
2. Fatiha El Ghorri: Arranged or Forced Marriages? | Jonathan Ross' Comedy Club
3. Muslim Woman Stand Up Comedy - Shazia Mirza
4. Shaparak Khorsandi On Iran's Morality Police | Late Night Mash | Dave

## 1.4. Limitation of the Study

The research is constrained by the inability to conduct direct interviews with stand-up comics due to geographical and connectivity limitations. Consequently, the study centers on content analysis conducted by the writer. This limitation implies that insights from the comics themselves, which might provide additional context and nuanced perspectives, is not directly incorporated into the research findings.

Furthermore, the analysis of issues using feminist criticism in this study is only as a support for the linguistic analysis of the stand-up comedy structure, therefore it is not too in-depth in its discussion. The analysis is also not made intersection with other theoretical analysis such as marxist theory, postcolonial theory, structuralist-functional theory, etc., so that the analysis is based on gender issues only.

### **1.5. Purpose of the Study**

Firstly, this study aims to understand how the structure of stand-up comedy reveals the themes in each bit. By examining words, phrases, and sentences used in the stand-up comedy performance, the study seeks to uncover the underlying messages and themes conveyed through their performances. Secondly, this study aims to investigate how feminist criticism can be applied to reveal common issues of women experiences from the identified themes.

### **1.6. Significance of the Study**

The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of scientific insights, particularly in the disciplines of literature, cultural studies, and media studies. It is the author's desire that this research can serve as a point of reference for students in the State University of Jakarta and other learners.

This study is expected to increase knowledge among literature students, stand-up comics, women advocates of social issues, and the general public about how we can mainstream and advocate for an issue in a non-litigation manner through creative and engaging ways with the public on social media. This study is also anticipated to be useful for people at all levels of society who want to investigate a comedy using Humor Theory, Stand-up Comedy Theory, and Feminist Theory.