

# Decolonial Subversions

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Creative Nonfiction and Stand-up  
Comedy as Alternative Forms of  
Decolonial Scholarship

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# Creative Nonfiction and Stand-up Comedy as Alternative Forms of Decolonial Scholarship

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## Abstract

The following article discusses the potential of creative writing as an alternative form of writing in academia. I ground the importance of such a form of writing in my experience of writing comedic and creative nonfictional accounts during my doctoral research. Influenced mainly by Feminist and Decolonial thought, I attempt to lay bare the subversive nature of such personal forms of writing in what may seem a rigidly defined academia. Ergo, the article holds a rather unconventional structure, as the discussion moves between my experience and the analysis of relevant theoretical literature in what may seem a personal style of writing. I ground my argument in the unfolding of truth from the Other's standpoint, the linguistic and the cultural richness that the stories present us with and the diverse stylistic discourses that such creative forms of writing bring into the rigid scholarly discourse that we are used to. This enables linguistic diversity to take place and to provide counter storytelling to colonial power situations that we encounter. Stand-up comedy in particular creates a space for honest critique that also develops our counter narratives. These creative forms of writings are not simply a biographical documentation of the Self, but can be a rich site for delivering critical, cultural, and linguistics analysis of complex narratives.

**Keywords:** academia, Algeria, autoethnography, decoloniality, feminism, humour, Othering, stand-up comedy, stereotypes, the Self, Western/indigenous knowledge.

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## ملخص

تناقش المقالة التالية إمكانات الكتابة الإبداعية كشكل بديل للكتابة في الأوساط الأكاديمية. تؤكد أهمية هذا النوع من الكتابة إستناداً على تجربتي في كتابة نصوص كوميدية وإبداعية واقعية خلال إعداد رسالة الدكتوراه. متأثرة بشكل أساسي بالفكر النسوي والديكلونيالي، أحاول الكشف عن الطبيعة التحررية لمثل هذه الأنواع من الكتابات الشخصية في ما قد يبدو وسطاً أكاديمياً جد صارم. لهذا تحمل المقالة بنية غير تقليدية إلى حد ما، حيث ينتقل النقاش بين تجربتي وتحليل أعمال أدبية ونظريات ذات الصلة فيما قد يبدو أسلوباً شخصياً في الكتابة. أقوم بتأسيس حجتي في استعمال هذا المنظور في كشف الحقيقة من وجهة نظر الآخر، في الثراء اللغوي والثقافي الذي تقدمه لنا القصص، والخطابات الأسلوبية المتنوعة التي تجلبها مثل هذه الأشكال الإبداعية للكتابة في الخطاب الأكاديمي الصارم الذي اعتدنا عليه. هذا النوع من الكتابات يبرز التنوع اللغوي يمنح مجالاً للرواية المضادة والمستنكرة لحالات القوة الاستعمارية التي نواجهها. تخلق الكوميديا الارتجالية على وجه الخصوص مساحة للنقد الصادق الذي يطور أيضاً من سرد الرواية المضادة. هذه الأشكال الإبداعية من الكتابات ليست مجرد توثيق للسيرة الذاتية، ولكن يمكنها أن تكون منظوراً غنياً لتقديم التحليل النقدي والثقافي واللغوي للروايات المعقدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأكاديميا ، الجزائر ، علم الكتابة الذاتية ، إزالة الاستعمار (الديكلونيالي)، النسوية ، الفكاهة ، الآخر ، كوميديا الارتجالية ، الصور النمطية ، الذات ، المعرفة الغربية / الأصلية.

## Introducing This “I”

I did stand-up comedy in my early twenties when I was an undergrad student in Algeria, as a part of my course assessment, and I thought I left it behind me. Prior to that, my undocumented influences were dominated by female relatives and carers. The female quarters that I grew up in and had access to as a young girl was a rich site of humour; from the Hammam (public baths), the tailors, to weddings and social events. I was also influenced by the comedic sets that were aired on National TV by Algerian comedians; mainly Hassan Al-Hassani. He was commonly known for his character Bou-bagra (son-of-cow) which depicts the persona of a farmer who is frustrated with the socioeconomic situation of the country.

In his theatrical or cinematic pieces, he was outspoken about the struggles of working-class Algerians particularly after the independence, which my family and I are not estranged to. For example, his dramatic irony film “Rihlet Chouitar – Chouitar’s Journey - 1976” narrates the story of a working-class family from a farming background who decided to move to the city to better their lives. The family ties ended up being severed; as the son who was mesmerised by the vibrant city decides to remain there, whilst his father, mother, and younger sister return to the village. However, these three characters were shocked to see and to know what modernity did to their village, and how their land was no longer there. Like Chouitar and his family, whether in Algeria or abroad, on a daily basis or through my writings, I navigate different narratives about me sometimes successfully and at times not so much.

The comedy in this film was implicit and dark as the audience holds an omniscient view of the difficult lives of all characters whether in the city or the village. Despite holding constant disapproval and contempt of their living situations, the characters paint a jolly picture to others when they meet which Chouitar who was too naïve to recognise. The film also depicts the constant conflicts that are fuelled by stereotypical ideas about people from the city or the village towards each other. At times, such conflicts rise immediately after pinpointing the different dialects and visual attire that signposts the characters' origins. Colonial history in Algeria taught me a lot about multilingualism and how different languages have a varied access to power and visibility. Chouitar for instance could not shake away his rural accent. So even when he changed his traditional attire to a suit, he was still made out for being someone from a village the second he spoke, compared to his brother-in-law who managed to learn a different dialect and new skills. Chouitar decides to return to his village after he had the terrible realisation that he was sold into a life of modern slavery and false hopes. His dream of being a rich businessman with a kind heart that supports others was farfetched. This decolonial work does not only depict the lived experiences of working-class Algerians after the independence in indigenous dialects, but also exposes the geo-political and the socioeconomic structures that connect with colonial heritage of the country (i.e., the master-slave dialectic).

Before my stand-up in Algeria, I led a rather liminal life because of my background; an honours student from a working-class family. Ah- Yes, a girl too! That is always helpful. I arrived in academia through a scholarship where I started my explorations of Othering through lived experiences. I think I should have said "Western" academia because I am visibly a Muslim (I wear the Muslim headscarf - hijab) from a country with a long and painful colonial heritage – Algeria. Even though I did not live through the colonial era, my grandparents took an active role in the Algerian National War for Independence. Those who survived always narrated their struggles to me growing up, which explains the colonial extension of this in my work.

At first, I began my qualitative research with a quantitative research background. It is only fair to say that I started my doctoral research with a "shallow conception" of what qualitative research is. Interviews were what I sought first, but once I engaged in the analysis process, it became evident to me that it is impossible to investigate the material without "the lens of the self". It was then that I engaged in auto-ethnographic writings of my own experiences of Othering. My auto-ethnographic reflections helped me understand the critical and uncomfortable nature of my topic. Thus, researching Othering in an academic setting where everyone knew what I was exploring was no longer an option that I could seek. My identity as a Ph.D. student who was researching constructions of Othering through lived experiences in my institution made individuals cautious around me. At times, I even felt "kindly" isolated; I had to find another setting to work in and develop my interviewing and researching skills.

I got a part-time job at a local fast-food restaurant. It is there that I maintained a profile of a postgraduate student researching language and communication. That did not mean that I

thought that this fieldwork would eradicate my influence in the setting and on the results (Davies, 1999/2002, p. 4), but it allowed me to get rid of “the researcher status” that proved to be hindering and threatening in my academic setting to collecting relevant materials.

During that period, my awareness of what the setting necessitates heightened as my presence prolonged. Observing, reflecting, acting, reacting, and learning from different situations ignited back “my comedic skills” that I needed to create bounds and to access the “backstage lives” of my workmates. I found the banter and the humour in that setting were reflections of the politics of lived experiences; resistance to othering, and at times othering to gain control and structure. Between management and employees and between employees themselves. The fast-food restaurant was a rich slice of the complex reality that we live in, and humour was more than just an organisational tool.

## Linguistic Diversities in Creative Nonfiction and Stand-up Comedy

As a PhD student, an Other in Western academia, I grappled with the normative ways of academic writing that I was expected to demonstrate. Drawing widely on autoethnographic and creative forms of writing assisted me in expressing the complexities of my positionality, my identity and doctoral work. But most importantly, these alternative forms of writing brought in nuanced understandings of abstract concepts and detailed accounts of lived experiences that transcends the boundaries of time, space, languages, and culture.

I think there can be a rather monolithic interpretation of what autoethnography or creative nonfictional forms of writing cover. My interpretation of linguistic diversity in these forms of writing covers; (a) whose story is it (which extend to presents the reader with social and cultural diversity), (b) what language is used, (c) what kind of discourse and repertoire these untold stories work with. The source of knowledge in Western academy has always been white, middle-class man; hence gendered, empowered, able-body and rich, and so was the traditional view of knowledge. Such views and forms smothered the Other’s potential to speak up and about their indigenous knowledge and views of their world. Even though, as a PhD student, I used mainly English in my creative nonfiction and comedy – which might be frowned upon in the view of some scholars from Non-Western backgrounds, I see this use as an opportunity to educate the West about me as the Other. These artistic presentations break the normative ways of thinking, being, making knowledge and researching in academia. It also presents us with undocumented truths and sense of agency from the Other allowing for a decolonial praxis to take place and bringing an equal footing to this disregarded indigenous knowledge. In a similar vein, Martins (2023) in this Special Issue writes about the how crucial it is to employ language in “a free, poetic, radical way” that challenge the dominant, existing discourses in a Brazilian university.

It is worth noting that by coloniality I refer to the oppressive views and ways of perceiving and researching the Other not just the historical colonial act of expansion. And by

decolonial praxis, I refer to the "decolonial turn" by (Maldonado-Torres, 2017) the paradigm that disrupts the colonial heritage of power that remains rooted in ways of knowing, doing, and being in the world. I agree with Atallah and Dutta (2022, p. 434), "Colonial structures/systems are predicated on recurring patterns of domination and violence". In my situation, that does not only include the Algerian French colonial conflict that I inherited through oral literature, but also the set expectations of how to write and to research in the Eurocentric perspective of knowledge. This latter point is built on the idea of social classification based on race that capitalism worsened (Quijano, 2000, p. 215). Therefore, coloniality is fuelled by the idea of differentiation between the idea of human Self as opposed to the dehumanised Other(s). Add to that the power created and gained with European expansion which contributed to the knowledge perception (Maldonado-Torres, 2017, p. 434) and visibility.

I must explain that by creative nonfiction I mean the creative format in which stories about the self and others are collected and shared. Thus, the creative covers the literary style in which a story is told. This literary, creative style allows the writer to present the reader with a detailed, unexpected, and risqué subject matter. In my experience of writing creative nonfiction and stand-up comedy, I reported on my own lived experience and others' that I interviewed. When I am writing about an ethnographic event for the first time, I do not have the clear-cut vision that is expected until I have finished writing the piece. However, I am well-aware that the two have distinct styles of writing that may share commonalities, such as storytelling, but overall comedic discourse uses more puns, sarcasm and plays with the "truth" through exaggeration and dramatization to draw laughs.

Meanwhile, creative nonfiction attempts to bring forward a sense of re-living the research and walking into the data, so the reader can have their own interpretation, and are able to see how I arrived at my own understanding of this slice of social reality. An example of walking into data is when I narrated an incident where my male friend and colleague at work Hamada was objectified by two females on the volleyball court. Such account encounters the idea that man cannot be subjected to an objectifying gaze.

After an intense point scored by Hamada and I when we thought we almost lost the ball to the other team, I sat down next Francisca, and Omar joined the game to replace me. Francisca started: "He's a bit skinny, but the strength on him!", while starring at Hamada's body. Her friend - at that time who I did not know her name nodded while looking at me and said: "you guys are very strong". I did my awkward laugh while hoping that they would not pick it up, and I said: "A-AH! Thanks?!" Then, Francisca continued: "It's always the skinny one who comes in packing, right Jess?" Mutual almost hysterical laughter rose. I understood the reference, but I found it hard to laugh considering that I know the person they are referring to. So, I inquired to cover the tracks of disapproval from off my face: "Packing?" Jess replied: "Yeah! You know...", she said while pointing at her crotch. Francisca then continued: "This is only how he plays volleyball. Euuf! Can you imagine how he's in bed" Jess giggling away: "GOD!" I then felt the urge to tell them: "I can't actually. He's my co-worker and my friend." An awkward, silent



second filled the place, then Francisca started: "You work with that thing?". Jess bursted into laughter: "Well done, sis!" (Souleh, 2022, p.111).

This account shows how creative nonfiction relies heavily on the descriptions of places, individuals, how they felt they communicated and how their stories impacted me as a part of their setting as a form of reflexive practice.

An anecdotal example of the uncertainty when writing creatively happened during a conference talk by a British academic that was hijacked by a colonial racist discourse from the audience. The presenter's work was in support of the similar complexities that both the Other and the Self have, and how we should be aware of this, and accommodating to the presence of the Other in shared spaces and the world. The presenter proceeded to give an example of the noticeable Algerian community at that event. A member of the audience interjected: "what if these foreigners want to change the face of the UK?" The presenter requested clarification and the same member replied: "what if they, Algerians in this case, decided to illegalise alcohol? Change the rules!" Before the presenter could say anything, I said: "but we have bars in Algeria; some are illegal underground market, and some are licensed five stars hotels". Feeling cornered this lady then said: "both my parents were born in Algeria during the French colonisation, and they told me a lot about Algeria, so I know what it is *REALLY* like there." Before I could say: "I lived there for my whole life." The speaker intervened to defuse the situation.

Feeling betrayed and silenced, I turned to my safe place; my diary, and I start writing about the event. Two hours later, I had my comedic set and it read something like this:

The other day, I had a discussion with this French lady that opposed for people like me - "Algerians" in particular, to come to the UK. I don't know if you can see the irony already; French in the UK! Who speaks about "UK matters"?! O-K-A-Y!!!! Not judging, WHICH I AM! But, seriously, mind your own fucking business. She said: "What if they decided to illegalise wine and alcohol?!" In my head, I was like: "what the F... Are you Snooki from Jersey Shore?!" (Souleh, 2022, p. 252).

Someone who is not familiar with stand-up comedy materials may see it as an angry rant. Thus, it is emotional and subjective which disqualifies it from being a scientific, rigorous work. Basically, it is the same critique that autoethnography received before it was finally seen as the systematic study of one's life and the situatedness of these experience in a larger cultural sphere of thought (Canagarajah, 2012). Similarly, comedians rely on their observation of reality, their awareness of creative linguistic formats, and self-analysis whilst being aware of the different conflicting discourses and ideologies. This qualifies it to be a complex and rich ethnographic study that is linguistically, individually, socially, and ideologically diverse. In the case of the previous example, the conflicting discourse is present when the French lady in the UK imposes my presence as a migrant. The use of "Snooki from Jersey Shore" is an exaggeration of a stereotypical image about "the dissolute West" since "Snooki" is the name of a character from an MTV reality show "Jersey Shore" that is outspoken about her alcohol consumption and intimate relationships.

Stand-up comedy as creative nonfictional writing is entrenched in resistance and politics. Such forms do not simply transmit the emotional status of the writer, or the mood in which the events took place in, but also utilises their material, social, cultural, and linguistic knowledge of the worlds. These in return shape their view of the world and political stand. For example, in Dağtaş' study (2016, p.27) of humour in Turkey's Gezi protests found that the social frameworks of political expressions were reworked through "mimicry, inversion, subversion and reproduction". We must understand that humour has a role that extends beyond "entertainment", it can be a complex means of delivering social critique. As Tsakona and Popa (2011, p. 1) put forward "politics can be represented in humorous manner and humour can have a serious intent".

In understanding the outcomes of humour, Sorensen (2008, p. 180) summarises it as follows. Humour can either (1) provoke and ridicule to increase the pressure on the oppressors, (2) have cathartic quality for the oppressed (which connects to Freudian view of humour as a release), (3) decrease the oppressors' reactions. My stand-up does not simply provide me with a cathartic release. In my stand-up, when I deconstructed the joke about the French lady, I can see I tried to punch holes in her argument about the presence of "foreigners", by pointing out that she is one. I also reproduce the stereotypical image of her as a "dissolute West" which is no different of her image of me "the Oriental, religious, fanatic". In using both techniques, I aim to ridicule her discriminatory agenda and silence her for good.

## Feminist Autoethnographic Selves and Indigenous Truths

At first, I found it hard not to look when people are moving around me naked like the day they were born, but with biological features of adults. My mom found an almost excluded corner in the hammam near the running waters, and she said: "let's sit here." [...] she turned to me and said: "nobody is looking, but you. People are busy with themselves". [...] I took off my towel cautiously, and she started bathing me (Souleh, 2022, p. 30).

Whilst the common assumption is that autoethnography generated in the West, my seventeen years old self who grew up reading autoethnographically written essays, and creative forms of writings in Arabic from Feminist writers from North Africa and the Middle East strongly disagrees. I must say I only knew Ellis and other researchers when I started my doctoral research in England. Since then, I have been wrestling with my reference list, many times, and unfortunately, I took the cowards' way out, and I gave up on translations and referencing people that Western academics and academia were not built for.

It is true that I arrived at writing autoethnographically from my research development, but I was immensely encouraged by my readings of Fatema Mernissi (2001), *Scheherazade Goes West*. It is not simply the writer's background that I connect with, but her reflexive



retelling of her intercultural experiences with different others encouraged me to speak up and about mine. Her quest of exposing the “sexual fantasies” attributed to the East by Westerners relates to Yegenoglu (1998) text about *Colonial Fantasies*. Yegenoglu (1998) views envisage the intersection that the Oriental female body is part of. Ergo, when I write about the personal, I write from within the intersections that I am from, and the layers of oppression that I recognise – as a Muslim woman of colour from a working-class colonial space. After all, our lives are fashioned by our racial, social, economic status and gender, but not determined by these traits (West, 2016, p. 38). One of the memories that Mernissi’s writing unlock in me was the construction of the Hammam (public baths); where this image of the Oriental female body was used and abused by white male middle class writers and painters. Each of their Western productions depicted an exotic image of the female body from the master’s point of view. Writing about my first experience in the Hammam “attempts to overthrow these undermining constructions away and to give voice to the postcolonial subject that was smothered decades ago” (Souleh, 2022, p. 27), as an image of people getting on with a daily chore in their lives and not as sexual beings rubbing up on each other for the pleasure of their captives.

The thought that autoethnographic writing is a self-indulging trip has been used to silence alternative forms of writing that are deemed as a subjective knowledge-making. However, my arguments for the importance of autoethnography lies in the fresh acuties that indigenous autoethnography in specific provides from counter-story telling that holds both new insights and diverse linguistic repertoire. “The indigenous researcher recovers subjugated knowledges, that helps create spaces for the voices of the silenced to be expressed and ‘listened to’, and that challenges racism, colonialism, and oppression” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, p. 253-254). Similarly, creative nonfictional writing forms do not only tell stories, but they also acknowledge the power of story in marginalised groups, as a disruptive narrative in the mainstream media that devalue the Other’s consciousness and voice (Delgado, 2013, p. 71). As an indigenous researcher in the West, I bring the knowledge that I grew up with into academia to allow voices from the margins to have a space and to confront all forms of oppression whether gendered or racial. Even though, in Algeria, I may not qualify in the view of some to be “indigenous” because I am perceived as an Arab who arrived to the Amazigh area with the arrival of Muslims. I still see myself as an indigenous researcher because my great-grand parents held strong political grounds against the French colonisation that were passed on to me.

Being able to write experiences from within has the potential to challenge the existing knowledge that is grounded in the myth of the rationale white male researcher. Such forms of writings hold a disruptive power. Being consciously aware of the insider layers of our oppressions and privileges and reflexively writing about these issues is an alternative form of writing, rethinking and “unearthing a hidden or unacknowledged or unnoticed life” (Krog and Brown, 2011, p. 57). Similarly, stand-up comedy is not just a “form of self-analysis” (Smith, 2018, p.14), but also a form of writing and performing visible subversions that connects with the disregarded lived experiences from the periphery. This is

why; feminist comedic materials include not just the discussion of discriminatory behaviours that is grounded in their lived experiences, but also uncover the rebellious side of feminine writing in speaking up. Female comics introduce us to subversive acts of comedy that are grounded in the lived and are supportive of the marginalised.

## The Laughing Medusa: Standing up in Academia

I see creative forms of writing as a form of indigenous ethnography. As I write comedically and creatively, I engage in disrupting the narratives surrounding me as a Muslim, woman of colour in the West, where most of the establish knowledge about me comes from travelling, middle-class white man from centuries ago. My interests whether in comedy or creative nonfiction are seen as an uncontrollable, frivolous, random acts that do not reflect the critical nature of academic discourse. Nevertheless, I see the potential of these art forms in “speak[ing] truth to power” (Said, 1993, p. 85), bringing the nuanced, marginalised, and complex realities to the ivory tower of knowledge where the silver-spoon fed white males laid down and wrote about “the mindless lives of the laboured help”. Stand-up comedy is a crucial voice in research with the potential to assist us in learning and “unlearning” (Cochran-Smith, 2002, p. 5) the narratives surrounding us and others. Thus, it can be regarded as a form of counter storytelling. Gillborn (2008, p. 31) writes about the importance of counter story-telling in “minoritized cultures”, as it unpacks the mythical ideas and prejudgements about the self and others, which “turn dominant assumptions on their head”. This subversive nature is very much established in the Feminist and Postcolonial research, as “fixed” representations are challenged because they do not consider the [Other] “in a positive light” (Memmi, 1974/2021, p. 127).

In Feminist works, autoethnographic practices can disrupt the constant broadcasting of “controlling images” (Hill Collins, 2002, p. 69) that surrounds us, and grounds our knowledge of the world in a “single story” (Adichie, 2009) about truth. Building on the words of Adichie, the danger of a single story is that we succumb to the notion of a universal truth, and we become complacent towards the notion of knowledge. It is my understanding “the first myth that framed our knowledge of the world, and blindly guided us into a swamp of colonial misery, sexual and cultural stereotypes is the myth of the European, rational, white male” (Souleh, 2022, p. 188). This became our single story of research and truth before the rise and the access to Feminist and Postcolonial thought. This view left us with a “fixed, froze, and often false image” about others (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 50), as we forget that Othering can be “the result of partial and distorted representations” (Laclau, 2007, p. 10).

Having a social imagination is key to writing comedic materials as you are thinking beyond the realms of reality and about social reality itself. I think this is what rigid academic works lack – *imagination*. I think a crucial reference that supports the engagement with the

funny and the imaginative is Helen Cixous' *The Laugh of Medusa*. She writes: "Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing; their stream of phantasms is incredible" (1976, p. 876). Following this statement, the feminine writing is not just to introspect ourselves, but to also to tap into our imaginative skills. Therefore, Cixous' work is an invitation to women in particular to participate in the feminine writing as a way of standing up against the violent exclusion that is exhibited towards them, which drives them away from their bodies, the world they live in, and eventually scholarship.

Humour in the female quarters where I grew up was no different from male comedy. At times it was outrageously crude, and other times secretly witty. It will either make your drink burst out of your nostrils or it will take you a good two seconds for the laughter to start build up in your belly before you give up on breathing. Intercourse jokes flew right off my head at that age, but it made the women have a bellyful of laughter, and the young girls either secretly chuckle or look away in disgust. This might be difficult to hear for some, even though there was no male member in those quarters, the punchlines had plenty of those in them. Feminist humour does not shy away from the use of profane language, as it is recognised as a part of our linguistic repertoire and social life. However, it is not the norm to use profanity in one's comedy to be perceived as feminist. The use of obscene language is up for taking depending on the comic, and the persona they are trying to draw. It is worth noting that Feminist humour is not solely taken up by female comics.

My comic representation (persona) is a reflexive account of my feminist, Muslim and decolonial self that does not adhere to the prescribed ideas about it. With that in mind, it is difficult not to consider stand-up as a performance of activism as well. The following is a piece of my stand-up routine where I challenge a French teenager at the restaurant where I worked, pointing out the inevitable result of colonialism in Algeria.

In my job, I get to meet people from different backgrounds. Once, I had this group of French teenagers. I started speaking to them in French. And, this guy didn't like it, he was like: "Pfff! Is this England or France!? What must a person do to hear some English around here?" I was like: "Well, your dickhead of grandpa shouldn't have showed at our shores guns blazing!" (Souleh, 2022, p. 258).

In this example, I ignore the fact that not all Algerians speak French. I certainly started to lose mine since I moved to England. However, I assert the domino effect that the violent coloniality had on Algeria which caused "the mild discomfort" of this teenager who was not satisfied with my ability to converse with him in French on his visit to an English-speaking country. I was mocking him which can be interpreted as if I was blaming him for a coloniality that he did not have a direct hand in. Certainly, the use of profanity asserts that; however, I would like to think that I am pushing him to rethink his decolonial turn.

My stand-up, as many feminist comedians is, is crude, ribald, dark, and sarcastic. Not because I want it to befit the expectations that "male dominated comedy" has drawn, but because it is an extension of myself that social norms try to dis-acknowledge its presence, tame it if not silence it for good. My stand-up acts as a subversive statement that disturbs the



centre's knowledge of me, as an attempt to challenge narratives about me visibly and critically. The following comedic piece is an example of challenging the stereotypical views about me as an inert, oriental woman and the abusive man.

Once, I hurt my wrist, so I had to wear a splint. In the city centre, this shop keeper asked me: "Oh! Dear! What happened to you?" I decided for the fun of it to tell her: "my husband beat me up." And she said: "Oh! My God! What a savage!" I said: "WOAT? Why?! Christian beats Anastasia in the bedroom all the time, but all they say about him "he is stud".

Christian and Anastasia are two characters from a series of fiction books entitled "Fifty Shades of Grey" (James, 2011) that tell the story of this couple who engage in erotic practices of bondage, discipline, dominance, and submission. My knowledge of such sexualised item from popular culture reference defies the assumptions about me. The social and cultural norms surrounding me as a woman prohibits or looks down at me if I use profanity or in this case insinuate at intimate matters. Therefore, the discussion of the intimate whether from our bodily functions to our politicised bodies is also frowned upon and silenced. For that reason, writing and performing comedy is a creative, subversive act that encounters stereotypical narratives about the comic, and recentralises their subjective stories in a time where mainstream, degrading representations are the norm. Stand-up comedy presents the audience with a counter story-telling that is grounded in the comedian's experience of the world and thus a form of decolonial praxis that brings stereotypical ideas about the Self and the Other into discussion.

## Linguistic Diversities and Decoloniality

There are hidden riches to these artful forms of writing; (a) of a narrative, which we tackled in view of the indigenous ethnographer, and which Parvin (2023) explores further in her contribution to this Special Issue, Parvin introduces us to narratives of multilingualism in Canada as a person of colour who attempts to rupture the colonial heritage of English. (b) of the language used (multilingual, vernaculars or registers), and (c) of the material culture that comes with it (descriptions of the surroundings and human practices). These linguistic and non-linguistic diversities, when and if investigated, brings to light new forms and views of, and about knowledge that challenges our monolithic, able-bodied, gendered, aristocratic views of the world and knowledge about different Others. Like indigenous ethnography, I consider writing creatively in academia to be a form of decolonializing the normative scholarly language; thus, a novel intake of what linguistic diversity can be. To bring change and awareness of the decolonial and feminist issues, we must recognise that "the protocols of academic convention are biased and partisan. The dominant conventions are informed by modernist and Euro-centric assumptions. Notable, also, is the power of English as the academic lingua franca" (Canagarajah, 2021, p. 2).

This means that in western thought, the travel writings that ethnography yielded came from the study of the Other as a subject, different and distant from the Self communicated

mainly via English from the lens of contempt and inferiority. This sets a rather conservative and constraining frame of thought and knowledge-building, as the Other is a complex entity that is also a part of a linguistically, culturally rich environment. The following is extract from my first time in a Hammam which introduces the reader to the surroundings and the recorded human interactions that in my opinion Western views failed to communicate in their exoticized version of investigating Eastern Hammams from afar.

My mother prepared two baskets for us to carry. She placed fruits in one basket with a bottle of mineral water, some clean cloths, and covered it with clean white towels... In a small bucket that rotated between my grip and my sister's, my mother placed: soap, shampoo, "Kasa" (A thick glove used to rub the skin with after being soaked with water to remove the dead skin off), bath sponges, rose water and "Talik" (A white powder that is a mixture of different aromatics. It is applied mainly under the armpits and near private parts after being cleaned and dried thoroughly. It keeps you fresh for longer). Some Westerners seem to think of the Eastern hammam as hundreds of naked women gathered in a small steamy place, bodies touching and rubbing against each other. This can be seen in the painting of "Le Bain Turc -Turkish Baths" by Ingres (1863). In fact, one of the women in that painting was cupping the breast of another, while listening to music being played by another naked woman where other naked women were dancing. I think such picture magnifies the erotic vision about the East in general, but such depiction is not even remotely true. In the hammam – at least my hammam, I have noticed a great deal of physical distance that I did not notice before when people had their clothes on in their daily, regular life. To the extent which that the usual warm greeting of hugging and kissing another woman on cheeks was replaced by warm greeting words only (Souleh, 2022, pp. 28,32).

Although, the text is mainly in English, I introduce the reader to the accompanying material culture; Kassa and Talik, and I describe the human interaction in that setting. This is to question the Western views of public bathing, to demystify it, and to break this sexualised perception. These thorough descriptions of this social event are a subversive account of a discarded indigenous knowledge. Very much like Ngugi wa Thiong'o's articulation of "the importance of vernaculars and multimodal art forms in social transformation. He discusses the role of affective dispositions such as memory, pain, and hope in resistance" (Canagarajah, 2020, p.1). My language is an extension of my identity and life history which is in a constant clash with dehumanising ideas about me.

Similarly, comedic discourse comes with its own linguistic diversity. Every comedian develops their own linguistic repertoire depending on their identity, life history and their comedic persona. My persona is an exaggeration of one character in me in particular; "honesty turned to bluntness". Such a persona is in direct contrast to the perceived image of me that was drawn by white, middle-class travellers and is accessible through mainstream media; the submissive. Thus, my identity is disruptive of the stereotypical images about hijabi Muslim women. This is why my linguistic repertoire does not shy away from the use

of profanity. As a polyglot some of the punchlines or details in the set-up of joke are not in English either.

One of many feminists' comedic examples is Sarah Millican's *Chatterbox* (2011/2019); which is a rich linguistic set. As background to her special, drawings of a male sexual organ and muffins were displayed. This refers to her being outspoken about her intimate life, her body image and love for cakes. Millican was outspoken about intimacy, her living alone naked, and other life instances where she breaks from the social norms and expectations that are drawn on her female body. She says:

A male acquaintance of mine with whom I've never had a dalliance. Said to me: "you know what? If you lost a couple of stone... (she pauses, and audience laughs)" – I said: "the rest of this better be a fucking equation" (audience laughs). He said: "we could probably go out". I said: 'Only if the couple of the stone I lost was me fucking head'.

Millican's humour does not simply defy the social norms imposed on women's bodies, but also introduces us to a different discourse that is not common in academic genre. In this case, it includes grammar, lexicon, and her northern accent which cannot be transmitted to the readership through writing. Comedy in this sense is an extension of Millican's embodied experience and self; after all, a comic persona is a mean for introducing social critique.

## Concluding Thoughts

In conclusion, I think creative modes of writing whether nonfictional or comedic form a multilingual, decolonial praxis for academia. These modes of writing constitute; (a) the practice of truth and storytelling from indigenous research perspectives, (b) the introduction of cultural and linguistic richness indigenous to the narrative, and (c) the diverse discourses encourage and encounter the normative ways of making and presenting knowledge.

As mentioned earlier, I am aware of my use of English and how it contributes to the continuity of language coloniality. However, I hope the readership will be forgiving, as I use this colonial language and discourse as an attempt to educate the West about the different Other(s). I consider my ability to speak English as an arsenal for change. This connects with what Bishop (2021, p.370) explores in her role as an indigenous researcher; a translator, a mediator, and a confronter. My struggle as multilingual researcher persists. Translating original texts is a fulltime job, let alone convincing academics of the worth of my indigenous knowledge and system of inquiry. This seems to be a key struggle in decolonial works, as "it takes energy to carefully explain that there are multiple knowledge systems" (ibid, p. 369). I feel this is partially what pushed Eddo-Lodge (2017) to write her controversial work "why I'm no longer talking to white people about race". The pressure is crippling at many times as I attempt to explain from within a system that does not recognise my narrative as worthy. Whilst I want to go past this, and explore other routes within my indigenous research



interests, my worry is that when I am writing these words, another nutcase comes and misuses this to further their agenda.

Still, in my doctoral thesis, I tried to bring forward the indigenous understandings through providing explanations in English as a form of inclusive practice to those who do not speak the local languages that I am fluent in. Examples of this are explaining the material cultural such as Kasa and Talik, or the linguistics and historical interpretations of keywords or punchlines that the participants or I use in our mother tongues. I used footnotes, literation, and translation to explain words from local languages. These keywords were selected because either my participants' or I used it or felt it was a key component to discussing their lived experiences. Sometimes, I wrote long paragraphs as a part of the analysis of these keywords which had specific socio, cultural or historical relevance within my work.

In the colonial university, autoethnography is now recognised as a method of inquiry within the interpretive paradigm that focuses on the study of the self from cultural, political, and social constructs. However, from a decolonial indigenous perspective, "at times [it] lacks a certain esoterically, metaphysical, and w(holistic) edge specific to an indigenous reality" (Whitinui, 2014, p. 461). This is why stand-up comedy as other methods of creative practices provide frameworks for different Other(s) to bring forward and discuss their indigenous realities and knowledge making. As I mentioned earlier, my early experiences of humour were documented in the female spaces that I grew up in.

Writing creative nonfiction or comedy is not simply an extension of the biography of the self. It embodies the social, historical, and cultural counter storytelling of the indigenous selves allowing for a critical view and resistance of the existing knowledge about the Other. The experience of the self holds historical, cultural, social, and economic tensions (material or non-material ones) that we are surrounded by and channels it into a creative output for the world to see. The comedian's persona many times is an extension of them. In indigenous terms, the "them" does not solely refer to the comedian's "I", but also to the village that carried this "I", and the circumstances and the knowledge that this "I" was in contact with. Therefore, stand-up comedy writing in academic research can be viewed as an auto-ethnographic observational tool, an intercultural site for learning, a constant ideological struggle, a creative and reflexive form of Feminine writing that decolonise our existing norms of research (Souleh, 2022, pp. 47-60).

Although there are similarities between autoethnography and indigenous autoethnography, the latter focuses on "centring indigenous axiologies, ontologies and epistemologies" (Bishop, 2021, p.368) into the space of research. This means that when writing creatively the nonfictional realities of our experience or of the participants' draws on different ways of knowing, such as their feelings, atmosphere and our reasoning and emotions. This exposes our prejudices and privileges as a practice of truth-telling that resists the normative ways of thinking, being, and researching.

In their article “You can be creative once you are tenured”, Covarrubias, Newton and Glass (2022) explored their own lived experiences as women of colour in academia with the rigid rules of academic writing through their scholarly personal narratives. They (2022, p.126) explain the need for creative practices as follows: (1) The structured academic discourse and narrow frameworks do not accommodate complex learning experiences. This explains why I resort to creative nonfiction and stand-up comedy in my work as alternative forms of writing to accommodate the complexity of the social reality that I research. (2) How the normative academic writing conventions weigh down and isolate academics from different intersections because of the constant rule of “intellectualizing the lived experience”. By intellectualizing, I do not mean to dismiss the scholarly perspective to investigate and to introspect. However, in my decolonial turn, there are other ways of learning that within the normative canon of Western research may not be acceptable. (3) Glass, as a black woman researching racism, struggled with the false claims that are grounded in the Western reasoning of neutrality and objectivity. Comedic language like any creative writings of the self is grounded in vulnerability and honesty. With the need to constantly intellectualise the lived experience as a woman of colour researching discrimination through creative practices in predominately white academia, I was constantly told that I am either reading too much into something or my interpretation of the event is not what it is. My creative nonfiction and comedy allowed me to stand-up and bluntly say: “They called me a sand nigger! What else do you want from me?”.

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