

## **Laughing Back: Women’s Stand-Up Comedy as a Site of Gendered Resistance**

### **Rire en Résistance : Le Stand-up des Femmes comme Espace de Résistance Genrée**

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## Abstract

This article examines female stand-up comedy as a discursive site of gendered resistance through a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) and intersectional framework. Focusing on performances by Hannah Gadsby, Nawell Madani, and Hanane El Fadili, it investigates how humour operates as a socially situated practice through which gender norms, power relations, and cultural ideologies are negotiated and contested. Rather than treating humour as a universal or purely affiliative strategy, the study demonstrates that comedic resistance is shaped by intersecting structures of gender, culture, and social positioning. The analysis reveals three distinct modes of feminist humour: confrontational refusal and discursive rupture (Gadsby), hybrid negotiation between critique and relatability (Madani), and culturally embedded indirect resistance (El Fadili). These variations challenge dominant humour theories that associate women's humour primarily with self-deprecation and affiliation. Findings further indicate that humour in stand-up comedy functions as both a site of ideological struggle and a mechanism for managing social intelligibility within specific cultural contexts. The study contributes to feminist humour scholarship by extending FCDA to performance comedy and by demonstrating how intersectionality reshapes comedic agency across different sociocultural environments.

**Keywords:** humour, FCDA, intersectionality, stand-up comedy, gendered discourse, feminist resistance

## Résumé

Cet article examine le stand-up féminin comme un espace discursif de résistance genrée à travers une analyse critique du discours féministe (FCDA) et une approche intersectionnelle. En se concentrant sur les performances de Hannah Gadsby, Nawell Madani et Hanane El Fadili, il analyse la manière dont l'humour fonctionne comme une pratique socialement située à travers laquelle les normes de genre, les relations de pouvoir et les idéologies culturelles sont négociées et contestées. Plutôt que de considérer l'humour comme une stratégie universelle ou purement affiliative, cette étude montre que la résistance comique est façonnée par des structures imbriquées de genre, de culture et de positionnement social. L'analyse révèle trois modes distincts d'humour féministe : le refus confrontationnel et la rupture discursive (Gadsby), la négociation hybride entre critique et proximité (Madani), et la résistance indirecte ancrée culturellement (El Fadili). Ces variations remettent en question les théories dominantes de l'humour qui associent principalement l'humour féminin à l'autodérision et à l'affiliation. Les résultats indiquent en outre que l'humour dans le stand-up fonctionne à la fois comme un espace de lutte idéologique et comme un mécanisme de gestion de l'intelligibilité sociale dans des contextes culturels spécifiques. Cette étude contribue à la recherche sur l'humour féministe en élargissant l'usage de la FCDA au domaine du spectacle vivant et en montrant comment l'intersectionnalité reconfigure l'agentivité comique dans différents environnements socioculturels.

**Mots-clés :** humour, FCDA, intersectionnalité, stand-up, discours de genre, résistance féministe

## Introduction

Humour is a socially embedded discourse practice shaped by cultural norms, ideological structures, and gendered expectations. While earlier research often framed humour as a universal cognitive or social mechanism, contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasises its role in constructing and negotiating power relations (Holmes, 2000; Lazar, 2007). Within this perspective, stand-up comedy represents a particularly rich site for examining how humour operates as both entertainment and social critique.

Historically, stand-up comedy has been conceptualised as a male-dominated performance genre, in which women have been marginalised or constrained by expectations of likability, self-deprecation, and relational humour styles (Coates, 2007; Kotthoff, 2006). However, recent developments in feminist humour studies challenge these assumptions, demonstrating that female comedians actively reshape comedic norms through irony, narrative strategies, and subversive performance practices.

This study examines how female stand-up comedians use humour as a discursive resource for negotiating gendered expectations and challenging dominant ideological frameworks. It focuses on performances by Hannah Gadsby (Australia), Nawell Madani (Belgium/Algeria), and Hanane El Fadili (Morocco), selected for their distinct cultural and socio-political contexts and their engagement with gender, identity, and social norms.

The study is guided by the following research question:  
**How do female stand-up comedians use humour as a form of gendered resistance across different cultural contexts?**

To address this question, the study adopts Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) (Lazar, 2007) combined with intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989). This dual framework allows for an examination of how humour simultaneously reflects and challenges gendered ideologies while accounting for the intersection of gender with culture, migration, and social positioning.

The analysis focuses on selected excerpts from the three comedians' performances, identifying humour strategies such as irony, exaggeration, narrative storytelling, and self-deprecation. It further explores how these strategies function as forms of resistance, negotiation, or cultural mediation across different socio-political contexts.

By doing so, the study moves beyond universalist accounts of humour and instead conceptualises stand-up comedy as a situated discursive practice in which feminist agency is contextually produced and constrained.

## **1. Literature Review**

### **1.1 Gender and Humour: Challenging Traditional Assumptions**

Early research on language and gender often portrayed women's speech as less assertive and less humorous than men's. For instance, Lakoff (1975) argues that women's language is characterized by politeness, hedging, and a lack of authority, suggesting that women are less likely to engage in humour production. Similarly, humour studies historically associated men with joke-telling and comedic performance, reinforcing comedy as a male-dominated domain. However, such claims have increasingly been challenged. As Coates (2007) observes, "women are just as capable of producing humour as men, but they often do so in different ways." This perspective highlights the necessity of moving beyond deficit models of women's language to recognize the diversity of their communicative practices.

Crawford and Gressley (1991) and Norrick (1994) argue that women tend to favour anecdotal humour—"short, personal narratives that create shared understanding"—over canned jokes or wordplay. Such humour allows women to draw from lived experiences, enhancing relatability while engaging in subtle critique. Kotthoff (2006) notes that "storytelling provides a space where speakers can negotiate identities and social norms through humour," highlighting the strategic potential of female humour in constructing social meaning.

### **1.2 Humour Styles and Gendered Communication**

Traditional humour theories categorize humour into styles often linked to gender. Martin and Ford (2018) suggest that affiliative and self-deprecating humour are more commonly associated with women, whereas aggressive and sexual humour are typically linked to men. Freud's typology of humour—aggressive, sexual, and non-tendentious—further reinforces this gendered distinction.

Recent studies problematise these rigid categories. Holmes (2000) argues that humour can be both "bonding and biting," simultaneously creating solidarity and expressing critique. This dual function enables female comedians to navigate societal expectations while challenging them.

Self-deprecating humour has historically positioned women as objects of laughter rather than agents of humour (Tomsett, 2018). Yet contemporary female comedians often subvert this

dynamic, employing self-deprecation ironically to reveal strength and social critique. Similarly, irony and sarcasm serve as strategic tools: Haverkate (1990) describes irony as “a strategic form of indirect communication,” while Cruttenden (1986) emphasizes prosodic cues in signalling sarcasm, enabling comedians to address sensitive topics while maintaining ambiguity.

### **1.3 Intersectionality and Humorous Discourse**

Intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (1989), provides a critical framework for understanding how multiple identities intersect to shape individual experiences. In humour, intersectionality highlights how gender interacts with race, religion, sexuality, and class, influencing comedic expression.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) seeks to uncover “how gendered power relations are discursively produced, sustained, and resisted” (Lazar, 2007). This framework is particularly relevant for stand-up comedy, where personal narratives intersect with broader social structures.

Comedians from marginalized backgrounds frequently leverage humour to negotiate identity and challenge dominant discourses (Shivaprasad, 2020). Barreca (1991) asserts that humour enables women to “speak the unspeakable,” addressing topics silenced in mainstream discourse. Similarly, Gilbert (2004) observes that comedy is “a unique and powerful form of communication” capable of subverting hierarchies and creating alternative spaces for expression.

### **1.4 Humour as Resistance and Social Critique**

Humour functions as a tool of resistance. Lazar (2014) contends that feminist discourse can operate as activism, raising awareness and challenging oppressive ideologies. Humour becomes a form of “critical reflexivity as praxis” (Lazar, 2007, p. 152).

Comedians employ strategies such as exaggeration, parody, and role-play to expose social absurdities. Yus (2016) explains that humour can “reframe reality,” allowing audiences to perceive familiar situations from alternative perspectives. Such reframing is particularly effective in addressing sexism, racism, and social inequality.

Furthermore, humour operates as both “shield and sword” (Holmes, 2000), protecting performers from direct confrontation while enabling critique: a dual function crucial for female comedians navigating societal expectations while asserting agency.

## 1.5 Summary of the Literature

The literature demonstrates a shift from viewing women's humour as deficient to recognizing it as complex, strategic, and socially significant. Early theories emphasized male vs. female differences, but recent research foregrounds context, identity, and power.

This study builds upon these insights by examining how female comedians from different backgrounds use humour to both reflect experience and transform dominant discourses. By integrating FCDA and intersectionality, it contributes to a nuanced understanding of humour as a site of resistance, agency, and social change.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)

Feminism has inspired gender and language studies since the late 1960s (Sunderland, 2006, p. 21). The combination of the insights of feminist studies of language and critical discourse analysis gave birth to a new approach: *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)*. Its main goal is to study linguistic and paralinguistic assumptions about gender and show that they are primarily ideological (Lazar, 2005; Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002; Talbot, 1995).

It seeks to examine “the complex, subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated and challenged in different contexts and communities” (Lazar, 2007, p. 142). That is to say, FCDA examines how power and ideology function within language, and how everyday communication and societal narratives perpetuate gender norms, often reinforcing hierarchical structures and social inequalities between genders. Also, the study of language and gender from feminist critical perspectives involves investigating whether certain discourses within specific contexts have been or are being gendered. Thus, analysing humorous language by female comedians from different cultures, (western and eastern ones) using FCDA sounds promising.

FCDA encourages the need to incorporate intersectional treats such as class, ethnicity, and gender into the discourse analysis (Lazar, 2005, p. 2-7). In other words, it seeks to challenge the underlying assumptions that keep gender inequalities prevailing by encouraging social change. This is motivated by the belief that discourse has real-world impacts on the lives of men and women, particularly in relation to how they are positioned within their communities and institutions.

## 2.2 Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American critical legal race scholar, coined the term intersectionality to describe how antidiscrimination laws failed to protect black women because they considered race and gender as mutually distinct categories of experience and analysis (Cooper, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) argued that using a single-axis framework (i.e., one that considers single, rather than multiple categories of identity) as a basis for making legal decisions in employment discrimination cases involving black women did not account for the multiple ways these women experienced discrimination. Crenshaw (1989) contended that individuals, particularly those with numerous minority-identities should be regarded through a lens that considers how their identities overlap to influence their experience of the world, particularly experiences that result in prejudice. Thus, intersectionality refers to the simultaneous experience of social categories such as race, gender, socioeconomic class, and sexual orientation, as well as the ways in which these categories interact to form oppressive, domineering, and discriminatory institutions (Crenshaw, 1989).

Integrating intersectionality into my analysis will help recognize how gender interacts with other social categories such as race, ethnicity, class, religion, educational background and sexual orientation and this interaction shapes female stand-up comedians' comedic content.

## 2.3 Analytical Framework

To operationalise Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) and intersectionality, an analytical framework is developed to guide the examination of the selected stand-up performances. The framework identifies the main dimensions analysed in the corpus and the indicators used to interpret how humour functions as a form of gendered resistance. These dimensions are derived from previous research on humour, discourse, gender, and power relations (Lazar, 2005, 2007; Holmes, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989).

Dimension	Indicators
Humour Strategy	irony, satire, exaggeration, self-deprecation, storytelling
Gender Resistance	challenging stereotypes, questioning norms, exposing inequality
Power Relations	references to patriarchy, authority, privilege, discrimination
Intersectionality	race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, nationality, class

Discursive Function	resistance, empowerment, awareness raising, identity negotiation
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Table 1. Analytical framework used for the analysis of female stand-up comedy performances.

The framework serves as a coding guide during the analysis of the selected excerpts. Particular attention is paid to the humour strategies employed by the comedians and the ways these strategies are used to challenge gender norms, negotiate power relations, and articulate intersectional identities. The framework also facilitates a comparative analysis across the three comedians by providing consistent analytical categories through which similarities and differences can be identified and interpreted.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) and intersectionality theory. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the aim is to explore how meaning, power, and identity are constructed through language and humour in naturally occurring discourse, rather than to measure frequency or test hypotheses.

FCDA provides the analytical lens for examining how gendered power relations are reproduced, resisted, or negotiated through comedic discourse. It allows for an investigation of humour as a discursive practice embedded in social and ideological structures. Intersectionality complements this approach by accounting for how gender intersects with other identity categories such as race, ethnicity, class, religion, and nationality in shaping comedic expression and audience positioning.

Together, FCDA and intersectionality enable a nuanced interpretation of stand-up comedy as a site of both resistance and reproduction of dominant social norms.

#### 3.2 Corpus Selection

The corpus consists of three stand-up performances accessed through online platforms that host stand-up comedy videos, such as YouTube and Netflix:

- Hannah Gadsby – *Nanette, a Netflix Special 2018*
- Nawell Madani – *C'est dur d'être une femme aujourd'hui – Marrakech du rire 2022*
- Hanane El Fadili – *Chikha ZIG ZAG 2017/ Comedia 2021*

These comedians were selected through purposive sampling because their performances explicitly engage with themes of gender, identity, social expectations, and power relations. In addition, they represent three distinct sociocultural and geopolitical contexts: Australia (Gadsby), Belgium/Algeria (Madani), and Morocco (El Fadili). This cross-cultural selection allows for a comparative analysis of how gendered humour is shaped by different cultural and ideological environments.

The performances were chosen based on their relevance to the research focus, their availability in recorded format, and their rich discursive content related to feminist critique and social commentary.

### 3.3 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is the stand-up excerpt and they were selected from the three performances. These excerpts were chosen because they contain explicit or implicit references to:

- gender norms and expectations
- discrimination and sexism
- domestic labour and care giving roles
- harassment and violence
- identity negotiation
- social and cultural constraints on women

Each excerpt constitutes a complete rhetorical and comedic segment in which humour strategies and ideological positioning can be meaningfully analysed.

### 3.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis followed a multi-stage interpretative procedure:

1. Transcription of selected stand-up excerpts, ensuring accuracy in capturing linguistic and paralinguistic features relevant to humour and emphasis.
2. Familiarisation with the data through repeated viewing and reading of transcripts.
3. Coding of excerpts according to the analytical framework, focusing on humour strategies, power relations, gender resistance, intersectionality, and discursive function.
4. Identification and classification of humour strategies such as irony, satire, exaggeration, self-deprecation, and storytelling.

5. FCDA-based analysis of how power relations (e.g., patriarchy, authority, discrimination) are constructed and challenged in discourse.
6. Intersectional interpretation of how gender interacts with race, ethnicity, class, nationality, and cultural identity.
7. Comparative analysis across the three comedians to identify similarities and differences in humour use and discursive positioning.

This qualitative study analyzes selected excerpts from stand-up performances using FCDA. The analysis focuses on three comedians: Hannah Gadsby, Nawell Madani, and Hanane El Fadili, chosen for their diverse cultural backgrounds and distinct comedic styles. The data is collected through videos of comedy routines performed by these female comedians and the analysis focuses on each female comedian's style and humour strategies within their performances. The research uses feminist critical discourse analysis as the theoretical framework, allowing for an in-depth exploration of how gendered discourses are constructed and negotiated in stand-up comedy contexts. Also, the intersectional approach and qualitative content analysis are used to foster a more inclusive examination of gender and the intersectionality of gender roles with other social identities in comedy, moving beyond the singular focus on gender alone.

#### **4. Analysis and Discussion**

Humour serves as a tool through which women comedians articulate resistance. By transforming personal experiences into public narratives, they expose systemic inequalities while engaging audiences.

##### **4.1 Hannah Gadsby (Nanette): Subverting Comedy and Critiquing Power**

Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette* challenges traditional expectations of female humour by rejecting self-deprecation as a strategy of social appeasement and instead using humour as a platform for social critique, identity exploration, and emotional truth. Her routine blends comedic observation with deeply personal narrative, creating a dual effect: laughter and critical reflection.

##### **Gender Misidentification and Social Commentary**

Gadsby opens with reflections on how she is often mistaken for a man, using humour to explore societal assumptions about gender roles:

*“I get mistaken for a man quite a lot. But not for long. My masculinity doesn’t hold up to scrutiny. I’m only a man at a glance. Which means it happens in a customer service situation, usually. Because I’m only a man at a glance, it means I’m very much right there still. Right in front of the person who’s just called me ‘sir’... and deeply regrets it. The really good ones just erase my memory of being called ‘sir.’ They’re clever. It’s a clever trick. They do that with a combination... of hypnosis, and the magic word. They go, ‘Can I help you, sir? Madam.’ And it works. Gone. I do not remember being called ‘sir’ if someone calls me ‘madam’ immediately after. Because ‘madam’ is a very triggering word for me. It is. It’s what my mom used to call me when I was in a lot of trouble... for opening a brothel. Can we just have more words?”*

This passage highlights how humour can expose micro aggressions, gender norms, and fleeting social privileges. By framing a mundane customer service encounter as both comedic and socially instructive, Gadsby makes visible the subtle mechanisms of gendered assumptions.

### **Identity, Self-Deprecation, and Marginalization**

Gadsby challenges traditional female self-deprecation, framing it not as humility but as historically imposed humiliation:

*“Do you understand what self-deprecation means when it comes from somebody who already exists in the margins? It’s not humility. It’s humiliation. I put myself down in order to speak, in order to seek permission... to speak. And I simply will not do that anymore. Not to myself or anybody who identifies with me.”*

Here, she subverts the expectation that women must perform self-effacing humour to be socially acceptable. Instead, she reclaims her voice, turning self-reference into a tool for empowerment and critique.

### **Irony and Privilege**

Gadsby uses ironic juxtaposition to comment on social privilege, particularly the temporary advantages of being misperceived as a straight white man:

*“Don’t apologize. In fact, I should thank you. I enjoyed it. Thank you. Never apologize. Don’t apologize. Look, I don’t identify as transgender, but I’m partial to a holiday. I love being mistaken for a man, ’cause just for a few moments, life gets a hell of a lot easier. I’m top-shelf normal, king of the humans. I’m a straight white man. I’m about... I’m about to get good*

*service for no fucking effort! Do not apologize. I was going to take my assigned seat and both the armrests. Your knee space? No.”*

Through this segment, Gadsby highlights systemic inequalities, showing how humour can create critical awareness by turning privilege into a point of reflection.

### **Humour and Anger as Social Critique**

Towards the conclusion of her routine, Gadsby introduces anger as a necessary tool to convey truth:

*“To the men in the room... who feel I may have been persecuting you this evening... well spotted. That’s pretty much what I’ve done there. But this is theater, fellas. I’ve given you an hour, a taste. I have lived a life. The damage done to me is real and debilitating. I will never flourish. But this is why... I must quit comedy. Because the only way... I can tell my truth and put tension in the room is with anger. And I am angry, and I believe I’ve got every right to be angry! But what I don’t have a right to do is to spread anger. I don’t. Because anger, much like laughter, can connect a room full of strangers like nothing else. But anger, even if it’s connected to laughter, will not... relieve tension. Because anger is a tension. It is a toxic, infectious... tension. And it knows no other purpose than to spread blind hatred, and I want no part of it. Because I take my freedom of speech as a responsibility, and just because I can position myself as a victim, does not make my anger constructive.”*

This passage demonstrates how humour can coexist with serious social critique. Gadsby transforms comedy into a platform for feminist activism, illustrating Lazar’s (2014) concept of humour as critical reflexivity in practice.

To sum up, this segment highlights three key dimensions of contemporary feminist humour as exemplified in Hannah Gadsby’s performance. First, Gadsby subverts conventional expectations of female humour by rejecting the norm of self-deprecation and the pressure to appear likable. Instead, she adopts a more assertive and authoritative stance, redefining what it means for women to be “funny” within a traditionally male-dominated space.

Second, her humour is deeply rooted in intersectional identity. By drawing on her experiences related to gender and sexual orientation, Gadsby’s performance reflects multiple layers of marginalization. This aligns with frameworks such as Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) and intersectionality, which emphasize how overlapping identities shape discourse and power relations.

Finally, Gadsby's work demonstrates humour as a form of activism. Her performance goes beyond entertainment to educate audiences, raise awareness about social injustices, and challenge systemic inequalities. In doing so, comedy becomes a powerful tool for social critique and transformation.

#### **4.2 Nawell Madani (C'est dur d'être une femme aujourd'hui - Marrakech du rire 2022): Cultural Critique and Feminist Humour**

Nawell Madani's stand-up demonstrates how humour can interrogate societal expectations, gender roles, and domestic inequality. Her use of personal experience, sharp observational humour, and French-language storytelling allows her to engage audiences while critiquing cultural norms.

*0:01*

*[Music]*

*0:02*

*[audience clapping]*

*0:06*

*[Music]*

*est-ce que ça va ? oui ?*

*ça fait longtemps que je suis pas monté*

*sur scène j'ai eu un bébé*

*j'ai une magnifique fille depuis que je*

*l'ai je vais être un exemple pour elle*

*mais pour être un exemple va falloir que*

*je revois toute mon éducation tu vois*

*que je casse tout que je reconstruise*

*tout moi j'ai grandi avec des films qui*

*ont fait la femme que je fais*

*aujourd'hui tu vois mon film préféré*

*c'est pretty woman on est d'accord ou*

*pas ? les filles !! pretty woman !!*

*Julia Roberts Richard Gere Hollywood*

*Boulevard on est d'accord ou pas à la*

*fin du film on se dit pas inshallah je*

*devienne*

*c'est chaud ce film c'est l'apologie de  
la prostitution parce que ça reste  
fantasme de pas mal d'hommes de sortir  
une meuf de la Street et la rend d'une  
fille bien au lieu de prendre une fille  
bien tout ça pour lui dire en  
embrouillard n'oublie pas quand je t'ai  
connu tu étais une ...*

In this excerpt Nawell Madani addresses societal expectations placed on women and the cultural messages she has internalized, particularly those conveyed through media.

As we can see, Madani highlights her desire to set a strong example for her daughter, though doing so may mean rethinking her own values and influences. She critiques *Pretty Woman*, a well-known Hollywood film that centers on the "transformation" of a woman by a man who "rescues" and elevates her (a sex worker) by turning her into an "ideal" partner. This indirectly underscores how media narratives often devalue women by suggesting that their worth is tied to conforming to male standards. The reference to "a man taking a girl from the street and turning her into a good girl" critiques cultural double standards that praise men for "reforming" women, reflecting patriarchal beliefs that women's worth depends on their proximity to ideals defined by men.

Madani's humour in this performance reflects a feminist call to "rebuild" her understanding of gender roles, aligning with the broader goal of deconstructing restrictive societal norms. This re-evaluation hints at her desire to set a new example for her daughter, free from outdated or limiting portrayals of femininity in media.

Through humour, Madani critiques these pervasive narratives, encouraging her audience to question how they themselves have absorbed and internalised similar cultural scripts. Her comedic approach to serious themes invites the audience into a shared reflection on how media influences self-image and gender expectations, encouraging both women and men to reconsider their assumptions and attitudes.

Madani's style helps her audience access feminist ideas in a way that feels both relatable and thought-provoking. By doing so, Madani positions comedy as a powerful tool for questioning and reshaping social expectations.

1:06

*c'est dur d'être une femme et je dois  
préparer ma fille à tout ça  
l'harcèlement il est partout sauf que ça  
s'est banalisé je pense qu'on a tout  
vécu ce moment là tu es avec ton mec  
dans ton lit tu es censé dormir  
en tout cas toi tu dors là tu sens un  
souffle chaud sur ta nuque le même que  
sur la ligne 13 tu sais  
ce souffle qui te dit tu vas te faire  
frotter tu vois  
là comme dans ce quick game tu sais que  
si tu bouges tu es morte  
il pose une question tout à fait normal  
à 4h du matin tu dors  
il te reposent la question il t'a jamais  
parlé comme ça français dors-tu ?  
et là tu essayes de gagner son empathie  
tu dis bébé s'il te plaît je me suis  
réveillé tôt ce matin je me réveillais  
tôt demain s'il te plaît viens on met ça  
ce weekend et là il te répond par une  
phrase d'anthologie 'dors  
je m'occupe de tout'  
dore je m'occupe de tout c'est pas une  
phrase de violeur dehors je m'occupe de  
tout moi je veux bien qu'il me dise je  
m'occupe de tout mais pour les tâches  
ménagères ok moi il m'a jamais dit  
deors je m'occupe de tout tu vois moi  
je suis chargée mentalement je suis  
l'exemple même de la charge mentale je  
fais tout il fait rien tu vois quand il  
fait la vaisselle il me dit pas j'ai*

*fait la vaisselle il me dit je t'ai fait  
la vaisselle le gars pense qu'il vit  
chez l'habitant*

In this segment, as in the previous one, Nawell Madani humorously explores the complexities of being a woman, addressing issues like harassment, gender roles in relationships, and the concept of “mental load.” Madani uses humour to highlight and challenge these pervasive social issues. She also uses it while talking about her personal experiences to critique gendered power dynamics and expectations, transforming them into a platform for broader social commentary.

She begins by discussing how harassment has become normalised, by stating that it is “everywhere.” Through her comedic portrayal of an uncomfortable situation, she highlights how women often endure unwanted advances, even within intimate relationships. This shows how women’s boundaries are frequently disregarded, which can mirror the invasive and oppressive dynamics of public harassment. By using humour to compare a partner’s persistence with the experience of being harassed on public transportation (e.g., on “ligne 13”), she underscores how normalised harassment has become. This particularly shows how harassment is now a pervasive social issue and how it transcends spaces and disregards women’s comfort. When imitating her partner’s attempt to initiate intimacy and his assumption that she should comply; Madani points to a common societal expectation that women should be always available to meet men’s needs. Also, imitating and exaggerating her partner’s tone and behavior subtly draws attention to how language and expectations can make women feel objectified or disempowered, even in supposedly loving relationships.

Madani’s plea to her partner, “Bébé s’il te plaît... ce week-end,” is her attempt to assert agency and set boundaries. The humour here lies in how her partner’s response dismisses her request, yet she comically reflects on how he might instead be dismissive about tasks like housework. This juxtaposition highlights how women’s voices are often minimized or ignored, especially regarding their comfort and well-being.

In the same excerpt, Madani touches on the “mental load” or “charge mentale,” when referring to the invisible labor often performed by women, especially in domestic settings. Her commentary on doing “everything” while her partner remains largely inactive reflects this concept. It is a critique of traditional gender roles, where women are often responsible for household management, emotional labor, and caregiving. When her partner says,

“Dors, je m’occupe de tout,” Madani humorously flips the phrase, wishing he would say that when it comes to household chores. This line cleverly underscores the imbalance in domestic responsibilities, highlighting how men often feel entitled to be cared for but don’t reciprocate in ways that would ease the burden on women. The line, “Je t’ai fait la vaisselle” subtly critiques the idea that household tasks are favours men perform for women, rather than shared responsibilities. This reflects the traditional notion that domestic tasks are primarily a woman’s responsibility, so when a man does contribute, it’s presented as a special act rather than a shared duty. Madani’s humour here reveals how language reinforces traditional gender roles and implies that men see themselves as “helping” rather than equally participating in household labour.

2:34

*mon mari est mannequin et acteur ok  
ouais je me fais pas chier  
et on a le même âge lui et moi sauf que  
je fais 10 ans  
et je pense que c'est parce  
que je m'occupe de tout je pense pour  
deux et je pense réellement que Brigitte  
Macron n'est pas plus âgé que le  
président  
c'est juste la charge mentale  
tu vois  
c'est dur franchement et tout le monde  
me dit mais arrête pas de te plaindre  
pourquoi tu me laisses pas partir je  
peux pas ça fait 20 ans que je le forme  
je peux pas le laisser partir maintenant  
avec une petite meuf de 20 piges touches  
dites sous cellophane c'est pas possible  
je peux le laisser partir que sous une  
seule condition comme les joueurs je  
veux une indemnité de transfert  
on est d'accord ou pas les filles*

*une indemnité de transfert pour les  
embrouilles on les a éduqué moi je suis  
sûr que notre belle-mère nous déteste  
pour ça parce qu'on a réussi là où elles  
ont échoué*

Here again, Nawell Madani uses personal experience, sharp observational humour, feminist concepts, and collective humour to expose gendered injustices. Her jokes are short, simple and smart. They are subversively forged and aim at giving voice to women's invisible role. When she says, “Je pense pour deux... c’est la charge mentale,” she’s pointing to the emotional and mental load women carry at home—planning, worrying, and organizing—while their partners remain—consciously or unconsciously—unaware. She once more critiques the way society tends to overlook women’s roles in maintaining emotional and domestic stability. By joking about wanting an “indemnité de transfert” if she were to leave her husband, Madani, first, subverts traditional narratives suggesting that women are the ones who should feel fortunate to be in a relationship, and second, draws attention to the gendered imbalance in many heterosexual relationships, where women’s contributions are mostly undervalued or taken for granted.

In addition to focusing on gender, Madani shows how other variables like age and generational expectations shape women’s experiences. When she states “*moi je suis sûr que notre belle-mère nous déteste pour ça parce qu'on a réussi là où elles nt échoué*” Madani points to the tension between generations of women because younger ones may seem like having more freedom and and success especially when it comes to challenging traditional gender roles. “je pense réellement que Brigitte Macron n'est pas plus âgé que le président c'est juste la charge mentale” is another example through which she critiques the unfair standards placed on women leaving them look older than men who are emotionally and mentally relieved.

#### **4.3 Hanane El Fadili: Social Satire and Gender Commentary in Moroccan Context**

Hanane El Fadili’s stand-up illustrates how humour can expose social norms, traditional expectations, and gender roles in Moroccan society. Using Moroccan Arabic, she blends personal anecdotes, exaggeration, and cultural references to critique societal pressures while keeping the audience engaged.

مرحبا والى الف الف مرحبا بالجاليه المغربيه شكرا سمحو لي تقدم لكم نفسي خويا خويا الراضي غير بشويه بش لا  
قنالك صافي قنالك الراضي بشويه بشويه غادي ندقه دقه وحنا يلا الجمهور جلسنا ويلا واخا وليدي يلا يا تفاهمنا وريتنا في  
الهندا الحمد لله سمحولي تقدم لكم نفسي وخا انا ما خصني نتقدم حيث فايت في مقدمه معكم الشيخه نمبر و اخيتي نمبر  
والي بغ تطح راسها في الشبخات الحبحه صاحبه الصوت الجياش الله صاحبه الصوت الدعوي صاحبه المقوله الشهيره  
”لننا معكم الشيخه الزيك

وا المغرب وهي الورده وجول لك الناس وغير مره وصدقوا قاعدين في خطرهم ميمتي شد الزعطه ايوا يلا كت عنك شي  
حب الوطن وكنت الرايه المغربيه كفر في الريني السيك وريني وريني حار البلاد وريني وريني على الغربه يلا نسيك  
صافي صافي صافي صافي صافي صافي حب الوطن هذا الراضي الراضي الراضي بشويه ما تكسيري مايكش الوسط  
ويلي على العيطه العيطه العيطه ما كردش ج العيطه تغز ع من العطه والدي تشوفوني نضحك الع العطه الق بغيت نتاج  
الشب نشد في العيطه العيطه موري ثقافي ددخل عليه السناب دخل عليه الراس دخل عليه الهيبو دخل عليه وكن شدوا لي  
في العيطه ما تفش تسمعوا دك الاغاني ديال هك صحاب تيتي وميمس وم وكشك السمق الكاسيات العاريات صحابت الف  
من منفوخه ودات المعاوده نص متر لابسه ماكينش شش ه ما يخافوش من البرد يضربهم الكشوش ما فهمتش ما يخافوش  
”من مرض البروشو حيث ماشي ديالهم زيدينا بلاستيك ك كان ديالهم ك حاش على اعراضهم ما حناش ناقصنا

معايا اويلي على العيطه ويبي البارح عيطنا شيناس ليفون كنا جالسين صافينا ماين لا خدمه لا والوق اجي وكين شي  
قصاره قضا صليت العشاء هزيت البندير يا ويبي ودي دونيلي واحد واحد السهره ماعود لكم كان في واحد السيد لاداع  
لذكر الاسماء واحد السيد في البرلمان وهو عل ما تقولوش شكون برلماني وصافي لا لا الشيخه ما تقولوش لاو كون جات  
الشيخه تقول شحال تشدات الشيخه ككتشوف وطم سالنا اوك البرلمان عرفتي معش مشو انت قيم البرلمان صباح صباح  
”الروض ما يدورو اويلي في البرلمان شابيس

In this segment the Moroccan comedian Hanane El Fadili intertwines humour with cultural and social commentary. She discusses various topics, including societal expectations, gender roles, marriage traditions, financial interactions, and everyday social scenarios. El Fadili frequently references traditional gender roles, especially in the context of marriage and social interactions. She includes discussions about suitors, wedding preparations, and the expectations placed on women to conform to specific behaviours highlighting the societal norms governing gender roles. The portrayal of marriage ceremonies and the interactions between the bride and suitors reflect the patriarchal structure where women are often expected to meet certain standards to be deemed suitable for marriage. This reinforces the idea that a woman's value is tied to her ability to conform to these traditional roles.

El Fadili also plays on stereotypes, such as men being reluctant to discuss their finances openly or women managing the "mental load" of household responsibilities. By exaggerating these traits for comedic effect, the comedian both acknowledges and implicitly critiques the double standards in how men and women are perceived and treated

in social settings. For instance, men may openly discuss personal issues but shy away from financial transparency, while women are expected to handle emotional and domestic tasks without acknowledgment.

El Fadili also uses language to highlight the power imbalances between genders. Phrases like "وا رجاله" (Oh men) and discussions about financial transactions in social contexts reveal the underlying authority men hold in certain societal aspects, such as finances and decision-making. Through humour, the comedian asserts her perspective and subtly resists traditional power structures. By bringing attention to the absurdities in social norms and gender expectations, she encourages the audience to question and reflect on these dynamics.

**El Fadili** uses personal anecdotes and spices her jokes up by exaggeration to expose the absurdities within societal norms. For example, the complicated process of giving tips or the exaggerated expectations during marriage ceremonies serve to highlight how rigid and sometimes absurd these practices can be. By making the audience laugh at these exaggerated scenarios, she encourages them to reflect on their own adherence to and acceptance of these norms. El Fadili's humour acts as a mirror, showing the audience the flaws and inconsistencies in societal expectations. She empowers women by voicing their frustrations and challenging traditional roles. Through this performance, the Moroccan comedian challenges the status quo by questioning why certain traditions and expectations exist. This fosters a sense of agency among women, encouraging them to seek change and redefine their roles beyond societal prescriptions.

## 5. Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that stand-up comedy operates as a complex discursive site where gendered power relations are simultaneously reproduced, negotiated, and resisted. Across the three comedians, humour is not merely a performative tool for entertainment but a structured mode of social critique that reflects different configurations of feminist resistance shaped by cultural and ideological contexts.

### 5.1 Hannah Gadsby

Gadsby's performance reconfigures stand-up comedy by deliberately breaking with its conventional reliance on self-deprecating humour and linear comedic resolution. Instead, her narrative foregrounds trauma, marginalisation, and structural violence, thereby disrupting audience expectations of humour as a form of relief or cohesion.

Her discourse strongly aligns with Lazar's (2007) conceptualisation of language as a site of ideological struggle. Through irony, meta-commentary, and narrative fragmentation, Gadsby rejects patriarchal comedic norms that traditionally position women as objects of ridicule or self-effacement. In doing so, she reclaims discursive authority by refusing the requirement of "likability" that often regulates female comedic performance. Her work thus repositions humour as confrontation rather than accommodation.

## **5.2 Nawell Madani**

Madani's performance illustrates humour as a negotiated discursive space in which gender critique is interwoven with migrant identity. Her comedic strategy oscillates between self-irony and social commentary, allowing her to address sexism while sustaining audience alignment and accessibility.

From an FCDA perspective, this oscillation reflects a dual orientation: resistance to patriarchal norms on the one hand, and strategic accommodation to dominant comedic expectations on the other. Her use of exaggeration, storytelling, and relatable self-positioning enables her to articulate critique without fully destabilising audience comfort. This supports Holmes' (2006) view of humour as simultaneously affiliative and challenging in gendered interaction.

Intersectionally, Madani's discourse highlights how gendered experience is refracted through migration and cultural hybridity. Her comedic identity is therefore constructed at the intersection of belonging and otherness, positioning her as both insider and outsider within European comedic spaces.

## **5.3 Hanane El Fadili**

El Fadili's stand-up situates humour within a culturally regulated Moroccan context where gender norms are strongly shaped by tradition, family authority, and social surveillance. Her comedic discourse relies heavily on exaggeration and observational humour to expose contradictions embedded in everyday gender expectations.

Her performance reflects a tension between conformity and critique. While certain references remain embedded within dominant cultural frameworks, her humour simultaneously exposes the irrationality and rigidity of gendered expectations. This ambivalence aligns with Holmes' (2000) notion of humour as both a "shield and a sword," enabling speakers to address socially sensitive issues while maintaining acceptability within their cultural context.

Rather than direct confrontation, El Fadili's humour operates through contextualised irony and implied critique, illustrating how feminist resistance can be culturally mediated and indirectly articulated.

Taken together, the three performances demonstrate that women's stand-up comedy functions as a differentiated form of feminist discourse shaped by cultural, social, and ideological positioning. While Gadsby adopts an explicit confrontational strategy that rejects comedic conventions, Madani negotiates between critique and relatability, and El Fadili employs culturally embedded indirectness to articulate resistance within normative constraints.

This variation challenges simplified accounts of "women's humour" as uniformly affiliative or self-deprecating. Instead, the data suggest that female comedians strategically mobilise a repertoire of humour strategies—including irony, narrative, exaggeration, and meta-commentary—to navigate gendered expectations while simultaneously exposing structural inequalities.

Overall, the analysis confirms that humour in stand-up comedy functions as both a social and political practice. It can destabilise dominant ideologies, reinforce cultural belonging, or operate as a strategic balancing act between resistance and intelligibility. This supports existing feminist humour scholarship (e.g., Holmes; Coates; Lazar) while extending it by demonstrating how intersectional positioning significantly shapes the form and intensity of comedic resistance.

## **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that female stand-up comedy cannot be adequately understood through traditional humour frameworks that emphasise affiliation, self-deprecation, or social cohesion. Instead, the analysis shows that humour operates as a contested discursive practice in which gendered power relations are actively negotiated, but not uniformly in the same way across contexts.

By applying FCDA and intersectionality to the performances of Gadsby, Madani, and El Fadili, the study has revealed that comedic resistance is not a fixed or universal strategy. Rather, it is structurally conditioned by cultural norms, linguistic environments, and the performers' intersectional positioning. Gadsby's explicit rejection of comedic likability disrupts dominant expectations of female humour in Western stand-up traditions. Madani's work illustrates how feminist critique is mediated through hybridity and cultural translation, where humour must remain both intelligible and relatable. El Fadili's performance,

meanwhile, demonstrates that resistance can be embedded within indirect, culturally constrained forms of expression that remain socially acceptable while still subversively critical.

These findings challenge essentialist accounts of “women’s humour” and complicate dominant humour theories that assume a stable relationship between gender and humour style. They show instead that humour is a flexible ideological resource that can simultaneously reproduce, negotiate, and destabilise social norms depending on context.

Importantly, the study also suggests that stand-up comedy is not merely a reflective medium but a productive one: it actively participates in shaping how gender, identity, and power are understood by audiences. However, this agency is not unrestricted. It is mediated by institutional expectations of comedy, cultural boundaries of speech, and audience tolerance for critique.

In this sense, humour emerges not as a neutral expressive form but as a regulated space of discourse where resistance is possible, but never fully free from constraint. Future research should therefore move beyond textual analysis to include audience reception and platform-specific studies in order to better understand how feminist comedic messages are interpreted, resisted, or reappropriated.

## **Contributions of the Study**

### **Theoretical Contribution**

This study extends Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) by applying it to stand-up comedy as a performative and multimodal discourse genre. It demonstrates that humour is not merely a linguistic strategy but a structured ideological practice shaped by gendered and intersectional power relations. The study also refines existing humour theories by challenging the assumption that women’s humour is primarily affiliative or self-deprecating, showing instead that feminist humour operates across a continuum of confrontation, negotiation, and indirect resistance.

### **Empirical Contribution**

Empirically, the study offers a comparative analysis of three female comedians from distinct sociocultural contexts: Australia, Belgium/Algeria, and Morocco. This cross-cultural perspective highlights how feminist humour is not uniform but context-dependent, revealing how gendered resistance is shaped by cultural norms, migration histories, and audience expectations.



## Methodological Contribution

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of integrating FCDA with intersectionality in the analysis of stand-up comedy. By combining discourse analysis with humour theory and performance data, it offers a replicable analytical model for examining humour as a form of situated social practice. The study also shows how qualitative coding frameworks can be adapted to capture humour strategies, ideological positioning, and intersectional identity construction within performative discourse.

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