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"*Si Geena*" (Brat): Un-Social Digital Juveniles' Episodic Resistance in Singapore

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Abstract

This paper explores episodes of provocative online articulations and the accompanying angry public reactions as part of the cultural politics of juvenile online resistance in contemporary Singapore. Rather than viewing such delinquency as 'youth deficits', this paper seeks a literary-culturalist standpoint in exploring the uninhibited audacity of these public online displays. We perceive such performances as reflecting the critical and socially unrestrained emotional subjectivities of 'youth mirroring deficits' of the 'Emperor's new clothes'. The authors propose to appropriate the colloquial Singaporean Chinese Hokkien term of *Si Geena* (brat), a label commonly used to describe these offending personalities, to frame the dynamics of youth resistance, and new media in Singapore. *Si Geena* are often un-social digital juvenile provocateurs baiting moral outrage and public indignation. In turn, societal responses to the *Si Geena*'s episodic resistance reveal the contradictions, insecurities, and volatility of Singapore's reactive public.

Introduction: "Hell, No!"

On 23 March 2015, Singapore officially announced the passing of the founding father and first prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, whose legacy has been synonymous with the prosperous republic. As the bustling city fell into an unusual solemnity during the week of official mourning, less reverent opinions surfaced openly on social media. Internet users reacted to some of these posts with discomfort, but one particular YouTube video posted by a then-sixteen-year-old Singaporean-Chinese vlogger, Amos Yee, received the angriest responses (Wong 2015a). Although Yee was previously considered an undeferential child prodigy filmmaker (Rasul 2011), on the second day of national mourning for Lee, the teen posted a nine-minute video diatribe against the late prime minister. Hardly containing his excitement, Yee opened his vlog with the proclamation 'Lee Kuan Yew is finally dead!' (Yee 2015a), followed by an expletive-laden speech filmed from his bedroom that caused significant backlash on social media and created online furore that diverted public attention from Lee's funeral. Yee was arrested, detained, and subsequently jailed for a month under the Sedition Act for making derogatory remarks of Christianity during his video commentary on Lee (ibid.). His case was not only the subject of active discussion in Singapore (Radics & Poon 2016), but also received international news coverage. Public demonstrations in his defence were held in Hong Kong and Taiwan as the 'youngest victim' of political repression (Sung 2015), thus amplifying the reach of his youthful monologue.

A year later, Yee was sentenced to jail for six weeks under the Sedition Act again for 'hurting the feelings of Christians and Muslims' (Hussain 2016). This time, he applied successfully for political asylum in the United States, which was met with bemusement by the Singapore government as 'a prerogative of the United States to take in people who engage in hate speech' (Ministry of Home Affairs 2017). When asked whether he wanted to continue his studies should he receive asylum, Yee said, 'Hell, no! The plan is to make more and more videos. I came here to escape the horrible anti-free speech laws in Singapore' (Ghosh 2017).

Throughout this episode, one phrase that is a common refrain in the flurry of online comments and responses to postings and news relating to Amos Yee is *si geena*. A term in Min-nan (known in Singapore as 'Hokkien dialect'), a language group spoken in southern Fujian and other areas in south-eastern China and by emigrants and their descendants from these areas, *si geena* (or *si gin na* in colloquial Singaporean English and 死囡仔 in simplified Chinese) literally translates to 'dead kid' but connotes the meaning of being a 'brat'. It is used in a tone of exasperation to express disapproval over actions by young

people that are deemed troublesome and disrespectful, and it is also used as a label for youths such as Yee.

With *si geena* as a literary reference, this article frames the manifestation of trends in juvenile intransigence on the internet as the cultural politics of youthful expression and resistance on social media in Singapore. Behaviourist approaches to juvenile delinquency have often been framed in terms of 'youth deficits' (Earl & Kimport 2009). However, we posit a literary-culturalist perspective to explore the seemingly uninhibited audacity of these public online displays and performances, and perceive these incidents to reflect the critical and socially unrestrained youthful emotional subjectivities of 'youth-mirroring deficits'—such deficits in turn often expose and amplify otherwise latent social contradictions and tensions in the country. As a result, these juveniles' episodic resistance on digital platforms expose the nakedness of the emperor supposedly wearing new clothes in entrenched hegemonic structures behind the veneer of liberalization and openness. Rather than using social media as a marketplace to communicate ideas, such postings instead intentionally provoke the backlash from a reactive public that has consequently also manifested its presence online.

The following sections in this paper delve into the conceptualization of *si geena* as juvenile digital resistance and antagonism, and its location within scholarly discussions on youth in social media. As part of Singapore's evolving cyber cultures, this study features several case studies of provocative online postings by young people, who generally exhibit subversive sexual and social morality and political culture, and it interrogates the public responses to *si geena*.

Youth and the Digital-Linguistic Turn

The digital and internet revolution has created a new generation of net-worked, savvy young users who forge new frontiers as they level and disrupt existing social hierarchies in information and communication (Cuconato & Waechter 2012; Ridder & Bauwel 2015; Storsul 2014; Wojcieszak & Smith 2014). Poyntz (2009) perceives such youthful creative participation in political communications as part of Hannah Arendt's (2009: 370-73) notion of democratic habituation against 'regimes of visibility'. This participation is also critical in shifting the scholarly trajectory from the 'youth deficit' model in often personalized criminological and behaviourist approaches to a framework of youth politics as a more meaningful cultivation of emotional citizenship (Tang 2015). These trends are also seen in the Asia-Pacific region, where young people are

increasingly at the forefront of shaping digital cultural politics and deploying digital platforms for public activism (Lin et al. 2010; Liu 2011; Park, Kim, & Na 2015). The Umbrella movement in Hong Kong and the Sunflower movement in Taiwan have pushed young people to the forefront of activism that opposes the top-down approaches to citizenship (Tang 2015: 24) and depict youths as impersonal instruments in rationalized societies (McLaren 2014: 154). Joo (2018: 419) expands on Tilly's (2008) 'repertoire of contention' by framing the multifaceted nature of youth-based protest cultures in East Asia as 'political opportunity structures' that are available to young people at different historical junctures.

These trends suggest the role of the internet in engendering autonomous, democratic, diverse, participatory digital public spheres that, following Habermas (1989), replace an older and more hierarchically representative counterpart (Trenz 2009). However, as much as social media creates new frontiers for the next generation, its porousness makes it susceptible to colonization (Siapera & Veikou 2016; Valtysson 2012) by the existing mainstream of the state-buttressed moral majority that we call the 'reactive public'. We illustrate this in Singapore, where intergenerational tensions play out in episodes like that of Amos Yee.

As one of the Asian miracle economies with a highly educated and wired populace, Singapore shares some historical trajectories with other states in East Asia (Leung 2007; Robertson 2002). However, citizens in Singapore experience tighter regulations that severely limit autonomous political mobilization (Lim 2013; Zhang 2013), as evidenced by the cases we list below. The People's Action Party (PAP), the longest ruling party in Singapore, has fostered a global reputation for being highly interventionist and paternalistic. The state has extended its instruments of social mobilization and control to young people. In parallel with the institutional and social rewards from excelling in academic and sports activities are penalties for deviance and delinquency (Chong 2010; George 2007; Tan 2007a, 2016; Vello 2004). This dichotomy became more acute when deviance was defined not just as criminal behaviour but also as any behaviour deemed to resist the state-prescribed notion of public morality. Several incidents concerning such issues occurred during the 1990s. They include public disapproval by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of a television commercial that showed a boy haughtily challenging his father (Hoon 2004: 170); outcry over a sex marathon performance by the US-based Singaporean Annabel Chong (Grace Quek), who was then in her early twenties (The Must Share News Team 2018); and debates over the caning of Michael Fay, an American teenager convicted of vandalism in Singapore in 1994 (Lal 1994). In the 1990s, government-controlled newspapers and television stations dominated the

media (George 2012; Lee 2010), with almost no independent media outlets for these offending parties to air their perspectives.

Beginning with its infrastructural planning in the Intelligent Island Masterplan in 1991 (Lim 2001; Telecoms Infotech Forum 2007), the internet was deliberately framed as a more liberal space, as the state opted for a 'light touch' approach (Koh 2015) in its management. The plan also opened new frontiers of connectivity and dialogue between otherwise disconnected users through national education, state-wide technological infrastructure, and pedantic messages spread by the state-controlled media. As youth education advanced alongside rising internet penetration rates, and as smartphone ownership peaked at more than 90% (National Youth Council 2014; Singapore Department of Statistics 2015), a more articulate and consciously aware young citizenry began to emerge and make its presence felt on the internet. It is at this juncture that intergenerational tensions arose online between the state and digital society. Although Singapore's legal definition of juvenile ranges from 7 to 16 years of age (The Law Society of Singapore 2017), we wish to position the juvenile here as one between 12 to 20 years of age. Youths in this category would have generally completed primary education but fall below the minimum voting age of 21 years old that formally acknowledges the political maturity that comes with adulthood (Lim 2019b).

We posit a more nuanced understanding of Singapore's digital youth culture through some of the milestone controversies generated by the internet activities of specific youths. Other scholars have found that some young people restrain themselves or avoid 'doing politics online' out of fear of causing offence (Clark & Marchi 2017: 57; Gershon 2014); in contrast, the *si geena* are eager to provoke controversy. Episodic, provocative, and audacious, this often individualized, sporadic expression is largely intended to be outrageous. Although some of the actions may be offensive, with some bloggers even being criminally charged, our emphasis is the subversive undertone of these commentaries and postings that oppose socio-political norms, hierarchies, and notions of public decency and sexual morality. Within this context, we propose a category of "un-social" digital juvenile antagonists in Singapore who are neither activists nor delinquents.

Often acting individually with the intention of garnering public attention, rather than mobilizing politically, these antisocial digital juveniles express their disaffection with the status quo and spontaneously challenge existing social norms and public morality on the internet. When their postings gain public attention, they can create controversy, usually among older Singaporeans, appalled by the audacity of commentaries by those whom they consider mere children. In highlighting the latent intergenerational tensions expressed

online, Singapore's social critic and academic Cherian George opined (2017: 37), 'I suspect [Amos] Yee's age (and his annoyingly affected American accent) was also held against him. He may have pushed all the wrong buttons among older Singaporeans already disturbed by youth who seem too spoiled and smart-alecky' (colloquial adjective for smart-alec).

'Death-Deserving Child' and the 'Emperor's New Clothes': Framing Singapore's Juvenile Digital Resistance

For the purpose of this discussion, we present the writings online by a Singaporean poet and an activist to develop a more locally grounded and dynamic approach for framing the politics of social media and insolent youth in Singapore. The poet Gwee Li Sui has assumed a new role in the social media landscape as an advocate for the creolization of the English language in Singapore. Known commonly as Singlish, this colloquial language reflects organic multicultural expression that the state sees as improper 'standard English' (Goh & Woo 2002; Wong 2015b). The second set of writings we examine come from Miak Siew, a social activist and pastor at the progressive Free Community Church (Ong 2013), who borrowed the idea of the 'emperor's new clothes' to describe Singapore politics.

Previously, their audiences were limited to small isolated literary and social circles, but Gwee and Siew, both in their forties at the time of this study, probably found new audiences on the internet. Observing the frequent use of *si geena* to describe Yee, Gwee (2015) says the expression means a 'death-deserving child', who is

> not just any kid but a delinquent or one in the making. He or she is naughty, rude, brash, and, above all, socially irresponsible. A *si geena* spares no thought for what good Confucian folks value: order, authority, tradition, manners, and respect for elders. When you call someone a *si geena*, you're maintaining a gap in maturity between yourself and that joker. You're positioning yourself as a functional member of society while the other guy becomes a public nuisance. In paternalistic Singapore, *si geena* has even developed political nuances and can be used to show support for the views and values of senior state leaders ... *Si geenas* are *si geenas* because they're thinking and acting in ways opposed to how we're all expected to think and act.

In Amos Yee's Facebook update from his remand, he mentioned being called a '*si gin na*' by fellow inmates, and the label turned into a badge of honour (Yee

2015b). Yee's further intentions were to combine two different references to resistance: that of the haughty and authoritarian position of *si geena* because of their bold challenge to the state and the status quo (Gwee 2015) and that of seemingly more innocent juvenile insolence, which unwittingly exposed the nakedness of power, as implied by Siew's reference to 'the emperor's new clothes' (Siew 2015). Siew was one of the speakers at the state-approved Speaker's Corner at Hong Lim Park during a rally on 5 July 2015, held just a day before his verdict, to call for Yee's acquittal as a minor. On this occasion, Siew (2015) spoke of his encounter with Yee and described him as just an annoying teenager who should not be criminalized for his intransigence. Inverting the apparent individual gormlessness of Hans Christian Anderson's tale 'The Emperor's New Clothes' to connote silenced subjects in the face of the sovereign's nakedness of power, the community pastor spoke of the new amnesic and audacious youth who have yet to face the repressive brunt of state power. Referring to the arbitrary detentions of Catholic social workers and other activists in the 1987 'Marxist Conspiracy' (Liew & Pang 2015), Siew stated: 'But there was a generation who grew up not knowing of the procession and the executions twenty-five years ago, and many started to laugh at the emperor's nakedness. In rage, the emperor again ordered for them to be rounded up and executed' (Siew 2015).

We use 'The Emperor's New Clothes' as a framework for understanding the contradiction in the dominant narratives of 'opening up' by successive generations of PAP leadership. Upon assuming the premiership in respectively 1990 and 2004, Prime Ministers Goh Chok Tong (Singapore Government Press Release 2003) and Lee Hsien Loong sought to each define their leadership styles through catchwords like, in Goh's case', 'a kinder and gentler' Singapore and, in Lee's case, a more 'inclusive society' (Law 2015). Minister of Parliament Heng Swee Keat, who is slated to succeed Lee as the next prime minister, also aims to achieve more 'consultative leadership' and openness (Au-Yong 2018; Tham 2017). However, the many accounts of straitjacketed media and school cultures coupled with growing social inequality show that these exhortations are either inadequate or contradictory, and they are best encapsulated by the term used by Cherian George (2017): 'Singapore incomplete'. One incident reflected the evidence of the state's paternalistic attitude: an MP of the ruling party labelled critics of government policies '*si gui kia*' (死鬼仔, literally translated as 'death-deserving little devils') (Tan 2019), a term similar to *si geena*, and this sentiment was seconded by Heng (Lim 2019a).

In the highly regulated and conservative society of contemporary Singapore, where the politics of cultural citizenship is overlaid with ethno-socially defined channels of participation and responsibility (Chua 2007), discourse on social liberalization continues to be met with scepticism. In the digital sphere, as

activists and bloggers face legal prosecution for their online activities, the supposed 'light touch' appears to have turned into the heavy hand of the state. In this respect, through their provocative postings, which have not yet been tamed by the established boundaries of cultural politics, the *si geena* have tested both the claims and the extent of society's openness to and tolerance of dissenting voices.

George (2017: 30) attributes the less tolerant climate to both the state and the moral public that buttress it, where 'at least if someone engages in political critique, the government still provides abundant reason to fear. But in many areas of life, especially to do with culture and identity, members of the public are the ones ready to punish any perceived offence'. In part actively moulded and mobilized by the PAP government for decades (Tan 2017), this seemingly 'silent majority' became angrily noisy online with the *si geenas*. Hence, when viewed not just as a coincidental intersection but a discursive convergence, the critical commentaries of Gwee and Siew help to frame the juvenile insolence of *si geena* as indications of Singapore's otherwise opaque and unarticulated hegemonic structures.

Genres of *Si Geena*: Leaky Bodies, Keyboard Warriors, and Unruly Jesters

To understand the evolution and culture of *si geena* in Singapore, we look at controversial media spectacles involving young people on the internet who have demonstrated antisocial behaviour in the past twenty years. In the rest of the paper, we introduce three kinds of *si geena* and discuss three iconic personalities who have now been memorialized in Singaporean society as *si geena*. The first kind, 'leaky bodies', consists of young people who toe the line of teen celibacy and sexual agency amidst the state-sponsored abstinence-only sex education that emphasizes medicalized discourses, best characterized in the internet age by Isabella Chen (a Sarong Party Girl) and sex blogger Alvin Tan and his then-partner Vivien Lee. The second genre is that of 'keyboard warriors', comprising young people who contest the family fabric in Singapore, which is framed as a conservative Confucian society, by engaging in public shaming as a strategy for ensuring compliance and becoming public pariahs, best characterized by Wee Shu Min, a blogger who also happened to be the daughter of a politician from the ruling party (Charissa 2006). The third genre is that of 'unruly jesters', young people who use digital media to test their freedom of speech, engage in clickbait frivolity, and indulge in subversive performance on their digital estates, best characterized by Stephanie Micayle

TABLE 1   *Si Geena* types

Type	Name and age	Controversial activity	When
Leaky bodies	Isabella Chen, aka Sarong Party Girl (17yo)	Sex blogs, in particular describing controversial encounters; posting nude photos of herself	2004
Keyboard warriors	Wee Shu Min (17yo)	'Politically incorrect' blogposts	2006
Keyboard warriors	Aaron Tan (18yo)	Expletive-filled Facebook video taunting a younger teen who had flirted with his ex-girlfriend	2011
Leaky bodies	Alvin Tan (24yo) and Vivien Lee (23yo)	Explicit sex blogs	2012
Keyboard warriors	Ridhwan Azman (19yo)	Photographic evidence of him physically abusing his girlfriend went viral	2013
Unruly jesters	Stephanie Koh, aka Stephanie Micayle (21 years old)	When interviewed after appearing in a South Korean reality show, in which she displayed 'bad behaviour', posted a video expressing that she was 'not proud to be Singaporean'	2014

(a reality TV star of viral rant video fame) and Amos Yee. Table 1 summarizes descriptions of these *si geena*, including the kind of *si geena* they represent, their legal names and monikers, the year and age at which they gained viral fame, and the controversies that made them infamous.

Leaky Bodies: Teen Celibacy, Abstinence-Only Education, and Sexual Agency

Isabella Chen, better known by her self-proclaimed title 'Sarong Party Girl' (SPG) and her blog moniker 'Miss Izzy', was seventeen-years-old when she began blogging about her sexual escapades and posting nude photos of herself in 2004. In the Singapore vernacular, an SPG is a local or Asian woman who dates only white men, whom they consider superior to other men (Goh & Woo 2002), akin to what has been called 'yellow fever', in which White men exclusively date Asian women (Shoji 2013; Yuan 2014). The stereotypical SPG speaks with a fake American or British accent, dresses provocatively, is a gold digger, and believes dating White men brings her social respectability.

In particular, Isabella rose to fame for her posts on multiple blogs on her preference for White expats and her controversial views on sex and religion. She explains her preference for White men, asserting that they are 'walking credit cards', who are 'better then local men in bed' and usually have their own home whereas 'local boys live with their parents' (isachen 2004). In her post 'How to Be a Super SPG' (Sarong Party Girl 2 2004), Isabella writes that not all *angmohs* (Singaporean colloquialism for White foreigners) are 'rich, nice, interesting and pretty—in order of importance', but some are 'definitely worth snagging'. At that time, Isabella's topless, nude, and provocative photos circulated on numerous internet forums (now removed). However, on various local and expat blogs, personal accounts of Isabella shed light on her personality 'behind the scenes', including one post by her platonic Singapore housemate of two years who spoke of her intelligence and wit (Expat at Large 2010). Later, Isabella was briefly the sex columnist for *FHM* magazine (Hudson 2015: 27) and starred in *Pleasure Factory*, a 2007 movie about casual sex in 'Singapore's red light district' (IMDB 2016).

Malaysian sex vlogging/blogging duo, 'Alvivi', or Alvin Tan and Vivian Lee, became infamous in Singapore for over three years beginning in 2012. Alvin was a twenty-four-year-old reading law at the National University of Singapore (NUS) with a prestigious scholarship from the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and his twenty-three-year-old girlfriend Vivian also lived in Singapore. The couple had been uploading videos and images of their explicit sex acts on their dedicated blog 'Sumptuous Erotica', their YouTube channel 'Alvin Vivian', and their Facebook page 'Alvivi.Swingers'. Their tongue-in-cheek but graphic videos included topics such as '7 Foreplay Tips to Inject New Fun into Your Old Sex Life' and 'Singaporeans Talk about Vaginas' (Alvin Vivian 2013). When their viral videos gained the attention of the university, Alvin was forced to take a leave of absence and face the university's disciplinary proceedings for 'uploading pornographic pictures and videos' (AsiaOne 2012). Despite speculation about his expulsion—which was advocated by several internet commentators—Alvin's scholarship was revoked, and he was made to repay the 'full non-subsidised fees as a foreign student' for the remainder of his studies (AsiaOne 2012). The university deemed his acts 'inappropriate ... and detrimental to the reputation and dignity of the university', and Heng Swee Keat, who was then the Minister of Education, chastised him for behaviour that was 'reprehensible and unbecoming of a scholar' (AsiaOne 2012). In other words, the state had made an error in investing in Alvin despite his academic calibre because his personal values and comportment were not consistent with those of a good student in Singapore. Alvin and Vivian were charged under the Film Censorship Act, the Sedition Act, and the Penal Code in Singapore (New

Paper 2014). It was reported that they were even hawking self-branded mer-
chandise, such as T-shirts with the slogans 'sex is good' and 'Sexcussions' (Vice
2015). Subsequently, they continued to dominate headlines when Alvin 'caught
her having sex with his best friend at her apartment', when Vivian declared
that she was 'not sexually exclusive' to him but only 'emotionally exclusive'
(Stomp 2014). This coincided with another scandal in which Alvin 'purport-
edly fled to the United States to seek political asylum' after being investigated
for sedition for mocking the religious observance of Ramadhan in Malaysia
(Astro Awani 2014), and his mother subsequently forfeited $8,000 after he had
skipped bail (AsiaOne 2014).

     In her work on feminism and bioethics, Margrit Shildrick (1997) conceptu-
alizes a 'leaky' body as one that requires discipline and restoration to return
to order, as defined by the standards of health care, the morality of society, or
the legality of the state. By this definition, to the Singapore state, the *si geena*
are 'leaky bodies'. In Singapore, sex education is the purview of the Ministry
of Education (MOE), which oversees the syllabus at educational institutions.
In general, the MOE promotes a conservative approach focused on medical-
ized discourses of prevention based on 'social and emotional skills', protection
against 'sexual advances and abuse', and avoiding 'sexual experimentation'
that leads to 'teenage pregnancies and STIs/HIV' (Ministry of Education 2016).
Abstinence is preached except between heterosexual married couples for the
purposes of reproduction and maintaining family stability. Alongside this
formal curriculum, the MOE considers parents, schools, students, and com-
munities the key stakeholders in sustaining sex education. Yet the *si geena* are
'leaky bodies' who represent contagions of excessive sexuality and 'matter out
of place' (Douglas 2002) that needs to be restored because of their bold pub-
licness in subverting state rhetoric and control over young bodies. However
short-lived against Singapore's sexual hegemony, the *si geena* push more
autonomous narratives of desire and pleasure in the youthful border zones of
adventurous sexuality.

Keyboard Warriors: Family Fabric, Shaming for Compliance, and Public Pariah

For more than a decade, the internet-scape in Singapore has been filled with
teenagers who have been called out and publicly shamed for their purportedly
offensive behaviour online. Several incidents include the ten-minute YouTube
monologue threats of eighteen-year-old Aaron Tan against a fourteen-year-old
counterpart (Yahoo News, 2011), and the online circulation of photographic
evidence then nineteen-year-old social media influencer and actor Ridhwan
Azman physically abusing his girlfriend (AsiaOne 2013). However, the most

significant episode was in 2006 involving Wee Shu Min, an eighteen-year-old teenager at one of Singapore's elite schools. Responding in her personal blog to an online lament by Derek Wee, a thirty-five-year-old concerned about his job prospects, Wee wrote (Online Citizen 2006):

> Dear derek is one of many wretched, undermotivated, overassuming leeches in our country, and in this world. one of those who would prefer to be unemployed and wax lyrical about how his myriad talents are being abandoned for the foreigner's, instead of earning a decent, stable living as a sales assistant. it's not even about being a road sweeper. please, get out of my elite uncaring face.

Underlying her disdain was an elitism associated with the discourses on competitive meritocracy promoted, in some respects systematically, by the state in filtering and attracting what it identifies as talent within and outside Singapore. As angry reactions poured in, the teenager's blogpost attracted significant attention both online and in the mainstream media. Initially, her father, a PAP MP, defended his daughter's post, claiming that some people cannot take the 'brutal truth'. But days later, he backtracked and issued an unreserved apology, and his daughter was also reportedly counselled by her school (Tan 2008: 23). After closing down her blog, Wee became persona non-grata online, and her father subsequently resigned from office. This episode heralded a new level of juvenile intransigence and resistance in airing politically incorrect opinions, accompanied by the reactive politics of public shaming and stigmatization in reaction to such posts. Subsequently, although no teenagers from a politically or economically elite background made headlines, the politics of the outraged or the otherwise banal online exhibition of objectionable micro-aggressive politics continued.

The *si geena* who are 'keyboard warriors' are on the border between cyber-bullying and being cyber-bullied. They present themselves as rash and loud-mouthed youth on the internet who taunt other youth, violate their parents, and hit their partners. Yet the repercussions of their hyper-publicity often escalate into internet users naming, shaming, and cyber-bullying the *si geena* in return, but on a national scale (Family & Life 2014; Sin 2016; Teng 2015). Part of this rise is attributed to the 'naming and shaming' culture proliferate on the digital journalism portal *Stomp* that is managed by Singapore Press Holdings, in which citizens are encouraged—and at times monetarily rewarded—to contribute to human interest stories via email, WhatsApp, and mobile phones (Stomp 2016). Newspaper reports highlight the blurring boundaries between 'civic duty' and 'cyber-bullying', in which public humiliation is provoked by internet users' 'sense of justice' (Kok 2015). In this sense, the hyper-visible

reactions of *si geena*—whether in publishing follow-up taunts, showing no remorse, or expressing regret and apologies—are a reflection of how such public but marginalized youth are repeatedly shamed and silenced on the internet for failing to perform 'cyber wellness' (Ministry of Education 2014) and 'integrity' and 'resilience' (Media Literacy Council 2016) as stipulated by the state, refusing the normative obedience of their peers, and being unabashed about the complex provocations of youth. What these episodes reflect is not the character and behavioural flaws of the individual young people involved. Rather, they reflect both broader disaffection by the larger public with Singapore's political culture, vented at Wee Shu Min, and the cyber-bullying culture that lurks beneath Singapore's clean and orderly image.

Unruly Jesters: Calibrated Freedoms, Clickbait Frivolity, and Subversive Performance

Although the case of Amos Yee's YouTube video attracted international attention because of its call for freedom of expression for young people on the internet, similar cases have also emerged as young Singaporeans go online to share opinions that are deliberately contentious. In 2014, then twenty-one-year-old Stephanie Koh, better known by her internet pseudonym Stephanie Micayle, produced a viral video on YouTube lasting 13:50 titled 'Why I Am Not Proud to Be Singaporean'; the original has since been taken down, but it has been reposted on several other YouTube accounts. At that time, Stephanie was also a contestant in a South Korean reality show, a singing competition in which she became infamous for her bad attitude and behaviour (azliah 2014; Lee 2013). Her viral video was an extension of something she expressed in an interview, when reporters asked whether she was bothered by viewers who believed her behaviour was giving Singapore 'a bad name' (Lee 2014a). In response, Stephanie said (ibid.):

> I wouldn't actually bother about representing this country because to be honest, I don't really feel proud to be a Singaporean.... Everyone here is so small minded, everyone here is so submissive, everyone here don't know how to think outside the box, no one here is creative, everyone here just thinks the same way, full of the same rules, and it's too rigid for my taste.

In the video, Stephanie offered several evaluations of Singaporean society in a very opinionated commentary backed by anecdotal experience that Singapore 'is no place for an artist' and that Singaporeans 'are narrow minded', 'are not creative', 'are submissive', 'are not happy', 'are not nice people', and 'just follow the rules'. Many internet users responded by attacking Stephanie for being ungrateful, arrogant, and rude (ibid.). After her viral video and the national

controversy that followed, Stephanie was invited to give a series of video inter-views about her origins and strong opinions with various digital new networks (Boom Video 2014; Native Canvas 2014), and a short student-made documen-tary focused on Stephanie's thoughts on her family and Singapore as 'home' (dtvmsp 2014).

Although she expressed that her intention for making the video was to 'spark a social revolution' (Lee 2014a), this sentiment was not widely shared. An article on the *Asian Parent*, a website for sharing parenting resources, also discouraged Stephanie's behaviour, exhibited moral panic that more young people would fail to 'note the overflowing good of our country', and encour-aged parents to 'ensure that [their] child learns to appreciate and respect his or her roots' (Pasupathy, n.d.). In response to the media furore, Stephanie called upon the media to 'stop slamming her' and blamed a local newspaper for mak-ing her 'sound like such a bad person' and putting her 'on headline news' (Lee 2014a). A month later, Stephanie made viral news again when a family brawl with her aunt was widely publicized in newspapers (Lee 2014b), including pho-tos of some bruises inflicted (Lollipop 2014) and subsequent legal action (Chiu 2014). At the time of writing, Stephanie still maintains her YouTube channel as a musician (Steph Micayle 2012) but has not played at any mainstream venues since her public controversy.

Stephanie Koh's consecutive controversies—bad behaviour during a singing contest, contentious interview comments, a viral video, a family brawl—have perhaps made it difficult for her to reframe her public persona. Additionally, she seems to sideline her music career when she comments on social issues in her personal capacity, as opposed to mobilizing her public musician per-sona, thus constructing her master status as a *si geena* rather than a pop star. Subsequently, aspiring young singers in Singapore have consciously avoided making commentaries similar in tone to those from Koh, probably out of the fear of sharing her marginalization. Nonetheless, as in the other cases featured here, she revealed that the toxic reactions to her online commentaries are the new boundaries in the politics of gratitude and deference that are expected from Singaporean youths.

Conclusion: the Bad Millennial *Si Geena* and Their Public Encounters

In the 2016 Olympic Games, twenty-one-year-old Singaporean swimmer Joseph Schooling beat veteran American Michael Phelps in the 100-metre freestyle to win Singapore its first Olympics gold medal. Schooling was given a

rare mention in Parliament to thunderous applause by the country's national leaders, and the young athlete became a model for youth in the republic. As he travelled around the country in his victory parade, pedantic accounts of Schooling's back story began streaming in, such as his parents' extraordinary effort to obtain a deferment for him from mandatory national military service, or the need for his family to move abroad to enable their son to pursue sports over education. His narrative of success seemed to have eventuated not because of, but despite the state's prescribed path for young people. Although the publicly affable and attractive athlete was no *si geena*, his trajectory reveals the struggle of youths in Singapore against the scripted dominant discourse. In this respect, the resistance of Schooling's fellow young citizens on social media is part of the larger resistance by those whose performative arena is the internet, rather than in the sports hall.

This article explicates online acts and expression of juvenile resistance through the broader discourse of youth identities and political participation in Singapore. Between the role model Schooling and the disdained Amos Yee is a spectrum of articulations and performative strategies that seek to shock and expose state hegemony, through acts of defiance to unstated social norms and taboos. To a large extent, social media has given this generation of otherwise unnoticed and silenced teenagers a critical platform and canvas for projecting their voices and acts to the public sphere with an unprecedented level of attention. In an online tongue-in-cheek chart that circulated widely as a meme, the 'Millennial Index of Singaporean youth public personalities' ranked athletes such as Schooling as 'saving the world' at the top and Amos Yee at the bottom of the scale as the bad millennial 'Destroying the World' (Junkasia 2018). Whereas the athletes were endeared to the mainstream public, Yee and the other *si geena* examined here—the jesters, leakers, and protesters—have made and will continue to make their mark on the internet to the annoyance of the public. Although they may have garnered some public sympathy and admiration with their provocative performances, the online antics of the *si geena* alone does not create the kind of critical affective counter-public that will resist dominant discourses actively, as envisaged by the potential of the social media (Clark & Marchi 2017: 116). Rather, these episodes have illuminated the digital presence of a vociferous moral majority in the dominant public. George (2017: 42) affirms that the 'baying for vengeance [by the public] was ultimately less excusable than the antics of a psychologically troubled child' and reflects on the anachronism of Singapore's insult laws used in charging. At the same time, the episode with Amos Yee helped to show bystanders—'including other youths armed with more IT savvy than common sense—about where art and politics end, and bratty self-destructiveness

and impulsiveness begins' (ibid.). In offending public morality and exposing the state's fangs, the *si geena* of Singapore have created a new category of "un-social" digital juvenile antagonists.

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