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# The State of Fun? Exclusive Casino Urbanism and Its Biopolitical Borders in Singapore

Juan Zhang and Brenda S.A. Yeoh

## ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates the exclusionary politics of casino urbanism in Singapore, especially in terms of how this particular brand of urbanism reproduces disciplinary regimes through the uneven consumption of fun and leisure. Singapore's vision of becoming a world-class "state of fun" is accompanied by increasingly sophisticated measures of boundary making between global leisure citizens and the excluded others, often comprised of the working class and those deemed to be at risk or lacking self-control and responsibility. The evolving biopolitical borders coincide with the multiple borders set up around Singapore's casino spaces, ensuring the exclusive consumption of Singapore's casino urbanism by the wealthy few. The fun regimes help to normalize social exclusion, moralize disciplinary control, and give legitimacy to the new class of global consumers under the operations of the state-capital apparatus. This paper argues that exclusive casino urbanism has broader social and political implications on issues of equality, accessibility, and urban participation.

**KEYWORDS:** casinos, fun, discipline, urbanism, biopolitical borders, Singapore, integrated resorts, tourism, gambling

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## Introduction

In June 2014, Singapore's Tourism Board and the island's best-known tourist attraction Sentosa Island launched the new "State of Fun" campaign to boost tourist dollars and to promote Singapore as a world-class entertainment destination. The "State of Fun" campaign featured a promotional video, showcasing how Sentosa Island (and by extension Singapore) could now be imagined as "the Neverland, the dreamland, the wonderland," where "the borders are open to everyone."<sup>1</sup> As part of the new campaign, the Sentosa Development Corporation also released a short video featuring "a hardworking father" having a "deserved day of fun." Mr. Hui, a taxi driver and single father of two sons, was filmed cruising the island on a Segway, feasting with friends in one of the food courts, and trying out indoor skydiving. As a taxi driver, Mr. Hui ferried tourists and visitors to Sentosa every day, but he was never really part of this "Neverland." The promotional campaign offered him a rare opportunity to experience the "state of fun" with packaged activities, though the more expensive attractions, such as Universal Studios Singapore, were not included in the deal. This "state of fun" campaign thus reveals how fun is to be had in Singapore: the fun-seeker has to be a *deserving* individual; fun has to be had in particular ways; and some fun can be publicly promoted, while other forms are restricted. The most popular attractions within the "state of fun"—the Resorts World Sentosa Casino, for example—remain hidden in view and are not accessible to ordinary citizens like Mr. Hui. The "state of fun" tagline therefore is not just a "playful proposition" or a "light-hearted brand approach."<sup>2</sup> It points to more fundamental issues about fun and discipline in Singapore's state-capital apparatus. Sentosa's tagline makes clear that fun is in fact "state" like, with its own borders, regulations, and the right kind of citizenry. The "state of fun" is symptomatic of the exclusionary borders of fun and pleasure and the disciplinary regime that underpins it.

This paper interrogates Singapore's transformation from a conservative "nanny state" to the new "state of fun" with the opening of two luxurious mega-casino resorts in 2010. The emerging casino urbanism in Singapore lends glamour and legitimacy to the state project of global branding,<sup>3</sup> through

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpts are quoted from "The State of Fun" official promotional video on SentosaTV, the official YouTube channel of Sentosa Island. Video available at <https://youtu.be/TSGIKDM4jSM>, accessed on 10 May 2017.

<sup>2</sup> TTG Asia, "Sentosa Ditches Six-year-old Branding with The State of Fun," 27 May 2014, accessed 2 August 2016, [http://www.ttgasia.com/article.php?article\\_id=23162](http://www.ttgasia.com/article.php?article_id=23162).

<sup>3</sup> We borrow the phrase "casino urbanism" from Lee Kah-Wee, who uses it to refer to urbanization processes where integrated casino development becomes an intrinsic part. Lee's blog on casino urbanism can be found at <https://casinourbanism.wordpress.com/>, accessed 30 June 2017. Also see Kah-Wee Lee, "From Casino to Integrated Resort: Nationalist Modernity and the Art of Blending," Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series no. 242 (2015), [http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/wps/wps15\\_242.pdf](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/wps/wps15_242.pdf), accessed 12 May 2017.

which Singapore successfully reinvents itself as an exciting global city attractive not only to the rich and famous, but also appealing to transnational tourists with money to spend. The two casino resorts, Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Sentosa, package gambling, entertainment, culture, arts, and shopping together as a total experience of fun and pleasure. Much like the island of Sentosa, the two casino resorts are suggestive of the “state of fun,” where experiences of excitement and dullness, pleasure and boredom, welcome and rejection are all shaped by the disciplinary practices operating through both state regulations and market enticement.

Singapore’s casino urbanism is illustrative of a mutating form of neoliberal urbanism. Urban spaces become increasingly critical nodes in the global politics of neoliberalization.<sup>4</sup> Economic spaces are mobilized for capital growth, and market discipline becomes the primary agenda of institutionalized political governance. Cities, by choice or by force, are confronted by the creative and destructive forces of urban neoliberalization, and face the persistent state of “competitive anxiety” that leads to “desperate pursuit of investment opportunities and development panaceas.”<sup>5</sup> Singapore’s turn toward the casino economy (despite strong public resistance) reflects the interplay of anxiety and hope as the city-state embraces speculative urban development as part of a new “worlding” strategy.<sup>6</sup>

Singapore’s two integrated casino resorts are similar to what Shatkin has described as urban integrated mega-projects that represent “a vision for the transformation of the urban experience through the wholesale commodification of the urban fabric.”<sup>7</sup> Casinos as capital-driven ventures carve out large-scale urban spaces for concentrated entertainment and consumption practices. Special rules and regulations are put in place to ensure profit maximization via the operation of a competitive and open market environment. In the meantime, mega-casinos help to project strong cosmopolitan ambitions and world-class status. They are iconic urban forms ready to be recognized (and even emulated) as an example of successful global urbanism. The new values attached to the mega-casinos also help to mask the controversial nature of such projects and erase their contested pasts. Singapore’s residents are encouraged to reimagine the casinos, no longer with suspicion and anxiety but with the hopeful optimism that the rebranding of Singapore will also lend them new status as global subjects.

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<sup>4</sup> Nik Theodore, Jamie Peck, and Neil Brenner, “Neoliberal Urbanism: Cities and the Rule of Markets,” in *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*, eds. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Somerset: Wiley, 2011), 15–25.

<sup>5</sup> Theodore, Peck, and Brenner, “Neoliberal Urbanism,” 24.

<sup>6</sup> Aihwa Ong, “Worlding Cities, or the Art of Being Global,” in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, eds. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1–26.

<sup>7</sup> Gavin Shatkin, “Planning Privatopolis: Representation and Contestation in the Development of Urban Integrated Mega-Projects,” in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, eds. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 77.

But this imagined global citizen status is not to be enjoyed by everyone. In fact, with these aspirational urban renovations modelled on large-scale, profit-driven mega projects, new borders of inclusion and exclusion invariably emerge to separate the global leisure citizens from the rest, often those deemed to be vulnerable, at risk, or lacking resources, self-control, and responsibility. Such boundary-making politics are not new to the process of neoliberal urbanization. The various forms of urban social and spatial exclusion have been carefully documented and critically analyzed by scholars on a range of issues, including urban segregation, privatization, gentrification, and diversification.<sup>8</sup> Many pay special attention to citizenship politics, addressing the sharpening inequalities and entrenched social exclusion experienced in many global cities today.<sup>9</sup> These politics highlight the different fronts of what David Harvey has famously theorized as “accumulation by dispossession,” a process where neoliberal restructuring of the city helps to create further chasms between the urban elites and those with diminishing claims on their right to the city. From Special Economic Zones in India, to urban renaissance projects in Europe, from the private property boom in China, to the global branding of cities such as Singapore and Dubai, studies of neoliberal urbanism show how contemporary spatial practices and social relations are undergoing drastic transformations in a shifting global environment.<sup>10</sup> Most of these state-corporate projects of urban remaking and renewal serve to benefit a transnational class of “flexible citizens” and alienate those who fail to embrace such global aspirations and participate in the growing regime of accumulation and consumption.

Building on these studies, this paper aims to join the debate on neoliberal urban transformations and citizenship politics in the realm of “fun” and “play”—non-material forms of leisure experience now also absorbed by the ideology of production-consumption in global cities and managed biopolitically by the state-capital apparatus. This aspect has not been thoroughly discussed in the existing literature on neoliberal urbanism, where the

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<sup>8</sup> There is extensive literature on these topics, see for example Trevor Hogan et al., “Asian Urbanisms and the Privatization of Cities,” *Cities* 29, no. 1 (2012): 59–63; Teresa P.R. Caldeira, “Fortified Enclaves: The New Urban Segregation,” *Public Culture* 8, no. 2 (1996): 303–328; Choon-Piew Pow, “Living It Up: Super-rich Enclave and Transnational Elite Urbanism in Singapore,” *Geoforum* 42, no. 3 (2011): 382–393; Neil Smith, “New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy,” *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 427–450.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Gordon MacLeod, “From Urban Entrepreneurialism to a ‘Revanchist City’? On the Spatial Injustices of Glasgow’s Renaissance,” *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 602–624; Asef Bayat, “Politics in the City-Inside-Out,” *City & Society* 24, no. 2 (2012): 110–128.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Levien, “Special Economic Zones and Accumulation by Dispossession in India,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 11, no. 4 (2011): 454–483; Gordon MacLeod and Craig Johnstone, “Stretching Urban Renaissance: Privatizing Space, Civilizing Place, Summoning ‘Community,’” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 36, no. 1 (2012): 1–28; Li Zhang, “Spatiality and Urban Citizenship in Late Socialist China,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002): 311–334; Michele Acuto, “High-rise Dubai: Urban Entrepreneurialism and the Technology of Symbolic Power,” *Cities* 27, no. 4 (2010): 272–284.

analytical focus has been primarily placed on material productions of segregated urban spaces (for example, gated communities, gentrified neighbourhoods, special zones) and symbolic creations of city image, status, and brand. We take cues from recent scholarship on elite urban spaces and bring non-material experiences into discussions of neoliberal urbanism.<sup>11</sup> Centering on practices of framing and consuming fun around mega-casinos in Singapore, we offer an interrogation of the regime of leisure and pleasure that has come to discipline consumer conduct, differentiate citizen status, and legitimize exclusionary politics.

In this paper, we regard fun as an emotional regime of neoliberal urbanism that carries with it a special kind of disciplined pleasure.<sup>12</sup> Through Singapore's city branding efforts, fun has been actively pursued, promoted, and rigorously regulated. Singapore's transformation into a "fun city" has been a state-orchestrated development project deemed pivotal to the city-state's economic survival since the 1990s. Like other urban renovation initiatives in places like Shanghai or Dubai that showcase urban spectacles (for example special zones and hyper-buildings) or what Aihwa Ong calls the "hyperspace of sovereignty,"<sup>13</sup> Singapore's new mega-casino resorts were also built to demonstrate global city success. Having fun in Singapore is not simply a matter of pleasure seeking but a bio-political project of governance. It implicates political strategies, pragmatic intentions, and calculative logics. On the one hand, Singapore's technocrats hoped that fun, with its associated projects of global city branding and excessive consumption, would offer the much-needed excitement to revitalize a sluggish economy in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. On the other hand, it is of concern that Singapore's citizens might be having too much fun, or having the wrong kind of fun. It therefore needs to be carefully programmed and controlled so as to ensure that fun is to be had at the right time, in the right place, by the right people, for the right reason, and of the right amount.

Our main aim is to present an analysis of Singapore's casino urbanism and the evolving biopolitical borders operating through the management of urban leisure life. We depart from the current scholarly debate on the biopolitical governance of urban life through material forms of segregation, denial of rights, growing inequality, and the precarization of work and lives.

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<sup>11</sup> Gillian Rose, Monica Degen, and Begum Basdas, "More on 'big things': Building Events and Feelings," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35, no. 3 (2010): 334–349; Alan Latham and Derek P. McCormack, "Moving Cities: Rethinking the Materialities of Urban Geographies," *Progress in Human Geography* 28, no. 6 (2004): 701–724.

<sup>12</sup> John Urry, "Consuming the Planet to Excess," *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, no. 2–3 (2010): 191–212.

<sup>13</sup> Aihwa Ong, "Hyperbuilding: Spectacle, Speculation, and the Hyperspace of Sovereignty," in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, eds. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 205–226.

To extend our analysis, we incorporate non-material forms of consumptive experiences and shed light on the spatial ordering of pleasure and restriction in the controversial space of casino-related services and games. We highlight how this ordering legitimizes the right to self-indulgence for the exclusive few, and the demand of self-control for the urban other in Singapore's entertainment and leisure economy. Current studies on Singapore's pleasure spaces have examined how the diverse affective geographies (for example clubs, night markets, arts spaces, high-tech "Bohemias") produce gendered and classed articulations of citizenship and belonging.<sup>14</sup> We join these studies by bringing forward an analysis of regulation and discipline that has increasingly become a normal part of pleasure seeking and leisure life.

This paper is based on a two-year research project on mobilities and governance in the casino industry in Singapore (2013–2015). We draw materials from semi-structured interviews with visitors and consumers to Singapore's casino resorts (n=25) and local and migrant employees in the casinos and related sectors (for example, hotel, hospitality, entertainment, and retail) (n=38). Informants come from Singapore as well as China, Malaysia, the Philippines, United States, and Japan. Some of the informants were recruited through personal contacts, and some were approached while they were visiting the resorts. Most of them had previously visited casino resorts in Macau, Malaysia, Las Vegas, and Europe, and they constantly compared their experiences in Singapore to the ones they had previously had elsewhere. Apart from interviews, ethnographic fieldwork was also carried out in the casino resorts, on the casino floors as well as in related establishments in the resorts. Field observations provided first-hand perspectives on the varied ways in which different individuals in the resorts experienced fun and pleasure. We also draw on news and government reports, and other published sources to explore how local discourses and debates on casino resorts are framed. Together these materials shed light on the politics of fun and the ways in which they shape local meanings and practices.

To begin, we first engage in a theoretical discussion of fun and discipline as mutually arising processes of governing. Taking Singapore's casinos as a space of exception, we argue that fun is rendered as an exceptional experience to be carefully staged, packaged, and promoted. We proceed to detail Singapore's national politics of fun-making as instrumental to the transformation of the city-state's global image. Singapore as a global destination of "good clean fun" is of particular importance to this process.

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<sup>14</sup> Just to name a few, Qian Hui Tan, "Flirtatious Geographies: Clubs as Spaces for the Performance of Affective Heterosexualities," *Gender, Place & Culture* 20, no. 6 (2013): 718–736; T.C. Chang and W.K. Lee, "Renaissance City Singapore: A Study of Arts Spaces," *Area* 35, no. 2 (2003): 128–141; Kai Wen Wong and Tim Bunnell, "'New Economy' Discourses and Spaces in Singapore: A Case Study of One-North," *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 1 (2006): 69–83.

Moving on to an analysis of how fun is shaped and governed in different arrangements, we describe how pleasures and restrictions are experienced and how self-indulgence and self-control are managed. In conclusion, we argue that Singapore's casino urbanism produces not simply "good clean fun" but disciplined pleasure, controlled welcome, and implicit rejection. It produces ideal citizens of the "state of fun": consuming subjects who also ethicalize the borders and exclusions of the fun regime.

### Fun and Discipline in Leisure Governance

Fun and discipline are closely intertwined in late capitalism, especially with the emergence of the consumer society. Fun and pleasure are highly encouraged and desired as they turn individuals into ideal consumers. Fun, together with other emotions such as amusement, comfort, and excitement, masks the fact that in daily life a whole range of feelings are strictly controlled and disciplined, and can most effectively be experienced through consumption.<sup>15</sup> The tying of emotion and discipline constitutes an "emotional regime" that stresses the powerful effect of dominant social structures on individual feelings and desires.<sup>16</sup> In the contemporary emotional regime shaped largely by capitalism and consumption, Bourdieu notes the emergence of the new ethics of pleasure, or the "fun ethic," among the consuming middle class. It departs from the dominant ethic of work that valued diligence, hard work, and abstinence from material indulgence, and turns previously disdained qualities such as hedonistic enjoyment and self-indulgence into new moral pursuits.<sup>17</sup>

As the "fun ethics" of the consuming middle class have gained popularity and legitimacy in late capitalism, business and professionals have learned to not only embrace the "work hard, play hard" motto but also to advocate it in diverse ways. Turning workplaces into "fun places" and introducing playtime into work time are emerging corporate strategies to boost productivity.<sup>18</sup> Excessive consumption—often packaged as fun and pleasure—becomes a natural reward for one's hard work.<sup>19</sup> Singapore's "state of fun" campaign specifically declares that "wild nights are hard-earned," indicating that having fun is not a natural given, but a reward for those who have "earned" it. An

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Peter N. Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-century Emotional Style* (New York: NYU Press, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> For example, Bent Meier Sørensen and Sverre Spoelstra, "Play at Work: Continuation, Intervention and Usurpation," *Organization* 19, no. 1 (2011): 81–97.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Ransome, *Work, Consumption and Culture: Affluence and Social Change in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Sage, 2005).



implicit notion of “deservedness” underpins the contemporary fun discourse and grants the right to pleasure to the “deserving” consumers. Having fun becomes increasingly disciplinary, as consumers become subjects of a differentiated regulatory process.

In Singapore, the emergence of the state of fun coincided with the normalization of the state of exception, when the city-state embraced casino urbanism to refashion its leisure economy as a way of economic revival. Since the early 2000s, Singapore’s ruling elites hoped to develop a new growth engine to rescue its stagnating tourism industry and inject new energy into the national economy. This urgent need for transformation gave legitimacy to drastic measures, among which the legalization of casino gambling was the most controversial. In the past, the casino proposal had been brought up and subsequently rejected many times on moral and ethical grounds.<sup>20</sup> Exceptions were finally made in the mid-2000s when casinos were presented as world-class Integrated Resorts (IR) that could offer fun and games. Gambling was downplayed to take up just a small part of the IR entertainment landscape.

There are two mutually constitutive aspects of Singapore’s casinos as exception. On the one hand, casinos become exceptional symbols of accumulation, reflecting neoliberal values of economic maximization, open market competition, and the retreat of the state as a regulator.<sup>21</sup> These casinos are also clear examples of international capital flows and the intensification of inter-city referencing.<sup>22</sup> Citing Las Vegas and Macau, Singapore invokes these iconic casino cities to articulate a speculative discourse about its own global future.<sup>23</sup> The spatial organization of casinos as part of the IR also makes sure that fun and entertainment become the façade that hides away the moral ambiguity of gambling.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the casinos also create ethical spaces of “citizen protection,” “clean fun,” and rightful exclusion. In a way, Singapore’s casinos as exception shape the innately paradoxical “state of fun.” Citizens who want to play in the casinos have to be protected against the harms associated with gambling. Public advertisement of casino fun is strictly prohibited under the Casino Control (Advertising) Regulations, so as to minimize risk due to exposure. Fun is to be had in designated areas, under surveillance cameras, after identity and security

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<sup>20</sup> Gillian Koh, *IPS Forum on the Casino Proposal* (Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies, 2005), <http://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/IPS-Casino-Forum-Report.pdf>, accessed 10 April 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Lionel Wee, “Neoliberalism and the Regulation of Consumers: Legalizing Casinos in Singapore,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 9, no. 1 (2012): 15–27.

<sup>22</sup> Ong, “Worlding Cities,” 17–20.

<sup>23</sup> Juan Zhang and Brenda Yeoh, “Harnessing Exception: Mobilities, Credibility, and the Casino,” *Environment and Planning A* 48, no. 6 (2016): 1064–1081.

<sup>24</sup> Sytze F. Kingma, “Dutch Casino Space or the Spatial Organization of Entertainment,” *Culture and Organization* 14, no. 1 (2008): 31–48.

checks. At the same time, the “state of fun” exudes consumption excess, when pleasure seeking is heralded as the most “FUNdamental right” in the space of exception.<sup>25</sup>

With world-class casino IR, Singapore is transforming into a consumer paradise characterized by luxury, excess, and indulgence. Mimi Sheller, in her work on the all-inclusive resorts in the Caribbean, describes how such resorts are often gated and fortified, carved out of the norm for liminal, excessive services and consumption.<sup>26</sup> The Caribbean islands are curated into exclusive resorts for the super-rich and removed from local communities. Such places of consumption and excess are also turning Dubai into a dream city of glitz and glamour for millions of aspirational professionals. However, it is increasingly difficult even for the middle class to maintain an affordable lifestyle and to imagine themselves being part of the “global citizens” residing in the city.<sup>27</sup> As the city becomes a “destination” attraction, it relies on “profits derived from affect-driven tourist consumption related to such activities as gambling, shopping, sightseeing, and relaxation.”<sup>28</sup> Producing nothing tangible, these global destinations offer excessive consumption as the ultimate leisure experience. Their success depends as much on the carefully packaged experiences of fun and pleasure sold globally to tourists and nomadic professionals, as on the exploitative labour conditions and excessive accumulation by dispossession.<sup>29</sup>

Singapore’s fun regimes are modelled on such consumer paradises. The IR carve out an exclusive casino zone detached from Singapore’s local everyday life. This carving out serves the double purpose of isolating the otherwise morally ambiguous practice of gambling, and upholding the “fun ethics” that encourage consumption to excess by the eligible pleasure seekers. It is a strategy of territorializing particular fun and pleasure to maintain its limited access and exclusivity. Such a strategy falls in line with Singapore’s vision to become a “livable city for the super rich,” and a “capital of fun and creativity” for the transnational class in the “high net-worth category.”<sup>30</sup> The enclaved space of the IR also helps to discipline the consuming subjects to behave in certain ways; both self-indulgence and self-control should be practiced.

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<sup>25</sup> This line is taken from “the State of Fun” official promotional video on YouTube.

<sup>26</sup> Mimi Sheller, “The New Caribbean Complexity: Mobility Systems and the Rescaling of Development,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 29 (2008): 340–355.

<sup>27</sup> Chad Haines, “Cracks in the Façade: Landscapes of Hope and Desire in Dubai,” in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, eds. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 160–181.

<sup>28</sup> Tim Simpson, “Tourist Utopias: Biopolitics and the Genealogy of the Post-world Tourist City,” *Current Issues in Tourism* 19, no. 1 (2015): 27–59.

<sup>29</sup> Urry, “Consuming the Planet to Excess,” 203.

<sup>30</sup> Pow, “Living It Up,” 386.

Existing studies on Singapore's consumption culture and leisure economy have explored different aspects of the city-state's evolving regime of leisure and recreation. Chua's seminal work on "life is not complete without shopping" detailed how "structured" shopping and regimented consumerism shaped the subjectivity and self-conduct of Singapore's consumer citizens.<sup>31</sup> "Local identities," "Singapore uniqueness," and various motifs of the "New Asia" have been used by Singapore's planners and tourism promoters for urban image-making and branding to gain a winning edge in the intensifying global "place wars."<sup>32</sup> Heritage tourism, green tourism, medical tourism, queer tourism, arts tourism—these different selling points and branding strategies indicate the pervasive politics of cultural governance and the shaping of diverse citizen bodies and subjectivities to reflect what is at stake for the economy. Minca and Ong offer a particularly interesting case of the promotion of adventure tourism in Singapore during the "post-Tiger Economy," a period of economic uncertainty that required the citizen-worker to be adventurous yet resilient, capable of surviving a treacherous natural environment as well as unforeseeable economic conditions.<sup>33</sup> Taking up adventures in nature was promoted by the Singaporean state as an antidote to the "couch potato" culture and as a gateway to healthy bodies and minds. Adventure tourism became a way of training citizen subjects to be adaptable and resilient, ready for the challenges in the new economy.

In the new phase of Singapore's global branding, in which casinos have become the postcard image selling Singapore's fun and creativity to the world, the biopolitical operations embedded in this branding continue to bear resemblance to earlier tourism campaigns. The element of state pastoral care and custodial discipline is clearly seen in an emerging responsibility discourse. "Play responsibly" becomes the key disciplinary motto that seamlessly brings play and responsibility together in one catchphrase, advising citizens to have fun but within limits, to know the line and stay out of trouble (i.e., debt). More importantly, ordinary citizens learn to understand that Singapore's casino urbanism exists, but not for them. Their exclusion from casino leisure is not only widely accepted as normal, it is moralized as care. Under this operation, citizens also learn to embrace Singapore's "casinopolitan" aspirations,<sup>34</sup> some as beneficiaries who enjoy the services

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<sup>31</sup> Chua Beng Huat, *Life Is Not Complete Without Shopping: Consumption Culture in Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Brenda Yeoh, "The Global Cultural City? Spatial Imagineering and Politics in the (Multi) cultural Marketplaces of Southeast Asia," *Urban Studies* 42, no. 5–6 (2005): 945–958.

<sup>33</sup> Claudio Minca and Chin Ee Ong, "Hotel California: Biopowering Tourism, from New Economy Singapore to Post-Mao China," in *Tourism Encounters and Controversies*, eds. Gunnar Thor Johannesson, Carina Ren, and Rene van der Duim (New York: Routledge, 2015), 159–180.

<sup>34</sup> Term borrowed from Timothy W. Luke, "Gaming Space: Casinopolitan Globalism from Las Vegas to Macau," *Globalizations* 7, no. 3 (2010): 395–405.

and consumption, and the rest as bystanders who cheer it on without any real participation.

### **Fun as Cosmopolitan Strategy and Casino Resorts as Model**

In Singapore, the opening of the two integrated casino resorts caused major controversies and generated heated debates among citizens, analysts, and spectators.<sup>35</sup> Since the 1990s, Singapore's leadership has been concerned with the city-state's growing reputation as a sterile nanny state, which they feared would drive away the "talent" much needed for economic growth. Senior officials believed that integrated resorts and revived tourism would give Singapore the much-needed "X factor" to attract investment and boost its global image. Once a determined opponent of legalizing gambling in Singapore, elder statesman Lee Kuan Yew told the *New York Times*,

If we don't have an Integrated Resort like the ones in Las Vegas, we will lose ... . We have to go in whatever directions world conditions dictate if we are to survive and to be part of this modern world. If we are not connected to this modern world, we are dead.<sup>36</sup>

Lee's words show the intense pressure and anxiety experienced by Singapore's politicians, with loss in this competitive scenario being treated as analogous to death. Inter-city comparisons and rivalries became intense motivations for politicians, planners, and developers to push forward controversial projects in the name of ensuring future benefits. Although such projects raised skepticism and resistance from the local population, speculative development backed by the logics of achieving world-class status and catching up with other pace-setting cities often helped to justify unpopular measures.

Prior to Singapore's embrace of casinos, the dominant social ethics revolved around the self-orientalizing ideology of "Asian values." Based on this, Singapore's leadership promoted thrift, industry, and filial piety as antidotes to disruptive individualism and Westernization.<sup>37</sup> Prudence and hard work were championed as key values that underpinned Singapore's earlier economic success, and citizen productivity was tied to industrious labour, competitiveness, and discipline.<sup>38</sup> But since the 1990s such sterile views of productivity and development were challenged by a new agenda of fun and pleasure, along with the expansion of neoliberal capitalism and globalization. In his 1999 National Day rally speech, Prime Minister Goh

<sup>35</sup> Koh, *IPS Forum*.

<sup>36</sup> Lee cited in Teo Xuanwei, "Lee Kuan Yew: The Economic Pragmatist," *Today Online*, 23 March 2015, accessed 30 June 2015, available <http://www.todayonline.com/rememberinglky/economic-pragmatist>.

<sup>37</sup> Literature on Singapore's "Asian values" is extensive, see for example Michael Hill, "Asian Values" as Reverse Orientalism: Singapore," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 41, no. 2 (2000): 177–190.

<sup>38</sup> John Curtis Perry, *Singapore: Unlikely Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Chok Tong made clear that fun should be actively promoted as a serious national strategy: “Singapore should be a fun place to live. People laugh at us for promoting fun so seriously. But ... if Singapore is a dull, boring place, not only will talent not come here, but even Singaporeans will begin to feel restless.”<sup>39</sup>

The fear of dullness and the anxiety that talent would not come became the necessary emotional ground on which a drastic national strategy of revamping Singapore was put on the table. Among the many initiatives to make Singapore more artistic and creative,<sup>40</sup> the opening of integrated casino resorts gave the city-state a strong boost in tourism and hospitality industries, and turned it into a cosmopolitan hub offering fun and luxury, world-class services, and a variety of leisure activities. Marina Bay Sands, the US\$5.5 billion development operated by Las Vegas Sands Group, occupied the city’s newly minted waterfront central business district. It instantly became an architectural icon, featuring three 55-storey hotel towers connected by a rooftop SkyPark and the 150-metre infinity pool where guests could “swim on top of the world.”<sup>41</sup> The US\$4.4 billion Resorts World Sentosa, managed by Malaysia’s Genting Group, features the only Universal Studios theme park in Southeast Asia, and one of the world’s largest aquariums. These two integrated resorts represent the best attractions Singapore can offer to transnational visitors. The Singapore Tourism Board publicized an editorial on “serious business, serious fun” to stress the importance of experiencing Singapore with “more than just a signed contract in hand.”<sup>42</sup> Fine dining, world-class entertainment, and luxury shopping at the resorts give visitors a “top of the world feeling.” The casino resorts are designed to be “an international playground for the rich,”<sup>43</sup> and are intended to draw in “our share of the rich and famous for which casinos might be an attraction.”<sup>44</sup>

When resort developers and urban administrators repeatedly invoke the “top of the world” experience at the IR, they are also explicitly drawing on inter-city referencing to not only cite the successful examples of casino destinations such as Las Vegas and Macau, but also to show that Singapore

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<sup>39</sup> Goh Chok Tong, “National Day Rally Address by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong,” in *First-World Economy, World-Class Home*, <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/view-html?filename=1999082202.htm>, accessed 18 July 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Lily Kong, “Ambitions of a Global City: Arts, Culture and Creative Economy in ‘Post-Crisis’ Singapore,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 18, no. 3 (2012): 279–294.

<sup>41</sup> Marina Bay Sands, “Infinity Pool,” <http://www.marinabaysands.com/-/sands-skypark/infinity-pool.html>, accessed 26 September 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Your Singapore, “Serious Business, Serious Fun,” 11 April 2016, <http://www.yoursingapore.com/editorials/serious-business-serious-fun.html>, accessed 26 September 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Trade and Industry Minister George Yeo, cited in Tracy Quek, “Why the Casino Rethink,” *The Straits Times*, 13 March 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Vivian Balakrisnan, “Senior Minister of State Vivian Balakrisnan at Parliament Sitting,” 19 April 2004, [https://www.mti.gov.sg/MTIInsights-/Documents/VB at Parliament Sitting 19apr05.pdf](https://www.mti.gov.sg/MTIInsights-/Documents/VB%20at%20Parliament%20Sitting%2019apr05.pdf), accessed 30 June 2015.

could be better. Former Minister of Trade and Industry George Yeo said in 2004 that “we don’t want to be a Las Vegas, we don’t want to be Macau. We don’t want to have the crime and the sleaze.”<sup>45</sup> Instead, according to Gillian Koh, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies in Singapore, the IR could offer a new “Singapore model” of “good clean fun” that showcases the city’s innovation and strong governance of casino urbanism. In Koh’s words:

The IR say Singapore is keeping up with the times. It affords its residents and people who want to visit good clean fun. It’s swish, it’s swanky and yet we are able to keep out the worst of it, the bad stuff. It’s really trying to show that there’s a model of how you can have your cake and eat it almost.<sup>46</sup>

The Singapore model of casino resort development becomes “a condensed set of desirable and achievable urban forms” ready to inspire the next Asian casino destinations.<sup>47</sup> As a model of selling “good clean fun,” Singapore’s casino resorts neutralize the morally questionable business of gambling by turning it into a growth sector, one that is not only economically desirable but also ethically acceptable. The Singapore model then sets new standards of casino gaming and resort entertainment in Asia, as casinos transform into “realizable utopian” projects<sup>48</sup> in other emerging destinations in Cambodia, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

### **The Politics of Having Fun**

On 14 February 2010, the first day of the lunar year of the Tiger as well as Valentine’s Day, at the auspicious hour of exactly 12:18 pm, Resorts World Sentosa unveiled itself in front of a large crowd, many of whom had waited under the tropical sun for hours just to be the first visitors to enter the casino resort. The Resorts World Sentosa casino floor provided over 500 tables and 1,300 slot and electronic gaming machines, featuring over 19 types of games. The subsequently opened Marina Bay Sands casino offered four levels of gaming spaces with over 600 tables and 1,500 machines. Both casinos witnessed solid economic performances in the first few years, generating over \$6 billion in gaming revenues, close to out-grossing the entire Las Vegas

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<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, “Ministerial Speeches and Comments for Integrated Resorts (2006),” <https://www.mti.gov.sg/MTIInsights/Pages/Ministerial-Speeches-and-Comments-for-Integrated-Resorts.aspx>, accessed 20 June 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Comments of senior research fellow Gillian Koh of the Institute of Policy Studies, cited in Muhammad Cohen, “Singapore’s Super Model,” *Inside Asian Gaming*, 6 February 2015, <http://www.asgam.com/cover-stories/item/2621-singapore-s-super-model.html>, accessed 20 June 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Ong, “Worlding Cities,” 14.

<sup>48</sup> Chua Beng Huat, “Singapore as Model,” in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, eds. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 29–54.

strip. The two IRs also reportedly contributed between 1.5 to 2 percent of Singapore's GDP, and created more than 20,000 jobs in the first five years of operation.<sup>49</sup> In 2016, despite rising regional competition and large-scale anti-corruption crackdowns in China that targeted VIP gamblers, Singapore's gambling revenues remained at an impressive US\$4 billion.<sup>50</sup> The two casino resorts also helped to significantly boost Singapore's tourism. In 2010 when the IR had just opened, tourist arrivals in Singapore reached 11.6 million, nearly a 40 percent increase from 8.3 million visitors in 2004. In 2016, tourist arrivals grew by another 40 percent to 16.4 million, with tourist spending amounting to S\$24.8 billion.<sup>51</sup> Such figures serve to endorse Singapore's successful branding and self-transformation through casino urbanism. The two casino resorts are now flagship venues in destination Singapore, showcasing a world of exclusivity and excess, luxury and indulgence. With these world-class facilities offering "top of the world" experiences, Singapore has gained a new reputation of being "the world's newest Monaco, a haven for the ultra-rich."<sup>52</sup>

The luxe and glamour of the two casino resorts help to define what fun is and how it should be experienced in cosmopolitan Singapore. Behind the glamour and excitement, however, heavy surveillance is perpetually at work, ensuring that any kind of conflict or unpleasant presence will be swiftly and sometimes forcefully removed from the scene. In our interviews with staff members who worked in the casinos' surveillance departments, we were informed about the ubiquity of surveillance cameras in the casinos and the resort premises. Several teams of surveillance staff work around the clock in shifts to observe thousands of monitors that oversee every corner of the casino. Cheating or any disturbance will result in intervention by security staff, who are trained to deal with unpleasant incidents quietly and skillfully. Richard, a Filipino surveillance officer, told us that the act of intervention required skills:

You cannot ask the security to go down and catch the person [who's making trouble]. Or else other players will be affected. Because the table will stop. If you are there, enjoying your game, and because of this one person ... you don't want to delay [the game], you don't want to stop. So

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<sup>49</sup> Linette Lim, "Are the Chips Down for Singapore's Two Casinos?" Channel News Asia, 23 May 2016, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/are-the-chips-down-for-singapore-s-two-casinos-8005866>, accessed 16 May 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Melissa Tan, "Singapore Gaming Revenues Likely Flat in 2017," *The Business Times*, 1 February 2017, <http://www.asiaone.com/business/singapore-gaming-revenues-likely-flat-2017-fitch>, accessed 16 May 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Singapore Tourism Board, *Annual Report on Tourism Statistics 2005, 2010-11 and 2017*, available <https://www.stb.gov.sg/statistics-and-market-insights/Pages/statistics-Annual-Tourism-Statistics.aspx>.

<sup>52</sup> Shibani Mahtani, "Wealth over the Edge: Singapore," *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 March 2013, <http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB100014241278873246-62404578334330162556670>, accessed 30 June 2015.

we have to minimize the impact and use our judgment about the action we take.<sup>53</sup>

Keeping the games going is crucial to the operation of fun. Protocols are designed to ensure that disciplinary actions do not interfere with having fun. Another member of the security enforcement staff told us that his daily work involved patrolling the resort in casual clothes so that his presence would not raise attention and concern. A particular task he needed to perform was to remove exhausted gamblers who might be sitting or sleeping in various corners of the casino. He said that the presence of these tired customers did not project a good image of the venue and might affect the mood and “luck” of other players.

Apart from ubiquitous surveillance and control that maintain a trouble-free environment for fun seeking, a number of governing techniques are also set in place to maintain the exclusive borders of having fun. The first is the setting up of exclusionary measures in the name of citizen protection to channel only the right kind of people into the casino space. In these two casinos, an entry levy scheme is imposed on all Singapore citizens and permanent residents if they wish to go inside the casinos. The levy scheme dictates a payment of S\$100 (US\$75) for a 24-hour entrance or S\$2,000 (US\$1,500) for an annual pass. This order is put in place as a deterrent to stop Singapore’s citizens—particularly those from the lower socio-economic classes—from entering the casino. Minister George Yeo explained in a straightforward manner that “while we want to attract international gamblers, wealthy people to come here, I don’t think we want to encourage Singaporeans to go and patronize the casino when they cannot afford it.”<sup>54</sup> Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong also made a similar point in the 2004 National Day Rally speech:

Let’s put out to say we are going to impose the following restrictions: Singaporeans below a certain income, you don’t go. I mean, if they want to travel all the way to Batam (an Indonesian island destination for Singaporeans where offshore gambling is offered), that’s them. But we will not make it easy for people to go broke and ruin their families in Singapore. But if a millionaire wants to bring another millionaire friend from China or India, I don’t think I should say no to him. It may help lessen my other taxes.<sup>55</sup>

The casino entry levy is an effective governing technique to turn away citizens who cannot afford to gamble in the casinos, and to offer the leisure

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<sup>53</sup> Richard, interview by author, tape recording, Singapore, 5 October 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, *Ministerial Speeches*.

<sup>55</sup> Lee Hsien Loong, “From National Day Rally Speech,” 22 August 2004, [https://www.mti.gov.sg/MTIInsights/Documents/PM National Day Rally Speech 22aug05.pdf](https://www.mti.gov.sg/MTIInsights/Documents/PM%20National%20Day%20Rally%20Speech%2022aug05.pdf), accessed 20 June 2015.



experience to the wealthier national and transnational class. The implicit message is that poorer citizens cannot and should not have the kind of fun that is beyond their means. They need state protection to make sure that they do not go broke and ruin their families.

The second technique governs fun itself. Pleasure and indulgence within the casinos are perfectly fine; but these should never be publicly promoted beyond the borders set at the entrance. The Casino Controls Regulations 2010 make clear that any form of promotional materials is strictly prohibited in places accessible to the general public. This prohibition includes explicit or implicit inducement to visit the casino, rewards programs, membership benefits, the enticement of new games and gaming machines, and the public announcement of winners. The casino operators are required to strictly observe these rules as part of their corporate responsibility commitment. In other casino destinations such as Macau, winning the jackpot is a regular publicity strategy to showcase the fun of winning and the excitement of the game. In Singapore, however, this is not the kind of fun for the public. Singapore's casinos are also pledged to promote "responsible gambling" using slogans such as "Play Responsibly. Know the line. Know when to stop. Stay in control."<sup>56</sup> At Resorts World Sentosa, responsible gambling ambassadors are on deck inside the casino to offer advice discreetly in private lounges. The discourse of responsibility and the containment of dangerous fun are meant to offer another layer of protection to those who could afford to pass the entrance but could not afford to play the game. In the name of protection, ineligible consumers are blocked out, monitored, removed, contained, and disciplined in private spaces. Their presence is carefully managed to have a minimal impact on other active consumers.

The discourse of "play responsibly" is welcomed by some of the casino patrons, who call themselves casual players or responsible players. They believe that having fun in the casinos entails great self-control and discipline. Without control, they claim, gambling is no longer leisure but addiction. Kathy, a Singaporean player who visited Resorts World Sentosa casino on a monthly basis with her mother and sister, claimed that her strategy of self-control was to set a limit on her budget, usually S\$200. As soon as this budget is spent, she would stop herself from playing. Although she would continue to spend another three to four hours inside the casino to maximize the experience (and the entry levy she paid), she said that she would only watch others play. Kathy claimed that this was an act of strict self-discipline. She would only bring the S\$200 in cash with her, and deliberately leave her bankcards and credit cards at home to avoid the temptation of withdrawing more cash. This personal initiative is very similar to the pre-commitment

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<sup>56</sup> Marina Bay Sands, "Responsible Gambling," 2016, <http://www.marinabaysands.com/company-information/responsible-gambling.html>, accessed 26 September 2016.

strategy available in the casinos that helps patrons to set a limit on gambling spending over a 24-hour period. The casino programme requires a formal application and enforcement by the gambling operator; the actions Kathy took require self-control as a personal approach of risk minimization. The individual actions show that playing has to be restrained within limits and that having fun naturally comes with the principle of self-responsibility.

The various forms of control that underpin fun seeking in the casinos are put in place for the sake of protection and harm minimization. How much protection these measures serve to achieve remains debatable; it is clear that some of these protective practices have produced unintended results. Common strategies of maximization, for example, are widely practiced by Singaporean patrons who are forced to pay the entry levy. Many said they felt that they needed to play extra hard, spend more and linger longer inside the casinos to “max out” the value of their levy payment. A Singaporean patron Ken said that once he “bit the bullet” and paid the annual levy of S\$2,000, he visited Marina Bays Sands casino six times in two months. He planned to clock another 14 visits for the rest of the year “to break even on my full year levy.” Doing so, “all subsequent visits will be effectively levy free.”<sup>57</sup> Another patron Jane shared that:

As a local, you feel like you want to max out the experience, because you only have that 24 hours. So you want to go there and spend as much time as you can there, and you know, try to max out the time that you’ve been given, especially if you want to make your hundred dollars worth it.<sup>58</sup>

The purpose of the casino entry levy is to discourage citizens from entering the venue and gambling. The reverse effect is that when citizens do pay and enter, they are tempted to spend a longer time inside, and gamble a lot more. Ken claimed that going to casinos was not about having a leisurely time with friends; it was about focusing on gambling and gambling alone, “exploring the variety of games” (and the slots machines for him in particular), and “savoring the experience.”<sup>59</sup> For some patrons, even eating and resting became secondary compared to the need to maximize their playtime with different game opportunities. Jane, for example, described how she and her relatives would spend eight to ten hours gambling straight without a break. They might step out for a quick meal (as food inside the casino was not free and eating outside was cheaper) or a brief shuteye, before quickly heading back to play for the rest of the available time. For these patrons, having fun became a laboured, calculated exercise that had little to do with pleasure per se. The governance around playing in the casinos perpetuates the logic

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<sup>57</sup> Ken, interview by author, tape recording, Singapore, 7 May 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Jane, interview by author, tape recording, Singapore, 20 June 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Ken, interview, 7 May 2014.

of maximization, productivity (in the sense of number of games played within a limited period of time), and pragmatism. While the mantra of responsibility has resonated with some patrons as they effectively carry out self-regulation, the supposed protective schemes could also produce perverse effects of encouraging excessive play and diminished self-control.

### **Biopolitical Borders of the Casino**

The two casino resorts in Singapore draw in on average 20,000 visitors per day. Many are the so-called “low rollers”<sup>60</sup> who like to wager small amounts of money on the main gaming floors.<sup>61</sup> For most of the low rollers to enter the casinos, they have to go through a tedious process of identity and security checking. There are two entrances at each of the casino gates, one for foreign guests and the other for Singaporean citizens and permanent residents. Foreigners are required to show their passports, with the latest immigration stamps. Local residents need to produce their identity cards and the payment records for their entry levy. This added security measure could feel bothersome and unpleasant for many, who are reluctant to have their passports or identity checked at a facility supposedly for leisure and entertainment. Many compared this process to going through immigration again. One mainland Chinese visitor, Chen, lamented that:

It feels like an institutionalized place ... I feel that it is a little too much, too restrictive and institutionalized. It doesn't feel like a place of entertainment anymore. Most of us come to visit the casinos for fun (*laiwan'r*); but before I could get inside, my bag has to be searched and my passport checked. When I went to Macau or Genting (in Malaysia), no one looked at the passport and you could enter anytime. There were no checkpoints and no security staff who would check my passport so closely. I felt offended by the way they looked up and down at my passport and at myself, as if they were suspecting whether I was the same person on the passport.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *The Economist*, “The Rise of the Low-rollers,” 7 September 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/business/21584995-although-it-has-growing-number-rivals-macau-worlds-casino-capital-set-new>.

<sup>61</sup> Based on the 2014 Gambling Participation Survey with over 3,000 Singapore residents conducted by the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG), local gambling participation has slightly declined from 47 to 44 percent and most were gambling with smaller amounts in 2014 as compared to 2011. Over 90 percent bet on average SG\$70 a month in 2014, down from SG\$212 in 2011. Over half of the local gamblers were of PSLE or lower educational qualifications, and earning an average monthly income below SG\$3,000. In both 2011 and 2014, the majority of local gamblers participated in 4D and TOTO (Singapore lotteries). Only 3 percent played on jackpot machines in the IRs in 2011, a figure which declined to 1 percent in 2014. NCPG, “Report of Survey on Participation in Gambling Activities among Singapore Residents, 2014” (Singapore: NCPG, 2015), [https://www.ncpg.org.sg/en/pdf/2014%20NCPG%20Gambling%20Participation%20Survey\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ncpg.org.sg/en/pdf/2014%20NCPG%20Gambling%20Participation%20Survey_FINAL.pdf), accessed 27 July 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Ms. Chen and Ms. Zhou, interview by author, tape recording, Singapore, 16 January 2015.

Chen's friend also joined in the conversation and complained that her backpack had to be checked upon entry. The security staff asked her specifically whether she brought a camera and food inside the bag, and searched the bag thoroughly by taking out most of the items. Just when she was convinced that the casino would not allow camera or outside food, the security staff told her that she could still bring these inside. This made her feel that the search was ridiculous and pointless. She said, "I felt like being interrogated and not welcomed at all. I am here to have a good time; but at the gate I felt like I was treated like a criminal."<sup>63</sup> Not only are passports and personal items examined at the casino entrance, one's attire is also subject to close scrutiny. A Filipino visitor Rene said that when he visited Marina Bay Sands casino wearing a baseball cap, he was stopped at the gate and asked to remove his cap or to wear it in reverse so his face could be seen clearly (by the surveillance cameras). Even at the airport immigration control, he said, this was never really an issue. A Chinese banker who used to frequent casinos in Europe complained about the dress code enforced at the casino. He felt that it was ridiculous that shorts and sandals were not allowed, given Singapore's tropical climate. According to him, most of his Chinese friends did not like carrying passports around, especially when the weather was hot and humid. Some might have visited the zoo or Universal Studios during the day and wanted the convenience of visiting the casino in the evening wearing the same casual outfits. To their dismay, without passports and in shorts, these Chinese visitors could not enter the casino.

For these ordinary low rollers, "Asia's favorite playground"<sup>64</sup> is not easily accessible. Borders make their presence felt at the enclaved space, where visitors are routinely interrogated, searched, and screened. The borders that separate the casinos and the rest of Singapore operate in similar ways as national borders at immigration, when passports, identities, belongings, and behaviours are scrutinized. These additional borders emphasize the restrictive nature of the casino enclave and the fact that access is not guaranteed for all. Only those with proper documents, those who paid fees, and those who demonstrate compliance in self-presentation can be allowed to take part in the enclaved pleasure that casinos offer.

These borders may seem pervasive for the ordinary low rollers, but they disappear altogether when the VIP players and high rollers come to Singapore to enjoy the world-class entertainment and facilities. They are welcomed in luxury and style. A CNN journalist reported what VIP players could expect from a visit to Marina Bay Sands:

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<sup>63</sup> Ms. Chen and Ms. Zhou, interview, 16 January 2015.

<sup>64</sup> "Asia's favorite playground" was Singapore's tourism campaign tagline for Sentosa before "the State of Fun."

In Singapore, VIP guests arriving in the private JetQuay CIP Terminal and Changi Terminal 1, 2 and 3 will be welcomed at the aero-bridge or tarmac upon arrival, and escorted to the arrival gate by electric buggy or limousine transfers. They will travel in luxury in our dedicated fleet of BMW 5 and 7 series to our property.<sup>65</sup>

For these transnational elite customers, immigration processes are streamlined and simplified. Their welcome is made all the more attractive with private receptions. Travelling in style, VIP guests are escorted from the airport to the casino resorts with no checking, no screening, and certainly no requirement for outfit compliance. From one enclaved space (the airport) to another, VIP guests' access to leisure is made as seamless as possible. A Singaporean guest service manager revealed that VIP players are not only entitled to private and exclusive reception to visit the casino resorts, they are also housed in exclusive hotel suites reserved especially for these elite customers.

We have suites not accessible to the public. Only invited guests can use these suites. The guest can park the car just outside the room. Everything the guest needs is covered. Change chips? We will just go to your room and ask how much chips you need. One million? Another million? No problem. They finish one million very fast.<sup>66</sup>

Elite guests play in the exclusive VIP lounges away from the public view. Apart from gambling, other forms of entertainment are readily available, including gala dinners, private parties, wedding and birthday celebrations, all custom-tailored to enhance the pleasure experience. A staff member who worked in the VIP services in one of the casinos described:

Let's say we do a birthday party and all that night, it's pretty much free, because the guest has already spent so much money [in the casino]. It's just our way of saying thank you. So for the birthday party, we collate everything. We fly in artists. [Interviewer: flying in artists?] Yeah of course we fly in artists. Singapore not enough artists, not enough exclusive artists. We'll fly in celebrities for them. We have even flown in celebrities to have mini concerts just for a family.<sup>67</sup>

For the ultra-rich, Singapore is indeed their dedicated playground, where world-class experiences are at their fingertips. The more they demonstrate their wealth and the ability to consume, the more indulgent experiences and services they are entitled to enjoy. Checkpoints, restrictions, and codes

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<sup>65</sup> Chris Anderson, "Singapore's Marina Bay Sands Hotel Bursts onto the Scene," *CNN*, 2012, <http://travel.cnn.com/singapore/marina-bay-sands-opens-477023>, accessed 20 September 2013.

<sup>66</sup> Guest service manager, interview by author, tape recording, Singapore, 16 July 2014.

<sup>67</sup> A staff member of VIP services, interview by author, tape recording, Singapore, 20 April 2014.

of conduct, which ordinary guests cannot escape, are replaced by a red carpet welcome and excess pleasure in exclusivity, luxury, and all-round entertainment. Singapore's casino resorts are another form of "super-rich enclave,"<sup>68</sup> integrated into the glamour zone traversed by the world's privileged few, and disconnected from the life worlds of the rest of the population.<sup>69</sup> The elite presence in the casino resorts, in return, endorses Singapore's emerging global status as a leisure destination and consumption heaven. For Singapore's public officials and corporate managers, the transnational "high net-worth" class helps to consolidate the privileged connections that bring Singapore closer to global power centres as a new "dream world of neoliberalism."<sup>70</sup> But such connections necessarily exclude those who fail to contribute to the place-based strategies of making a global "model" out of gambling. As Singapore's casino urbanism articulates the new alignment of wealth and privilege in leisure life, social exclusion is normalized and perpetuated based on crude calculations of affordability and individual net worth.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have focused on the biopolitical governance of the "state of fun" in Singapore, when fun and pleasure become key strategies and selling points for the city's global branding and transformation. With the opening of two luxurious casino resorts in 2010, Singapore turned itself into a glamorous destination for the privileged class and a playground for transnational tourists. Singapore's casino urbanism resonates with the "casinopolitan globalism" that helped to turn cities like Las Vegas and Macau into "fantasy destination spaces."<sup>71</sup> Singapore's vision of becoming a world-class "state of fun" has been accompanied by increasingly sophisticated measures of boundary-making between global leisure citizens and the excluded others, often the working class, low-skilled migrants, and those deemed to be at risk or lacking self-control and responsibility.<sup>72</sup> The evolving biopolitical borders coincide with the multiple checkpoints and gates set up around Singapore's casino space, ensuring the exclusive consumption of Singapore's casino urbanism by the privileged class. The fun regimes working through casinos help to normalize social exclusion, moralize disciplinary control, and give legitimacy to the new class of global consumers under the

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<sup>68</sup> Pow, "Living It Up," 382.

<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Beaverstock, Philip Hubbard and John Rennie Short, "Getting Away with It? Exposing the Geographies of the Super-rich," *Geoforum* 35, no. 4 (2004): 401–407.

<sup>70</sup> Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk, eds., *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism* (New York and London: The New Press, 2011).

<sup>71</sup> Luke, "Gaming Space," 395.

<sup>72</sup> For further discussions on these aspects, see Zhang and Yeoh, "Harnessing Exception."

operations of the state-capital apparatus.

With a particular focus on casino urbanism and the exclusive borders it generates, this paper seeks to contribute to the growing literature on the “geographies of the super-rich” and the ways in which their lifestyles and practices have a far-reaching impact on urban transformations.<sup>73</sup> When both the state and transnational corporations actively court the millionaires, high net-worth individuals, talent, and super consumers, urban infrastructure, services, and priorities shift to cater to their needs and desires. Physical and symbolic borders are a necessary product of such courtship to separate the privileged from the ordinary. In doing so, new urban projects invariably serve to reproduce gated enclaves and “neoliberal dream worlds.” Pow’s study of Singapore’s exclusive residential development Sentosa Cove shows exactly the kind of reproduction and fortification of “new geographies of wealth, privilege and exclusion.”<sup>74</sup> As high rollers and VIP guests enjoy the endless pleasures that money can buy, the low rollers and common visitors can only have a taste of the experience.

What these studies of elite spaces have not highlighted is the normalization and moralization of social exclusion in the name of protection, responsibility, and self-discipline. Although these resorts have come to represent a postcard image of the new and fun Singapore, local residents know that this new and fun Singapore is not necessarily theirs to enjoy. In our conversations with local visitors, they made clear that the casino resorts were great for Singapore’s global profile, great for tourists, and great for the economy; however, they also stated that the resorts were not meant for them. Few people really thought about their own exclusion from these enclaved resorts beyond the official line of social protection. And for those who were deemed poor, indebted, or lacking in credibility, access could be fully denied through the institutionalization of third-party exclusions.<sup>75</sup> Such class lines underpin the new social morality of wealth and deservedness.

Last, this paper hopes to show that Singapore’s exclusive casino urbanism may have broader social and political implications on issues of equality, accessibility, and urban participation. Recent scholarship on Singapore’s leisure economy and urban informality suggests that mundane night-time leisure practices play an important role in making urban life vibrant and livable.<sup>76</sup> There is no denying that everyday informal practices in urban

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<sup>73</sup> Beaverstock et al., “Getting Away with It.”

<sup>74</sup> Pow, “Living It Up,” 392.

<sup>75</sup> Singapore’s Casino Control Act (2006) gives power to the National Council on Problem Gambling to ban certain persons from entering casinos. These exclusion orders can be self-initiated, family based, or requested by a third party (such as the employer). Third Party Exclusion also applies to individuals who are recipients of public assistance or a special grant, and who have declared bankruptcy. See <http://www.cra.gov.sg/cra/apply-for-visit-limits-and-exclusion-orders.aspx/93>.

<sup>76</sup> For example, Su-Jan Yeo and Chye Kiang Heng, “An (extra)ordinary Night Out: Urban Informality, Social Sustainability and the Night-time Economy,” *Urban Studies* 51, no. 4 (2014): 712–726.

neighbourhoods help to foster greater inclusion and tolerance. But a potential danger is to further separate the so-called everyday spaces for the common citizens and the privileged geographies of the wealthy elites. When unglamorous neighbourhoods continue to represent urban informality, enclaved resorts and similar exclusive spaces will come to represent future urban formality and centrality. The unintended consequence is that urban participation will be further disjointed. The privileged class can freely participate in both the formal and informal economies of urban life, but the less privileged only have access to street life and quotidian spaces. The more serious issue is the normalization of such disjointed urban participation. When less privileged individuals are excluded from certain aspects of urban leisure life on grounds of affordability, deservedness, and responsibility, their citizenship claims are further diminished. The “state of fun” thus produces variegated spaces of consumption and belonging, and delineates sharp boundaries between the elite consumer class and the humble citizens. Singapore’s casino urbanism makes clear that fun and leisure life are never apolitical; it shows the extent to which global city spaces are mobilized by speculative market growth and elite consumption. At the same time, discourses of order and control, responsibility and care are reinforced not to address the corrosive effects of speculative urban development, but to manage the already marginalized population.

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