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Comedy Close to the Edge: Race, Gender, Class and Nation

Comedy has license to go where other discourses fear to tread. It provides space for alternative perspectives on social relations, norms and identities. But it does so amid changing histories of the comedic arts and shifting conventions around the acceptable limits of expression. As Freud noted, taboo-breaking humour may be as aggressive as it is liberating. Recent international scandals surrounding apparently offhanded jokes by public figures show that humour playing upon difference remains a fraught issue. At the same time, however, much mainstream Anglophone comedy in the 2000s shares the distinctive thread that it is OK 'again' to make fun directly out of social difference. This panel provides critical interpretations of these tendencies in case studies of the mail-order bride figure in the British comedy show, *Little Britain*, the blackface performances of Japanese comedian Enomoto Kenichi in the 1930s and 1940s, and the standup of Korean American comedian Margaret Cho.