



'It's not God I'm joking about': Religion, stand-up comedy, dark comedy, and public sphere

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Keywords:</i> dark jokes dark comedy stand-up comedy incongruity public sphere</p>	<p>This article looks at the social aspects of dark comedy used in stand-up comedy. Dark comedy is seen as problematic because it is in a vortex of humor, subjectivity, and the public. To capture and analyze these various phenomena, the authors use socio-anthropological perspective with the play theory from Sastramidjaja's dissertation (2016) which is complemented by publicness from Sasono's PhD theses (2019). This qualitative study uses data collection methods with semi-structured interviews with several main questions which are deepened by still referring to the main questions, especially to know the process of preparing jokes and stand-up comedy performances. This research was conducted in the Stand-up Indo Bekasi community and the Stand-up University Bhayangkara Jaya (UBJ) Bekasi with three comedians who often used dark joke material consisting of Bilal (Muslim), Ahmad (Muslim), and James (son of a Christian priest). This paper reveals the finding that dark comedy does not only come from the comedians, but also involves the public sphere as a form of grievances. The authors see that dark comedy is born from concerns that include comedian subjectivity in viewing various symbols – including religious symbols or those related to religion, reversing them, and contextualizing them in an incongruity.</p>

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Introduction

In a meeting room humor seems stiff, it can become fluid instantly just because someone makes a joke. Humor also does not occur in a vacuum, but exists in a certain space and time, so humor also changes over time. The changing times have also changed humor into a certain form, which is usually a group, now it can only be individual. One form of individual humor is stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedy, according to Pandji Pragiwaksono (2020), started with humorous comments made by American comedian, Bob Hope, as a commentator on television shows in the United States and then over time developed into social commentary humor that took humor based on social phenomena. Theoretically, stand-up comedy is a form of small conversation that relies on various genres and is carried out with a kind of performance on stage but contains social, interpersonal, and natural collaboration aspects between the audience and the comedian (Brodie 2014: 32). Several things exist in stand-up comedy besides comedians, audiences, and stages, such as premise, which contains something that the comic wants to say starting from his background (Brodie 2014: 188); set-up, is a way that bridges how something that comics want to convey to lead the audience's assumptions (Brodie 2014: 213); and the punchline is the breaking point of the assumptions that have been set-up and the funny point of the stand-up comedy can be seen.

In its development in Indonesia, stand-up comedy has its form of development. Along with the times, stand-up comedy is finally very popular with the public and is widely spread, there is even a special program on television that broadcasts stand-up comedy such as the *Stand-up Comedy Show* on Metro TV and the *Stand-up Comedy Indonesia* talent show event (SUCI) on Kompas TV that aired

since 2011. From this talent search program, many famous comedians have spawned and regenerated as well as being considered a golden ladder to the top of a comedian's career, such as Mongol Stress, Boris Bokir, and Coki Pardede. One of the uniqueness of stand-up comedy is that each comedian has a persona. Persona is considered important because comedians develop it to maintain the relationship in a certain space and time between the comedian's identity and the audience, both outside the forum or inside the forum so that it is easily recognized by the audience (Brodie 2014: 128). That persona is what makes them famous.

One form of dark comedy that will be discussed in this article is the phenomenon of dark comedy about religion. Some humor in a stand-up comedy that talks about religious issues can be categorized as a form of dark comedy. Dark comedy is humor that is sensitive and can cause tension, for example using religious issues in a stand-up comedy. Dark comedy is not only satirical but also has the potential to ridicule a religious issue. Religious issues that seem serious and sensitive are trying to be melted down in the form of comedy, which in the end are widespread in the community and cause various reactions.

Seeing the phenomenon of dark comedy about religion in stand-up comedy, The authors try to see two sides. First, the dark comedy scheme from the comedian's point of view, such as the background and formulas used as a framework for writing a joke. Second, stand-up comedy is not something that only exists in comedians' minds, but is poured into a show. This makes the comedian must first identify the public in front of him to make his jokes out. But sometimes it's not only the public in front of him, the massive circulation of information due to media developments makes comedians able to be heard by people who are far from him.

Method

This research was conducted in the Bekasi Stand-up Community, Bekasi, West Java with a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a method that collects soft data (words, sentences, photos, symbols, etc.) to see the social context, reveal details and processes, and the research is non-linear (Neuman 2014: 167-169). Data was collected through interviews to gain a cognitive understanding of their performance and the material they produced. Interviews were conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews with several main questions which were deepened by still referring to the main questions, especially to find out the process of preparing material and stand-up comedy performances. The authors interviewed three comedians (Bilal, Ahmad, and James) from Stand-up Indo Bekasi and Stand-up Universitas Bhayangkara Jaya (UBJ). These three informants were chosen because in their shows they use dark jokes. The three comedians are Ahmad, Bilal, and James. Research conducted in June 2022 until July 2022. Data analysis was carried out by transcribing the results of interviews, coding based on themes (thematic analysis) (Bryman, 2012: 13), and interpreting and determining the appropriate analytical tools based on the data obtained.

Results and Discussion

Reversing religious symbols as incongruity

We see that dark comedy, especially those related to religion, are not born in a vacuum. On the other hand, dark comedies are formed from personal experiences, backgrounds, and comedians' identification with the public sphere, especially the audience in front of them. The relationship between humor and religion has been studied several

times in various forms. Birchok (2022) sees humor as part of an ethical play to achieve an ethical life, or to become a better person and is a transcendent and immanent form of ethics. Fadhlina (2021) notes the use of good humor by preachers such as Abdul Somad and Felix Siau, but this strategy is also used by *waria* preachers. Humor becomes a means of fighting *waria* against da'wah that isolates them and even connects them with the larger Muslim community (Fadhlina 2021: 70). Both see humor as part of a religious strategy.

Not only as the transmission of religious values, humor and religion can also be used for other purposes and in other forms. Hoesterey (2021) examines the NU Garis Lucu account as an account that seeks to convey aspirations through satirical jokes on social media. Hoesterey (2021: 87) argues that the involvement of humor, such as in the Twitter account of NU Garis Lucu, can be understood as a moral discipline that raises tension, while other humor tends to lead to disorientation, reduce anger, and tension. It is at this point that the phenomenon of dark comedy with religious nuances appears as often performed by comedians because comedy can be understood not only as an atmosphere-breaking but also as an atmosphere-burner, which is considered to provide affective power. Ibrahim (2018: 115) sees humor as an important part of the lives of young Muslims, for example in discussion activities, in contrast to the image of Islam which is sensitive and does not have humor in Western views. The use of religion in humor is also used by non-believers, as analyzed by Richter (2021) in the younger generation in Morocco to "criticize" religious authority. The use of religion in humor is also not always explicit, but can also be implicit, as in Spoliar's (2022) analysis of British television sitcoms.

As a show, stand-up comedy is performed in public spaces and front of an audience. The authors identify various

studies on religion and the public sphere in Indonesia into four categories. First, the revival of religion in the public sphere as a form of conservatism, both in social media (Kirana and Garadian, 2020), schools (Zuhdi, 2018), and the media (Abdullah and Osman, 2018). Second, religion in the public sphere in its moderate form (Mutawali, 2016; Sakai and Fauzia, 2016; Suharto, 2017; Akmaliah, 2020; Rahmatullah, 2021). Although many studies look at the contestation between conservatives and moderates in the public sphere or simply the appearance of religious symbols in the public sphere without referring to conservatives and moderates (Schmidt, 2017; Khisbiyah, et al., 2018; Takdir 2020).

Unlike the two types of studies, the other two types of studies do not focus on religion itself. Other studies see the public sphere as something secular, both secular in dealing with minority religious issues (Schafer, 2015), increasingly secularized education (Masuda and Yudhistira, 2020), and the media (Machmudi, Supratman, and Ozay, 2021). The last type of studies on religion and public space that the authors identified was the capitalistic public space that commodifies religion (Pamungkas, 2018; Pribadi and Ghufro, 2019; Elanda, 2019; Umam, 2021). The authors use these four types of studies of religion and the public sphere to examine the relationship between comedians and the public sphere in their performances using dark comedy.

Based on these conditions, the authors use play theory. Sastramidjaja (2016: 31) in his analysis of the student movement sees deficiencies in the theorization of games that are dominated by game theory. This game theory is limited to observing game mechanics which are considered stable. Likewise, the concept of *Homo Ludens* from Huizinga which has been monumental in theorizing about games and playing is considered to have limitations because it demands purity

of a game. The implication is that the game is considered separate from the world, so the game will be difficult to integrate with various things, such as politics and religion. Games and parodies are symbolic inversions, actions that reverse, contradict, invalidate, or in some way represent a genuine change from generally held cultural codes, values, and norms. As a game, the players do not play by the rules, but by the rules (Sastramidjaja, 2016: 32). By focusing on the subjunctive dimension in play, play provides space for supposition, which according to Birchok (2022: 4) is similar to ritual. This is because they both offer opportunities to experiment and explore truths that are generally taken for granted.

The problem that arises is the limit of the game itself. Generally, this limit is defined by a meta-message that tells you explicitly that something is still within the "play" limit. But this is not enough because the limit itself is often played. The consequence is that playing can be dangerous (Sastramidjaja, 2016: 33). Moreover, our research talks about religion, so the boundaries need to be re-discussed. One thing to note, the context of our research on stand-up comedy is the audience and the public sphere. The audience is part of the mass communication system as a circuit of production, circulation, reception, and reproduction. In this circuit, a process of meaning formation occurs (Carey and Mierzejewska, 2018: 282). Comedians need to pay attention to their audience to form intimacy, even though they are actually distant from the audience (Brodie, 2014:5). The audience is not only the audience in front of them when they perform, but there is a possibility of circulation that makes their audience come from a wider audience, in other words, they are watched in a wider public space as well. The presence of content in the media that is endemic, or often called viral, can affect even political conditions and the public sphere (Postill, 2014; Utami,

2017). In contrast to the definition of public space from Habermas, Nancy Fraser sees public space with its multiplicity which is indicated by the existence of contestation and competition for public space because each party has its interests (Sasono 2019: 37). The authors see this aspect as publicness, as defined by Sasono (2019: 38) as something that is collected. Publicness is not something universal, but contingent and determined by the various elements that compose it. With these theories, the authors see dark comedy as a form of play carried out in the comedian's understanding of the audience and the public space they face.

To analyze this, the authors conducted research on comedians in the Stand-up Indo Bekasi community and Stand-up UBJ. Stand-up comedy in Bekasi City has begun to spread at least since 2011, marked by the formation of the Indo Bekasi Stand-up Community on October 13, 2011. The Indo Bekasi Stand-up Community is quite active around public places such as cafes as places to practice and perform or commonly known as Open Mic, which until now is still routinely called Rehab Comedy which starts every Thursday at 19.00 WIB at 3 Cooks Cafe, Pekayon, South Bekasi. Bekasi has several stand-up comedy communities that stand under Stand-Up Indo Bekasi, such as Stand-up UBJ (Bhayangkara Jaya University), a stand-up comedy community for students of Bhayangkara Jaya University. However, the stand-up comedy community officially recognized by Stand-up Indo is Stand-up Indo Bekasi, which represents the Bekasi region. The Indo Bekasi Stand-up Community is also quite famous among stand-up comedy lovers because there have been many successful national comedians born from this community, such as Andi Wijaya (AW) who is the former president of the Stand-up Indo community. Even after AW, there was Adjis Doa Ibu who was also

the President of Stand-up Indo, continuing AW, and many more.

In this community, the authors interviewed three comedians (all pseudonyms) with different backgrounds. These three comedians were chosen based on their material or personas related to humor about religion, especially in dark comedy. The first comedian is a member of the Indo Bekasi Stand-up community, Ahmad (22) who has joined Indo Bekasi Stand-up since 2017 and has the persona of a native villager from remote Bekasi who in his appearance often talks about something that he thinks is strange that occur in life and environment in remote Bekasi. The second comedian is Bilal (25), one of the founders of Stand-up UBJ, a final semester student who is also quite active in Stand-up Indo Bekasi. In his appearance, he often brings jokes related to his background and something absurd. The last comedian is James (25), a friend of Bilal, who has a background that is unique compared to other members of the stand-up comedy community as a son of a priest. James is a comedian who has just joined stand-up comedy in the last few months after observing and learning for a long time until he finally dared to start joining Stand-up Indo Bekasi by bringing a strong persona and stand-up comedy material around his unique background as a son of a priest.

Bilal has no special background. However, in his appearance, Bilal tends to make absurd jokes, mainly relying on puns. This joke is not only based on his life experience, but his observation of something to seize the opportunity as something that can be played as something funny, including those related to religion. One of which is:

“Buat yang belum tau, Tuhannya orang Kristen itu meninggalnya karena kecelakaan, soalnya Yesus itu meninggal pas dia lagi naik motor, dia meninggal pas lagi disalib (read: disalip-red)”

(For those who don't know, the God of Christians died in an accident, because Jesus died when he was riding a motorcycle, he died when he was crucified).

In the joke, the word *salib* (crucifixion) is spun into *salip* (overtaking), a word with the same pronunciation but a different meaning. In stand-up comedy, this joke includes the use of a double meaning technique on the word "crucifixion" which diverts the audience's assumptions with words that have two different meanings. The source of the joke does not come from religion, which is the premise, but rather the double meaning that becomes the punchline. Bilal made this joke when the audience was entirely Muslim. This can also be seen from the set-up that emphasizes "the God of Christians," to first explain that the Jesus that will be discussed is the God of Christianity for people who in their estimation do not know about it.

In contrast to Bilal, Ahmad raises various daily activities as comedy material. One that he is familiar with is his life in a remote village in Bekasi, where residents are still religious. Not only religious, but because of the remoteness of the villagers, they don't know much about the popular culture which is even known to ordinary people in urban areas, such as singer Justin Bieber. This is the source of one of Ahmad's jokes:

"Gua tuh tinggal di pelosok kampung yang penduduknya masih norak bgt, gua pernah lagi nyanyi lagu Justin Bieber ditegor loh. Gua nyanyi gini 'ooo ooooo...' diomelin ' eh tong kalo adzan jangan dimaenin"

(I live in a remote village where the people are still very tacky. I once again sang Justin Bieber's song and got scolded. I sing like this 'ooo ooooo...' scolded 'hey, don't play adzan [the call to prayer in Islam]').

"Ooo ooooo..." refers to a part of Justin Bieber's song, *Baby*. However, because the villagers did not know about Justin Bieber or the song, the residents mistakenly thought that Ahmad was chanting the call to prayer in the wrong way. The misunderstanding, instead of being corrected by Ahmad, was continued by Ahmad by passing it on as the call to prayer.

Like Ahmad, James also brings jokes from his personal experience. James is the son of a charismatic priest and has a church in his own house. Every day, he is used to the ecclesiastical life at home with the congregation in the church which is also his home. This personal experience became the material for his appearance in stand-up comedy. He sometimes jokes about his religion from the perspective of a priest's son, from his personal life as a priest's son to the rituals of his religion. Unlike Bilal, who admits himself brings jokes that are considered a dark comedy, for James, his jokes are not as dark as Bilal's because he only brings jokes that come from his experience as a Christian and the son of a Christian religious leader. James confessed that he used jokes from his religious background only as jokes and stemmed from his own experience. An example of a joke that he uses as a dark comedy, but he doesn't think is too dark is:

"Kalo ngebaptis orang nih, yang gw lihat dari bokap gua ada tiga cara, eh maksudnya tiga gerakan: taro tangan di kepala, merem, terus dicelupin. Kalo gua, taro tangan di kepala, merem, gw celupin, pas gua melek ilang dicelupin di Sungai Aare (Referring to the death of Ridwan Kamil's son (governor of West Java province), Emmeril Kahn Mumtadz, whose body was found in the Aare River, Switzerland – red)"

(When it comes to baptizing people, what I can see from my father, there are three ways, uh, I mean three steps: putting your hands on their head, close your eyes, then dipping

them. For me, I put my hand on my head, close my eyes, I dip it, when I open my eyes, it's dipped in the Aare River).

and

"Kalo bapak gua jadi pendeta, gw jadi pendekar"
(If my father is a priest, I will be a warrior).

Even so, there are also jokes that don't use his experiences as a punchline but as a set-up or premise. The example is:

"Kalo untuk plus-nya jadi anak pendeta image-nya bagus, image-nya terkenal baguslah, jadi kalo buat deketin cewek tuh gampang, kadang ada cewek kalo deket sama anak pendeta tuh lebih aman, lebih nyaman karena ya anak pendeta. Tapi, yang namanya manusia kan gak ada yang tau, ya mungkin ada yang mau konseling misalkan ke OYO atau ke WP (Refers to a hotel booking application that is stigmatized as an application looking for hotels for sex for young people – red)"
(As for the pluses, being a priest's child has a good image, a famous good image, so it's easy to get close to a girl, sometimes it's easier for a girl to be close to a priest's child, it's safer, more comfortable because she's a priest's child. But, no one knows about humans, maybe someone wants counseling, for example, to OYO or WP).

"It's not God I'm joking about"

This section will discuss the origin of the various jokes above and their categorization as dark comedy in the view of each comedian. Aidi (2021) identifies three techniques that Muslim comedians in the United States and Britain use in dealing with Western constructs of Muslims. The three techniques are incongruence, performativity, and everydayness. The authors also found this pattern in the comedians We interviewed, although with different goals. This is also what makes the comedy they do not just

play, although it is still based on the play itself.

Those three patterns are very visible in Ahmad and James. Their backgrounds, both as village residents who are still strong with Islamic values and children of priests, appear as the basis for the jokes they make. In the world of stand-up comedy, this is known as grievances. It appears that incongruence is something important. These grievances can be present in the form of a story that is funny, as in Ahmad, or constructed as a joke as James did. In contrast to the term everydayness from Aidi, grievances are more appropriate because it already has an incongruent dimension and the subjectivity of the comedian himself. This comedian's subjectivity plays a role in capturing everyday moments as funny.

In this context, grievances are superior to the three comedy formulas as seen by Aidi. For example, this can be seen in Bilal's joke, which is not based on everyday life but sees an opportunity to play the word "*salib*" with "*salip*" which has the same pronunciation but different meanings. Bilal himself stated that he does not base his jokes on his daily life. His grievances are the subjectivity that comes from seeing the words "*salib*" and "*salip*". Grievances captures things that go beyond everydayness. This is what underlies dark comedy, grievances, although not necessarily from their daily lives. This is what makes the comedy that these three comedians do closer to playing, as something subjunctive (Birchok 2022: 4). While serious discourse presupposes an expected and predictable response, humor ends in unexpected ways – paradoxically – but that is its internal logic (Golozubov 2014:529).

From those examples of jokes above, there is one big picture, all play on various things about religion, without actually touching the religion itself, either in the form of puns or rituals. One phrase that can describe all three is James' saying that "it's not God I'm

joking about.” Like other comedies, their dark comedy has a humorous value because of its incongruence, bringing two elements that are not aligned or double framing that makes the message ambiguous (Keisalo 2018: 119). In this context, comedy is play, if it refers to the notion of playing as a symbolic inversion. However, the symbolic inversion did not just happen.

Like play, comedy can be dangerous. However, as admitted by all comedians who interviewed, there are limitations that keep comedy in its corridor as comedy. First, the meta-message that always accompanies their comedy is “just a comedy.” So far, none of them have broken through this limit, but instead, they have taken refuge from danger with the meta-message. They realize that there is a risk when making jokes about religion can be seen as blasphemy. This also relates to the second limitation in keeping comedy on track, which is not to make religion as jokes, but to play on it, either phonemic similarities, a play on ritual processions, or telling stories about everyday experiences. In humor theory, humor is sometimes classified as a form of superiority or a release of one’s emotions (Keisalo 2018: 118). The humor of these comedians is not included in the aggressive superiority humor. Superiority humor is often used to demean a group (Aidi, 2021), but this symptom does not appear in these three comedians. Another theory regarding humor, namely the nature of humor as relief and incongruence is also unable to describe the social aspects of humor (Lever, 2019), including how comedians compose dark comedies about religion. Third, comedians analyze their audience when jokes are expressed (which will be discussed further in the next section).

From here, as a form of play in the form of symbolic inversion, jokes are subjective, including when a joke is categorized as a dark comedy. *The Merriam-Webster*

Dictionary defines black humor, a synonym for dark comedy, as “humor marked by the use of usually morbid, ironic, grotesquely comic episodes”. The *Cambridge Dictionary* emphasizes the dimension of subjectivity in its definition of black humor, namely “a humorous way of looking at or treating ‘something that is serious or sad’”. In the context of this study, the definition of dark comedy is closer to the definition from the *Cambridge Dictionary*. Ahmad and Bilal identified their joke as a dark comedy, even though the intent was not to insult religion.

This is in contrast to James, who felt that the jokes he expressed were not a dark comedy. James saw it as an ordinary joke because it is based on his persona as a priest’s son. According to him, he still lacks the courage to perform dark comedy, while his jokes have generally focused on his persona as a priest’s son. The closer the source of the premise and the punchline, the farther away the jokes are categorized as dark comedy by the comedian himself. This can be seen from the fear of the three comedians over the response to their jokes. Bilal looks the most afraid, even referring to the incident that happened to Basuki Tjahaja Purnama alias Ahok, the former governor of DKI Jakarta who was imprisoned on charges of blasphemy (Osman and Waikar, 2018). Ahmad had an incident when one of his jokes spread through TikTok and drew a lot of criticism, but he didn’t feel too scared because he felt that his jokes were a reality, came from personal experience and can be found in real life. James is the most relaxed in dealing with the consequences of his jokes. The reason was that his jokes were about his personal life or his father as a priest. If anyone felt offended by his jokes, he argued that his jokes were his and his father’s personal stories, though it might not apply to the priest or other priests’ children.

Although subjective, it does not mean that dark comedy can be separated from

the social context. As a symbolic inversion, dark comedy is born from the comedian's interaction with various social symbols. In terms of comedy, a joke must be made close to the audience, or in other words, make the audience feel connected with what they say. Brodie (2014: 5-6) mentions that stand-up comedy needs to reconcile the comedian's distance from the audience. Stand-up comedy can only work if they can maintain distance as a persona or observation based on their sense of humor with the delivery that ensures the audience can understand what they are saying. This also emphasizes that their jokes about religion are not based on religion as something sacred, but as something social. Brodie (2014: 6) equates stand-up comedy with cultural anthropology in their approach to socio-cultural conditions and reconciling distance with intimacy. Based on the metaphor from Brodie, the authors classify that those three comedians see religion as a living religion, religion does not occur in a social vacuum, but rather is a human practice among other people, interacting in complex ways (Hewitt and Scrutton 2018: 350) and is formed from countless daily practices, habits, and patterns of social life (Knibbe and Kupari, 2020: 159).

This social nature does not only appear in the process of joke-making but also when the joke is performed. This can be seen from their concern for the consequences of their jokes if they are misunderstood. One of the boundaries that ensure jokes don't slip into harm's way is to pay attention to the audience. The problem, however, is that there is a possibility that their jokes will spread beyond their expectations. In this condition, they are no longer dealing with an audience they can calculate their reactions to but entering a wider public space where it is difficult for them to control their response. This is what the authors will discuss in the next section.

Read the audience, read the public sphere

Millie (2012) in his analysis of the da'wah carried out by preachers in West Java sees one of the keys to the success of da'wah is the ability of the preacher to adapt his way of preaching to the people who witness his da'wah. The authors also found this outside the context of da'wah, namely stand-up comedy. Comedians' success also depends on their ability to recognize their audience. There are two aspects of audience relations and comedians. First, comedians set the audience to feel connected to their jokes. Second, make sure the audience is not offended by the jokes they put out. Especially in the context of our research, even comedians themselves are aware that their jokes are potentially offensive.

Bilal, for example, made sure that his joke about "*Yesus Mati Disalip*" was only shown to an audience who were all Muslim. Even though the joke, according to him, has spread, even among his Christian friends. For Ahmad, in performing a joke related to religion, he brings it only when performing live stand-up comedy and not being recorded, which allows the recording to be widely spread. According to Ahmad, the audience's response when they heard the joke varied, but most of them laughed. However, he still doesn't want to have another misunderstanding in interpreting the joke. Ahmad is also picky about making the joke, he sees it from the age range of the audience and is only released when the audience is young. James, his persona as a priest's son makes him cautious in casting dark comedy, although he admits that his dark comedy is not as dark as people or audiences imagine because these jokes are his personal experience as a priest's son as well as a comedian on stage. This is what makes James believe and take responsibility for the joke – which according to him will

not hurt anyone, even though on the other hand James also consider the audience as the limit when he makes his dark comedy jokes.

However, performances made in public spaces have the potential to spread beyond the audience in front of them when a joke is made. This was experienced by Ahmad himself. His joke about Justin Bieber's song being the call to prayer spread on TikTok social media and many criticized it as an insult and playing the call to prayer. Ahmad refused to be called insulting because it was his personal experience and he also referred to a lecture by a preacher who recited the call to prayer with a *cengkok dangdut* (Melodic pattern, embellishment, or ornament typical of dangdut, one of the most common music genres in Indonesia). Even so, this is still a lesson for Ahmad to be careful. His caution is not in writing jokes because according to him there is no problem, but in reading the audience.

To understand this, it is necessary to first understand the position of religion in Indonesian society, especially in its public sphere. van Bruinessen (2014) looks at the conservative turn in Indonesia. The conservative turn is the point where the political revival of Islamic values occurs, characterized by the strengthening of narratives of religious conservatism in the Muslim community in Indonesia. According to van Bruinessen (2014: 36), conservative is a school of thought that rejects all modern, liberal, or progressive interpretations of Islamic teachings. The further development of the conservative turn resulted in a division between moderates and conservatives as a result of political distortions, this was reflected in the strengthening attitude of right-wing populist political elites in gaining political support from the Muslim community.

One of the important moments was the arrest of Ahok for blasphemy. This is directly referenced by Bilal that he feels there is a

potential that his joke is misunderstood as blasphemy that makes him suffer the same fate as Ahok. Contemporary Indonesian public sphere in the comedian's view does not provide a guarantee that their jokes will be accepted as a joke. Based on the classification that has been carried out in the Literature Review, the public sphere in Indonesia is often classified as a place of contestation between conservatives and moderates, and in the minds of comedians, the public tends to be conservative. This condition is increasingly complex because the public space has become a hybrid or as Postill and Epafras (2018) referred to a hybrid media space. Social media spaces are "social spaces mediated by old and new media technologies and humans interacting in dynamic ways to produce viral forms of public communication" (Postill and Epafras 2018: 101). Various communications, a combination of face-to-face communication and social media, form a hybrid public space. This combination cannot be separated from social factors which Postill and Epafras (2018: 105) say can shape space trends, the direction of change in sociocultural relations which is usually marked by terms such as "rise", "decline", "fall", and "acceleration". In a public space like this, the politicization of religion and comedy uses the same formula, to make the audience feel connected, or as Nastiti and Ratri (2018) referred to as emotive politics.

This becomes the social character of a dark comedy. Dark comedies can be seen as darker than the comedian himself thinks when entering the public sphere. In fact, since its preparation, the dark comedy has taken into account the audience they will face. This audience is a limitation so that, as a game, it does not slip into danger (Sastramidjaja 2016: 33) – in this context it is considered blasphemy. As something assembled, the public space is not singular but offers a space for this comedian to perform dark comedy.

However, as something that is contested, comedians must deal with and negotiate with the dominant power that has become a trend in the public sphere to determine the limits of their jokes or maintain circulation so that the jokes do not come face to face with the dominant party in the public sphere.

Conclusion

This article shows that dark comedy is a work in progress, not just thrown or composed without consideration, both in its preparation to its performance. Comedy, like play, offers an opportunity to speculate and experiment with different symbols. Sometimes, this opportunity is used to the point that it is considered dangerous because it offends some parties. The authors try to observe this in the dark comedy phenomenon used by stand-up comedians. By looking at the background, dark comedy was born from grievances, a term that describes the comedian's subjectivity in the form of reading various symbols in his life and forming it as a symbolic inversion that is incongruent and provokes humor. In this subjectivity, dark comedy is also shaped by social context, both in terms of its composition originating from the social context of the comedian's life to the extent that dark comedy is revealed in front of the audience. In this context, comedians must take into account the audience's response. However, with the development of media that forms a hybrid space, when reality combines with the circulation of information through digital media, it is increasingly difficult to calculate to what extent and to what extent the public enjoys – or does not enjoy – a dark comedy. The public space that is built (assembled) ensures that the power is needed to contest the public space, and this is the public space that comedians face.

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Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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