

# Humour and global food: Uncle Roger and Big Zuu's visions of culinary hybridity

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## Abstract

*Scholars have shown that there is a longstanding connection between food and humour (Sover & Ben-Meir, 2017) as well as food and questions of identity (Counihan, Van Esterik, & Julier, 2018, Hutnyk, 2000, Wu & Cheung 2002). This article will focus on two performers' humorous visions of global food, and the issues they raise concerning diversity, stereotypes and cultural reappropriation. It will firstly focus on Uncle Roger, a character created by Malaysia-born comedian Nigel Ng who became a viral success on YouTube by mocking non-Asian chefs' attempts to cook dishes such as egg fried rice. It will then analyse the relationship between food and humour in the light-hearted television programme Big Zuu's Big Eats. In this programme, British rapper Big Zuu prepares a brand of hybrid fast food for celebrities of whom many are comedians. Big Zuu is the son of parents from Sierra Leone and Lebanon and hosts the show with fellow presenters who are of Iranian and Kurdish descent. This article will begin by assessing the importance of Uncle Roger and Big Zuu's humorous visions of global food reaching audiences via television and computer screens rather than via live in-person performances. In addition, it will examine the forms of humour they use and assess the extent to which they perpetuate and challenge stereotypes. Although Uncle Roger and Big Zuu's humour has several shared themes, it will be shown that it is nevertheless based on differing attitudes to hybrid cuisine.*

*Keywords: hybridity, cultural reappropriation, humour, global food.*

## 1. Introduction and context

The cultural importance of food has been examined by many academics who have discussed its symbolism and the role it can play in identity construction (Counihan, Van Esterik & Julier, 2018; Van Esterik, 2008; Roberts, 2002; Wu & Cheung, 2002). Within his seminal work *Mythologies*, the French cultural theorist Roland Barthes devotes several essays to the ways in which iconic dishes or products can become important symbols of national and cultural identity (Barthes, 1957). Where humour is concerned, Sover and Ben-Meir argue that "the connection between laughter and food is ancient" (Sover & Ben-Meir, 2017, p. 70). A reason for this to be

particularly relevant to members of minority groups is provided within the opening sentences of the article within which they make this claim. They note that “humour is a central component in a person’s integration into society” and add that “a person who identifies with a particular group shares common values with it that are expressed in all aspects of life: communication, culture, ethics, education, aesthetics, etc.” (Sover & Ben-Meir, 2017, p. 70).

This article will analyse how two performers who have become famous largely due to humour which focuses on food and which explores questions of identity. It will initially discuss Uncle Roger, a character invented by the Malaysia-born comedian Nigel Ng. Uncle Roger became a viral success on YouTube in 2020 thanks to videos where he often mocked English speaking food presenters, chefs, and influencers who are generally non-Asian but seek to explain how to make supposedly “authentic” Asian dishes such as egg fried rice. Subsequently, the focus will move to the British television programme *Big Zuu’s Big Eats* which is presented by the rapper and influencer Big Zuu and combines humour, hip-hop, and food.

## **2. Methodology and research questions**

In this article, I will analyse Uncle Roger’s YouTube videos in which he frequently critiques attempts by non-Asian chefs to make Asian dishes such as egg fried rice. This will involve primarily focusing on the period 2020-2022 as it was a key phase in establishing his reputation and a time during which he gained a high level of notoriety. The analysis of Big Zuu will primarily focus on the first two series of his television programme *Big Zuu’s Big Eats* as these series similarly played a key role in establishing his reputation, and this will permit discussion of contemporaneous performances by Uncle Roger and Big Zuu.

The analysis of Uncle Roger and Big Zuu will focus on key questions concerning humour and food. Drawing on discussions of comedy audiences by theorists such as Brodie (2014), Daube (2012), and Gartman & Godin (2012), it will initially examine the significance of these performers reaching audiences via television screens and those of mobile devices rather via in person performances at venues such as comedy clubs. It will then examine the forms of humour used by Uncle Roger and Big Zuu, and assess how they present global food and culinary hybridity within their respective videos and television programmes. To conclude, it will consider the extent to which the humorous focus on food challenges or perpetuates stereotypes.

## **3. The humour of Uncle Roger: exasperation and ridicule**

After studying in the United States, the Malaysian-born comedian Nigel Ng moved to the United Kingdom in the mid-2010s. He began stand-up comedy after turning his back on a career as a data scientist and was nominated for the Best Newcomer award at the 2019 Edinburgh Fringe Festival for a show entitled *Culture Shocked*. However, he has become well-known in recent years for having created the Uncle Roger character and regularly making YouTube videos that focus on food. This combination of live performance in comedy venues and use of internet technologies begs the question of what changes when spectators experience comedy on a screen rather than in a live venue. In 2012, Gartman and Godin noted that “video shares, streaming, and other digital technologies are multiplying the sites for comic exchange” and formed part of “a new nexus, a new comedy arena.” They added that “with the increased splintering of performance venues, from the stage to the computer screen, new degrees of audienceness are created” and established a division between “primary and secondary audiences” (Gartman & Godin, 2012, p. 254; see also Weitz, 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, Brodie notes that “broadcasts and recordings [...] introduce a further distance between the stand-up comedian and the audience”

yet “also provide the greatest opportunity for reputation cultivation” (Brodie, 2014, p. 5). Being able to utilise such technologies was particularly beneficial to Nigel Ng as many of his early Uncle Roger videos were made at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic made it harder for comedians to perform in public due to lockdowns and government restrictions.

The success of Uncle Roger owes much to audiences enjoying the YouTube videos in which he frequently shows exasperation at the sight of people – who are generally not Asian – preparing Asian dishes without fully respecting culinary traditions of the countries from which the food originates. In many ways, Uncle Roger is a caricature: a man who likes his food and seems somewhat stuck in the past. Nevertheless, the comments he makes in his YouTube videos also raise serious questions about authenticity and cultural appropriation in a culinary context. Consequently, Uncle Roger’s humour has the potential to please audiences for a variety of reasons. There are those who may laugh at how exasperated he becomes while commenting on cookery videos and also the expressions he uses. People may well also laugh about the videos on which he comments and due to the way in which they feature people preparing traditional dishes in an inauthentic or unusual manner. The comments under many of Uncle Roger’s videos reflect this. In many cases, they combine endorsements of Uncle Roger’s criticisms of inauthentic cooking methods and also reactions that celebrate the humour associated with his turns of phrase and exaggerated reactions. It could even be said that Uncle Roger has something in common with Sacha Baron-Cohen’s mock Kazakhstani journalist character Borat. As Gartman and Godin have noted, Borat has a degree of “complicity” with his “deferred audience” (i.e. those who watch videos of his interactions with members of the public) who are able to laugh at the way in which people react to him and what they say in response, rather than merely at his own behaviour (Gartman & Godin, 2012, p. 261). Uncle Roger may appear to be a stereotypical representation of a Southeast Asian uncle due to the way he dresses and speaks, but his videos also invite laughter at the expense of the people whose cookery videos he mocks. As noted above, comments added under Uncle Roger’s YouTube videos reflect this dual potential and show that people who have watched his videos are laughing both at the original videos he criticises and the mannerisms he uses when doing so. It is worth also noting that although his comments may at times be melodramatic, Uncle Roger’s criticisms of other food videos are nevertheless based on a detailed knowledge of Asian cuisines.

One of Uncle Roger’s recurring obsessions concerns egg fried rice. His first video to go viral dates from July 2020 and is a reaction to a BBC Food video in which Hersha Patel explains how to prepare this dish. However, Uncle Roger reacts against what he terms “white people egg fried rice.” He is disappointed to see Patel not wash the rice at the start, use a colander to drain the rice, and in particular not use the flavour enhancer MSG. As of January 2025, this video had been viewed 39 million times. In August 2020, Uncle Roger embarked on another rant about egg fried rice in response to a video by the TV chef Jamie Oliver. His anger stemmed from Oliver describing egg fried rice as a side dish rather than a main dish and using what Uncle Roger saw as incorrect ingredients. In particular, this frustration was provoked by the sight of Oliver using rice from a sachet, olive oil (which he terms “white people oil, not suitable for an Asian dishes [sic]”), and sweet chilli oil. Towards the end of the video, Uncle Roger is seen reading an online article about Jamie Oliver being accused of cultural appropriation and wonders if Oliver hates rice and has made such a bad video because he is sponsored by a company that wants people to eat potatoes rather than rice. As we will discuss in more detail later, Uncle Roger’s humour is based on what Brodie sees as two key premises of stand-up comedy. These are the ideas that “marginalization provides an entry into the comedic universe” and “the stand-up comedian is a solo performer who is making some claim to difference, because he or she has something interesting and distinct to say” (Brodie, 2014, p. 104). In the case of Uncle Roger, it is his marginalized status as a person of Asian descent living outside of Asia allied to the

performative and exaggerated sense of pride he takes in Asian food traditions which define much of his humour.

#### 4. Big Zuu: celebrating hybrid cuisine using humour

Given that Big Zuu is a rapper, presenter, and influencer and Uncle Roger is a character created by a stand-up comedian, it might initially appear that they are quite different. However, the way in which several theorists have framed humour and comedy points towards commonalities between this pair of performers. Bhargava and Chilana (2023, p. 25) argue that there is an “inextricable link between stand-up comedy, traditional forms of humour, film, TV, rap, and other forms of media.” In turn, Brodie (2014, p. 41) states that “most stand-up comedy implies a level of performed autobiography” and this is something which is evident in both Uncle Roger’s videos and Big Zuu’s television programmes. Big Zuu frequently references his experience of growing up in a diverse working-class area of London in his television show *Big Zuu’s Big Eats*, and Uncle Roger conveys a form of fictional performed autobiography in his role as a Southeast Asian uncle struggling to come to terms with how non-Asians prepare traditional Asian dishes.

As I have mentioned elsewhere (Ervine, 2022b), there is sometimes a tendency to oversimplify relations between comedy and hip-hop, or comedy and urban culture more broadly. However, Big Zuu provides a clear link to comedy and hip-hop via food. Born Zuhair Hussain in London in 1995, his mother is from Sierra-Leone and his father is from Lebanon. He initially became a rapper before becoming more well-known since 2020 as the presenter of *Big Zuu’s Big Eats*, a television programme broadcast on the UK cable channel Dave (and subsequently BBC Three) that combines rap music, humour, and food. This programme owes its existence to a television executive seeing a video on social media of Big Zuu preparing macaroni cheese.

The idea behind the programme *Big Zuu’s Big Eats* is that Big Zuu prepares food for comedians (and in later series other celebrities) that is inspired by their tastes and can generally be described as hybrid street food. The concoctions that Big Zuu creates on the television show include dishes such as one he describes as “French tacos in Algerian sauce,” a dish whose hybrid nature is clear. In a recipe book he published to tie in with his television show, he further underlines the importance of hybridity and diversity when he describes one of the desserts he made on screen as “a combination of two classic British staples [...] made by an ethnic refugee” (Zuu, 2021, p. 187). In this cookbook, he also recalls a period of his childhood characterised by “wanting more westernised dishes at home and less jollof rice” and how his adult life has seen him increasingly ask his mother to prepare dishes from Sierra Leone (Zuu, 2021, p. 8). Hybridity is evident in cultural references in the programme, such as Big Zuu referring to his fellow presenters Tubsey and Hyder as “the Arabian Chuckle Brothers.” This evokes their Kurdish and Iranian roots while simultaneously comparing them to a popular working class television comedy duo from the North of England.

The television programme itself, Big Zuu’s rap lyrics in the title sequence, and the dishes he prepares all celebrate diversity. At the BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) Television Awards ceremony in 2022 where he accepted two prizes for *Big Zuu’s Big Eats*, Big Zuu highlighted the importance of representation and diversity. In his acceptance speech, he notably said:

Growing up there wasn’t many chefs or people that looked like me on telly, yeah, and now there’s young people, watching us doing our ting, thinking ‘you know what?’ If these waste men can win a BAFTA, surely we can.

Within this extract from his acceptance speech, the use of informal urban language stands out and it is worth noting that such language is not often heard within traditional food programmes broadcast on British television. Furthermore, there are several episodes of *Big Zuu's Big Eats* where Zuu and his friends evoke the lack of diversity that exists within British television cookery programmes and rural areas which seem somewhat alien to someone who grew up in a working-class area of west London. In one episode he emphasizes his desire to unite British and non-British culinary traditions when talking to Mel Giedroyc, a comedian who previously presented the popular television cookery competition *The Great British Bake Off*. When presenting the dishes to Giedroyc, Big Zuu performed a mock political speech in which he sought to celebrate a diverse vision of British cuisine and stated:

We are marrying British culture with ethnic stuff. I beg, I beg. Boris Johnson, shout me if you need someone to do the cultural speakings in the parliament. I've come through with a Lebanese-Iraqi Scotch egg I'm proud of, yallah! We are together Britain, we can connect with this one egg !

The ways in which this message of tolerance and inclusivity is delivered using informal urban language and a deliberately exaggerated sense of importance is typical of the tone and humour of Big Zuu in his eponymous television show. As we will see, this celebration of culinary re-appropriation shows Big Zuu's attitude has a very different attitude to global food and culinary hybridity to Uncle Roger.

## **5. Uncle Roger, Big Zuu, and the appetite for food-based humour**

Although the Uncle Roger videos challenge the appropriation of Asian dishes by non-Asian chefs, Big Zuu seems to advocate a different attitude that celebrates what could be described as a form of "fusion" cuisine; it is one that is based on creating and re-appropriating dishes from different places at the same time as celebrating the origins of the people for whom he prepares the food. There is a parallel between Big Zuu's rap music – rap notably being a genre in which artists often sample the work of others – and his approach to making food that combines different cuisines. Big Zuu evoked this comparison in an interview with the magazine *TimeOut* in June 2022:

The West, particularly Britain and America, changes food for consumers {...], we remix things. So I like going back to the original versions of stuff and finding out where they came from. It's about listening to people who come from those places, respecting their culture, respecting their food.

(In Saville, 2022)

This culinary re-mixing creates a parallel between rap and food, and has similarities to a process that Brodie associates with stand-up comedy. He argues that the notion of "mak[ing] the strange familiar and the familiar strange [...] provides one lens through which one can view the stand-up comedian's act" (Brodie, 2014, p. 152). It can be said that Uncle Roger is taking something fairly mundane – the sight of well-known chefs preparing dishes – and making it appear strange via his exasperated reactions to their approach. At the same time, his obsession with foods which would be considered foreign to British and American viewers – such as egg fried rice – fits in with the idea of "making the strange familiar." Big Zuu follows a similar process via his culinary creations on *Big Zuu's Big Eats* by creating new twists on traditional dishes and introducing guests to new foods. Via their respective videos and programmes, Uncle Roger and Big Zuu are

also illustrating differing attitudes to hybrid cuisine and cultural reappropriation. Much of the humour associated with Uncle Roger's videos stems from his often extreme reactions to what he sees as the unacceptable breaking of rules about how to make specific dishes. Contrastingly, Big Zuu's approach – as discussed above – seeks to both do something new and different at the same time as respecting traditions.

The perhaps over-the-top hard-line approach that Uncle Roger adopts to hybrid cuisine and doing things differently fits in with the way in which he is a character who is quite traditional in his attitude to food. The fact that he is an “uncle” helps to situate him as someone who is implicitly older than many of his viewers – to whom he refers as nieces and nephews – and is also reflected in the way he always wears an orange polo shirt. His rejection of culinary hybridity and shortcuts nevertheless puts him at odds with younger generations of Asian diasporas. In a book about her experience of growing up working in a Chinese takeaway run by her Hong Kong-born parents in South Wales, Angela Hui argued in 2022 that “food is adapted to regional preference and local palates in order to survive, but it's something that should be considered innovative rather than looked down upon” (Hui, 2022, pp. 2-3). She also mentions eating spring rolls with salad cream and also congee – a form of rice porridge – topped with crushed Monster Munch crisps (Hui, 2022, pp. 39, 311). Uncle Roger's failure to embrace culinary hybridity thus appears out of phase with the realities of modern global food as it is consumed by both Asians and non-Asians. His approach is also somewhat paradoxical given that the dishes he discusses are of a variety of different origins – such as Chinese, Indian, Thai – and the food in his native Malaysia is influenced by a variety of culinary traditions. Numerous food experts have also observed that what is referred to as Chinese food is both very varied and has a long tradition of utilising ingredients from a range of different locations (see: Wu & Cheung, 2002, p. 4; Roberts, 2002, p. 23; Cheung, 2002, p. 61). Furthermore, Kelly has argued that “when a national food travels, it shares its identity, it belongs to those who produce it and to those who eat it; it changes, something different is created and it always changes differently” (2023, p. 184).

As well as having differing approaches to hybrid cuisine, Big Zuu and Uncle Roger also appear to have different relations to the world of cuisine more broadly. Nigel Ng – the creator of Uncle Roger – has featured the slogan “I am not a chef, I just complain” on his YouTube channel. Somewhat ironically, in 2024 Ng launched a restaurant in a major shopping centre in the Malaysian capital city Kuala Lumpur. The restaurant is named “Fuiyoh!,” a Cantonese expression of delight or approval that is one of Uncle Roger's catchphrases. Another significant difference between Uncle Roger and Big Zuu concerns their attitudes to a well-known British television chef. Big Zuu admits to enjoying food programmes by television chefs such as Uncle Roger's *bête noire* Jamie Oliver.

Despite the contrasts that exist between Uncle Roger and Big Zuu, one thing that they have in common is the importance of social media in their route to fame. Uncle Roger has gained a large online following thanks to his humorous videos mocking chefs; this allowed him to achieve international notoriety during the Covid-19 pandemic. Brodie's discussion of stand-up comedy and audiences suggests that being present in the venue where a comedian is performing “allows us to avail ourselves of all our senses for the interpretative act of understanding and judging and not having some experiences cut off from us by an intermediary” (Brodie, 2014, p. 45). However, what YouTube allowed Nigel Ng was to rapidly create a following for his character Uncle Roger and thus generate interest in his own stand-up comedy during a time when health restrictions made it harder to perform on stage. Post-Covid, the success of the Uncle Roger videos has allowed Nigel Ng to perform his stand-up shows in front of large audiences in many countries. These shows often begin with him appearing as Uncle Roger before he performs as himself, and it is worth observing that both parts of these shows often have a strong focus on food. As mentioned earlier, Big Zuu had the chance to make *Big Zuu's Big Eats* thanks to a

video of him cooking that appeared on social media. His BAFTA acceptance speech, and excerpts from his television show, have also been widely shared on social media. Big Zuu has also appeared as a guest on other television food programmes and in 2024 was the subject of a BBC documentary in which he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

## **6. Conclusions: serving up culinary stereotypes?**

Bhargava and Chilana (2023, p. 24) argue that “when a stand-up comic comes from a disenfranchised group or a minority community, there is also the fear that the comic will be pigeonholed and expected to do community specific comedy.” Food referred to as “ethnic cuisine” may at times be popular with a wide cross-section of the population of a given country but there remains a risk that minority performers who make food a key part of their output end up reinforcing immigrant stereotypes. Memoirs by several members of Asian diasporas living in the United Kingdom have acknowledged that being from a minority group and working in the catering trade can potentially lead to being exposed to prejudice, perpetuating stereotypes and facing racism. Angela Hui argued in April 2023 that “working in a takeaway you kind of have a target on your back” and that “you’re immediately the Chinese one or you’re called something racist.”<sup>1</sup> Anna Lo has argued that working in the catering industry risked constituting an obstacle to integration for members of Chinese communities in Northern Ireland during the 1980s. She argued that “with their lack of language skills and qualifications, nearly all of Northern Ireland’s Chinese immigrants were confined to working in the Chinese catering trade, which did not help them to improve their English or integrate into the wider community” (Lo, 2016, p. 88). David Y. H. Wu (2002, p. 100) made a similar point in an article entitled “Chinese Cuisine Overseas”:

Restaurants, by their presence and advertising, emphasize a stereotype of Chinese culture, by virtue of how they market ‘authentic’ Chinese cuisine, how they decorate and furnish the places where the cuisine is eaten, and how they dress the employee who serves the cuisine.

Due to the popularity of international cuisines in many locations across the world, focusing on food within in a performance can be a way of creating relatable material. One could argue that referencing stereotypes can be a first step towards challenging them, Rosello (1998, p. 36) argues that even this type of process “involves a minimum, if unconscious, yet unavoidable element of allegiance [to the original stereotype]”. Nigel Ng has been criticised by some who see his Uncle Roger character as a negative and highly stereotypical representation of Southeast Asians, notably due to his somewhat broken and heavily accented English (Wolseley, 2021). Ng has responded to such criticisms by arguing that “Uncle Roger never puts his own race down” and that “the people who say Uncle Roger shouldn’t have an accent are essentially saying that Uncle Roger should sound white, which is very problematic in itself” (LadBibleTV, 2022). As I have suggested in an article about comedians of Southeast Asian descent in France, when East Asian comedians begin a stand-up routine outside of Asia by referencing stereotypes it is perhaps a consequence of many people’s lack of familiarity with East Asian communities within Europe (Ervine, 2022a, p. 382). In his discussion of Mintz, Rappoport argues that the nature of a minority group’s relationship with humour can evolve over time and be influenced by its social status and self-confidence (Rappoport, 2005, pp. 99-100; see also Davies, 2002, pp. 1-16).

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<sup>1</sup> Comments made in ‘Chinese and Britain: Food Stories’ event hosted at the British Library (London, UK), 17 April 2023.

When discussing Uncle Roger's relationship to stereotypes, it is important to acknowledge that there are ways in which certain aspects of his videos are very much not in keeping with stereotypes about members of Asian diasporas. Via his criticisms of Western chefs' attempts to replicate Asian cooking, he does not conform to the stereotypical image of the "model minority" which is often used to describe members of Asian diasporas in Europe and North America. Although this concept could be seen as being associated with neutral or positive attributes – such as being well-integrated, ambitious, professionally successful, and not complaining – scholars who have written about these groups have also argued that it at times does them a disservice. As I have previously discussed, the concept of the "model minority" is seen by some commentators as playing a role in "obscur[ing] the racism and prejudice faced by Chinese communities in France" as well as "mak[ing] them a target for those who resent their perceived successful integration and supposed economic prosperity" (Ervine, 2022a, p. 386; see Chuang, 2021, pp. 6-7, 12, 206). Uncle Roger is certainly unafraid to complain and express incredulity about Western culture, especially where food is concerned. By often tending to mock people who occupy a higher position on the social ladder, Uncle Roger is actually doing something potentially empowering that appears to match with what Rappoport sees as the fourth stage of Mintz's scale that maps how minorities use humour. This is the moment when minorities "use humor to directly confront and ridicule those who formerly ridiculed them" (Rappoport, 2005, p. 100).

It could perhaps be argued that the way in which Big Zuu – unlike Uncle Roger – celebrates diversity through his brand of fusion cuisine helps to explain why he has not received as much criticism for supposedly perpetuating negative stereotypes of ethnic minorities. However, one may nevertheless ask what is achieved by food-focused celebrations of diversity. In his 2005 book *Critique of Exotica*, the British anthropologist John Hutnyk describes how culinary metaphors in the English-speaking world sometimes create an overly simplistic vision of integration and tolerance. He explains that "the 'melting pot' may mean participation in the feast of cuisine, but not always as a diner – there are cooks, service staff, and guests" (Hutnyk, 2000, p. 19). Hutnyk also argues that "an inclusive rhetoric of curry-loving culture in the UK serves as a smoke screen to occlude various inequalities among the various constituencies of Britain, and the vast socio-economic distance that separates those serving the curry-shifts from those swallowing the cardamom" (2005, p. 182). Siumi Maria Tan makes a similar point about the "superficial" nature of assuming that an appreciation of food from different countries necessarily implies tolerance and assimilation within a discussion of Hong Kong cuisine in Australia (2002, p. 132). These arguments have much in common with questions that Green and Linders have raised about the extent to which humour possesses meaningful potential to bring about social and cultural change. They have argued that "while ethnic comedy may lighten the topic of race, it does not yet facilitate meaningful interactions that can be used in everyday racial discourse for improving racial interaction" (Green and Linders, 2016, p. 264).

The phrase "tasting funny" which has been used to frame the articles around which this special issue is based can be interpreted in a variety of ways which are highly relevant to Uncle Roger and Big Zuu. Given that "taste" can mean both to sense the flavour of a food and to experience something in a more general sense, this dual meaning fits well with the way in which viewers of Uncle Roger and Big Zuu experience two performers focusing on food in humorous and creative ways. The way in which "tasting funny" can also refer to something which tastes odd is also relevant here. Although Uncle Roger generally does not taste the dishes he criticises in his videos, his criticisms are implicitly based on the idea that something unusual – and from his perspective totally wrong – is being done and that the dish being produced is consequently likely to also taste odd. As discussed, the incredulity of his reactions and ways he expresses them are frequently a source of humour. Viewers of *Big Zuu's Big Eats* get an experience of



tasting funny (as in experiencing humour) through the way in which Big Zuu presents himself and his culinary creations in a deliberately exaggerated manner that invites humorous responses from comedians who appear on the show. The way in which he fuses styles and dishes could be termed funny as in odd, although crucially – and very much unlike what we see in Uncle Roger’s videos – this means of not following traditional methods is presented as something to be celebrated and not something which is problematic. As we have seen in the discussion of stereotypes, some have questioned whether the humour involved in Uncle Roger’s videos is in good taste. Some critics see in Nigel Ng’s character an offensively stereotypical vision of Asian male (Wolseley, 2021).

What Uncle Roger and Big Zuu show is the potential for food to be a source of relatable material for comedians and other performers, and indeed material which can at times go viral online. However, we have seen that this relatability and the iconic status of specific dishes also creates a risk of reinforcing stereotypes concerning food and ethnicity. Big Zuu’s focus on what can be described as fast food or street food potentially reinforces stereotypes about job sectors in which ethnic minorities work. Nevertheless, we have seen that there are significant ways in which both Uncle Roger and Big Zuu challenge stereotypes. For example, Uncle Roger does not fit with the “model minority” image associated with members of Asian diasporas. Furthermore, Big Zuu’s status as an ethnic minority performer from a working class background who is also a rapper marks him out as being quite different from a great many television chefs and food presenters in the United Kingdom. These types of issues illustrate the dual potential of food to be a source of relatable humour and the object of serious socio-cultural debates. In this article, we have explored issues such as racial and ethnic prejudice, cultural and culinary hybridity, and cultural appropriation. Despite notable differences in their attitudes to culinary hybridity, and the combination of celebration and denunciation with which it has been greeted, their successes point towards the considerable appetite which exists within contemporary culture for humorous performances which are based on food.

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