Liminality and Knowledge Production in Egyptian Stand-up Comedy: Reflecting Perspectives and Defying Restrictions

Nohayer Lotfy

nohayer.lotfy@bue.edu.eg

Recommended Citation

Liminality and Knowledge Production in Egyptian Stand-up Comedy: Reflecting Perspectives and Defying Restrictions

Nohayer Esmat Lotfy iD
Department of English Language and Literature
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
The British University in Egypt
Egypt
Email: nohayer.lotfy@bue.edu.eg

Abstract
This paper aimed to examine how Egyptian live stand-up performances act as a liminal space where comedians present their perspectives on issues of concern, offering a different source of knowledge other than mainstream views and ideas. Data collected for this study included selected excerpts from Egyptian live stand-up shows in addition to interviews with stand-up comedians to collect more in-depth information about how they perceive stand-up comedy as a form of art and how they select their topics and develop their stand-up material. For this paper, two analytical approaches were applied: 1) A thematic approach to closely investigate the range of topics women and men Egyptian comedians tackle in their shows and how these topics introduce a new angle to knowledge production, and 2) Van Dijk's (2007) macro-level critical discourse analysis that aimed to examine the context in which the selected performances have taken place, how comedians' stances are expressed and whether their material defy or adapt to the surrounding incidents/contexts. Analysis of data showed that comedians discuss taboo topics both implicitly and explicitly, and in reaction to possible restrictions on stand-up material, comedians employ various techniques of humor to defy these restrictions using the space and time of the live show to share their views with the audience.
Keywords: stand-up comedy, Egypt, liminality, knowledge production, critical discourse analysis, performance art

Introduction

As a genre of humorous performative arts that flourished and spread after the January 25th, 2011, Egyptian revolution, stand-up comedy has played – and still does – a significant role in presenting an alternative discourse to that of mainstream media. Stand-up comedians in Egypt believe this art form provides them with the space to articulate their perspectives concerning different topics whether social, cultural, political or religious. It is the space where they try to communicate their personal views about everyday situations and events that the audience themselves experience. Recent restrictions imposed on the art and comedians, since 2014, have challenged them to look for different strategies that enable the comedians to implicitly say what they want, offering the audience a chance to consider a perspective different from that dictated by state media. By doing this, comedians create their own liminal space – embodied in the place and time of their live performances – to identify with their audience and humorously transfer their views. There is limited research on stand-up comedy in general, and on Arabic stand-up comedy in particular. Accordingly, this paper aimed to analyze selected videos of live Egyptian stand-up acts to examine how Egyptian comedians create a temporary community during live performances and how they reflect their perspectives through their live shows. The paper was specifically interested in investigating the themes discussed by Egyptian comedians in their stand-up shows. In addition to this, the paper investigated how the comedian's perspective presented in the show offers a narrative alternative to mainstream discourse.

Literature Review

After the January 25th Egyptian revolution in 2011, young artists had better opportunities to present their works of art more independently and freely away from state censorship, at least until 2014, when administrations of some venues started to have their regulations and restrictions on the stand-up material presented in their theatres. Stand-up comedy is one of the new forms of art that flourished and gained popularity during this period. Before this date, live comic shows were either comedy drama performances, monologues, or comic sketches where the comedian goes on stage for fifteen or twenty minutes telling the audience a group of one-liner jokes that do not share common themes. Stand-up comedy as an art "that allows for reaction, participation, and engagement on the part of those to whom the stand-up comedian is speaking" (Brodie, 2009, p.4) was introduced to Egypt in 2009 when Hashim el-Garhy established *el-Hizb el-comedy* (The Comedy [political] Party) – a stand-up comedy show event organizer. Performances organized by *el-Hizb el-Comedy* included stand-up comedians performing in English initially. However, it currently organizes stand-up shows and open-mic events hosting Egyptian comedians performing in Arabic, like Mena Risha, Gamal Ramzy, Taha Desouky, and Reem Nabil. In 2010, the first TV show that presented stand-up comedy on a larger scale was *Moga Stand-up* – produced by a private Egyptian TV channel, *Moga TV* – where each recorded episode featured three or four comedians performing before a live audience in a studio and tackling socio-cultural topics like marriage expenses, traffic issues in Egypt and city-versus-country life. With the beginning of the 2011 uprising and the sit-ins in Tahrir Square in Cairo, comedians like Ali Quandil were encouraged to perform before the protestors where they used to mock the political scene and state official decisions taken at that time (A. Quandil, personal communication, June 17, 2020). Since then, and for three years later, stand-up comedians have enjoyed the freedom of discussing various issues of interest to them and their audience, whether these issues are socio-cultural, political, or religious.

In other words, the art of stand-up comedy did not witness noteworthy censorship during this period. However, this has not been the case since mid-2013, as venues where stand-up comedy shows take place have started to set restrictions on comedians, believing that the country's conditions at that time did not require much criticism. Some rules include preventing comedians from speaking about the three taboos – sex, religion, and politics – and asking them to send scripts of their stand-up acts at least two weeks before the show.

Within this context, stand-up comedy, as a performance art with a live audience, exemplifies Victor Turner's (1983) concept of liminality. Here, both the comedian and the audience share a temporary space (the theater) and time (during the live show). In his essay on liminality and art, Turner argues that theater and literature function as mediums for both performers and society to explore and potentially break free from social restrictions. To elaborate, Turner (1983) argued that leisure genres such as theater act as liminoid actions that "can repossess the character of 'work' though originating in a 'free time' arbitrarily separated by managerial fiat from the time of 'labor'" (p. 65). In other words, leisure genres performed in "free time" could contribute to a change of mindset and ideas among community members outside the performance arena. In this sense, the live stand-up performance creates a liminal space. Here, stand-up comedians express their perspectives on issues relevant to both themselves and the audience. This allows the audience to re-think and re-evaluate their values and opinions, potentially challenging those formed through mainstream information channels. Stand-up comedy can also serve as a new source of knowledge, offering an alternative perspective that contributes to the process of knowledge production.

The concept of liminality explained above is strongly related to the term "knowledge production." As defined by Carayannis and Campbell (2019), knowledge is associated with two fundamental notions, "expertise and skills" of an individual or an entire society (p. 5). A third significant notion related to the concept of knowledge production is discussed by Lässig (2016): history. Lässig explained that history dwells in the idea that knowledge is "made by human[s] and is subject to change" (p. 39). In other words, knowledge is formulated and attained through a "process of negotiation between opposing understandings," and it "change[s] over times and vary with place" (p. 39). It can thus be argued that stand-up comedy contributes to the process of knowledge production. As explained by Lässig (2016), cultural centers, "social spaces" as well as coffee shops and bars, and educational institutions "function as knowledge arenas" (p. 47) that create and influence knowledge through – in the context of stand-up comedy – the liminal space and time of the live performance. Stand-up comedy, in this framework, constitutes a form of popular culture that plays a significant role in the process of knowledge production where comedians re-think and introduce knowledge from an alternative angle that the audience might be unaware of.

As noted above, stand-up comedy is a relatively new art introduced to Egypt in 2009 and has been widely spreading since 2011. Many scholars have examined stand-up comedy from different perspectives be it cultural (See Daube, 2009; Double, 1991; Michael, 2013; Mock, 2012; Woodrow, 2001) or linguistic (See Glick, 2007; McIlvenny, Mettovaara & Tapio, 1993; Seizer, 2011; Wells & Bull, 2007). However, limited research has been conducted on this art in the Arab World (See Hassaine, 2014), particularly, in Egypt (See Oleimy & Lotfy, 2016; Lotfy, 2022). Accordingly, this current paper aims to analyze selected Egyptian stand-up comedy shows by adopting from a different perspective that addresses the gap in this area of research adopting an

interdisciplinary approach that integrates cultural studies – through the theories of liminality and knowledge production – and linguistics – through adopting Van Dijk's macro analysis approach.

Methodology

        For this paper, selected excerpts of stand-up acts of five Egyptian comedians were analyzed. The comedians included two women comedians: (1) Habiba Ashraf and (2) Gehad Atef, and three male comedians: (3) Taha Desouky, (4) Mena Risha, and (5) Ali Quandil (See the following section for *comedians' profiles*). Videos selected for this paper included three videos of Taha Desouky (Videos 3-5) and two online segments of Mena Risha (Videos 6 and 7). Videos of Gehad Atef and Habiba Ashraf are of 10-15 minutes (Videos 1 and 2, respectively) each. They were received through personal communication with Ali Quandil, the producer of the shows they performed in. In addition, excerpts of Quandil's shows (Videos 8-10) are taken from his official YouTube channel (See Appendix A for list of videos referred to in this paper).

        In addition to the analysis of videos, the five comedians were interviewed to discuss their concepts of the theater, how they define stand-up comedy, their reactions towards restrictions imposed on the art, and how they deal with the audience during the live show and immediately after the show. This paper focused on the environment created during live performances. Comedians' responses to audience comments on online videos from their social media are not examined. Other themes covered during the interview include what techniques comedians use to overcome restrictions dictated by theater administrations and whether these restrictions enhance or weaken the content of their stand-up material. The interviews followed a semi-structured format (See Appendix B for interview questions), were conducted in Arabic via Skype and were recorded for analysis.

Comedians' Profiles [1]*Habiba Ashraf*

        Habiba Ashraf, born in 1998, is a university graduate who started her stand-up performances in 2016. She has performed in a limited number of shows at cultural centers such as El-Sawy Culture Wheel, Ain Shams University and Hosapeer Theater in Cairo. Ashraf defines stand-up comedy as "a form of sarcastic performance art that criticizes several topics of concern. I believe one of its main aims is 'change.' Laughter comes next" (H. Ashraf, personal communication, June 13, 2020). She elaborates on the idea of "change" asserting that "it is important to make people laugh but it is more important to inspire the audience or urge them to change" (personal communication, June 13, 2020).

Gehad Atef

        Atef's first encounter with stand-up comedy was through an open-mic event held by Ali Quandil in a street festival in Road 9, Maadi, Cairo, in 2014. Her segment was a success, and she was encouraged to join Quandil's stand-up comedy workshop. As a result, she had her first live performance in July 21, 2016 (G. Atef, personal communication, June 16, 2020). After that, Atef participated in *il-Comedian* competition and won second place. Since then, her stand-up career has mostly been at *El-Sawy Culture Wheel*, Zamalek, Cairo. She performed in many shows there, with her last one in 2019 at a private Egyptian university. Gehad Atef defines stand-up comedy as "an art that highly depends on improvisation" (personal communication, June 16, 2020). She elaborates that "it is not about narrating a situation. Stand-up comedy is more of observing a certain

phenomenon or idea which the comedian discusses humorously through their improvisation and punchlines" (G. Atef, personal communication, June 16, 2020).

Taha Desouky
Desouky is a university graduate who started his stand-up comedy performances in 2013. Since then, he has been performing in different venues, including universities and private theaters, as well as some restaurants and coffeeshops like *Al-Sawy Culture Wheel* and *Room Art Space* in Cairo, Egypt, or "any place that allows having that setting of stage and a microphone with people sitting down to watch the show" (T. Desouky, personal communication, June 11, 2020). For Desouky, stand-up comedy is "one form of sarcastic arts that depends on two main elements: criticism and humor" (personal communication, June 11, 2020).

Mena Risha
Risha's – born to a Coptic Christian family – first performance was on November 4, 2011, where he had a short stand-up act as part of an event organized for young people in a church in his hometown, Zagazig, Egypt. Risha (means *feather*) is his nickname which he has had since he started playing football as a child with his friends. His real name is Mena Henein, a Christian name, that caused him many problems due to being mistaken for Hussein – a Muslim name. After several successful shows in churches and universities in his hometown, Risha decided to join the second batch of Ali Quandil's stand-up comedy workshop in late 2013. However, he could not attend regularly because he was busy searching for a full-time job. However, Risha rejoined Quandil's workshop in 2015, graduating with the sixth batch. He had his first stand-up performance in Cairo in May 2016. Risha's definition of stand-up comedy depends on the idea of individuality. To him, stand-up comedy enables him to

> describe and discuss social issues that concern him personally. [Stand-up comedy] enables me to express my own opinions and beliefs sarcastically. It does not have to be didactic. In other words, the audience does not have to get a message or learn a lesson by the show's end, but they are introduced to the comedian's philosophy and perspectives through their stand-up material (M. Risha, personal communication, June 12, 2020).

Ali Quandil
Quandil, born in 1984, is an actor, theater director and stand-up comedian. He started his stand-up comedy performances in 2009. To date, he has a total of 499 performances that have taken place in several places like cultural centers such as *El-Sawy Culture Wheel* and *Beit el-Raseef*, Cairo, Egyptian schools and universities, sports clubs, as well as street cultural events such as *El-fann Midan*. However, he refuses to perform in restaurants and pubs, saying that he would "rather perform before people who are actually listening" to him (A. Quandil, personal communication, June 17, 2020). In 2011, Quandil used to perform during the Tahrir sit-ins. Later, in August 2012, he started his stand-up comedy workshop to train prospective comedians on how to prepare stand-up material and perform on stage. When asked about his definition of stand-up comedy, Quandil explains,

> defining stand-up comedy in Egypt, and the Arab World in general, proves challenging. Still a developing art form, stand-up comedy in Egypt hasn't had decades to become well-established. However, like other forms of art, stand-up comedy should present an idea in

a distinctive, humorous, and philosophical way (A. Quandil, personal communication, June 17, 2020).

To him, stand-up comedy is more than just making people laugh. It rather reflects the comedian's philosophy, ideas and acting and performing skills.

Analytical Framework

A qualitative analysis of the selected videos and the interviews applied two analytical approaches. The first approach was a thematic analysis of the selected videos. The purpose of this approach was to investigate the range of topics discussed by comedians in their stand-up acts. This approach aimed to closely examine the themes comedians cover in their stand-up acts and whether the angles they adopt oppose official narratives or not. Thematic analysis was chosen for the selected data. This approach aimed to investigate how comedians make use of the performance time and place as a liminal space to express their perspectives that act as an alternative source of knowledge. The second approach applied in this paper was Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) following Tuen A. Van Dijk's (2007) macro-level analysis. Macro-level linguistic analysis is concerned with analyzing "the denotation and connotation meaning of words and their metaphorical functions, authors' stances, hedges, and other related elements" (Abdul Jabar & Yunnus, 2017, p. 358). This approach helped visualize the stand-up comedy scene in Egypt concerning two critical factors: the surrounding context in which the performance takes place, and how the comedians either adapt to or resist this context and conditions. According to Van Dijk, analyzing macro-contexts requires examining the *macro setting, participants,* and *macro acts of groups* (p. 10). Macro setting refers to the broader context of time ("period" such as day, month, year) and space ("space" such as city, country, and – in this context – the theater). By examining the "period" and "space", the target was to consider the major events/incidents happening at the time of the show to see how far comedians' shows appeal to or repel the surrounding socio-political scene at the time of the show. Participants include, in the context of this paper, the comedians and the audience. By *"macro acts of groups",* Van Dijk meant the message the speaker/writer aims to deliver to their audience.

Therefore, to effectively use macro-level CDA, several tools are used: (1) examining the socio-cultural and political contexts during which the live performance takes place, (2) investigating the theater where the performance takes place, and whether the theater administration imposes certain restrictions on the stand-up material presented on its stage or not, and (3) analyzing how comedians choose their topics and what criteria they follow to write their stand-up material. To cover these three points, the selected videos were analyzed considering whether the themes discussed during the live performance comply with the political and cultural context of the Egyptian scene at the time of the show or not in addition to observing if comedians' views comply with or oppose state narratives. In addition, the interviews with the comedians were also examined to fill in the gaps that stand-up videos could not answer concerning the comedians' beliefs about the purpose of humor and stand-up comedy and their effect on knowledge production.

Analysis

To provide context before discussing the themes comedians tackle in their videos, we should first give a brief overview of the analyzed videos should be provided, focusing particularly on the venues where these performances occur. All videos analyzed here are parts of live stand-up

shows performed at *El-Sawy Culture Wheel* in Cairo, Egypt. One exception is Video 5 by Taha Desouky, which was performed at a cultural center called *NWT House* in Maadi, Cairo. *El-Sawy Culture Wheel* is a cultural center founded in 2001 whose mission is to "cooperate with artists and organizations to highlight the importance of culture as being the main pillar of the Egyptian society" (El-Sawy Culture Wheel). Performances taking place in El-Sawy Culture Wheel are organized by the comedians themselves, reserving the theater from El-Sawy administration and advertising for their shows through Facebook events shared on their official social media platforms. However, they abide by the theater regulations which require them to submit their stand-up scripts for reviewing at least two weeks before the show. *NWT House*, on the other hand, is a cultural center that hosts art galleries, music, and theater performances including stand-up comedy (NWT House's official Facebook page). The show from which Desouky's video is taken was an event organized by *The Glocal*[2], an entertainment website that was celebrating its first anniversary. The performance is filmed and uploaded on *The Glocal*'s official YouTube and Facebook pages. The following section of the paper covers a more detailed analysis of the different themes and topics spotted in the selected videos in addition to reflecting on the idea of "knowledge production" at the end of the section.

Thematic Analysis: Themes, Criteria for Choosing Stand-up Topics, and Knowledge Production

Analyzed videos of stand-up acts show that, in general, women stand-up comedians in Egypt seem to prefer discussing socio-cultural issues to taboo topics found to be addressed by men comedians in the selected data. Neither of the two videos of women comedians – Habiba Ashraf and Gehad Atef – examined addresses taboo issues. On the contrary, they self-ridicule girls' attitude in the Egyptian society or mock how young people use a "distorted" version of Arabic slang. In her video performed in January 21, 2016, Gehad Atef uses the theme of cultural quirks as a springboard for humorous observations drawn from her daily experiences. She mocks how ugly modern Egyptian poetry has become by imitating how the "so-called [modern] poets" recite poetry that lacks aesthetics. She then elaborates on this point by commenting on how Egyptians have borrowed the Lebanese word *"fashx"* which means "step" in Levantine Arabic and misused it in Egypt, where it is used as an intensifier meaning "very". As an example of misuse, she mentions the phrase *Jihād, intī fashīxa* "جهاد إنتِ فشيخة" (translates to *Gehad you're awesome*) to illustrate how the word is used in inappropriate contexts, such as men complimenting women. Considering the context of this performance in 2016, it's worth noting that, as explained earlier, cultural venues had recently begun requiring comedians to submit stand-up material for internal review before the show. The word *fashx*, for instance, is considered an example of "inappropriate" language that Atef was warned not to say while on stage. The video shows that she pushes the boundaries of the rules and says the word in a lower tone to express her perspective (See *Macro-level CDA* section for a detailed discussion of this excerpt from Video 1). Similarly, Habiba, in her segment from the same January 2016 performance, opens her segment with a comment on public transportation in Egypt. She talks about being raised on the idea that "older people are never wrong". Under this theme, she also tackles several examples that she has personally encountered. One of the examples she covers in the video is that, because she grew up in a society that values the idea that "older people are always right", her personal views towards simple everyday situations, like street vendors and the noise they cause while calling for their goods, are affected.

Although neither of the women comedians discusses taboo topics, the personal views expressed in their material are considered a source of knowledge production. This production leaves the audience with lingering thoughts to ponder after the show.

Men comedians, on the other hand, are found to be more daring either in their choice of topics or in using "inappropriate" language in some instances. This is evident in Videos 3-10, cited in Appendix A. For example, the second theme discussed by Taha Desouky in Video 3 is completely politics-oriented. He discusses how the government and state media underestimate their citizens' intelligence in their news coverage. This video is from a 2013 performance where one of the significant incidents was the police breaking up demonstrations using live ammunition. However, the report issued by the Egyptian Ministry of Interior Affairs at that time stated that their forces "do not have live ammunition" and that they only used *"bullets that stings"* to break up the demonstration. Desouky, in his act, tries to make sense of this report. It is worth noting that in 2013, theater administrations did not impose clear restrictions on what comedians should discuss on stage. This explains why Desouky is more explicit in how he mocks this incident during his stand-up act. However, in video 4 (January 2016), it is noticed that Desouky is more careful and subtle while talking about the procedures followed by conscripts during their military service period (See the section *Macro-level CDA* for analysis of how Desouky defied theater's restrictions regarding political topics). Furthermore, being part of an event that will be filmed and uploaded on YouTube by the event organizers (i.e., *The Glocal*), Desouky avoids taboo topics in the fifth video and chooses to comment on man-woman relationships instead.

Also politics-oriented, Mina Resha, in video 6 (performed on October 18, 2018), comments on how difficult it has become to make Egyptians laugh since they – the comedians – are not allowed to talk about the three taboos (i.e., sex, religion, and politics) and in the seventh video, which is another excerpt from the same show, Risha talks about how Christian students have been bullied in his school, first by being put in a separate class by school administrators and, second, by not being cheered for during school football leagues. Quandil's material in the selected data focuses on social and cultural topics. He comments on his upbringing, including how teachers in public schools used corporal punishment. He also explores the attitude of Egyptians in everyday interactions. *Ṭifl Kibīr* show (Video 8) was performed in February 2019 on *El-Sawy Culture Wheel*. Throughout the show, Quandil narrates his childhood memories growing up in the 1980s, explaining how the surrounding community and different TV shows have shaped his personality. While narrating his stories, Quandil indirectly critiques children's shows on TV, state TV news coverage and traditional parenting styles of the era. Video 9 also covers how parents raise their children on the idea of disrespecting the "other" and being inconsiderate to other people, their different ways of thinking, and their emotions. In video 10, Quandil talks about various forms of violence he has faced from his teachers in school.

Listing the themes comedians cover only provides a basic overview of the analyzed videos. However, a significant question about the criteria comedians consider while preparing their stand-up material arises and is worth discussing. Interviews with the comedians reveal that they consider several criteria before they decide on their stand-up material. Key factors comedians consider include their own interests, the restrictions of the venue where they perform, and the expected audience. The first principle they follow is for the theme to be of personal concern to them, which asserts the feature of individuality that characterizes stand-up as a performance art. The idea of interest is extended to ensuring having a common interest with the audience, as emphasized by

Atef and Ashraf. They believe this shared interest helps guarantee audience engagement during the show. On the other hand, Desouky asserts that because stand-up comedy is a "real" art, he tends to talk about what he observes daily. He says,

> To me, there are no clear criteria that I consider. I don't plan to discuss a specific topic from a certain perspective. No, as I told you, [stand-up comedy] is authentic…if I observe something during my day and make a funny comment on it, I jot it down as potential material for my future shows (T. Desouky, personal communication, June 11, 2020).

The second criterion comedians consider is the nature of the place they perform in, its restrictions, and the nature of the audience expected to attend. About the significance of the audience, Desouky explains that

> the nature of the audience is very important since I need to make sure what I plan to say is relevant to them. I want the audience to feel that I represent them and that we share the same everyday experiences (personal communication, June 11, 2020).

The audience factor is also a point of concern to Habiba Ashraf, who elaborates what Desouky mentions that considering the audience while preparing the stand-up material includes contemplating the angle from which she wants to tackle her stand-up content and, more importantly, choosing a relevant level of language that would appeal to the audience and make them interested in the show.

In addition, Ashraf and Risha emphasize the importance of not using "inappropriate" or obscene language that might be hurtful to the audience. On this point, Asharf comments, "I realized the fact that there might be children attending my shows, which makes me aware of the language I use while on stage; I do not want it to be offensive to my audience" (H. Ashraf, personal communication, June 13, 2020). Sharing this sentiment, Risha says, "I try not to use obscene language even when some places now hold 18+ shows. Using swearwords in shows should be put in context. Otherwise, there is no need for it" (M. Risha, personal communication, June 12, 2020).

Concerning the restrictions some places enforce, Risha asserts that right after the 2011 revolution, there were no such rules, "but now," he adds,

> you might have someone from the administration attending your show to see how far you follow the script you have submitted. This is, in fact, good and bad. It is inconvenient because you feel bound at the time you want to speak up freely since part of our show depends on improvisation. Still, it is good because these restrictions challenge us to look for indirect methods to implicitly say what we want, which makes us more creative in preparing our material" (M. Risha, personal communication, June 12, 2020).

Quandil has a different answer when asked about the criteria he follows while choosing a topic since he immediately answers that the first rule is "no politics" (A. Quandil, personal communication, June 17, 2020). When asked to clarify, he comments,

> I mean politics of the place [where I perform], state politics, and people's interference in each other's business. Plus, censorship rules in our country are not clear. Imagine if we have a censorship board to which I could present my stand-up content to review and tell which parts I should not say while on-stage. I know it is awkward to imagine the existence of an entity that censors arts. However, if we had such board, things would have been easier. The main problem with restrictions is that each venue or event organizer has their rules…They even, in some cases, want what is safer for them; so, they start crossing out

parts from my stand-up script claiming that 'it might make people angry' (A. Quandil, personal communication, June 17, 2020).

It can be thus summarized that while comedians consider venue restrictions, the analyzed videos highlight the significance of the comedian's individuality in the choice of stand-up content. The themes tackled in the selected videos are infused with the comedians' perspectives and experiences that are humorously introduced to the audience. These personal views are manifested on two intertwined levels. It is linguistically expressed through the recurrent use of first-person pronouns and ideational verbs like *believe, think,* and *see*, as well as opinion verbs like *agree*, *disagree*, *love*, and *hate.* It is also ideologically reflected through the angle the comedians choose to discuss the theme of interest to them. Supported by Lässig (2016) and Carayannis and Campbell (2019), it can be argued that comedians, during the time of their live performance, could be a source of knowledge production – "reproduction". I use the term "reproduction" here to highlight the idea that although comedians might seem only to express their perspectives, they are in fact aiming that their shows would encourage their audience to engage in a critical reassessment of the knowledge they receive through mainstream discourse. In other words, they re-introduce knowledge that may counter the discourse dictated by channels of mainstream media by expressing their perspectives that are based either on their close observations and readings of the surroundings or their first-hand experience with issues they talk about or – as explained by Carayannis and Campbell (2019) – "expertise and skills" (p. 5). This idea of knowledge "reproduction" is also reflected in the comedians' definitions of stand-up comedy (quoted in *Comedians' profiles* above). Both Quandil and Risha emphasize the philosophical and individual nature of stand-up comedy. As Risha says, the audiences is "introduced to the comedian's philosophy and perspectives through their stand-up material" (personal communication, June 12, 2020).   This "new" and different source of knowledge, embodied in the stand-up material, helps update and restructure the audience's knowledge (Van Dijk, 2007, p. 8). Thus, stand-up comedy, as a performance art, is a discourse that mainly depends on the idea of "shared knowledge" (Raskin, 1985, p. 138), which, in some cases, the comedians rely on to deconstruct what the audience already know or believe in so that they could communicate their personal views, hence, urging the audience to possibly revisit their own beliefs. The role of knowledge, in this context, which is "organized by a special K-device that strategically projects what recipients already know or what is still unknown to them, thus regulating the presuppositional structure of the discourse" (Van Dijk, 2007, p. 14), is an essential element to the art of stand-up comedy.

Macro-level CDA

This section focuses on analyzing excerpts from the selected videos to see how comedians use the theater space and the time of the live performance to present their personal views through their stand-up acts. Discussion of excerpts from the stand-up routines is complemented by the comedians' responses to interview questions regarding censorship regulations and their effect on the stand-up material. The interviews also explore what strategies comedians use to express themselves within these limitations. This section is divided thematically based on selected excerpts from the videos where, first, I will discuss some excerpts that discuss taboo themes. I will, then, move on to analyze other excerpts where "inappropriate" language (i.e., swearwords) is used.
Taboo topics

The thematic analysis reveals a difference in how male and female comedians approach sensitive topics in the selected videos. While the videos of women comedians do not include taboo content, routines of men comedians do occasionally touch on such topics, sometimes alluding to political events. For example, videos 3 and 4 of Taha Desouky, video 6 of Mena Risha, and video 8 of Ali Quandil have political content that is either explicitly or implicitly covered. To start with, in the second half of Video 3 (See excerpt 1[3] quoted below), Desouky comments on the official statement issued by the Ministry of Interior Affairs reporting on how police officers used "*stingy bullets*" – not live ammunition – to disperse the Cairo University demonstrations in 2013.

> Excerpt 1: Video 3-Desouky (2014)
> A couple of weeks ago, a demonstration took place in front of Cairo University – we all heard about it – it is the demonstration that was dispersed by the police in front of Cairo University. The Ministry declared, "We have a president who issued a law, and we are a state that respects law … so, we dispersed the demonstration, but we didn't use live ammunition. We only used <u>stingy bullets</u>." (Audience laughter)
> <u>What does this mean? Don't laugh! I never get an answer to this question! If we believed such an assumption, it would mean that the ministry had bead guns!</u> (Audience laughter) … In this case, what would be the injuries? The medical report would say, "a rash all over the body, some inflammations behind the ear, and red cheeks; death is probably due to shyness!" (Audience laughter) (applause)
> While at home, you'd be angry and want to get these people's rights and support them. So, you go and shout, "Sting Haitham! Sting Dina! The more you sting, the stronger we become!" (Audience laughter) (applause)

Desouky, in this part of the video, is explicit about questioning the validity of the ministry's report. As pointed out in the section on *Thematic analysis: themes, criteria for choosing stand-up topics, and knowledge production* above, the segment is part of a show in December 2013 where no clear restrictions concerning covering taboo topics, especially political ones, were announced yet. The sarcastic tone maintained throughout this segment is evident in Desouky's punchlines, as in "What does this mean? Don't laugh! I never get an answer for this question! If we believed such assumption, it would mean that the ministry had bead guns!". This sarcastic tone reflects Desouky's disbelief in the Ministry's official report. He highlights the contradiction with other non-official news coverage reporting the death of one protestor, making the Ministry's claim of not using live ammunition seem illogical and nonsensical.

The same sarcastic tone is maintained in other videos of Desouky's stand-up acts, especially in Video 4, where he questions the aim of compulsory military service in Egypt. However, Desouky employs a more subtle approach to mockery in this video. Excerpt 2 below suggests that the theater administration might have tried to cut off the microphone during Desouky's performance.

> Excerpt 2: Video 4-Desouky (2016)
> Thanks to God! But there is something that I don't get, honestly! Why? All of this, why? Because, in the end, I'll stand like this (Audience laughter), like this (imitating the way a soldier stands)! We do nothing in our lives! Noth—just stand like this! I just hope they put me in the service of guarding a curtain, a grave! Anything—I swear I'm patriotic. I would love to go for a service where I feel I'm defending my country, serving it! But no! They can make you guard a banner! (Audience laughter) … I graduated from law school and work hard to guard a banner at the end! No, six

soldiers to guard one banner! Send them to guard Abu Ṭāriq (a local Egyptian restaurant) to (unclear word) (sound fades out) What?!

…Plus, there's something even more humiliating! For example, the Mouled holiday, an occasion! Someone wants to say something, so he brings six thousand soldiers behind him! Stand just like this! I didn't say who! Anyone! It could be (sound is not clear) (Audience laughter) (applause) six thousand soldiers are standing in the sun with no food, so make your speech short!

Desouky imitates the president: "I (pause)" (Audience laughter) (applause) "I want to say something important" (Audience laughter) (applause)

Desouky as himself: you haven't met us by chance! (Audience laughter) you have to say something important! (Audience laughter) (applause)

Desouky imitates the president: "I (pause)"

Desouky as himself: he already delivered the speech.

Imitating the president: "Should I repeat it?"

As himself: Why say it again? (Audience laughter), there are people standing outside and didn't even have their breakfast! (Audience laughter) Whoever would want to watch the speech again, they can do this on YouTube (Audience laughter)

Excerpt 2, from video 4, was performed in January 2016. It highlights the restrictions imposed upon stand-up performances since 2014. Since this date, venues have started to have clear regulations that comedians should not discuss political topics. However, in this video, Desouky questions the purpose of the military service in Egypt, arguing that if conscripts would end up "guarding a banner" during their service, there is no need for it. He even takes it a step further and imitates how the president speaks. In this stand-up segment though, Desouky does not mention names. He rather depends on the audience's intelligence and their "shared knowledge" (Raskin, 1985, p. 138) to decipher the persona Desouky imitates by mimicking the tone of voice, pauses and parts of the president's original speech, which Desouky alludes to in this stand-up routine. The audience's ability to understand Desouky's point of view and to interpret who he is imitating is immediately translated into their laughter and applause. However, as elaborated in excerpt 2 above, it seems there has been an attempt to cut off the sound while Desouky is performing. This is clear when Desouky checks the microphone is working and says, "*what?!*" addressing sound engineers in the control room.

Risha, on the other hand, is more explicit in video 6 quoted below. This video is from a show performed at el-ḥikmah theatre in *El-Sawy Culture Wheel* on October 18, 2018 (M. Risha, personal communication, June 12, 2020). According to the venue's regulations, Risha must submit his stand-up script for review before the live show. Here, Risha boldly discusses – while on stage – how challenging it is to think of funny stand-up content outside the list of the "not allowed" topics.

Excerpt 3: Video 6-Risha (2018)

…It's difficult to make Egyptians laugh, especially that we can't speak about three things: religion, sex, and politics. I won't talk religion, because the last time I did so, I commented on the misconceptions we have about Christians. Ironically enough, Christians were the ones who insulted me! I don't know how! Someone commented, "Go to hell, son of a *****!" So, I'll go to hell for expressing my opinion, and when you insult me, you'll go to Dahab?! You'll definitely be with me (in hell)! I won't talk sex, of course, because I'm 26 and still a virgin. And I don't know if you should laugh or cry! And I won't talk politics because I don't want to experience sex now at all!

In only forty-three seconds, Risha summarizes the situation of nonofficial censorship practiced by the theater administrations in Egypt. He defies all the rules dictated to him. However, it is expected that this joke routine was not in the original stand-up material submitted to the theater administration. Otherwise, the reviewers would have crossed it out from the script. Risha surprises

his audience in this remarkably short segment by depending on one-liner punchlines that assert his views regardless of the regulations. By doing so, he employs the "here" and "now" nature of the live performance to rebelliously criticize the fact that he is not allowed to tackle any issues related to the three taboos – religion, sex, and politics – following the pattern of stating the fact that he "*cannot talk sex*" in "*I won't talk sex*" immediately followed by a "bullet-like" punchline in *because I am 26 and still a virgin.*" He ends this segment with the boldest punchline when commenting that he cannot talk politics because he does not "*want to experience sex now at all.*" In this last punchline, Risha both criticizes the fact that he is not allowed to reveal his political views and comments on possible consequences he might face if he speaks politics hinting at the idea that he might get imprisoned and sexually abused in prison.

Although not as explicit as Desouky and Risha, Quandil indirectly expresses his political insights in his show *Ṭifl Kibīr* performed at *el-Nahar* theater in *El-Sawy Culture Wheel*, Cairo, Egypt on February 21, 2019. What is interesting is the caption Quandil puts at the beginning of the video on YouTube to comment on the nature of his childhood: "*In short, my childhood is just like my country, something bright...in the middle of all shitty conditions*". Quandil does not directly comment on political events in Egypt in this 90-minute stand-up show. However, through his childhood stories narrated throughout the act, he implicitly comments on issues of concern to his generation, shaping the identity of the millennials. For example, when commenting on local TV channels in Egypt, he includes a short segment imitating how mainstream media used to report news in the 1990s (See excerpt 4 below).

> Excerpt 4: Video 8-Quandil (2019)
> We didn't have internet ... we were not open to the world the way we are now, we only had channels One and Two! And we used to wait for a nice movie to watch, something for Ismail Yassin, and suddenly…
> Quandil as a TV announcer: News Headlines (Audience laughter). Why would you watch the show or the movie? No! Listen to the news we just aired one hour ago! (Audience laughter). President Mubarak launches (Audience laughter) (pause) mourns (Audience laughter) (pause) receives a call (Audience laughter) (pause) negotiates (Audience laughter) (pause) comes (pause) travels (Audience laughter) (pause) eats (Audience and comedian laughter)
> Quandil comments: while there is another piece of news on the side... after Mubarak...
> Quandil as the TV announcer: The Egyptian football team wins, receives
> Quandil comments: and on the side, there is news about a ferry that sank with people on it…but this is not important! Let's watch the movie! Here you go! (Audience laughter). We lived in this dilemma for a while; we did not have access to such news from other sources. It was only channels One and Two [the state-owned TV channels].

Excerpt 4 again pinpoints how Quandil also uses the time and space he has during the live performance to comment on issues of concern indirectly. In this segment, he comments on how mainstream media has used to report unimportant news (i.e., daily tasks of the president) while ignoring more important accidents and events like the ferry accident that resulted in the death of over 400 people. Quandil, however, does not mention which ferry accident he means. In December 1991, *Salem Express* ferry sank in the Red Sea, resulting in the death of 476 passengers, and in 2006, As-Salām 98 ferry sank in the Red Sea as well, resulting in the death of 1032 passengers[4]. As elaborated earlier, Quandil mainly depends on the common knowledge he shares with the

audience and techniques of humor employed in the segment (e.g., the way he imitates the TV announcer, which links to the audience's memory of such news reports). Not clarifying which ferry Quandil means helps reach a wider range of the audience since even those who have not witnessed the 1991 accident are possibly familiar with the 2006 one. Another possible explanation for not mentioning the year is that he probably aims to draw his audience's attention to the fact that the way mainstream media reports news has not changed much since the 1990s. A possible interpretation is that Quandil suggests that despite the presence of satellite channels and other news sources, mainstream media continues to distract audiences with insignificant news at the expense of more important events in the country.

Inappropriate Language

The second aspect this section discusses is how comedians navigate restrictions on using "inappropriate" language on stage, even when their act aims to critique the use such language in everyday interactions. For example, part of Gehad Atef's video discusses how young Egyptians overuse the word *fashx* (means *very*) in inappropriate contexts (See excerpt 5).

Excerpt 5: Video 1-Atef (2016)
Guys, there is a Facebook page I would really love to hit the Like button (pause) but I'm afraid, because its name is ilkumint (said in a lower voice) ilfashīx (the extreme comment) (Audience laughter) What is this word that has spread?! Ok, let's go to Lebanon, as we can't travel, let's imagine a scene of Lebanon where there are beautiful mountains, and women and men (Audience Laughter). You'll find a girl calling her boyfriend, "Honey, where are you? Love you, darling!" He replies, "Immediately, darling, just a step away!" (Audience laughter) means a step, fashxa means a step in Lebanese Arabic. But here, we imported the word and added our Egyptian touch to it.
A boy comes to me saying, "Gehad, I like you fash--!" fa—what? fa—what? The Arabic language has a total of 28 characters, all of them have failed to make a sentence that express your love to me! (Audience laughter) (applause) Shame on you! Seriously. (Audience laughter)

Excerpt 5 shows how Gehad defies the restriction of using obscene language on stage. Gehad comments on this segment during the interview explaining that the theater administration has requested that Gehad cannot say such a word [*fashx*] on stage. "I had to rewrite the whole material again where I depended on the audience to say or complete the word on my behalf instead of me saying it during the show" (G. Atef, personal communication, June 16, 2020). In other words, she, like male comedians, depended on the idea of Raskin's "shared knowledge" she has with the audience. This same technique of depending on the audience's knowledge to fill in unsaid words by the comedian is also found in Quandil's video 9 (performed in August 2019), where he comments on how some people in Egypt are inconsiderate of other people's needs and thoughts as is the case in the way some people celebrate their wedding (See excerpt 6 below).

Excerpt 6: Video 9-Quandil (2018)
To us, the "other" does not exist! We're not raised on the idea that this "other" has feelings or ideas. No. He's just a "somebody"! Somebody passed by! Just somebody, not a human being! Somebody died! Not a human being!

> This is why when we have a wedding parade, we [wedding people] are happy now! Stop time! Everything else should stop! Women giving birth, sick people, funerals, and people working…None of our business!
> "Islam, we'll all go on scooters and meet in the square garden. Stop everything in the street, son of a bi***!" No one would move until we celebrate! (Audience laughter) (applause)

The punchline in the previous excerpt highly depends on the audience's knowledge of the context that Quandil criticizes. Because Quandil is not allowed to use swearwords on stage, he only says part of the word "ابن المتنـــ" (*son of a bitch*) leaving the audience a chance to decipher the word; a task which the audience succeeds in and burst out in laughter and applaud for Quandil.

> Although analysis of the selected data does not focus on audience response, such as instant comments during the show or their social media reactions, their laughter as shown in the videos cannot be overlooked. Audience laughter is, at minimum, a sign of their engagement with the stand-up material. The audience's laughter indicates their understanding of the comedians' jokes and their explicit and subtle views expressed during the show. To elaborate, audience laughter suggests that the stand-up comedians successfully use the theater as a platform to express their perspectives through their humorous stand-up routines. It also reflects the comedians' skill in employing different humor techniques, including mainly allusion and imitation, to deliver their content to the audience. Comedians, as clarified above, manage to allude to actual events that have impacted the Egyptian society leaving an "unsaid" part for the audience to interpret (Schwarz, 2010, p. 131). Again, Van Dijk's (2007) idea of the relationship between the speaker – the comedian – and the recipients – the audience – and how the comedians depend on what the audience already know is an integral part of the successful manifestation of humor embodied in the stand-up comedy shows. However, humor expressed in stand-up shows is not something momentary. Comedians aim at a deeper after-effect that their shows would have on the audience. This is evident in their responses to interview questions regarding the possible effects their stand-up acts may have on the audience. Desouky, for instance, elaborates that he considers his show a success if he hears one of the audience members saying *'he [Desouky] said all I wanted to say,'* (T. Desouky, personal communication, June 11, 2020). This comment marks his success, as a comedian, in delivering the message to his spectators. Quandil's response further emphasizes this idea. He suggests that tackling issues of interest to the audience sends them a message that they are not alone and that their observations about the community are valid because someone else is criticizing it (A. Quandil, personal communication, June 17, 2020).
>
> Giannachi et al. (2012) explained that theatrical presence depends to a great extent on "liveness, mediation, and documentation" (p. 1). In fact, the art of stand-up comedy in Egypt depends on these three elements. Stand-up performances, as elaborated in this study, employ the "live" situation – in the idea of presence in the "here" and "now" – where comedians communicate their views to the audience through their stand-up material, thus, offering an alternative source of knowledge to their spectators. This way, comedians involve their audience in the live moment of the show, hoping to influence them – at least through laughter. Laughter and applause are indications of audience engagement in the liminal space of the live performance. The comedians'

skillful use of content, ideas, and humor in their stand-up acts can potentially reshape their audience's views on socio-cultural and political issues in Egypt.

Conclusion

Stand-up comedy in Egypt thrives despite facing potential restrictions. However, these limitations, in fact, challenge the comedians to continuously seek new theatrical techniques to get their messages across to the audience. This paper aimed to analyze excerpts from Egyptian stand-up acts to explore how comedians navigate theater restrictions dictated to them. Additionally, in-depth interviews with the comedians provided valuable insights, enriching the overall picture of the stand-up comedy scene in Egypt. Finally, audience response to stand-up material remains an under-explored research area with the potential to show how these performances contribute to knowledge production. Further research in this field would incorporate social media analysis and audience interviews. Additionally, the performers' own views of stand-up comedy as a tool for social change (H. Ashraf, personal communication, June 13, 2020) and their willingness to offer alternative perspectives to state media cannot be ignored when examining the impact of stand-up comedy on knowledge production within popular culture.

Endnotes
1. Information included in this section is based on the interviews conducted with the comedians.
2. *The Glocal* official Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/TheGlocal
3. All excerpts included in the paper are translated by the researcher.
4. https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1467440

About the Author
Dr. Nohayer Lotfy is a lecturer at the British University in Egypt. She received her PhD degree in applied linguistics and humor from Cairo University. She grew interested in stand-up comedy as a humor genre and decided to analyze comedians' linguistic choices to create humor in stand-up comedy acts from Egypt and the United States. Her passion for the study of comedy shows has been the result of witnessing how comedians skillfully use language in their performances to criticize social, cultural and political issues of concern to their community. OCid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6836-4084

References

Abdul Jabar, N. F., & Yunus, K. (2017). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an approach of the analysis of language. *Man in India*, *97*(16), 357–365. Research Gate.

Brodie, I. B. (2009). *Stand-up comedy: A folkoristic approach* (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada. https://research.library.mun.ca/8960/. Memorial University Research Repository

Carayannis, E. G., & Campbell, D. F. J. (2019). *Smart Quintuple Helix Innovation Systems: How Social Ecology and Environmental Protection are Driving Innovation, Sustainable Development and Economic Growth*. Springer International Publishing.

Daube, M. (2009). *Laughter in revolt: Race, ethnicity and identity in the construction of stand-up comedy* (Doctoral dissertation). https://www.proquest.com/openview/f4e5a7c54fcdd0d5d38e41840d0a2f34/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750

Double, J. O. (1991). *An approach to traditions of British stand-up comedy* (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). University of Sheffield, England. http://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/9554350.pdf

El-Sawy CultureWheel | El Sawy. (n.d.). www.culturewheel.com. https://www.culturewheel.com/en/about-us/QVM1NB1gmB/WmR1JgDnBo

Giannachi, G., Kaye, N., & Shanks, M. (2012). *Archaeologies of presence : art, performance and the persistence of being*. Routledge.

Glick, D. J. (2007). Some performative techniques in stand-up comedy: An exercise in the textuality of temporalization. *Language and Communication*, *27*, 291-306. doi:10.1016/j.langcom.2007.01.003

Hassaine, N. (2014). Linguistic analysis of verbal humour in Algerian stand-up comedy. *International Journal of English Language and Translation Studies*, *02*(02), 90–98. http://www.eltsjournal.org

Lässig, S. (2016). The history of knowledge and the expansion of the historical research agenda. *German Historical Institute* [Bulletin 59]*, 29–58. https://www.ghi-dc.org/publication/bulletin-59-fall-2016

Library of Congress. (2020). *Arabic Romanization Table Revision Approved*. https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/roman_arabic.html.

Lotfy, N. E. (2022). Scripted and non-scripted humour in stand-up comedy: Techniques of Egypt's comedian Ali Quandil. In I. Nwankwo (Ed.), *Stand-up Comedy in Africa: Humour in Popular Languages and Media* (pp. 193–212). Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag.

McIlvenny, P., Mettovaara, S. &Tapio, R. (1993). I really wanna make you laugh: Stand-up comedy and audience response. *Tampere University Finnish and General Linguistics Department Publications*, *16*, 225-246. http://paul-server.humfak.auc.dk/research/cv/Pubs/stand-up93.pdf

Michael, J. (2013). American Muslims stand-up and speak out: Trajectories of humor in Muslim American stand-up comedy. *Contemporary Islam*, *7*(2), 129-153. doi:10.1007/s11562-011-0183-6

Mock, R. (2012). Stand-up comedy and the legacy of the mature vagina. *Women& Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, *22*(1), 9-28. doi: 10.1080/0740770X.2012.685394

Oleimy, D. M. & Lotfy, N. E. (2016, November). Humour as resistance in the Egyptian stand-up comedy after the January 25th revolution. In L. A. Youssef & S. A. Kamel (Eds.), *The 12ᵗʰ International Symposium on Comparative Literature: Language and Literature of Resistance* (pp. 381-396). Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt

Raskin, V. (1985). *Semantic Mechanisms of Humour.* Kluwer.

Schwarz, J. (2010). *Linguistic aspects of verbal humor in stand-up comedy* (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). Universität des Saarlandes, Germany. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://d-nb.info/1002728533/34

Seizer, S. (2011). On the uses of obscenity in live stand-up comedy. *Anthropological Quarterly*, *84*(1), 209-234. doi: 10.1353/anq.2011.0001

Turner, V. (1983). Liminal to liminoid, in play, flow, and ritual: An essay in comparative symbology. In J. C. Harris & R. J. Park (Eds.), *Play, Games and Sports in Cultural Contexts* (pp. 123–163). Champaign, Human Kinetics Publishers.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2007). Macro contexts. In D. S. Lottgen & J. S. Sánchez (Eds.), *Discourse and International Relations* (pp. 3–26). Lang. http://www.discourses.org

Wells, P. & Bull, P. (2007). From politics to comedy: A comparative analysis of affiliative audience responses. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 26*(4), 321-342. doi: 10.1177/0261927X07306978

Woodrow, A. (2001). *Why are they laughing? The re-formulation of identity in Canadian stand-up comedy* (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). Concordia University, Canada. http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/1426/1/NQ63995.pdf

Appendices
Appendix A
List of Analysed Videos

Gehad Atef
    Video 1
Personal communication with producer of the show, Ali Quandil (1 February 2020).
Habiba Ashraf
    Video 2
Personal communication with producer of the show, Ali Quandil (1 February 2020).
Taha Desouky
    Video 3
N2O Comedy. (2014, April 24). *N2O Comedy:* طه دسوقي في ستاندبكوميدي [Video]. YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJHlucAq14Q
    Video 4
Desouky. T. (2016, January 17). *Standup comedy* ليه؟ ده الكلام بقول أنا. [Video]. YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLht8J_23-0
    Video 5
The Glocal. (2020, January 28). الحلقة الخامسة من ذا جلوكال شو / طه الدسوقي *#TheGlocal*. [Video] Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=212526139909364&extid=BiOdGCzndCtWK1fe
Mena Risha
    Video 6

Risha, M. (2020, December 19). آثار الحملات الصليبية (*'athār ilḥamalāt ilṣalībiyah*) [Video]. Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/mena.risha/videos/2881871558499659/?lst=520692820%3A100000305285534%3A1598533236
    Video 7

Risha, M. (2019, December 29). المحرمات الثلاثة (*ilmuḥaramāt ilthalāthah*) [Video]. Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/mena.risha/videos/2904832529536895/

Ali Quandil
    Video 8

Quandil, A. (2019, September 14). علي قنديل ـ ستاند اب كوميدي: حفلة (طفل كبير) كاملة (*ᶜalī qandīl – standup comedy: ḥaflit "ṭifl Kibīr" kāmila*) [Video]. YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7f8kWA-yDnU
    Video 9

Quandil, A;. (2019, August 29). اوعي ياله يابن المـــ (*iwᶜah ya-la yabn ilm--*) [Video]. YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lobAhwkzO3Y
    Video 10

Quandil, A. (April 6, 2020). علي قنديل ـ ستاند اب كوميدي: أستاذ عبد الله بُنْدُجَة (*ᶜalī qandīl – standup comedy: ustadh ᶜabullah bundugah*) [Video].YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuA3fEHBc0Y

Appendix B
Interview Guiding Questions

Table 1. *Interview guiding questions*

English	Arabic
Interview Protocol:	:بروتوكول الإنترفيو
Interview starts with the comedian introducing themselves (when have s/he started? where do they usually perform? Do they have online platforms to regularly share their performances?)	تبدأ المقابلة بتعريف الكوميديان نفسه (متى بدأ عروض الستاندب كوميدي؟ أماكن حفلاته؟ هل يشارك حفلاته أونلاين أم لا؟
1. What is your definition of stand-up comedy as a performance art?	1. ما تعريفك لفن الستاندب كوميدي؟
2. Do you think stand-up comedy could be institutionalized or sponsored? a. What would be the pros and cons of such a step?	2. تفتكر فن الستاندب كوميدي ممكن يبقى "مؤسسي" – قطاع عام – أو له راعي؟ أ. إيه في رأيك المميزات والعيوب بتاعة خطوة زي دي؟
3. How do you measure audience interaction while you are performing? a. What do you do if the audience does not interact or laugh on what you say?	3. إزاي بتقيس تفاعل الجمهور معاك وإنت على المسرح؟ أ. بتعمل إيه لو لقيته مش متفاعل معاك أو مابيضحكش على الشو بتاعك؟
4. Do you think the theater as a setting provides the opportunity for better interaction with the audience? Is it a better option to have a show in a theater? Or can you only depend on online videos?	تفتكر لما تقدم الشو بتاعك على مسرح (خشبة المسرح، 4. ده بيديك مساحة أكبر للتفاعل مع الجمهور؟ وهل ده معناه إن وجود مسرح اختيار أفضل للحفلات؟ ولا ممكن تعتمد على تقديم فيديوهات أونلاين بس؟
5. What criteria do you consider when preparing for stand-up material? (e.g., rules of the place, the venue itself, lighting, music, audience, topics of concern to you individually or to the society)	5. إيه المعايير اللي بتعمل حسابها وإنت بتجهز ماتريال الحفلة؟ (مثال: القيود اللي ممكن تتفرض من المكان اللي فيه الحفلة، مكان العرض، حجم مكان العرض، الإضاءة، الموسيقى، نوعية الجمهور، موضوعات العرض اللي بتهمك بصورة شخصية أو بتهم المجتمع...)
6. In what way does your stand-up show affect the audience? a. How do you measure this?	6. تفتكر إزاي عرض الستاندب كوميدي بتاعك ممكن يأثر على الجمهور؟ أ. بتقييس التأثير ده إزاي؟