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**Living as One United Peoples**

*A Study of the Practices of Integration and Grassroots Volunteering in Singapore*

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Living as One United Peoples:  
A Study of the Practices of Integration and  
Grassroots Volunteering in Singapore

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A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for  
award of the degree of PhD in Politics in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law

October 2020

Word Count: 81,297 words

## Abstract

This dissertation explores how grassroots volunteers, known as Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs) aid in the integration of migrants into Singaporean society. Through using a combined approach of narrative interviews and participant observation techniques, the research finds that INCs occupy a liminal position between the state and their local communities. They work under the purview of and with funding from the Singapore government to implement state integration policy while simultaneously being embedded within their local community. This dissertation argues that INCs use their liminal position between state and society to promote migrant integration into the Singaporean nation by promoting integration into two smaller subnational units. Firstly, the volunteers welcome new citizens to the neighbourhood and introduce them to the often unspoken norms of community living in Singapore, which in turn strengthens new citizens' sense of rootedness to their neighbourhood and bonds with their Singaporean neighbours. Secondly, as INCs educate newcomers about Singapore's multiculturalism and embody the ethos of accepting difference in everyday interactions, new citizens feel that they are welcome in Singapore despite coming from different cultural backgrounds.

This research thus provides two key contributions to existing research on migrant integration through its study on integration practices carried out by INCs. Firstly, it brings into focus meso-level actors, who are often neglected by scholarship that tends to focus either on macro, top-down policy approaches by the state or everyday micro practices of cross-cultural interaction, by arguing that these actors act as a vital bridge between state policy and everyday life. Second, it argues that promoting integration into smaller subnational collectives of neighbourhoods and ethnic groups, rather than threatening national cohesion, can lead to a greater sense of national belonging and integration.

**Key words:** Integration; migration; nationalism; multiculturalism; volunteers; street-level bureaucracy; Singapore

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: .....DATE: .....

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, thank you to all the people who participated in this study. You were immensely generous with your time and open with sharing your experiences. I learnt a lot from you and have gained a new appreciation for all that you do for Singapore.

Thank you to my supervisors, Professors Tariq Modood and Jon Fox. Your unwavering support, words of encouragement and constructive advice were invaluable in the completion of this project. Thank you especially for being so supportive of my efforts to balance my PhD and family life. I could not have asked for a better pair of supervisors who have helped me grow professionally and intellectually over the past four years.

To David and Hannah, both of you are my sun and stars. David, I know that these four years have not been easy for you, especially when we were living apart. Thank you for your constant love and care, and for all that you do for our family. Hannah, you won't be reading this for a while, but thank you for helping me crystallise my deadlines. Your arrival was the most effective motivation that I had to get a move on with the dissertation. Thank you both for cheering me up on long and frustratingly unproductive days, and reminding me that there is a lot more to life than the PhD. I love both of you.

To the rest of my family both in relation through blood and marriage, I cannot thank you enough. Juggling the PhD and family life is an impossible task alone. I, and our family of three, would not have survived without your emotional and practical support, especially over the past year with Hannah's arrival. Thank you especially to David's and my parents for taking care of Hannah on weekdays so that I've been able to work on my dissertation. A special shout-out to Liz and Amy: love you both! Thank you for being there for me through all the ups and the downs of this journey.

Friendships both sustained and begun over the course of these four years have played a huge role in getting me to where I am today. To my friends from SGX, debate, NUS and Bristol, I consider myself fortunate to have you as friends. Thank you for your words of advice, encouragement and prayers. Thank you especially for being patient when I was less than responsive, harried and anxious. A very special thanks goes to Rosie, Huiyi and Raymund for listening to my rants and nervous ramblings with great empathy and patience at various points of this academic journey.

Last and certainly not least, to God be the glory. The best is yet to be.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**CC** – Community Club

**CMIO** – Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others

**CSS** – Community Sharing Session

**EP** – Employment Pass

**GRC** – Group Representation Constituency

**HDB** – Housing Development Board

**ICA** – Immigration and Checkpoints Authority

**INC** – Integration and Naturalisation Champion

**PAP** – People’s Action Party

**PR** – Permanent Resident

**SCJ** – Singapore Citizenship Journey

**SLB** – Street-level bureaucrat

**WP** – Work Permit

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

They [migrants] are looking at a country that is very, very strange. You don't see a lot of new citizens, for example, in coffee shops. At least, I don't think I see a lot in hawker centres... We have a problem because a lot of them don't integrate, they don't mix around with us... they don't do most things that Singaporeans do. Singaporeans drink at coffee shops, at hawker centres. So I think when people don't mix, that's where a lot more misunderstanding of any kind come along. [If] you can start convincing people to come to coffee shops and laugh with the Singaporeans, I think after a while people will accept them. But right now we have one group drinking in a pub, the other group drinking somewhere else. It is a bit difficult... My role is to help new citizens to adjust to Singapore... and try to help Singaporeans understand that these people need time to adjust.

- Tony<sup>1</sup>, Integration and Naturalisation Champion

Communities everywhere are grappling with the challenge of migrant integration in an increasingly globalised world. These issues range from how host populations can accept varying religious belief systems that migrants bring with them (Reitz et al., 2017) to adapting the legal system to reflect the country's changing linguistic landscape (Aliverti & Seoighe, 2017). In many ways, Singapore is no different. In 2019, non-citizens constituted over 38% of its residential population ('Singapore's Population Grows to 5.7 Million, Boosted by Increase in Foreign Workers', 2019). Despite many believing that immigrants are vital for securing the country's future and continued economic growth, a 2019 survey of over 4,000 Singaporeans also found that one in six of those surveyed felt that 'immigrants were not doing enough to integrate' into Singaporean society (J. Yap, 2019). As one of the interviewees for this project, Tony, explained in the quote above, migrants are perceived to not 'mix' with locals, choosing instead to live separate lives and socialize in different contexts. The challenge for the Singaporean state is that a lack of integration means, in the words of Tony, an increased propensity for 'misunderstanding' between locals and foreign-born residents. This fuels antipathy towards migrants, evidenced by rising anti-foreigner sentiment expressed on social media, in everyday interactions and politics. (T. Chong, 2015; F. C. M. Ong & Yeoh, 2013; Ortiga, 2015).

Despite calls for the greater integration of migrants, it is not a straightforward affair but is plagued with thorny issues surrounding identity and belonging. First and foremost is the question: 'Integrate into what?' or, put differently, 'What collective body are migrants expected to become part of?' In Singapore, one of the defining characteristics of this collective is its multicultural character which poses significant

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<sup>1</sup> The names of and insignificant details about interviewees have been changed to ensure anonymity and protect confidentiality. Their country of origin, citizenship status, ethnic identification, and organizational affiliation have been correctly identified where required.

challenges for the process of integration. Here ‘multicultural’ is used to refer to both the demographic reality of cultural diversity and Singapore’s response to that cultural diversity. In the first case, Singapore is home to a very diverse population. Today its residential population is classified into four main ethnic groups: Chinese (74.4%), Malay (13.4%), Indian (9.0%) and Others (3.2%). Each group contains multiple sub-groups. For instance, government statistics organise the ethnic Chinese population into ten different dialect groups, such as Hokkien, Teochew and Cantonese (*Chinese Resident Population by Age Group, Dialect Group and Sex, 2015, 2017*). Ethnic Malays and Indians are classified into four and eleven dialect groups respectively (*Indian Resident Population by Age Group, Dialect Group and Sex, 2015, 2017; Malay Resident Population by Age Group, Dialect Group and Sex, 2015, 2017*). This diversity means that there is no dominant cultural identity to unify the members of the nation-state. In contrast, more culturally homogenous countries often present a clearer picture of how members should act, speak or even what god they should worship. For instance, in Thailand where approximately 95% of the population identify as Buddhist, it is unsurprising that Thai national identity takes on a religious-cultural element whereby to be Thai is to practise Buddhism in some form (McCargo, 2004). While there is no place on Earth that is wholly homogenous, countries which have an evident and sizable diversity, such as Singapore, face an even greater challenge to develop a sense of commonality amongst citizens since such commonality cannot be based upon common cultural or ethnic characteristics. Given that integration efforts are premised upon the existence of a cohesive collective to integrate into, cultural diversity within a population further complicates the integration process. Simply put, if the ‘imagined community’ of the nation-state cannot be premised on common cultural identities and practices, then integrating newcomers into the population requires efforts that emphasize traits and practices that transcend ethnic differences instead of relying on them to tie people together.

However, more than merely being culturally diverse, Singapore’s multicultural character is not just a demographic reality, but a normative position which celebrates cultural difference. This celebration of different cultures is what readers might recognise as multiculturalism whereby cultural difference is held up as a reality to be embraced and protected (Kymlicka, 1995; Modood, 2013; Parekh, 2006). Singapore’s version of this is known as ‘multiracialism’ due to its reliance on racial categories inherited from the British government during the colonial period which have shaped a wide variety of public policies created to manage race relations (Vasu, 2012). Under multiracialism, difference is embraced as an invaluable and desirable part of the Singaporean lived experience and identity in political rhetoric, public spectacles and everyday expressions of national pride (D. P. S. Goh, 2013; Kong & Yeoh, 1997). Yet, integration necessarily requires that individuals who are different adapt to their home country and the behavioural norms expected of a ‘good citizen’. Thus, individuals must become more alike in order to be part of a cohesive national whole. This tension between narratives creates a cognitive dissonance. On the one hand, migrants are told that Singapore welcomes people from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds and ways of life, yet they cannot be so different that they appear not to be well-integrated.

Given the challenges of integrating into (in the words of Tony) ‘a country that is very, very strange’, it is unsurprising that integration is not something that just happens organically, but is a process that the

Singaporean state, like many others, has promoted through public policy. Tony's quote highlights one such approach: grassroots volunteers known as Integration and Naturalisation Champions (hereafter referred to as INCs). According to Tony who has been an INC volunteer for over a decade, INCs 'help new citizens adjust to life in Singapore... and try to help Singaporeans understand that these people need time to adjust'. This dissertation thus asks: How exactly do INCs carry out their role and aid the integration process?

### **The Puzzle of Grassroots Volunteers in the Singaporean Integration Process**

One of the most distinctive features of the Singaporean integration process is the involvement of community volunteers who volunteer under the INC programme which began in 2007 (Hong, 2017). The programme was part of a slew of measures undertaken by the government in response to rising public anxieties over the rate of immigration and fears that migrants were integrating too slowly (M. T. Yap, 2015, pp. 33–36) INCs are unpaid volunteers who work with the state in their local communities to promote migrant integration and receive monetary support from the state to fund their initiatives, such as running cultural events or outings for new citizens to local landmarks.

The involvement of volunteers in the integration of migrants and new citizens is puzzling for several reasons. Firstly, the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), which has been in power since 1963, is well-known for centralising governance to ensure that policies are well-implemented. The centralisation of public policy has been largely successful and resulted in great electoral success for the PAP (B. Wong & Huang, 2010). The state carefully manages race relations through centralised control over many aspects of residents' lives, such as implementing ethnic quotas for each apartment block of public housing in Singapore (Sin, 2002) and prohibiting speech that might inflame racial or religious sensitivities (E. K. B. Tan, 2008). To that end, it is odd that the implementation of migrant integration policy has been partially decentralised to community volunteers who are neither paid employees of the state nor elected politicians and thus cannot be held to the same level of accountability and may not have the same level of expertise one would expect for the effective implementation of public policy. Secondly, reasons commonly provided for the decentralisation of governance to unpaid volunteers, such as budget cuts or difficulty delivering services to a geographically dispersed population (Stuckler et al., 2010), are not applicable in this case since Singapore is small, does not have a tight public budget and is renowned for having a very efficient civil service (Low, 2016, p. 184). In other words, why use grassroots volunteers at all? This dissertation argues that INCs fulfil a role in migrant integration efforts that cannot be filled by any other actors, such as bureaucrats, politicians or immigrant associations. This is due to their position at the grassroots level which allows them to act as a vital bridge between state, the local population and newcomers.

### **Tensions in Integration Efforts**

While this dissertation examines the unique role that INCs play as a bridge between the local population and newcomers in the integration process, this process is not without its complications and tensions which

are a theme that comes up repeatedly in the empirical chapters. These tensions take two forms: the limitations of existing integration policy and contradictions between policy and lived experiences.

In the first case, studying INCs' work to promote integration also shows the areas of society where integration efforts do not extend. For instance, INCs work primarily with members of the residential population in Singapore who have the option (which some have exercised) to take up Permanent Residency or Singaporean citizenship. However, there are huge swathes of the migrant population who INCs do not work with, revealing how integration efforts are not extended to them. In June 2019, 1.68 million non-residents lived in Singapore, primarily comprising dependents of migrants, international students and workers on Work Permits ('Singapore's Population Grows to 5.7 Million, Boosted by Increase in Foreign Workers', 2019). These numbers include workers here on Work Permits who are barred from applying for Permanent Residency even though some of them might have lived and worked in Singapore for decades (Begum, 2019). This deliberate and systematic exclusion of low-skilled foreign labour from naturalisation and integration processes reflects other guest worker regimes, such as those in Germany and Switzerland in the 1980s. This exclusion is fundamentally premised on a capitalist logic of wanting to be able to be easily rid of excess labour when the economic situation demands it. As such, if workers are not given residency status in the country in which they work, they can be more easily made redundant and deported when their labour is no longer deemed necessary and/or profitable (Zolberg, 1987). Even spouses of Singaporean citizens can find themselves outside the citizenship and integration regime in Singapore. A press release by the Ministry of Social and Family Development stated that 'marriage to a Singaporean does not automatically qualify a foreigner for long-term stay in Singapore' (*New Measures to Help Prospective Singaporean-Foreigner Couples Better Plan for Their Future*, 2014). This means that an individual who is married to a Singaporean and even may have Singaporean children might find themselves in limbo without long-term residency and in a precarious position regarding their future. Despite forming a significant proportion of the population in Singapore, these non-residents are not sufficiently valued as to be included in integration efforts and extended the opportunity to acquire a legal status that allows them to reside permanently in Singapore.

Moreover, even in their interactions with individuals who can and have been granted permanent residential status or citizenship in Singapore, studying INCs' volunteer work throws into stark relief the inadequacies and contradictions between state policy and everyday experiences. This is demonstrated most prominently amongst newly naturalised citizens who are deemed to not be of the 'right' ethnicity so as to belong. The first section of this chapter highlighted the challenges of how individuals can be integrated into an ethnically diverse population where there exists no singular cultural context to which they can adapt. As INCs work with newly naturalised citizens to integrate into Singaporean society, they are faced with stories and experiences that show that some newcomers are not accepted members even though they have acquired the legal status of citizens. For instance, minorities who do not fit into the existing categories of the 'main' races of Singapore of Chinese, Malay and Indian, are not provided the same degree of state recognition and often encounter racism in their everyday interactions with Singaporeans.

Faced with these two major tensions in integration efforts, the INCs in this research project often struggle with questions over why some groups are excluded from state integration efforts or why the government's integration efforts appear to have limited effect in changing sentiments on the ground. Studying INCs thus does not merely show that these volunteers play a vital role in integration processes but how they make sense of their role and its limitations. INCs respond to these tensions in a variety of ways. Some accept that integration is limited and often contradictory, while others seek to exercise their own discretion to 'change the system' (in one of my interviewee's words) and rectify perceived failings within the system. Thus, this dissertation does not merely tell a story about integration efforts and their shortcomings, but how individuals can and do respond to these challenges.

### **Thesis Overview**

Given the aforementioned puzzle about grassroots involvement in integration policy, this dissertation investigates the following research question: **What role do Integration and Naturalisation Champions play in the integration of migrants into Singaporean society?** It advances the argument that **INCs, by occupying a liminal position between public policy and the everyday, seek to encourage integration at the subnational units of the neighbourhood and ethnic groups which in turn is seen to boost migrants' sense of national belonging.**

Chapter Two introduces the historical and political context for contemporary immigration and integration in Singapore. It charts the country's long history of migration and the cultural diversity that has resulted, which began in earnest with British colonial rule in the 1800s. It tells a story of Singapore's shift from a pluralistic society comprising sojourners from all over the region and beyond to an independent nation-state developing its own cohesive national identity while continuing to welcome migrants. A central theme running through this historical account is how governmental policy, whether under the British or in independent Singapore, has shaped and responded to the realities of immigration and Singapore's multicultural character. In particular, the INC programme is introduced in greater detail as one of the contemporary policies created to grapple with the twin imperatives of maintaining open borders and a cohesive national identity.

Chapters Three and Four engage with the existing scholarship to develop the thesis' theoretical framework for exploring the role of INCs. They present two critical theoretical contributions to the existing literature on migration and integration. Firstly, Chapter Three looks at how the literature on nationalism and multiculturalism grapple with the issue of how to build a cohesive society amid cultural difference. Expanding on Tariq Modood's conception of 'multicultural nationalism' (2018), it argues that nationalism and multiculturalism are complementary, with multiculturalism's recognition of cultural identities being a source of national pride. Chapter Four examines the debate within integration studies as to where integration occurs and who carries it out. While the state plays a significant role in integration efforts, everyday interactions involving intercultural mixing and engagement also contribute to integration.



However, rather than focussing on one approach or the other, Chapter Four draws on insights from both the micro, everyday and macro, statist approaches to develop a more middle-of-the-road approach to understanding migrant integration. I argue that to understand how macro-policy level actions impact the everyday context and vice versa, we need to study how these two spaces are bridged by actors who act as go-betweeners between state and society. I use the literature developed by Lipsky (2010) on street-level bureaucracy to develop my argument about how community volunteers, known as INCs, function in this in-between role and exercise discretion as they negotiate the different and sometimes competing interests of the various groups that they work with, such as state actors, local-born residents and migrants.

In Chapter Five, I describe my methodology in studying INCs. I explain my choice to use narrative interviews and participant observation to study the role that INCs play in migrant integration. In particular, I highlight the challenges that I faced in gathering data in a tightly controlled political context and various ethical challenges that I had in gaining access to my interviewees and contacting gatekeepers. Finally, I reflect on how identity as a researcher impacted my research.

In Chapters Six to Eight, I explore the role of the INC from three different perspectives. Chapter Six establishes the liminal position that INCs find themselves in – serving state policy goals while being embedded in their local community. By using the politically-charged case of immigration policy in Singapore, I illustrate how this in-between position both gives INCs valuable insights into how policy is implemented and received or rejected. These insights put them in a position where they feel caught between the competing interests of the various stakeholders who they meet through their volunteer work. Chapters Seven and Eight go on to show how this liminal position allows INCs to promote integration in two sub-national ways that in turn, promote a sense of national belonging amongst new citizens. Chapter Seven focusses on how migrants are brought into the local neighbourhood and how their sense of rootedness to the community and links with their neighbours, facilitated greatly by INCs actions, helps them feel a greater sense of belonging to the larger nation-state. Chapter Eight focusses on another sub-national group of ethnic groups. Here INCs are shown modelling the Singaporean conception of multiracialism in two ways: the cultural diversity that is represented and the ethos of accepting different cultures. In doing so, I go on to show how migrants challenge the established image of Singaporean multiracialism as they are incorporated into the Singaporean nation-state.

Finally, Chapter Nine summarises my dissertation's findings while exploring options for further research and theorising.

## **Chapter Two: Setting the Stage**

Chapter One outlined the research focus for this dissertation and also set out the motivations and significance of studying the role that Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs) play in Singapore's efforts to integrate migrants into the national community. This chapter sketches Singapore's rich history as a site for immigration, and the policy efforts that have developed in response, including the development of the INC programme. This chapter takes a broadly chronological approach which shows the public policy shifting from a very laissez-faire approach to one that has become increasingly interventionist in response to corresponding changes in public sentiment towards immigrants. The first section focusses primarily on the period between 1819 and 1965. It charts Singapore's pre-independence history of migration and how British and Japanese rule created practices and policies that have enduring legacies on ethnic relations in present-day Singapore. The second section examines how the independent Singaporean state grappled with the twin tasks of managing ethnic diversity and forging a national identity. In particular, it emphasises the role of the policy of multiracialism in achieving both goals. The third section continues on the same theme as the second but with a greater focus on the past two decades of migration. It outlines the challenges that continued inflows of migration have posed to the nation-state and its multicultural policies. Finally, the fourth section narrows in on efforts that have been undertaken in the last ten years to encourage migrants to integrate into Singaporean society. It is here that the advent of the INC programme is situated within a broader framework of grassroots volunteerism. While by no means claiming to be comprehensive, this chapter should be seen as a story of how migration and its accompanying cultural diversity has been managed throughout Singaporean history. This management has been an ongoing project to find a balance between unity and diversity amid continued immigration flows.

### **Colonial Singapore as a Destination Country**

Records on Singapore's beginnings as a settlement are murky, with work on its pre-colonial history only just starting to gain momentum (See Heng, 2009; Miksic, 2013). However, some historical accounts show that Singapore had about 1,000 inhabitants in 1819, mostly comprising the indigenous *Oran Laut* or sea nomads. The population make-up on the island began to change dramatically after 1819 when Sir Stamford Raffles of the English East India Company arrived. Wanting to boost British trade in the South East Asian region and compete against the Dutch in the East Indies, Raffles signed a treaty with the Sultan of Johore to establish a trading post (Turnbull, 2009, pp. 1–9). Singapore began to see its status as a trading hub rise rapidly in the 1850s. It benefitted from geographical advantages, such as a nodal position between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean that made it a vital stopover for ships plying the lucrative trade route between India and China, its naturally deep harbour and sheltered anchorage. On top of its natural advantages, the British instituted Singapore's status as a free port and did not discriminate against the nationalities of traders or ships in the marketplace, making it even more attractive to traders (L. K. Wong, 1978, pp. 56–58). With the rise of trade and British investment in areas such as tin and rubber in the northern Malayan peninsular,

migrants came flocking to Singapore. The lack of restrictions on immigration and trade led to an influx of immigrants from a wide range of regions, from Parsis and Armenians to Javanese and Bengalis (P. G.-L. Chew, 2013, pp. 11–12). For instance, Chinese immigrants from villages in Southern China that used to export Chinese tea emigrated to this ‘Eldorado’ to find alternative work when they were unable to compete with the Indian and Ceylonese tea trade (Joyce Ee, 1961, pp. 34–35). Beyond laissez-faire trade policies that attracted immigrants to Singapore, less liberal measures by the British increased the demographic diversity on the island. Faced with a shortage of labour for menial work like construction, the British brought in convict labour from the South Asian colonies to clear jungle, fill swamps and build roads across Singapore (Pieris, 2009, pp. 59–60), which contributed to a burgeoning South Asian population.

With this increasing cultural diversity, Singapore became a ‘plural society’ consisting of ‘a medley peoples... [who] mix but do not combine... they meet, but only in the market-place... with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit’. More than living as separate social units, society was divided along economic lines with ‘a division of labour along racial lines’ (Furnivall, 1948, p. 304). One explanation for the ethnic divisions was how immigrants thought of their migrant status. For Chinese and Indian immigrants, migration was viewed as a ‘sojourn’ rather than a permanent uprooting (Lian, 1995, p. 382), resulting in many continuing to maintain strong links with their homeland and eschewing the urge to put down roots in their new place of residence. As Warren puts it when speaking about the Chinese rickshaw pullers, for many, moving to Singapore was a form of ‘circular migration’ where ‘men go abroad, earn, remit money, and return’ (2003, p. 216). This continued sense of rootedness to their homeland was evidenced by the Chinese in Singapore contributing financially to the anti-Japanese war effort in China in the 1930s (Leong, 1979) and the rise of the Indian National Army in the 1940s formed by overseas Indian nationalists who fought alongside the Japanese in Burma to defeat the British Raj in colonial India (Lebra, 2008). If immigrants identified primarily with their country of origin and saw their residency in Singapore as merely temporary, it would explain why they did not feel the need to mix with those of different national origin except when necessary. However, this is not a complete explanation. While Furnivall’s conception of a plural society has been integral to studies of colonial life in much of Asia, it has been criticised for presenting ethnic segregation as a natural and almost inevitable result of the capitalist market’s invisible hand with different ethnicities not mixing merely because they were organised by a seemingly ‘natural’ division of labour. Instead, scholars have argued that the existence of a plural society was ‘primarily an outcome of colonial state institutionalization’ (D. P. S. Goh, 2014, p. 217). This institutionalisation emerged from a deeply racialized anthropological imagination fuelled by colonial ethnography (Ganguly, 1997, p. 238). For instance, Syed Alatas in his book ‘The Myth of the Lazy Native’ demonstrates how Western historians, naturalists and travel writers constructed a narrative of the lazy native, such as presenting the Malays as being indolent and preferring to cultivate rice rather than work in construction or factories (1977). This racialized world view influenced colonial policy in a variety of ways. For instance, since the ‘lazy’ Malay did not want to take up hard labour and the Chinese could not be trusted with honest labour because they were viewed as untrustworthy, the British subsidised the immigration of

the supposedly more docile Tamils to be employed as municipal labourers (Abraham, 1983, p. 23). Beyond the structuring of economic life according to racial stereotypes, the British authorities set up a zoning system different ethnic groups to live in, such as Chinatown for the Chinese labourers and Kampong Glam for Malays. The plan, known as the Raffles Town Plan, required the large scale resettlement of the existing population (Turnbull, 2009, p. 20).

Policies of segregation continued throughout most of the British colonial rule and during the period of Japanese Occupation from 1942 to 1945. Under the Japanese, the Chinese were targeted with an extraordinary level of viciousness by the occupying Japanese for the former's role in resistance movements before and during the occupation. After the British surrender in 1942, the Japanese forces began 'Operation Clean Up', also known as *sook ching* (loosely translated as 'purification by elimination') (Cheah, 2012, pp. 20–22). In Singapore, this saw the detention of tens of thousands of mostly Chinese men and thousands of deaths from massacres (Gunn, 2007, pp. 277–278). In contrast, the Japanese favoured non-Chinese. For instance, leadership training schools known as *Koa Kunrenjo* were set up in Singapore, Malacca and Penang. 70% of trainees were Malay and given high appointments in the government after graduating from the training (Cheah, 2012, p. 29). Such starkly differential treatment unsurprisingly resulted in a deepening of racial divides between groups who saw themselves as oppressed and others who were often labelled as 'collaborators'. All this is not to suggest that racial divisions or identification did not exist before colonisation, but that British (which continued from after the Japanese surrender in 1945 until the British withdrawal in 1963) and Japanese ethnic policies exacerbated and rigidified pre-existing ethnoreligious difference (Hefner, 2001, p. 42). Unsurprisingly, the racialisation and segregation of the population had long-lasting effects on the identities and practices of Singapore's multicultural population. The next section discusses how the state addressed these effects upon the country's independence.

### **Crafting a Unified Independent Nation-State**

After returning to Singapore when the Japanese surrendered in 1945, the British proposed a union between Singapore and the Malayan peninsula to form the Federation of Malaya. The negotiation between the two territories in the lead up to merger in 1963 threw into sharp relief the different approaches to the issue of ethnic identity within the Federation with the various territories seeking to protect their population. In particular, the Malay majority in the northern peninsula sought to protect their privileged indigent position endowed by the British, while the other ethnic minorities sought concessions (Lian, 2016, pp. 12–13). Unsurprisingly, the leaders of Singapore played an influential role in pushing for concessions as they represented a territory with an ethnic make-up comprising 75.2% Chinese, 12.9% Malay, 7.7% Indians in 1947 (Del Tufo, 1970, p. 40). However, rather than advocating communal politics, the ruling party, the People's Action Party proposed multicultural policies such as removing the colour bar in the civil service and giving official recognition to instruction in the vernaculars of the various ethnic groups (Yeo, 1973, p. 90). This approach was in direct contrast to the rise of communal politics up north in peninsular Malaya.

When the main Malay party, United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), came to power, it formed alliances with other parties representing the Chinese and Indian minorities. However, UMNO sought to preserve policies that protected the Malay majority implemented under British rule, such as Malay land reservation and quotas in public service (Bedlington, 1978, pp. 84–90). This stark difference in approaches to the issue of race and politics came to the fore when Singapore and Malaysia merged to become Malaysia in 1963. Singaporean leader, Lee Kuan Yew, sought the equality of races, invoking the rhetoric of a ‘Malaysian Malaysia’, in contrast to northern preferences for a ‘Malay Malaysia’ (Barr, 1997, p. 16). This clash of positions, combined with disagreements on economic policies, resulted in Singapore leaving the union in 1965 and becoming an independent country. The issue of separation still has emotive undercurrents for Malaysian-Singaporean relations (Harper, 1999, p. 363), with Malaysian politicians and citizens commenting on the status of Singaporean Malays and vice versa (Chua, 2003, pp. 64–65). Furthermore, the process of merger and separation was not merely fraught for the political leadership but saw significant cases of civil unrest in Singapore between ethnic groups. For instance, the 1964 racial riots resulted in the death of 22 people and 454 people injured. The riots were between Malays and Chinese, and both ruling parties in Malaya and Singapore, UMNO and the PAP respectively, blamed each other for inflaming racial tensions (Cheng, 2001).

Upon leaving the union in 1965 and gaining its independence, Singapore’s ruling party, the People’s Action Party (PAP), which gained power in 1963 and has held on to it ever since, was faced with the challenge of building a cohesive national identity amid significant racial differences. The experience of the short-lived merger and racial riots that took place in the 1960s led Singapore’s ruling party, the People’s Action Party, and its leader, Lee Kuan Yew, to view ethno-religious differences as potentially dangerous and divisive social fault lines, thus necessitating careful management by the state (Vasu, 2012, p. 736). This perspective led to the development of a state-led multiculturalism that sought to recognise ethnic difference and mould a national identity that transcends ethnic diversity, otherwise referred to as multiracialism. Singapore’s model of ‘governance through difference’ (Vasu, 2012) is unique in a wide variety of ways, but three stand out in particular. Firstly, as highlighted in the previous section, Singapore’s brand of multiculturalism is distinctly postcolonial. It emerged as a reaction to previous policies which were ethnically divisive yet also retained some of the more ‘useful’ elements of British policy, typified by its retention of the ‘CMIO’ model. The term ‘CMIO’ refers to the main racial categories used to organise the population: Chinese, Malay, Indian and Other. Secondly, the post-independence context in which multiculturalism was developed meant that multiculturalism was developed in tandem with efforts to create a national identity. This model is in contrast to alternative settings where multiculturalism developed in a state that had been independent for a more extended period. One might suggest that multiculturalism developed in these cases as a response to an established national identity that did not accurately reflect the diversity of the population. For instance, Winter highlights how the twin realities of a separatist Quebec and rising immigration challenged the ‘monocultural’ expression of national identity influenced heavily by English Canadians in the 1990s and increased public support for multiculturalism (excepting in Quebec) (2014, p. 139). Hence,

the Singaporean case is one that highlights the development of multiculturalism in conjunction with nationalism. Thirdly, as a competitive authoritarian state (Ortmann, 2011), Singapore's model of multiculturalism is unsurprisingly centralised. The government can implement policies that would most likely face significant public resistance in a democracy, such as controlling who can buy public housing based upon a desire to ensure a racial balance and prevent the creation of ethnic enclaves in specific neighbourhoods. Thus, Singapore's multicultural project is one that is facilitated in large part by the significant power that the government has to implement its vision of multiculturalism.

The reliance that Singapore's model of multiculturalism on racial categories has meant that it is heavily prescriptive with race forming the 'main means of social and cultural classification' (Clammer, 2018, p. 27). The CMIO model categorises residents based on their patrilineal racial heritage, reflecting it in official identification documentation such as birth certificates and national identification cards. The model is based on one developed by the British for census counting. Thus, present-day policy reflects and continues to reify the racialisation implemented by the British colonial government (Rocha, 2011, pp. 98–100). It also explains why Singapore uses the terms 'multiculturalism' and 'multiracialism' synonymously. From this CMIO model, the state has ascribed identities to individuals and groups, and in turn, seeks to protect those identities. One way in which it has done so is through its bilingual education policy. While the primary medium of instruction in most schools (except Muslim religious schools known as *madrasahs*) is English (a point which will be returned to later), Singaporean students are required to study the 'mother tongue' that corresponds with their racial grouping unless they request otherwise – Malays study Malay, Chinese Mandarin and Indians mostly study Tamil with some others taking other South Asian languages such as Hindi or Urdu (Xie & Cavallaro, 2016). Racial categories permeate many other areas of Singaporean life, from guaranteeing seats in parliament for ethnic minorities under the Group Representation Constituencies (GRC) system (Mutalib, 2002) to creating ethnic-based self-help groups that provide welfare benefits and support to disadvantaged members (Moore, 2000). Lian points out that this ethno-racialisation is so well institutionalised by the state and internalised by citizens that to be Singaporean, citizens must lay claim to membership of one of the four races (2016, p. 15). Individuals are thus put under pressure to correctly perform their racial identity, such as speaking their mother tongue well (Benjamin, 1976, p. 124). As Clammer notes, Singapore's policies of multiracialism have resulted in the intensification of ethnic identity rather than its diminution (2018, p. 41).

Principles of non-discrimination and religious freedoms are enshrined in Articles Twelve and Fifteen of the Constitution respectively (*Constitution of the Republic of Singapore*, n.d.). The protections extend so far as to have laws to protect against incitement of enmity towards individuals based on their racial or religious identities, such as the Sedition Act and the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (E. K. B. Tan, 2008). The justification provided by the state is that such measures are required to maintain social peace and harmony, with frequent warning references to the racial riots that took place in the 1960s (Hill & Lian, 1995, p. 93). This corporatist narrative of needing to maintain social cohesion and stability is a prominent thread woven throughout state discourses on multiculturalism. For instance, all students in local schools

celebrate Racial Harmony Day yearly, which marks the day when racial riots broke out in Singapore in 1964. Students dress up in ethnic clothing, share 'traditional' ethnic food and watch performances that emphasize cultural traditions, ultimately to facilitate cross-cultural learning and interaction (C. Han, 2000, p. 64). The logic of recognising and protecting diversity is interwoven with efforts to build national unity – if the state recognises important parts of individuals' and groups' identities, then they will feel that the state 'sees' them and feel a greater sense of rootedness to the broader national community, in contrast to a policy which ignores racial difference and alienates individuals who keenly identify with their cultural identities.

Following this concern over social harmony, the state is careful to minimise perceptions that one group is given preferential treatment over another. For instance, major religious holidays are national holidays in Singapore – 'two Islamic holidays, two Indian-related religious holidays... the first two days of Chinese New Year, Good Friday and Easter' (Chua, 2003, p. 60). Apart from the apparent conflation of race with religion, of note is the fact that there are two religious holidays for each group of the CMIO model, with Eurasians the group most often associated as 'Others' and Christianity. As such, even when recognising diversity, efforts are made to ensure that all groups receive equal formal treatment because of concerns over subsequent resentment if groups feel that they are being disadvantaged and overlooked. In other words, the state wants to recognise, protect and celebrate cultural diversity, because it recognises that to fail to do so would cause anger amongst citizens. However, to swing to the other extreme of emphasizing difference too much would perpetuate divisions within society. As such, the Singaporean state endeavours to create a cohesive national identity that can transcend differences and unite a diverse population.

While the Singaporean state has taken great pains to recognise and celebrate difference, it still seeks to assure citizens that their difference will not come in the way of their standing as equal citizens in the country. To that end, it has sought to develop a sense of national identity that is premised on traits that transcend difference. Two stand out in particular: meritocracy and an acceptance of cultural difference. Under meritocracy, every group is presented as an equally valuable part of the nation, so individuals cannot be given preferential treatment, especially in the classroom or workplace, based on their racial background and instead should be rewarded based on their hard work (Moore, 2000, p. 344). One manifestation of this is choosing English as the language of instruction in almost all local schools. Since it is a non-Asian language, English is presented as a racially 'neutral' language to all Singaporeans. Thus, all start by having to learn a 'foreign' language and have to compete on equal footing in school, through being measured by 'race-blind' standardised national examinations. Chua Beng Huat points out that the neutrality of English is an 'ideological illusion' since it is deeply class-biased, insofar as children of upper-middle-class background with well-educated, English-speaking parents start school with the advantage of speaking English at home (2003, pp. 71–73). Nonetheless, the choice of English as the medium of instruction in Singapore was not merely to forward narratives of racial equality and meritocracy. The choice of English was an economically pragmatic one - having an English-speaking workforce would attract investment and aid economic growth (P. G.-L. Chew, 1999, p. 40). While economic survival was indeed a concern when Singapore left Malaysia, economic success also had symbolic and non-material significance. Like many

diverse post-colonial countries, Singapore has sought to inculcate patriotism in its citizens based on its economic success and modernity, what scholars have termed 'developmental nationalism' (Barker, 2008). This pride in economic success is seen as desirable because it transcends ethnic identities, allowing Singaporeans to be proud of what they have achieved within a few decades of independence. Furthermore, the narrative of economic growth is predicated on social stability and harmony since ethnic strife is often presented as undermining the peace and societal stability that attracts investors to Singapore.

In conjunction with a narrative of meritocracy, Singapore's acceptance of cultural difference is a great source of national pride. Many Singaporeans speak proudly of the racial harmony in Singapore and see it as part of the Singaporean 'DNA' (Chua, 2009, p. 243). This pride has been facilitated not just by the earlier policies I mentioned which celebrate and protect religious and racial identities, but ensure interaction and learning too. For instance, public housing in Singapore is allocated based on racial identities to ensure that there is a mix of ethnicities in each block of flats and hence increase 'intercommunity mixing... at a daily interpersonal level, thus contributing to the development of healthy race relations' (Kong & Yeoh, 2003b, pp. 108–109) and prevent ethnic enclaves from forming. Furthermore, Wise and Velyutham argue that the communal areas within such public housing estates allow interaction between residents of various ethnic backgrounds (2014, p. 415). Areas that allow people of different ethnicities to meet, such as public housing estates and schools, and communicate in a common language are vital to this facilitation of intercultural interaction. In turn, Singapore's multicultural identity is viewed as a public good that Singaporeans can take pride in, regardless of which racial group to which they might belong.

Singapore's twin projects of multiracialism and nation-building are a result of past experiences of living in a plural society under British rule and communal politics during the merger with Malaysia. Since independence in 1965, the Singaporean state has taken great pains to simultaneously emphasize the importance of cultural diversity while developing a national identity that can unify all citizens regardless of their ethnicity. Despite these efforts, there still exist significant shortcomings and challenges, especially with continued inflows of immigration. It is to a discussion of these challenges that the next section now turns.

### **Contemporary Challenges to the Multicultural Nation**

Singapore's efforts to recognise and protect ethno-religious identities while also promoting a sense of national solidarity that transcends racial particularities are an ongoing process. Such efforts should be placed in a broader context of continuing migration. Faced with sharp declines in fertility rates partially due to a very successful population control programme implemented by the Singaporean government in the 1970s and 1980s and a tight labour market, the migration and settlement of foreigners were encouraged. From 1990 to 2000, the overall residential population in Singapore rose by 24.2%, with 66% of that growth attributed to immigration (Saw, 2012, p. 17). This rise in immigration rates brought about a corresponding increase in cultural diversity in the population, illustrated by changes in the Chinese residential population. Under British rule, most Chinese migrants hailed from the southern provinces in China of Fujian and



Guangdong (Kong & Yeoh, 2003a, p. 196). However, with significant state efforts to bring in Chinese students and professionals in the 1990s, newer Chinese migrants arrived from all over China (Diana Wong, 2013, p. 4). In this context of decades of post-independence multicultural and migration policy, Singapore faces two broad challenges to its conception of its national identity and practice of multiculturalism. Firstly, the top-down and often heavy-handed approach of handling the challenges of living with cultural difference has faced increased criticism as being out of touch with Singaporeans' everyday experiences and understandings of how to live in a multicultural nation. Secondly, the essentialisation of racial groups by the state fails to take into account the complexity of racial identity and Singapore's changing demographics, thus rendering invisible many individuals who do not fit within the existing racial framework.

Singapore's model of multiculturalism is thus firstly heavily prescriptive and top-down, primarily due to the authoritarian nature of its political system. One of the major arguments against such a state-driven approach is its failure to create meaningful and long-lasting inter-ethnic understanding. A recent study by Singaporean thinktank, the Institute for Policy Studies, found that about one in five members of ethnic minorities surveyed had experienced a form of racial discrimination (A. Lim, 2019). The findings suggest that while Singaporeans might celebrate ethnic diversity by wearing ethnic costumes once a year in public schools or living side by side in public housing, there is still a long way to go to see genuine 'racial harmony'. Other critics have gone further to argue that racial harmony is used as an excuse by an authoritarian state to limit public discourse on cultural difference. Local sociologist, Chua Beng Huat argues that the 'racial harmony' perpetuated by the state is not just a 'minimalist' effort that is 'maintained by tolerance of difference without any substantive cultural exchange, deep understanding and even less cultural crossing of boundaries', but that the concept of 'harmony' is, in fact, a 'repressive device for pre-empting public debate and negotiation of issues and difficulties that face all multiracial societies' (2003, p. 75). A recent incident involving a local Indian YouTube star illustrates Chua's point. The star, known as 'Preetipls', created a video with her brother in which they criticised an advertisement which saw a Chinese actor portraying minorities in Singapore using 'brownface'. While their video attracted significant public attention and generated debate on how ethnic minorities are portrayed in the Chinese-majority country, the pair were instructed by the government to take it down due to its vulgar content and antagonistic tone. Speaking about the case, Minister for Home Affairs, K Shanmugam, admitted that racism exists in Singapore but that it was 'much better than before', arguing that the siblings' response would cause greater animosity between races instead of creating greater racial harmony (Abu Baker, 2019). While state efforts to protect ethnic minorities have been substantive, their heavy-handedness in censoring speech that has the potential to offend a group (in this case, the Chinese majorities' sensitivities) can often limit opportunities for an honest public discussion on the state of ethnic relations in Singapore and a bottom-up shift in attitudes towards minorities that such soul-searching has the potential to precipitate.

Nevertheless, beyond such obvious prohibitions, the state prescription of what living in a multicultural society ought to be tends to clash with the lived experiences and conceptions formed by Singaporeans. One such example of this disjuncture is the role of Singlish in everyday life. Singlish is the

creole of Singapore in which the official English is combined with Mandarin grammar, including words from Mandarin, Tamil, Malay and other Chinese dialects (Ortmann, 2009, p. 36). Singaporeans use it in their everyday interactions, seeing it as a 'badge of identity' and a potent symbol of a multi-ethnic Singapore (Gupta, 1994, p. 4). However, its usage has often come up for much debate, with public officials often discouraging its use, such as teachers in the classroom (Rubdy, 2007). Recently, in response to an op-ed in the *New York Times* on Singlish, the press secretary to the Prime Minister argued that Singaporeans need to speak 'standard English' instead of Singlish to 'make a living and be understood not just by other Singaporeans but also English speakers everywhere' (Au-Yong, 2016). As such, we can see that the state's efforts to encourage English to create a cosmopolitan city and attract foreign investment clashes with grassroots conceptions of what it is to live in a diverse society. One might view the development of a common lingua franca as a sign of the success of multiculturalism. Yet, the state's single-minded efforts to promote English often clash with these organic sentiments, causing public frustration and resentment as the state is perceived to be micro-managing national identity.

The second challenge facing Singapore's practice of multiculturalism is how its CMIO model is seen to be too simplistic, essentialising changing racial identities in the city-state. This occurs on two different levels. Firstly, the CMIO model does not recognise diversity within each grouping but instead ascribes characteristics to all members of the group as if they were a homogenous bloc. For instance, the Chinese in Singapore used to identify according to their spoken dialect group, shown by their membership in specific clan associations (Kuah-Pearce, 2006). However, in a bid to increase intra-Chinese solidarity through reducing inter-dialect differences, the Singaporean government lumped them all together, requiring them to all learn Mandarin in schools and prohibiting the public broadcasting in any Chinese dialect apart from Mandarin in 1979 (Chan, 2017). Similarly, all Malays are labelled as Muslims, and all individuals of South Asian origin are grouped as 'Indians'. Hence, Chinese, Malays and Indians are grouped according to language, religion and area of origin respectively, regardless of whether it is a label that they identify with (Chua, 2009, p. 240), thus ignoring those who do not fit within state prescriptions.

This essentialisation also presents the racial categories as fixed and impermeable, rendering invisible significant numbers of individuals whose mixed lineage is not recognised. Despite a long history of inter-racial marriage in Singapore, the state was very slow in officially recognising the identities of children of such marriages. For instance, it only allowed the double-barrelling of ethnic identities on official documentation such as on national identity cards in 2011, recognising that there were some Singaporeans want to be recognised as 'Chinese-Malay' or 'Indian-Chinese' rather than being simplistically and inaccurately categorised according to one's patrilineal racial heritage (Wee, 2014, pp. 653–654). But even with this change, individuals whose backgrounds still do not fit within the boundaries of 'Chinese', 'Malay' or 'Indian' are given secondary status. For instance, groups as the Peranakans or Eurasians, are allocated to the 'Others' category, which some have reported as alienating (S. Lam, 2017; Rocha, 2011, p. 110) since it suggests that they are not of sufficient importance to be given their own label. Interestingly, the CMIO

system sends out mixed messages. It appears that the 'CMI' categories are rigid, yet 'O' is expected to be flexible, expanding to fit any number of alternative ethnicities.

While the realities of inter-racial marriages are a rising challenge to the CMIO framework, the continued arrival of newcomers to Singapore means increased cultural diversity and value systems within the population which further complicates efforts to manage racial diversity. As Singapore seeks to fuel its economic growth and thus support its model of developmental nationalism, it has opened its doors to migrants from all around the world, especially the Asian region. In 2018, Singaporean citizens made up 61.5% of the population, 9.2% were Permanent Residents who have been granted the right to stay permanently and are entitled to most of the rights and duties of citizens, and close to 30% were non-residents living in Singapore for education, work or family reasons (Strategy Group, 2018a, p. 5). Within this context of rising migration, the state has also been concerned about a disruption to the carefully managed 'racial balance'. As Chua Beng Huat notes, 'given geopolitical conditions, the government has made a fetish out of changing demographics and has decided that the Chinese population should constitute approximately three-quarters of the total population at all times' (2003, p. 69) (this 'geopolitical condition' being surrounded by majority Malay-Muslim states in Southeast Asia). As such, the state has sought to manage the inflow of migrants to maintain this racial mix, notably by admitting more migrants from China and South Asia (Yow, 2014, p. 168). However, these measures do not necessarily mean that migrants are welcomed into the country by Singaporeans of the same ethnic grouping. Race is now inflected with nationality and history, as Singaporean Chinese, in particular, seek to distance themselves from those labelled as 'PRC Chinese' (F. C. M. Ong & Yeoh, 2013, p. 91), and are more likely to identify with Singaporeans of other races than Chinese immigrants (Liu, 2014). This echoes other work on co-ethnic migration and the animosities that it produces between nominal co-ethnics (See Joppke, 2005; Morita, 2016; Tsuda, 2009b). One case where new Chinese migrants faced backlash from members of the Singaporean public has been termed 'the curry incident' in 2011. A family from mainland China complained about the smell of curry being cooked by their Singaporean-Indian neighbours. When the incident became public, a campaign rallied Singaporeans from all ethnic backgrounds to cook a pot of curry in solidarity with their Indian counterparts. Liu uses this case to illustrate how intra-diasporic conflict can lead to inter-ethnic solidarity (2014, pp. 1231–1232). But beyond that, the curry incident is instructive because it shows how multiculturalism and 'racial harmony' have been internalised and are now being upheld as a vital part of what it is to be Singaporean and to belong to Singaporean society. This is similar to what some have considered the 'paradox of tolerance' which is that a tolerant society needs to be intolerant of intolerance (Popper, 2002). In this case, to be Singaporean is to demonstrate intolerance of perceived intolerance, and insofar as foreigners are viewed as less willing to accept Singaporeans' varying ways of life, they are deemed to be illegitimate or undesirable members of society. They might be portrayed as a threat to the interethnic harmony that has been so carefully built, suggesting that the state's narrative about the need for stability and harmony has been internalised by Singaporeans and has become an integral part of the national identity.

On top of fears that new entrants to Singapore threaten its national identity and multi-ethnic cohesion, many Singaporeans are fearful of their economic security. In 2013, the government announced in its population white paper that it expected the population to grow to 6.9 million by 2030, fuelled primarily by immigration. This announcement was greeted by anger from the locals who felt that they were being crowded out of their country, worrying that they would not be able to partake in the fruit of economic success because they would lose their jobs to foreign workers. These anxieties sparked a protest in an otherwise fairly sedate population in which signs such as ‘Singapore for Singaporeans’ were displayed (A. Koh & Chong, 2014, p. 627). Moreover, debates critiquing the influx of new migrants often invoke narratives about Singapore’s precarious economic position, the same narrative that the state has used to justify bringing in workers to boost the economy. However, sceptical Singaporeans highlight how new migrants are foreign ‘opportunists’ who come to Singapore to take advantage of its economic success without having experienced the collective struggle (I. Chong, 2015), and of course, having the option of leaving when the economy faces a crisis does not improve impressions of foreigners (Ortiga, 2015, pp. 957–958). The state has sought to counter such narratives through an emphasis on how much foreigners contribute to Singapore. For instance, the mainstream media regularly features stories of how foreign-born residents volunteer to help needy Singaporeans (V. Lee, 2020) and how they are keen to integrate into Singaporean society (J. S. Ng, 2017). However, the ruling People’s Action Party, has changed its policies in response to Singaporeans’ anxieties, such as tightening the flow of foreign immigration, requiring firms to hire more locals and requiring that international students find employment within three months of graduation as a condition for their continued residency (Yeoh & Lin, 2012).

The PAP’s seemingly contradictory response to rising anti-foreigner sentiment which highlights the contributions of foreigners while limiting their entrance is indicative of a more comprehensive, ongoing effort to balance Singapore’s economic and social need for immigration with local concerns over greater competition for jobs and the dilution of local culture. Two logics of governance come into tension with each other. The first is the desire for social stability, where the state, fearing fragmentation of Singaporean society and increasing public resentment over its open immigration policy, seeks to manage the inflow of migrants. The second is its approach to governance, often termed as ‘economic pragmatism’. This approach means that state actions are ‘governed by ad hoc contextual rationality that seeks to achieve specific gains at particular points in time’ (Chua, 1997, p. 58). These specific gains are primarily ones driven by the desire for economic growth (K. P. Tan, 2012, p. 72). Here the Singaporean state seeks to control who can enter the country, yet is concerned that placing too many limits will result in labour vital for the effective functioning of the economy being turned away. At his National Day Rally speech in 2015, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong acknowledged the challenges of immigration that Singapore faces.

One tough issue which we already have and which will be with us for a long time to come is immigration and foreigners. It is a very sensitive matter, not an easy thing to talk about, even at the National Day Rally and Singaporeans understandably have strong views about it. The Government has heard them, we

have adjusted our policies, upgraded our infrastructure, slowed down the inflow of foreign workers, tightened up on PR and citizenships applications, made sure that Singaporeans are fairly treated at work. But on foreigners and immigration, there are no easy choices. Every option has a cost, has a downside. If we close our doors to foreign workers, our economy will tank. Companies would not have enough workers. Some will close down and our own people working in these companies will lose their jobs. Also we need foreign workers to build our homes and schools, to meet our daily needs, we need foreign domestic help. So we cannot close our doors completely. On the other hand, if we let in too many foreign workers, our society will come undone. Singaporeans will be crowded out, workplaces will feel foreign, our identity will be diluted and we just cannot digest huge numbers. Therefore, we have got to find something in-between, make a right trade-off but even in-between there is a cost and there is a price and there is a pain. Companies will still find your costs going up, they will have to pass some of these costs on to consumers. Things would not be as cheap. Companies will have to pass up opportunities too. When they can see the opportunities but cannot get the workers, many companies will not be able to expand. And yet because some foreign workers will still be coming in, there will be Singaporeans who will feel that Singapore is changing too fast and will resent having to compete with non-Singaporeans. Whichever option we choose, it will involve some pain (H. L. Lee, 2015).

This balancing act has involved, as indicated in the previous paragraph, moderating the inflow of immigrants and ensuring that locals have priority for employment, but as Lee Hsien Loong noted, Singapore cannot close its doors entirely to migrants. This does not mean that migrants can still reside in the country as they did before. The state, in response to Singaporeans' anxieties, has passed several policies to increase the distinction between foreigners, Permanent Residents (PRs) and citizens. For instance, foreigners and PRs have seen public school fees increase yearly since 2016 (V. Koh, 2017) and the Ministry of Education introduced a cap on the number of PRs in some primary schools recently to ensure that Singaporean children have priority during enrolment (A. Teng, 2020). Even foreign-born residents who acquire Singaporean citizenship have been affected by the passing of policies in response to rising anti-foreigner sentiments. In particular, the naturalisation process has been changed over the past decade to encourage new citizens to better integrate into their new home as the next section now proceeds to explore.

### **Adjusting Naturalisation and Integration Processes**

On top of being a major source of labour, immigration has contributed between 20,000 and 25,000 new citizens annually over the past ten years, in contrast to an annual average of 32,200 citizen births (E. K. B.

Tan, 2017). However, the public’s fear that incoming migrants are ‘diluting’ Singapore’s national identity and failing to adapt to Singaporean society (Nasir & Turner, 2014, pp. 107–109) has led the government to take measures to ensure that migrants who choose to acquire Singaporean citizenship are encouraged to integrate. Before the adoption of these measures, there were no integration efforts specifically targeted towards migrants acquiring Singaporean citizenship. They were subject to the same policies on multiculturalism as citizens, such as ethnic quotas in public housing and civic education in publicly funded schools. However, with rising tensions between local-born Singaporeans and ‘foreign talent’ (referring to highly skilled migrants), the government set up the National Integration Council in 2009 to encourage social interaction between local- and foreign-born residents (Chacko, 2017, pp. 267–268). In 2011, it introduced an induction programme known as the Singapore Citizenship Journey (SCJ) for individuals who have received preliminary approval for their citizenship application, known as ‘in-principle approval’. The figure below shows the process of applying for citizenship:

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4
<b>ONLINE APPLICATION</b>	<b>APPROVAL IN PRINCIPAL</b>	<b>FINAL APPROVAL</b>	<b>CITIZENSHIP CEREMONY</b>
Submit your Application and Supporting Documents Online	Download letter to complete your Singapore Citizenship Journey	Download letter to Renounce Foreign Citizenship and attend Registration	Ceremony for New Citizens to Collect Singapore Identity Card
Outcome Processing Time: 6 – 12 months*	SC Journey Duration: about 2 months	Renunciation Duration: about 1-2 months	

Figure 2: *The Citizenship Journey* (Your Singapore Citizenship Roadmap, *n.d.*)

As indicated in the above description provided by Singapore’s Immigration and Checkpoints Authority, when applicants receive their preliminary approval, they embark on the SCJ. The SCJ consists of three parts: an online course which educates and later tests applicants on Singapore’s history, vital national policies and ‘efforts in building a cohesive and harmonious society’, a half-day tour of a landmark or institution that speaks more of Singapore’s challenges and policies, and finally there is a small group discussion or ‘Community Sharing Session’ (CSS) in which new citizens share about their citizenship journey and conceptions of national belonging (National Integration Council, 2017a).

It must be noted that, unlike citizenship tests administered by other countries such as the United States where immigrants can be refused citizenship based on their test scores (Michalowski, 2011), the SCJ is relatively lax. In the Singaporean system, applicants have already applied and received in-principle approval to become Singaporean citizens when going through the online ‘test’. Furthermore, participants have an unlimited number of attempts on the quiz that is administered at the end of the online course (Fan, 2018) and as one of my interviewees wryly commented, ‘it’s more or less 100% pass’. Taking the test is free which also removes a significant barrier for applicants, unlike other countries such as the United Kingdom which also allow unlimited tries (before the application for naturalisation) but charge for each attempt (J. Turner, 2014). Hence, while it is a requirement to complete the tasks in the SCJ, an applicant effectively cannot fail them as long as they turn up. In a newspaper article covering the introduction of the SCJ in 2011, a local researcher observed that ‘some Singaporeans may feel that the SC Journey lacks rigorous assessment’, but added ‘this is not a test but a rite of passage, a learning process for would-be Singaporeans’

(Kok, 2011). One explanation for the seeming laxity of the SCJ is the balancing act discussed in the previous section of this chapter. The state is balancing locals' concerns about maintaining social cohesion and a desire to enable economically 'valuable' migrants to put down roots and contribute in the long-term. To that end, in January 2020, the Singaporean government announced that it was recruiting Singaporeans to participate in a workgroup which would re-examine and potentially shape the current SCJ curriculum (Zaccheus, 2020).

Key to the success of the SCJ is the involvement of grassroots volunteers who help to facilitate and organise various parts of the Journey. Contrary to more common understandings of the term 'grassroots' which is used to refer to organic citizen involvement in democratic governance (See Sekhon, 2006; Stout, 2012), the grassroots in Singapore is centrally controlled and monitored by the state, leading to Weiss highlighting its artificiality through her term 'AstroTurf' grassroots (2017, p. 275). The grassroots sector in Singapore has a history harking back to British colonial rule and can be broadly split into two prongs. The British first used a *laissez-faire* approach to the provision of services which relied on wealthy leaders from the various ethnic groups to take charge of the welfare of their respective communities (K. P. A. S.-S. Tan, 2003, pp. 3–4), thus allowing the cultivation of significant social capital within groups. The second prong involved the local government level. The City Council of Singapore was in charge of municipal services such as the provision of water, sanitation and electricity (Yunos, 2018). Community Clubs (CCs) were set up as recreational centres to facilitate community development across ethnic lines (Haque, 1996, p. 69), overseen by the People's Association (PA) which was formed in 1960 (People's Association, 2017). Upon independence, the People's Action Party viewed the reliance on ethnic leaders as an impediment to the creation of a unified national identity across different ethnicities (E. K. B. Tan, 2003) and put too much power in the hands of non-PAP members, including some with ties to criminal secret societies (Nasir, 2016). This led to the centralisation of grassroots governance, bringing it under the purview of the party which made the PA a 'para-political' organisation (K. P. A. S.-S. Tan, 2003, pp. 4–5). The PA manages a network of over 1,800 grassroots organisations across Singapore (People's Association, 2018b). One group of grassroots organisations are the Community Club Management Committees that organise activities for residents in the constituency. They are supported by Executive Committees that focus on specific groups within the neighbourhood such as senior citizens, women, youth, and ethnic minorities (People's Association, 2018a). The stated aim of the GROs is a nation-building one: to build and bridge different 'communities to achieve one people, one Singapore' (People's Association, 2018b). Efforts to integrate migrants, including naturalized citizens, fall within this aim, and the grassroots volunteers tasked with facilitating such integration are called 'Integration and Naturalisation Champions' or INCs.

INCs are part of their local Integration and Naturalisation (IN) Committee. There are eighty-nine such committees across the island that are overseen by the national PA Integration Council which was started in 2012 (Hong, 2017, pp. 23–24). The INC programme was first piloted in 2007 with a pioneer batch of 640 volunteers who mostly focused on meeting new citizens and encouraging them to get involved in the life of the local community through events organized at the local CC. Since then, the number of

INCs has increased exponentially to approximately 1,420 INCs across the country by 2016 ('PA to Promote Integration of New Citizens through Interactive Play', 2016). INCs work with other local organisations such as immigrant associations, schools and Chinese clan associations to promote integration (P. Lee, 2014). In 2011, with the inception of the SCJ, INCs took on a more formal role in the citizenship process. Their primary role is to help facilitate the Community Sharing Sessions (CSS) held at the CCs and organize citizenship ceremonies (Hong, 2017, pp. 20–23). Through these interactions, INCs often encourage new citizens to also volunteer in their constituency (Jamie Ee, 2011). About half of the INCs interviewed for this project are naturalized citizens. S. Iswaran, a local Member of Parliament and Cabinet member acknowledged this reality in a speech at a Citizenship Ceremony in 2018. He noted, 'Our INCs play an important role in helping newcomers to settle in and connect with fellow residents in the community. Many of them have also made that journey themselves, and therefore they are able to empathize and relate to some of the challenges as well as the new experiences that the new citizens face' (2018).

### **Chapter Summary: Contextualising the Project**

This chapter introduced the Singaporean case study. While by no means exhaustive, it highlighted some essential characteristics that explain the phenomenon of grassroots involvement in migrant integration. In many ways, Singapore is much like other migrant-receiving countries. Its geographical and economic position meant that it has long attracted migrants who arrived for work, much like other migration hubs such as London and New York City. But at the same time, this movement was mediated through colonial government policies which have had long-lasting impacts on the racial and social structure of society, distinguishing it from sites that do not have such a colonial history, yet also reminiscent of other colonial ports, such as Malacca and Cape Town. With such high rates of immigration, the state faced a challenge faced by many other countries in the same position: What is the appropriate response to cultural diversity? A newly independent Singapore's response was to embrace difference through its policy of multiracialism. This approach was similar to other countries who have sought to recognize, protect and support cultural difference through policies of multiculturalism, such as Canada and the United Kingdom. However, Singapore's practice of multiracialism is quite distinct in several ways. Firstly, due to its postcolonial context whereby it inherited a racially plural society upon independence, the Singaporean state simultaneously embarked on its multiculturalism and nation-building projects. To that end, multiculturalism was seen as a way to strengthen bonds to the new nation. Secondly, Singapore's practice of multiculturalism is carried out in an illiberal context in which political power has been centralized in the hands of the ruling party for over fifty years. This has meant that the policies of multiculturalism in Singapore are highly prescriptive and administered from the top-down, such as with the usage of an ethnic quota to ensure ethnic mixing in public housing estates. Such a top-down approach, regardless of the imperative of nation-building, has been met with significant criticism for rendering invisible individuals who do not fit within the existing racial framework, such as mixed race individuals. More broadly, it fails to account for everyday realities of living in an ethnically diverse society, including experiences of racism which undermine the happy picture



multicultural conviviality that the Singaporean state often forwards in its official narratives of Singaporean multiculturalism.

Unsurprisingly, in an era of even higher rates of migration, Singapore's efforts to manage cultural difference has run into difficulties as individuals and communities begin to question their own identities and challenge the state's approach, exacerbating existing grievances with the state's model of multiculturalism and immigration. The response to such challenges has been twofold: Firstly, step up integration efforts in a bid to address local concerns about the failure of newcomers to adapt to the Singaporean way of life. Secondly, to encourage local involvement in aiding migrant integration. Throughout these processes, the Singaporean state is carrying out a balancing act of responding to locals' resentment over rising numbers of migrants while still trying to remain open to migration. Here INCs come into the picture to help migrants adapt to living in Singapore and aid the state in its balancing act. While the challenges facing Singapore regarding migration and integration are not unique, its response to employ grassroots volunteers is. This dissertation investigates these volunteers' role in such efforts. To do so, it continues in the next chapter to examine the existing academic literature on migration, nation-building and integration, placing this project's research question in a broader academic landscape much like how this chapter contextualized the position of INCs within a larger Singaporean scene.

### **Chapter Three: Integration – Between Multiculturalism and Nationalism**

Having set out the research focus for the dissertation in Chapter One and introduced the case study of Singapore in Chapter Two, this chapter forms one-half of two chapters discussing this dissertation's contribution to the existing literature on migrant integration. In order to answer the research question set out in this thesis: 'How do INCs use their position as grassroots volunteers to facilitate the integration of migrants and newly naturalised citizens into Singaporean society?', I develop two approaches which Chapters Three and Four expound upon. This chapter engages critically with the existing literature on nationalism and multiculturalism, highlighting their contrasting approaches to integration. But rather than seeing nationalism and multiculturalism as incompatible, I develop a framework of national multiculturalism which brings the two perspectives together. I argue that when nationalism takes on a multicultural flavour of incorporating difference, multiculturalism itself becomes a characteristic of the nation around which peoples of various ethnic backgrounds can unite, boosting a sense of national identity.

Before going on to discuss nationalism and multiculturalism's differing approaches to integration, it is essential to clarify what is meant when the term 'integration' is used in this chapter (and the next). As Ager and Strang highlight in their extensive review of the existing literature and fieldwork with refugees, integration takes place in a wide variety of domains, such as in education and housing, and coming up with a working definition of the term is extremely challenging given its considerable subjectivity (2008). Furthermore, the term 'integration' has had a number of normative critiques levelled at it, such as whether integration discourses reinforce racialised differences and place the burden for adaptation solely on the foreign 'other' (Korteweg, 2017; Valluvan, 2017) or if they are guilty of 'methodological nationalism' (Dahinden, 2016). Nevertheless, rather than choosing to avoid the term entirely as some scholars have done and switching instead to terms such as 'incorporation' or 'inclusion' (Rudiger & Spencer, 2003, p. 5), this dissertation is choosing to use the term 'integration' for two reasons. Firstly, as Spencer and Charsley note, it is unclear that there exists a more appropriate term in both academic and policy literature (2016, pp. 3–4). For example, the term 'incorporation' refers to the political process of becoming a politically engaged member of society (Bloemraad, 2006, pp. 5–6) which neglects other forms of integration, such as economic or social integration. Moreover, given the continued usage of the term 'integration' in public and academic discourse, especially in Singapore (See 'PA to Promote Integration of New Citizens through Interactive Play', 2016; J. Seow, 2017; E. Teng, 2017; M. T. Yap et al., 2015), to bring in another term would only further crowd an already muddled marketplace of terminology. Secondly, recent scholarship on integration has addressed various criticisms of the term. For instance, scholars have demonstrated that the integration process is a complex, bi-directional one that involves a wide variety of actors both within and outside the nation-state that immigrants move to (Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016; Spencer & Charsley, 2016). On the criticism of 'methodological nationalism' (Dahinden, 2016), this paper is indeed focussed on the integration of migrants into the nation-state of Singapore, since, as Favell points out (although he is very critical of this), the nation-state is the principal organising unit of society which a migrant arrives to when they cross borders (2003, p. 15). However, focussing on the processes by which one can belong to the

nation-state does not preclude a recognition that individuals can and do belong to other groups simultaneously, such as ethnic groups. Of course, this dissertation's choice to use the term 'integration' does not mean that it assumes that integration is problem-free, but rather than starting from the blanket position that decries the concept as normatively problematic, it seeks to examine the complexities of integration processes as they occur in the multicultural nation of Singapore.

Therefore, when this dissertation uses the term 'integration', it does so to loosely refer to the process by which individuals belong to a larger collective. It recognises that this belonging is manifested and experienced in a number of ways, as Ager and Strang illustrate in their overview of the usage of the term 'integration' (2008) and that these measures are interrelated. For instance, central to this dissertation is the argument that while individuals might become citizens, social connections in various forms, whether they be between migrants and the state, amongst different migrants, and migrants and locals, play a crucial role in helping or hindering the development of a sense of belonging. On top of this broad conceptualisation of belonging, this dissertation also does not assume that the only form of belonging occurs towards the national unit but recognises that one can be integrated into more local settings such as neighbourhoods and ethnic groupings. As highlighted in Chapter One, it is this dissertation's central argument that strong senses of belonging to one's ethnic group and neighbourhood are vital for the integration of migrants into the Singaporean nation-state.

The concept of belonging is discussed extensively in the social science literature as a belief and feeling that one is part of a larger group (Chin, 2019, p. 3). Belonging informs one's identity which includes 'notions of the self, that is, identity as denoting 'the core self' and the aspirational self... as a form of categorization we claim... or attributed by others. It also encompasses seeing identity as a form of practice, as performance (e.g. as in lived everyday performativities or as impression management)' (Anthias, 2018, p. 141). While belonging certainly includes understandings about oneself, this developed identity through 'groupness' is deeply intersubjective in three ways. Firstly, one's sense of self is derived, whether partially or wholly, from association with others (Sandel, 1998, p. 150), such as through families, religious groups, schools, ethnic groups and nations. Secondly, it is intersubjective because it is premised on collective similarities that allow one to identify others and oneself as a member of a group. For instance, if I believe that I belong to a group, I need to understand what characteristics I share with others in the group through an examination of both myself and them, such as a shared ancestry in a family. This understanding then allows me to identify insiders and outsiders to the group, or with whom I do or do not belong. Thirdly, acceptance into the group requires signalling one's similarity so that other members of the group will recognise that I belong and hence belonging is relational because interaction is necessary between some members of the group in order for one to believe that one belongs. Belonging is not just an internal belief but is validated or invalidated by others. Given that belonging is performative, it follows that one can belong through the developing of one's performance and that changes to an individual's behaviour can signal one's belonging to a group (or not). For instance, linguists have long been interested in the role that dialects and accents play in signalling belonging. Sharma and Sankaran found that Indian migrants in London would

often downplay their Indianness through their speech when in public places, such as school, but would change their speech patterns when at home or working in an Indian setting. This switching allowed the migrants to '[signal] authentic membership in both British and Indian groups' (2011, p. 423). To that end, integration should be seen as the process by which one adapts to belong to a community. It can be achieved in a variety of ways as the next two sections go on to discuss.

### **Nationalism: Integration through Emphasising Commonality**

The concept of the nation is fundamentally tied to the development of a sense of commonality amongst a group of people, or as Benedict Anderson put it, it is about imagining a horizontal comradeship that binds strangers together despite their unfamiliarity and difference, to the point that these individuals may choose to lay down their lives for the collective good (Benedict Anderson, 2006, pp. 6–7). However, national belonging is not merely a familiar feeling that one is 'at home', but is a relational framework by which individuals are included or excluded (Antonsich, 2010). The first element of this framework is a set of identifying markers which indicate commonality amongst those who belong to the national community. These often rely upon the development of a sense of a common history, shared customs, norms and traditions through the use of vehicles such as public holidays (Hobsbawm, 1983), institutions (Keeney, 1947; Weber, 1976) and other practices such as map-making and census-taking (Benedict Anderson, 2006, pp. 163–185). This sense of national identity is embodied through practice and speech in everyday life, such as consuming certain kinds of food to demonstrate one's national identity (Caldwell, 2002), watching a national sport (Sibley et al., 2011), or in political acts such as voting or participating in civic society (Isin, 2008; Tully, 2000).

The embodiment of specific assumed national characteristics facilitates the imagining of a national collective as one can compare yourself and others to this ideal set of features, and then categorise individuals into those who are part of the national group and those on the outside (Langman, 2006). Here Judith Butler's conception of 'performativity' finds especial currency. Similar to gender which Butler speaks of, national identity is constituted through a 'stylized repetition of acts' that are recognisable to others and 'seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity' (1990, p. 192). In performing, we internalise and constitute our own identity, concretise these elements through our actions, and perform in such a manner that allows others to also identify us as belonging to the nation. This outward expression of one's national identity signals the possession of 'national cultural capital' (Hage, 1998, p. 52) whereby the individual doing the signalling is in a privileged position of belonging and is likely to be accepted by others in the 'in-group' of the national community. Insofar as the existence of nation-ness is an assertion of a unique national culture, comprising a range of practices, values, events, objects and figures, it simultaneously acts as a unifying set of identifiers while seeking to set the national collective and its members apart from other nations.

These acts of asserting and crafting a national culture are what Kristin Surak terms 'nation-work'. As Surak states, 'nation-work is a material condition both of nationalism, as a movement or ideology, and of nationness, as a form of collective existence' (2013, p. 3). Surak's point about national belonging being 'work' is important because it highlights that collective identity is not something that simply happens but takes intentional effort to construct, define and put into practice. More than just performing one's national identity, nation-work can also be carried out in our evaluation of others' performances. Observations such as 'How can you be truly American if you don't like baseball?' or 'You don't sound very Scottish' articulate assumptions about what ought to characterise the national, and the discursive act of making these observations reconstitute the national identity, while also pushing others to perform better the characteristics expected of them if they want to belong to the national collective, thus serving a disciplinary function. Furthermore, if we are to assume that such discourses are indeed disciplinary, we must believe that those being disciplined can alter their behaviour accordingly. In other words, belonging to a national community is not merely a performance that can be evaluated, but can be cultivated by individuals in response to others' evaluations. Hence, belonging to a national community is about negotiating a complex 'behavioural repertoire' (Hymes, 1981) of vaguely defined yet expected sets of values, attitudes and actions that are used as identifying markers for whether one belongs to the community. Many of these features of nationalism are present in discourses surrounding migrant integration. For instance, migrants are evaluated according to how much they have adapted to life in their homeland and face significant recrimination when they are perceived for having failed to do so adequately. This is evidenced when Muslim women in France are deemed to be less 'French' because of their unwillingness to uncover their faces in public spaces and thus conform to French norms of secularism (Hancock, 2015) and when Norman Tebbit suggested, if a non-white individual did not cheer on the English cricket team, but instead supported another team, such as the one tied to their country of birth, then they were not adequate members of the national community (Manning & Roy, 2010). Individuals who judge the success or failure migrants' integration efforts engage in nation-work since their evaluation is reliant upon their idea of what behaviours are required of those who belong. In turn, migrants who want to be accepted as members of the national community internalise these values and adapt to receive that acceptance. This adaptation does not signal the end of the matter, but, as Bridget Anderson points out, foreigners who receive 'contingent acceptance' often have to keep working to prove that they belong and 'mark the borders' of the nation by decrying others who are deemed to be deficient (2013, p. 6), such as the legal migrant who criticises the illegal immigrant for being a 'criminal'. Hence, even though integration is a means by which one can be included in the nation, the discursive construction of the nation in evaluating those who have failed to integrate is fundamentally exclusionary.

Nationalism has so far been identified as a set of categories of practice in which one both performs one's national belonging but also judges others' status. While this is certainly a vital framework to keep in mind, it is also an 'institutionalised practice' in which the state plays a vital role (Brubaker, 1996, pp. 17–18). Unlike nation-work which accounts for the actions of a multitude of different actors (Surak, 2012, p. 173), the role

of the state in constructing the nation is often labelled as 'nation-building' whereby state institutions, such as the military and education system, play a pivotal role especially at the advent of the nation (Rokkan, 1999). Much of the literature on Singaporean nationalism has studied nation-building, primarily because the authoritarian Singaporean state cuts such an imposing figure on the Singaporean political and social landscape (Barr & Skrbiš, 2008; Hill & Lian, 1995; Yeoh, 1996). States often use their position and resources to achieve their nation-building goals of securing 'the loyalty of broad populations inhabiting the territory represented by the state' (Schatz, 2004, p. 120). The tools that states can employ to develop a sense of national identity range from developing a national curriculum that emphasizes 'national values' and narratives of a shared national history (Msila, 2007) or requiring that all government and administrative businesses be conducted in a singular language (Montolalu & Suryadinata, 2007).

One such tool used by states to mould a national identity is citizenship and immigration policies. More than simply a juridical status signified by official documents such as national identity cards or passports, academic scholarship shows that citizenship is inextricably linked with concepts of belonging. For instance, the granting of citizenship can boost a sense of belonging among individuals. Simonsen, in a study of fourteen Western democracies, found that newly naturalised citizens feel a greater sense of belonging in countries where great emphasis is placed on citizenship as a marker for belonging (2017). Furthermore, citizenship status can often be used to claim that one ought to be treated as part of the nation-state, deserving of equal recognition, even when others might think otherwise. Irene Bloemraad, in her study of Vietnamese-American and Mexican-American teenagers found that her interviewees often argued that they should not be treated as outsiders because they were American citizens. They cited their possession of official citizenship documents as justification that they were due equal recognition as that given to their white counterparts (2013, pp. 75–77). However, this is not merely a discursive act. Under a liberal conception of citizenship, citizens are supposed to be guaranteed equal access to civil, political and social rights. While this is by no means realised entirely in reality, in theory, the provision of individual rights can go some way to reduce socio-economic inequality which often undermines national solidarity and identification (Marshall, 1950, p. 81). This can be seen when previously marginalised minorities receive citizenship and the accompanying ability to access key state provisions more fully, such as education and welfare. This access gives new citizens the means to belong more fully by being able to participate in the economy of the country (Nordberg, 2006, p. 529) and thus be considered a 'contributing member of society', reducing both their sense of alienation from better-off members of the same society and the ability for the latter to demonise the former as 'lazy, benefit scroungers' who are undeserving of membership in the national community.

Processes of naturalisation can be a means by which foreigners otherwise deemed as 'not belonging' may learn how to belong. Despite suspicions that foreign-born applicants might never belong to the same extent as those born in the country, the former go through naturalisation processes through which they acquire citizenship through a multi-step process involving 'entry, temporary stay, settlement and citizenship' (Bridget Anderson, 2013, p. 93). The assumption behind such a seemingly prolonged process

is that individuals will eventually acquire the values and knowledge about societal practices that make them members of the community even if they are not born in the country where they eventually receive their citizenship. However, as noted earlier in this section, Anderson highlights that this does not mean that these naturalised citizens are entirely accepted even if they are well-integrated by most measures and instead are ‘tolerated citizens’ who must continuously prove their belonging to the nation for fear of being excluded yet again (2013, p. 6). As such, at the point at which migrants apply for citizenship, they go through a vetting process, which often involves a test of whether they are adequately knowledgeable about the community to which they seek to belong (Michalowski, 2011) or if they are of ‘good character’ (Bauböck & Goodman, 2010), and so possess the correct qualities which allow them to belong to the national community. Hence, while these tests are meant to be a tool by which individuals are included in the community upon passing the assessment, they are also exclusionary. The tests assume that if one has not picked up the values and behaviours deemed necessary to be part of the national community, then regardless of how long you have resided in the country or how you have contributed to it, you are not deserving of citizenship and its attendant rights and privileges.

Given the constructed and dynamic nature of national belonging, it is unsurprising that it is often a site of contestation, particularly when reality does not match up with narratives about the equality of citizens and individuals chafe at being excluded from the national community. As Yuval-Davis argues ‘any construction of boundaries, of a delineated collectivity, that includes some people – concrete or not – and excludes others, involves an act of active and situated imagination. Could Jews be included in the boundaries of the German nation? Is there ‘black in the Union Jack’? Do Quebecois form a separate nation from Canadians, one with its own boundaries?’ (2006, p. 204). Race and culture play large roles in determining the extent to which individuals are accepted into the national community. As Bridget Anderson notes, racialised individuals are more likely to be treated as foreign and thus face greater scrutiny over how well they ‘belong’ (2013, pp. 6–7). The groups that face such questions often tend to be from minority groups, visible by the colour of their skin, the language they speak or the god they worship, setting them apart from the more accepted majority culture, which is also often identified as the national culture. This often results in discrimination against minority groups and individuals on the basis that they are not ‘one of us’. In particular, racialised migrants are more likely to face claims that they are unable or unwilling to integrate into the host community. This forms the basis of criticisms that some have levelled at integration efforts that integration is something that ‘non-white’ individuals do and hence integration efforts are an ‘act of purification’ of the identities and values of racial minorities deemed problematic (Schinkel, 2018, p. 17). It is therefore unsurprising that integration efforts have often been labelled as ‘racist’ because the targets of such integration efforts tend to be racial minorities with the preservation of the majority’s culture being given primacy. The pushback against such disparate treatment, especially in liberal democracies espousing the value of equality, has led to a move towards multiculturalism. Where nationalism emphasizes the importance of commonality and conformity with national characteristics, multiculturalism takes a different tack towards integration: celebrating difference.

## **Multiculturalism: Integration through Recognising Difference**

In contrast to nationalism which emphasizes the role of a standard set of practices and values, frowning upon those who fail to conform to the national conception of membership, multiculturalism does not approach difference as something that needs to be done away with but instead holds that the varying characteristics that individuals and groups bring into the civil sphere ought to be celebrated. Thus, under multiculturalism, ‘incorporation is not celebrated as inclusion, but as the achievement of diversity in which characteristics that were otherwise stigmatised under assimilation are now celebrated (Alexander, 2001, p. 246). Multiculturalism has a wide range of normative justifications. Michael Murphy provides a helpful typology of the main arguments for multiculturalism (2012, pp. 62–83). Firstly, liberal culturalism justifies minority rights as a means to protect the distinct communities necessary for the freedom and equality of individual members. One of the most prominent liberal arguments for multiculturalism is put forward by Kymlicka who argues that an individual’s choice is enabled and enriched when they have access to a ‘societal culture’ which provides ‘contexts of choice’ from which individuals can most freely formulate their identity (1995). Secondly, tolerationist multiculturalism (often associated with libertarian arguments), as put forward by thinkers such as Kukathas, presents multiculturalism as a necessary and natural outcome of allowing the freedom of association and conscience (Kukathas, 2003). Thirdly, multiculturalism is championed on the basis that diversity can add richness to our lives, such as allowing us to question our practices and beliefs (Parekh, 2006; Tully, 1995). Fourth, given that minorities are significantly underrepresented in democratic decision-making in many countries, multiculturalism is one way in which they can be heard and engaged in active political participation. This may even be extended to a form of democratic multinationalism in which ethnonational minorities are given self-determination. Finally, another normative reason for multiculturalism is what is commonly termed the ‘politics of difference’, as forwarded by Charles Taylor. He argued that to ignore the cultural and religious characteristics that make each individual distinct would be ‘a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, reduced mode of being’ (1994, p. 25). According to Iris Young, the recognition of difference can thus be liberating and empowering both for the individuals who can reclaim their identity and groups in fostering collective solidarity (1990, pp. 166–167).

While there are many different justifications for multiculturalism, uniting them is a broad recognition that the cultural identities of different groups ought to be given their due recognition. Given the favourable normative position taken towards cultural difference, proponents of multiculturalism argue for the accommodation of difference through state policy which ranges from exemption from rules which may conflict with one’s religious beliefs, such as creating special provisions in animal slaughter regulations to accommodate kosher and halal butchery practices, to institutional accommodation of cultural differences, like including minority groups’ languages in official government documents (Kivisto, 2012).

Beyond the philosophy and policies surrounding multiculturalism, multiculturalism often has a discursive element in which state officials publicly espouse multiculturalism and its attendant values. Joppke



and Morawska call this ‘official multiculturalism’ and identify key examples such as Canada, Australia and Sweden. The resilience of such official multiculturalism is due to its linkage to national self-understanding. For instance, multiculturalism can provide the basis for national solidarity for former British colonies who lack independent founding myths (Joppke & Morawska, 2003, pp. 10–12), much like the case of Singapore as discussed in Chapter Two. Nevertheless, this explicit support of multiculturalism is increasingly rare as states, perceiving what they see as ‘failures’ of multiculturalism, such as the radicalisation of local Muslims post-9/11, are renouncing the approach publicly. Of course, that does not mean that multiculturalism is now defunct but perhaps has shifted to what Joppke and Morawska call ‘defacto multiculturalism’ where ‘multiculturalism has become a pervasive reality in liberal, immigrant-receiving states’ (2003, p. 8). Hence, multiculturalism is still being practised (Uberoi & Modood, 2013), even if it is in a more muted manner. Kivisto in claiming that ‘we *really* are all multiculturalists now’ explains why multiculturalism continues to remain relevant when he observes that ‘there are political and cultural structures in place that will serve to sustain the demands made by stigmatized groups for recognition and respect’ (2012, p. 20).

One of the arguments used to justify a move away from state-driven multiculturalism (Burns, 2011; Weaver, 2010) is that multiculturalism forwards a ‘differentialist’ discourse that fragments the community into a plural society (Brubaker, 2001). This Balkanisation of societies is seen to undermine undermining the incentive to create a welfare system that allows for a more equitable redistribution of resources (Barry, 2002; Goodhart, 2004b) and causes members of a minority to feel ‘rootless’ and hence turn to religious extremism to find their identity (Wright & Taylor, 2011). They argue that multiculturalism’s focus on celebrating cultural difference has led to the prioritisation of ethnic belonging to the detriment of national belonging. However, proponents of multiculturalism argue that this is not true and that they do indeed support the inclusion of minorities to the national community. They distinguish their position from assimilationists by calling their process ‘integration’ which is presented as a two-way process through which both migrants and the receiving community are expected to adapt to each other, in contrast to assimilation’s one-way adaptation required of minorities (Modood, 2013). Carens presents a set of ‘reasonable expectations’ for the process of two-way integration in which he highlights different examples of how both the state and migrants ought to act in accommodative fashion. For example, he says that it is reasonable to expect children of immigrant origin to be sent to school to be educated in the language of public life. However, the state also needs to recognise that learning a new language for individuals who may not speak it at home can be particularly burdensome. Hence, the state needs to provide additional support to help these children (2000). But more than simply recognising individual difference, as Modood points out, multiculturalism brings an added dimension to integration (which he terms ‘multicultural accommodation’) by pointing out that the process of integration occurs differently for different groups and their constituent members based on the particularities of their identity, thus creating ‘hyphenated identities’ (Modood, 2013), such as Chinese-Americans or Pakistani-British. In short, becoming a member of the national community translates into different forms of adaptation for different groups rather than a single route of incorporation. By this logic, individuals of various ethnic backgrounds can become part of the nation, albeit by different routes.

This is in contrast to the approach outlined in the section on nationalism through which the different individual is expected to adapt to the national standards of belonging. The question that then arises is: Are these two perspectives irreconcilable? The next section argues that they are not but are complementary.

### **The Complementarity of Nationalism and Multiculturalism**

Adrian Favell, in his book *Philosophies of Integration*, asks, ‘How can a political system achieve stability and legitimacy by rebuilding communal bonds of civility and tolerance – a moral social order – across the conflicts and divisions caused by the plurality of values and individual interests?’ (2001, pp. 2–3). It is with this ‘puzzle of solidarity and belonging’ (Hartmann, 2015, p. 625) that this dissertation is primarily concerned. In particular, if individuals hail from a wide variety of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds with different value systems, practices and beliefs, how can they feel like they belong to the same group? As Borkert and Caponio astutely observe, while ‘international migration primarily concerns the territorial sovereignty of nation states, being defined as persons crossing national borders, integration touches upon the social boundaries of nations’ (2010a, p. 9). So, much like migration and citizenship studies are concerned with who can or cannot cross physical borders or move over the legal boundary between foreigner and citizen, integration is focussed on how individuals can become part of a social group. In other words, how can they belong?

The previous two sections of this chapter presented two ways in which integration is approached by nationalism and multiculturalism. In the former, integration is seen as becoming more similar while in the latter, difference is embraced, which leads to perceptions that nationalism and multiculturalism are opposites, as highlighted in the criticisms of multiculturalism as divisive as discussed in the previous section. In response to these criticisms, proponents of multiculturalism have argued that they do not support the fragmentation of society, as evidenced by Modood’s model of a two-way integration with society and migrants adapting to each other (2013). But it must be noted that migrants are still expected to adapt to the society to which they moved to under multiculturalism’s model of integration, even if it is to a lesser extent than that of assimilationist models. This view is reflected in academic scholarship on multiculturalism and also extends to political rhetoric and social expectations. Then British Prime Minister, David Cameron in a speech in 2011 spoke of the failures of ‘state multiculturalism’, arguing that multiculturalism’s ‘passive tolerance’ had led to young Muslim men feeling ‘rootless’ and turning to extremism. While acknowledging the onus on British society to create a community to which minorities could feel like they belong, Cameron presented Muslim groups with an ultimatum: Promote integration and uphold ‘British values’, like gender equality, or face funding cuts (Wright & Taylor, 2011). Even in everyday life, migrants face social pressures to become more like ‘locals’, resulting in serial migrants developing their mimetic skills to the point that they become ‘social chameleons’ (Ossman, 2004). Debates on migrant integration often rely on yardsticks of national identity to evaluate how well migrants have acculturated to their new home and hence whether they truly belong, regardless of whether they have acquired citizenship status. For example, language

acquisition is often seen as a necessary but insufficient criterion for integration (since short-term migrants often also have to acquire language skills for work but may still choose not to belong to their host society) but is seen to facilitate other measures of integration, such as the expansion of informal social networks to include locals and consumption of mainstream media rather than co-ethnic products (Remennick, 2003). The point being made here is that discussions about multiculturalism and migrant integration must necessarily involve issues surrounding what it is to belong to the national, rather than assuming that multiculturalism and national identity are incompatible as some writers have done (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Sayyid, 2009). The challenge of a multicultural approach to nation-work is to recognize diversity and difference while crafting a unifying national culture. It is a challenge on two counts, as discussed in Chapter One. The first concerns the reality of cultural diversity. If a country is incredibly culturally diverse, then how can commonality be developed amongst peoples who speak different languages, worship different gods and eat different foods? While there are no entirely homogenous countries, the reality is that the construction of an image of a united nation around a singular religion, language or history, is much easier when minorities form a much smaller, a relatively invisible part of the population. For instance, the creation of a ‘monocultural myth’ in Japan has formed the basis of a strong national identity (P.-E. Lam, 2005, pp. 224–225) yet this would be much harder in a country like Singapore with a sizable population of visible minorities. The second concern is a normative one, dealing specifically with the practice and policy of multiculturalism. As mentioned earlier, multiculturalism is a positive response to the reality of cultural diversity through which difference is celebrated and different collective cultural identities are protected and recognized. However, efforts to build a nation are fundamentally premised upon emphasizing commonality. Thus, the question arises: Is it possible to say that difference is celebrated yet also seek to develop commonality? Furthermore, multiculturalism is often seen as antithetical with national identity because it is perceived as accepting a plurality of cultural identities which might dilute or supersede the current national culture.

One key way in which multiculturalism is reconciled with nation-building efforts is in Tariq Modood’s concept of ‘multicultural nationalism’ (2018). He argues that multiculturalism’s efforts to promote the inclusion of culturally diverse peoples must necessarily both recognise their cultural identity and the existence of a community to which they are to be included, hence the development of hyphenated identities. To that end, Modood argues that national identity must be ‘re-imagined in a multicultural way’ (2013, p. 143). One example of this would be the recasting of national history in education. He uses the example of British history to illustrate this point. He suggests that minorities’ experiences can be included in the retelling of history through a story about empire and subsequent decolonisation which fueled mass immigration of minority groups. To that end, a multicultural history should not merely represent the stories of the majority. However, it should be told in such a way ‘that all the citizens-to-be can see how the minorities form part of the national story’ (2014, pp. 312–313). A similar strategy is employed in Singaporean history education in which secondary school students are taught about Singapore’s multicultural ‘civilizational’ history through a study of ancient Indian, Chinese and Southeast Asian history

and how migration from these regions has shaped present-day Singapore's diverse demographic and cultural reality (Loh, 1998). With this approach, the relationship between multiculturalism and national identity is one in which national identity is redefined in a multicultural manner, recognizing and celebrating the diversity of the national community to achieve the normative purpose of multiculturalism: to create a more inclusive society.

But more than simply trying to reconcile efforts to recognize difference while crafting a narrative of national unity, multiculturalism itself can become a valuable tool for carrying out nation-work with 'reciprocal integration' (Chin, 2019, p. 15) boosting a sense of national belonging rather than compromising it as critics of multiculturalism claim. This argument is premised upon multiculturalism becoming 'nationalised' in two ways: First, is in the expansion of a recognition of difference to national policy and practice and secondly, in being incorporated into conceptions of the nation. In the first instance, as Charles Taylor points out, to ignore or mis-recognise a person, including their cultural identity is a 'form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, reduced mode of being' (1994, p. 38). As such, to rectify such misrecognition and celebrate an individual's cultural identity is profoundly empowering. In her book *Becoming a Citizen* (2006), Bloemraad demonstrates that immigrants to Canada are more likely to feel like part of the host society than those who move to the United States, despite more political benefits for naturalised immigrants to the U.S. than their counterparts who move to Canada. She attributes this to the Canadian policy of multiculturalism in which the state gives both symbolic and material support to immigrants to encourage immigrants to naturalise and recognise their particular cultural affiliations. Through this policy of official recognition, immigrants feel 'seen' and recognised as having value because of the cultural diversity that they bring to Canadian society. In turn, this sense of feeling welcomed to the community boosts migrants' integration as they become more engaged and better represented in Canadian politics, thus increasing their autonomy and protection of their rights. This is in contrast with the U.S. approach that is less concerned with immigrants' ethnicity and culture, instead emphasizing an individual's role in naturalisation rather than the state's. Bloemraad highlights that in the U.S. case, immigrants are less incorporated in the political and social networks in their new home compared to Canada where migrants' cultural identities are recognised, celebrated and protected as a matter of national policy and practice.

On top of national multiculturalism boosting immigrants' desire to become part of their new host community, multiculturalism can be nationalised through adoption into the national culture. Again, Irene Bloemraad, in another study, suggests that multiculturalism has become a 'touchstone' for Canadian national identity (2015), through which Canadians feel that multiculturalism is an integral part of who they are. This is particularly important given that, as highlighted three paragraphs before this one, in societies where multiculturalism is a demographic reality (which is most countries now given the rate of globalization and migration), reliance on common ethnic markers of national identity is not possible. Hence, national commonality needs to be based on non-ethnic characteristics and shared experiences. Multiculturalism, if it becomes a widely accepted way of life in a country, can be one such characteristic. For example, multiracialism in Singapore is widely spoken of as a source of national pride for Singaporeans who see inter-

ethnic interaction in shared spaces, such as public housing estates and food centres, as a common set of experiences for all Singaporeans regardless of their ethnic background (Mathews, 2013).

### **Chapter Summary: National Multiculturalism**

Underpinning all research on integration is the question of how societies made up of many different peoples of various cultural backgrounds and value systems can simultaneously function as a cohesive unit with a common identity. This chapter critically engaged with existing scholarship on nationalism and multiculturalism in answering the question of how to create belonging amid cultural diversity. It began by showing how the literature on nationalism and multiculturalism have very different approaches to integration with the former emphasizing the need for sameness even as migrants are expected to adapt to living in their new home, while the latter focusses on the recognition of difference as a fundamental part of the integration process. It then went on to discuss how the two approaches are complementary rather than oppositional. To do this it drew upon Tariq Modood's conception of 'multicultural nationalism' as a way in which nation-building efforts could incorporate the many cultures present in society. But rather than simply giving an account of existing frameworks, this chapter went further to highlight the first of two theoretical contributions that this dissertation brings to debates about migrant integration. I argued that the nationalisation of multiculturalism in practice and policy contributes to national integration in two ways. Firstly, a policy of multiculturalism recognises minorities' cultural identities and makes them feel valued in the community. This, in turn, increases their willingness to participate in the life of the community, further bolstering integration efforts. Secondly, when multiculturalism is practised extensively in policy and everyday life, then it has the potential to become part of the national identity of the multicultural society. But fundamental to the development of this national multiculturalism is it being experienced by migrants and the wider society in both policy and everyday settings which the next chapter goes on to discuss as it highlights the second theoretical contribution of this dissertation: a meso-level approach to integration.

## **Chapter Four: Integration – Between the State and the Everyday**

This dissertation, in its study of grassroots volunteers known as Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs) and their role in migrant integration processes in Singapore, provides two key contributions to the existing literature on migrant integration. The first was discussed in Chapter Three when it examined the intersection between nationalism and multiculturalism. The chapter proposed that the intersection between the two, termed ‘national multiculturalism’, could promote national unity through the recognition and celebration of cultural pluralism. Where Chapter Three focussed on the conceptual aspects of different forms of integration, this chapter shifts its focus to the sites at which integration occurs. In particular, it critically examines debates within studies of nationalism and multiculturalism over the levels of analysis between macro, statist approaches to accounts of everyday, mundane interactions which can help or hinder migrant integration. But more than merely discussing the limitations of one method or the other, this chapter develops an approach between the state and the everyday that focuses on how meso-level actors aid in integration efforts in Singapore. It does so in the following way. Firstly, it discusses the rise of studies of the everyday as a means of addressing the limitations of macro, statist approaches, while also acknowledging the shortcomings of focussing on the everyday. By highlighting the gap between macro and micro approaches to studies of integration, this chapter demonstrates the importance of meso-level analysis. Following that, the next section brings in the public policy literature on street-level bureaucracy as a vital conceptual framework that this dissertation relies upon, albeit with an application to grassroots volunteers. Finally, the chapter ends with an explanation of how the focus of this dissertation: Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs), are such meso-level actors who act as a bridge between state and society.

### **Using the Everyday to Understand Integration Policy and Practice**

Chapter Three introduced the literature on nationalism and multiculturalism in the context of how they engage with the question of integrating those who are culturally different, including migrants. In many of these discussions, the state plays a starring role, whether it be in developing a national identity through the use of public institutions and tools, such as map-making and census taking (Benedict Anderson, 2006; Batuman, 2010; Ervin, 2009), ensuring that migrants are adequately ‘integrated’ through the administration of tests and classes (Schinkel, 2020; Tuckett, 2017) or granting recognition to the cultural diversity that migrants bring to the national community (Modood, 2017). The rise of studies of the everyday developed by scholars like Goffman and Garfinkel has challenged the dominance of these heavily state-centric, macro-approaches (Wise & Velayutham, 2009a, p. 3). Les Back, in his study of Christmas decorations in south London, argues that studying everyday life is crucial because it requires both the researcher and reader to take the mundane seriously and ‘ask what is at stake in our daily encounters with neighbours or the people we brush past at the bus stop’ (2015, p. 821). By taking the commonplace more seriously, we expand the spectrum of experiences that we examine. This in turn allows us to ‘link the smallest story to the largest social transformation’ and see how larger social movements are manifested in everyday life (Back, 2015, p.

834). While Back was studying everyday expressions of class identities, the shift to the mundane has similarly occurred in studies of nationalism and ethnic diversity.

Surak broadly classifies studies of nationalism into two strands (2013, p. 1). The first is a macro-historical view of the acts which form a nation and the actors that drive such nation-building initiatives. This approach emphasizes how a common history, shared customs, norms and traditions are invented and disseminated in nation-building efforts often at critical points of founding in a country's history, such as public holidays (Hobsbawm, 1983), the use of public education to teach a common national history (Weber, 1976, pp. 303–338), conscription (Keeney, 1947) and maps that demarcate the boundaries of the nation-state (Benedict Anderson, 2006). In many of these accounts, the primary actor is the state which uses its immense reach to craft a common national identity. The second approach to nationalism was developed in response to a perceived shortcoming with the macro, statist approach. Michael Billig, in his book *Banal Nationalism*, argues that to imagine nationalism as merely appearing during big crises and occurring primarily at the founding of the nation is to neglect the constant signalling of the nation in the mundane, taken-for-granted symbols embedded in everyday life (1995). As such, one needs to employ an alternative level of analysis to look at everyday, non-elite experiences of nationalism. Furthermore, this everyday approach allows us to look at how individuals experience the nation and live 'nation-ness'. This does not discount the role of the state in flagging the nation but shows that this takes place in an often unexceptional and overlooked manner. Examples of such approaches look at washing up (Linde-Laursen, 1993), road signs (R. Jones & Merriman, 2009) and the cooking and eating of 'national' food (Caldwell, 2002) as practices through which national identities are produced and reproduced.

A similar turn to the everyday has occurred in the academic literature on ethnic diversity. Scholarship on the subject uses a variety of terms to define their approach, from lived diversities (Husband et al., 2014) to everyday multiculturalism (Wise & Velayutham, 2009a) and banal racism (Noble, 2005). The turn emerged out of a similar general critique as forwarded by other everyday scholars: prior scholarship's neglect of the everyday context and practice of living amid ethnic difference has led to sizable blind spots in theorisation. For instance, Greg Noble argues that the way that young men of ethnic minority status have been studied is through 'the narrowing lens of ethnicity or masculinity' because of prior normative assumptions that these characteristics are *the* framework that researchers ought to start with (2009b, p. 877). Instead, by focussing on the everyday acts of (mis)recognition, we will discover that individuals see themselves as far more complicated than just 'Arab' or male and that the temporal and spatial positions that individuals find themselves in at that particular point in time and space shape this understanding. But more than being able to understand the complexity of ethnic identity better, scholars of everyday multiculturalism argue that if we study how diversity is lived and experienced in everyday settings, we gain a richer, if not a more accurate, understanding of how culturally diverse communities function (Neal et al., 2013; Wessendorf, 2014; Wise & Velayutham, 2009a). Implicit within this move is a suggestion that scholarship on multiculturalism before this everyday turn, forwarded by writers such as Will Kymlicka, Bihku Parekh and Tariq Modood, and subsequently referred to as 'normative multiculturalism' due to its

strong focus on providing normative justifications for multiculturalism, was lacking due to its 'focus on the identification of a continuing process of segregation between ethnic groups'. According to their critics, the focus employed by more 'normatively-focussed' scholars presents division as an almost inescapable part of social life in diverse societies, which can only be resolved through state intervention or large-scale socio-political movements (Neal et al., 2013, p. 308). In contrast, some everyday multiculturalists argue that an empirical study of the everyday realities of life in diverse communities reveals an alternative reality of environments of inter-ethnic conviviality (Gilroy, 2004) and practices of 'competent multiculturalism' (Neal et al., 2013).

Key to the everyday shift is its shift in the scale of its focus. Where previous approaches emphasized state, top-down approaches of policy-making in nation-building and multiculturalism projects, the everyday approach focusses on the experiences of non-elites. The privileging of the non-elite perspective stems from what Marco Antonsich terms an 'agency centred approach' (2016, p. 33). Where a state-centric approach would have discussed state policy with little reference to its reception amongst the people who are affected by its implementation, the everyday approach centres those views. For instance, Thompson and Day argue that we ought to look at how individuals understand and enact their understandings of the national, instead of just treating them like 'cultural dopes' who are recipients of state policy not worthy of academic study (1999, p. 38). A similar approach by Killian in her study of North African migrant women in France prioritised their voices in understanding how they understood and responded to debate over public policy on women wearing a headscarf (2003). Much like Greg Noble's argument that an everyday approach allows individuals the space to characterise themselves and describe their own perspectives instead of relying on our own pre-conceived notions (2009b), Killian's focus on the individuals directly affected by state policy provided a vital insight into a group usually rendered invisible by mainstream media representations or shown simply as women oppressed by a patriarchal religious practice in need of state intervention (Macdonald, 2006). More than merely providing a more nuanced and authentic portrayal of individuals, studying non-elites as actors in their own right allows us to see how they can have impacts on the wider society in unexpected ways. For example, at political protests, Chilean citizens waved Argentinian flags as a way to shame the Chilean government for the marginalisation of its citizens (Benwell et al., 2019). Hence, individuals while significantly affected by the actions of much more powerful forces, such as the state, do not lose their agency and an everyday approach allows that agency to be re-centred in ways that inform and enrich our understanding of societal forces.

Beyond looking at non-elites, the everyday approach focuses on sites of everyday encounters, which emphasize the role that interaction and relationships play in everyday life. As mentioned in the section on nationalism, given that national identity is deeply intersubjective, with individuals signalling their national membership and evaluating others' signalling, interaction is an essential way of examining how nationalism is practised and understood. For example, Alho and Sippola discuss how Estonian migrants frame themselves as 'deserving' of social citizenship in the Finnish state due to how they work diligently and pay their taxes. Two forms of relationships emerge in their research. The first is how Estonians see



themselves relative to native Finns, changing and framing their behaviour to be seen as acceptable. The second involves the migrants distancing themselves from other 'non-deserving' migrants who do not contribute to Finland (2019). In the case of multiculturalism, studies of everyday multicultures are fundamentally interested in how people live and interact within contexts of cultural difference, such as ethnically mixed neighbourhoods. A key concept within this work is that of the 'contact zone' which is described as the 'space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing social relations' (Pratt, 1992). Everyday multiculturalists in their empirical research have studied such contact zones, such as youth clubs (Back, 1996), schools (Noble, 2009a), knitting groups and public parks (Wessendorf, 2014). Amanda Wise, through her focus on places in Australian suburban neighbourhoods where everyday encounters occurred, such as over back fences of residents' gardens, identified relationships between local-born residents and newcomers who had just migrated to Australia and the role that gifts play in cementing relationships between two very different individuals (2009, pp. 24–25). Many everyday multiculturalists have argued that their focus on 'contact zones' demonstrate that not all ethnic interaction is conflict-driven. For example, Wise uses the term 'quotidian' to refer to 'the everyday, situated nature of transversal exchange which is not necessarily about conflict resolution' (2009, p. 24). Some everyday multiculturalists thus argue that an empirical study of the everyday realities of life in diverse communities can reveal an alternative reality than that presented by normative multiculturalists which supposedly emphasizes ethnic division as the de-facto reality of culturally diverse societies without the intervention of multiculturalism (Neal et al., 2013, p. 308). The studies of such contact zones suggest the possibility of practices of 'competent multiculturalism' in which 'people routinely manage social interactions and relations in multicultural environments' (Neal et al., 2013, p. 309). These practices occur within a context of 'conviviality' which refer the 'processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere' (Gilroy, 2004). In other words, difference becomes so normalised that individuals simply live together and take it for granted. This raises questions about whether the state intervention to facilitate interethnic interaction and the accommodation of cultural difference as proposed by normative multiculturalists is in fact as pressing a concern as they seem to suggest in their writing since these outcomes seem to occur in everyday life without prompting by the state.

Everyday multiculturalists, with their emphasis on lived experiences of conviviality, have been accused of peddling an image of a naturally occurring 'happy diversity' that does not convey the complexity of ethnic relations in culturally diverse societies (Ahmed, 2007), with some critics going as far to accuse everyday multiculturalists of 'descriptive naivety' (Valluvan, 2016, p. 206). However, in fairness to those studying everyday multiculturalism, this is not entirely representative of their work. For instance, Greg Noble's investigation into the daily lives of ethnic minorities, primarily focussing on Arabs and Muslims, reveal the 'banal racism' that many migrants experience every day, such as colleagues wanting to continually talk to them about the war in Iraq or name-calling, which reduce their sense of comfort and security (Noble, 2005). Even scholarship that purports to provide an account of 'competent multiculturalism' does not

provide a uniformly positive account of how individuals live with cultural difference. Wessendorf's account of the knitting club, while appearing to be an example of cultural cohesion, reveals complex ethnic relations, such as the close relationships between the Caribbean women within the group that inadvertently exclude non-Caribbean women. This ties into her broader argument that while there might exist everyday civility between ethnicity, there is a strong undercurrent of 'feeling comfortable with 'similar people' that mean that closer social relations are often still characterised by a degree of ethnic insularity in multicultures (2014). The language being used by such everyday multiculturalists reflects their ambivalence regarding the everyday experience of living amidst diversity. For instance, those studying everyday multicultures often use the term 'rubbing along' to describe how people live together, rather than a more positive term, like 'getting along', the former suggesting that people can be rubbed the wrong way too. As Husband et al. highlight, '*Rubbing along...* does not mean that there is an absence of latent conflicts of interest, nor of negative judgements of others encountered on the streets. However, what is in place is a normative level of behavioural civility that sets limits on the expression of these interpersonal sentiments' (2014, p. 126).

Thus, the import of the everyday approach to studying social phenomenon, whether it be national belonging or ethnic diversity, is twofold. The first is that it can provide a fuller picture of empirical realities. This is especially important once one understands that many of these concepts are not merely macro-level issues of interest to the state, but are experienced by individuals who grapple with how they understand themselves and others. The everyday and banal approaches require a shift in scales and focus on actors. Where a macro-approach looks at large-scale state policy, the everyday sees how individual citizens and local communities experience and make sense of diversity and the nation. Secondly, a shift in perspective can inform us more accurately about policy approaches to the social phenomena in question. This could either take the form of allowing a more grounded understanding of an issue which aids in the development of a better crafted and thus more effective policy or allowing policy-makers to evaluate the effectiveness of their policies. For instance, despite state policies of multiculturalism that accommodate cultural difference, minorities might still be facing discrimination. Suppose a Sikh man was regularly taunted on the street for wearing a turban. In that case, we might conclude that policies to promote acceptance of his religious identity, such as allowing an exception to the helmet-wearing rule for motorcyclists, have been mostly ineffective in actually allowing him to be seen part of the larger community despite the state's efforts to accommodate him.

### **The Meso-Level as a Middle Ground**

Predictably, the rise of the everyday approach has been the subject of significant critique, particularly from scholars whose macro, state-focused studies were heavily criticised by scholars of the everyday as a basis for their new approach. For instance, Anthony Smith, in his critique of Fox and Miller-Idris' model of everyday nationalism, argues that there is a tendency for scholars in their focus on immediate manifestations of nationalism in everyday life to neglect to account for a larger socio-historical context that shapes

individuals' ideas about the nation (2008, p. 565). Similarly, everyday multiculturalists, in their fervour to move away from a field that has been 'dominated by macro-theoretical approaches' (Wise & Velayutham, 2009b, p. 2), have been accused of lacking a 'historical *longue dure'e* as part of its critical orientation' and thus presenting everyday diversity as divorced from broader trends regarding the treatment of minorities (Sealy, 2018, p. 703).

But rather than taking a stance for one position or the other in the micro, everyday versus macro, statist approaches, this dissertation seeks to bring the macro and micro approaches together through a meso-level approach. Frequently, literature working on state approaches to managing ethnic difference or nation-building speak little to work on the everyday. Where the latter refers to the former, it is critical, using the shortcomings of macro approaches as a springboard for an everyday take on an issue. A discussion of the relationship between normative and everyday multiculturalism is useful to illustrate this point. Scholarship on everyday multiculturalism, despite its efforts to present a nuanced portrayal of the realities of living with ethnic diversity, is still lacking a thorough engagement with the limitations of 'competent multiculturalism'. Everyday multiculturalists fail to interrogate what might be done when contact zones are not as 'convivial' (Wessendorf, 2014) as one might expect and ethnic minorities are faced with everyday acts of banal racism (Noble, 2005) or an 'overtone of concealed aversion' (Simmel, 1971, p. 331). This shortcoming might be explained by the goals of everyday multiculturalism to examine 'the dynamics, the tensions, the intentions, and the meanings of those who produce it in their daily lives' (Semi et al., 2009, p. 66), which suggest that everyday multiculturalists seek to engage in descriptive work of everyday life rather than prescribing solutions to issues that they encounter in their research. As such, one might see the everyday and normative strands of multiculturalism scholarship as complementary rather than oppositional, with the latter engaging in the prescriptive work regarding cultural diversity, such as calling for anti-discrimination laws (Modood, 2013, pp. 63–64) and a multicultural education that teaches students about the cultural variety in the country (Parekh, 2006, pp. 224–225).

Furthermore, bringing the two approaches together allows us to understand the impact that state policy has on everyday life and remedy limitations with the individual approaches. Studies that examine integration with the state being the primary actor tend to assume a clear causal link between state policy and outcomes, and where implementation fails it is due to either the policy being flawed or the recipients being at fault, disregarding the role of implementers (Püzl & Treib, 2007, p. 91). Often no mention is made of those who communicate these policies to migrants, show them how they can fulfil the requirements and eventually evaluate the migrants' efforts to integrate. On the other hand, work on everyday realities, such as that by everyday multiculturalists, argue that routine interactions between individuals can and do carry out the work of integration. However, the state and its policies do impact everyday lives. For instance, Wise and Velayutham's observations about interethnic interactions between children playing in public housing estates in Singapore is conspicuously silent on the government policy of ethnic quotas which ensures that residents from a variety of ethnic backgrounds live in public housing in the first place (2014). Furthermore,

community leaders play a significant role in organising activities to encourage residents to get to know their neighbours (Vasoo, 2001, p. 12), something that Wise and Velayutham do not highlight.

Therefore, we must recognise that integration efforts and their successes or failures are not carried out in a vacuum but in broader policy contexts and historical precedent and hence need to be engaged with even as the everyday is discussed. Irene Bloemraad demonstrates this when she shows how policy and everyday life have a symbiotic relationship. The main argument in her book 'Becoming a Citizen' (2006) is that the Canadian state's policy of multiculturalism provides both material and symbolic support for minority groups, which then help them in everyday life through the provision of community groups that help migrants get jobs, volunteer in the community and so forth. Furthermore, while it is not as explicitly stated, her section on the election of representatives by minority groups shows how everyday life can affect the more macro, policy aspect of multiculturalism in two ways. First, the very logic of electing a representative from your minority group is one that presupposes that the individual is better able to understand what you as a minority go through every day, such as acts of racism or a lack of employment opportunities. Since they have gone through similar experiences and hence will then go on to pass policies that improve your everyday life. Secondly, she highlights how some minorities are less involved in politics because of impressions of government. Such collective beliefs are not merely formed by examining the macro level but are also spread through everyday interactions in the home and neighbourhood where attitudes towards governance are informed and passed down. Hence, while the everyday turn in studies of ethnic diversity and national identity has much to teach us about the lived experiences of individuals who are immersed in communities constituted by several different cultural groups, its focus exclusively on the layperson's experience has often neglected the role of the state. This focus can be attributed to the starting motivations for this area of research: to correct what they see as an overly state-centric approach undertaken by normative multiculturalists. However, in their efforts to right this perceived shortcoming, they have gone to the other extreme of neglecting the state almost entirely (although this is something that everyday multiculturalists are more guilty of than scholars working on nationalism).

The reality of integration is that it is not simply the application of policy on the ground nor something that happens organically with little to no state involvement. Instead, the success of integration efforts depends on a number of other actors who work to implement state policy, bridging the space between state and society. For instance, Korteweg and Triadafilopoulos, when studying multiculturalism and integration efforts in the Netherlands and Germany, found that efforts to engage migrants were most effective when the government worked with immigrant groups and community leaders (2015). These actors who are situated at the meso-level are better able to understand both the importance and limitations of prescriptive state policy on the issue of immigration in the context of everyday realities. To better understand how this act of bridging state and the everyday works, this dissertation draws upon work studying street-level bureaucracy which acts as 'the interface between government and the individual' in such a meso-level fashion (Brodkin, 2012, p. 942).

## **The Mediating Role of the Street-Level Bureaucrat**

An examination of actors who mediate between the state and everyday at the meso-level helps to strengthen our understanding of the overlaps, conflicts and relationship between actors, policies and practices that occupy the micro and macro levels of integration experiences. One such burgeoning area of academic study of meso-level actors is that of street-level bureaucracy. This research emerged out of criticism that public policy research tended to assign the agentic work of public policy work to politicians (Druckman, 2004) and high-level bureaucrats who make decisions about organisational structure (Olsen, 2001), while those on the frontline implementing the policies were presented as passive applicators with little to no involvement in decision-making. Instead, scholarship on street-level bureaucrats focussed on how the often overlooked frontline bureaucrat gives shape and meaning to public policy through their decisions and actions. One such scholar is Michael Lipsky who, in his seminal book 'Street-Level Bureaucracy', defined street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) as 'public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work' (2010, p. 3), such as police officers, social workers and immigration officers. He argued that SLBs should not be seen as passive actors, simply implementing policy formulated by those on the upper echelons of decision making. Instead, they play a significant role in forming policy through their everyday acts of discretion as they seek to balance the conflicting demands of delivering a high quality of public service despite facing considerable budget constraints (2010, pp. 3–4), doing what they can with available resources (Brodin, 1997). This leads to SLBs having to exercise their judgement on how they can make the best use of their limited resources. For instance, when faced with more applicants for welfare than the system can support and vague criteria for who qualifies for state aid, SLBs make judgements about who is more 'deserving' of welfare-based upon the attitude that the applicant has towards the state, if they have 'given back' to society and so forth (Kymlicka, 2015; Lipsky, 2010, p. 23). The exercise of the SLBs' discretion takes place 'in the context of broad policy structure of which their decisions are a part' (Lipsky, 2010, p. 221) or as Maynard-Moody and Musheno note 'front-line state agents are bound by a long tether of hierarchical relationships, yet discretion permeates every decision and every action' (2000, p. 344). The literature by scholars such as Lipsky emphasizes the role that external pressures and self-interest play in determining how SLBs exercise the discretion that they have in carrying out their jobs. Zacka highlights the various challenges that SLBs have to negotiate as front-line workers.

We have reason to be concerned with how street-level bureaucrats inhabit their role because, contrary to popular representations of bureaucracy where they often appear as rigid automata, they are in fact vested with a considerable margin of discretion. They must give content to hierarchical directives that are often vague, ambiguous, and conflicting. As agents of the democratic state, they are also exposed to a plurality of normative demands that frequently point in competing directions: they must be efficient in the use of public resources, fair in dealing with clients, responsive toward their

needs, and respectful when interacting with them. The proper implementation of public policy depends on their capacity to remain sensitive to these plural demands and to balance them appropriately in light of specific situations.

These tasks would be difficult to discharge in any context, but street-level bureaucrats must perform them in an environment that is particularly challenging—one that forces them to contend not only with drastic limitations in resources and a chronic shortage of staff but also with incompatible objectives, unrealistic targets, arcane rules, and an endless stream of emotionally trying encounters with clients. As frontline workers in the public services, they are condemned to being front-row witnesses to some of society's most pressing problems without being equipped with the resources or authority necessary to tackle these problems in any definitive way. They must navigate a terrain mined by conflicting expectations that cannot all be satisfied at once, while knowing that they are likely to be held personally responsible, by clients and superiors alike, for any shortcomings in service provision (2017, pp. 10–11).

Maynard-Moody and Musheno label this approach as a 'state-agent' approach and argue that it is used in most literature on public policy (2000, p. 335). While they recognise that the state-agent narrative is still a valuable framework to understand public policy implementation, the authors argue that this is not the narrative employed by SLBs when they speak about their work.

The alternative narrative highlighted by scholars studying SLB's language when describing their work is the 'citizen-agent' approach. According to Maynard-Moody and Musheno, these SLBs 'don't see their decisions and actions as part of the governmental realm. They don't describe themselves as policy makers, decision makers, or even government workers. They acknowledge that they are government employees... but they work for the client and families in human service organizations and for the public in criminal justice organizations' (2000, p. 347). Their study illustrates this by showing how police officers, counsellors and teachers carry out their work, seeing themselves as 'advocates on a mission' (2003, p. 62). Vital in determining how SLBs carry out their jobs is the identity of both the SLB and the client and the relationship formed between the two. The identity of the client significantly impacts the way the SLB treats them. For instance, single mothers attending citizenship class garnered more sympathy from immigration officers who were more likely to bend the attendance requirements for those who had issues with finding child care (Suvarierol, 2015). Similarly, how heartrending the stories given by asylum seekers would often affect the likelihood of the asylum seeker being granted refugee status by the listening bureaucrat (Valtonen, 2016). Beyond the identity of the client, the identity of the SLB was found to affect how he or she did their job (Ricucci & Meyers, 2004). Characteristics such as one's ethnicity or class status could significantly affect how one judged the clients in question and what services they would receive as a result (Watkins-

Hayes, 2009). The importance of such a ‘citizen-agent’ narrative is its argument that bureaucrats need to be positioned in the context of the societies in which they live and their social position, rather than just viewing them in terms of their relationship to the state. This is illustrated by the fact that interaction can also take place outside formal settings and structures, demonstrating that we need to expand our understanding of how individuals such as SLBs function. For instance, Middleton found that healthcare workers did not frame their evaluations of the effectiveness of mental health treatment in medical terms, but based their evaluations on their encounters with former clients outside along the street, expressing satisfaction with the latter’s ability to get along in everyday settings (2017, pp. 177–178).

### **Community Volunteers and Policy Work**

While the SLB scholarship has been vital in highlighting the role of bureaucrats as being the ‘face of the state’ (Jakimow, 2020), it has taken a relatively narrow approach of focussing on civil service employees as the primary bridges between state policy and societal implementation of said policy. This means that it has missed out on other actors who occupy a comparable liminal position and engage similar activities. In response to the rise of alternative actors in a climate of austerity and the ‘mutating faces of the state’ (Humphris, 2019), the label of ‘street-level bureaucrats’ has been expanded to start including individuals who are not formally employed by the state, such as those working with private companies who are engaged in private-public partnerships and workers in non-governmental organisations (Edlins & Larrison, 2018, p. 2). In particular, this dissertation is concerned with volunteers. While one can broadly delineate volunteering into two forms: one sector which is remote from the government, often functioning as sources of struggle and critical of state policy and practice (Wolch, 1999, p. 33) and the other linked to the government often through funding and tasked with carrying out some form of state policy (Dahrendorf, 2004, p. xiv), this dissertation is primarily concerned with the latter. Citizens are no longer viewed as passive recipients of government services but play a significant role in the delivery of such services (Löffler et al., 2008). This is not a pure form of ‘civic activism’ but sees citizens collaborate with local authorities (Bakker et al., 2012) in areas such as policing (Yarwood & Edwards, 1995) and the creation of community gardens (Rosol, 2012). The numbers for volunteer work with state agencies is significant. Hackl, Halla and Pruckner note that in 2006, 87% of US fire departments were manned primarily by volunteers, and in Austria, 70% of the population is served by voluntary firemen (2012, pp. 465–466). In Singapore, as discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, individuals who volunteer with state-run agencies and related organisations are overseen by the People’s Association which manages over 1,800 grassroots organisations (People’s Association, 2018b). Motivations for volunteering are very varied, ranging from allowing one to achieve meaning and status for individuals who felt that they did not garner it sufficiently in other areas of their life (Nakano, 2000) to wanting to have an impact in local life, such as being involved in their child’s school (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009).

The role of unpaid labour given for the benefit of others (Kenny et al., 2015, p. 86) has gained

increasing attention by scholars and states within the context of neoliberalism which can be seen as providing two pushes for volunteering. The first is a sense that as countries become more economically advanced, they have seen a drop in social participation in areas ranging from religious institutions to clubs and community groups, described in Robert Putnam's aptly titled book 'Bowling Alone' (2000). As such, proponents of volunteer work see it as providing 'opportunities for social participation, for democratic involvement at the local level, and thus for active citizenship' (B. S. Turner, 2001, p. 198). Volunteers are viewed as acting as vital bridges to build trust and reciprocity to solve local problems (Kenny et al., 2015, pp. 89–90) especially in contexts where trust in the state is low. Governments too have sought to encourage volunteering, such as Tony Blair's Active Communities Initiative (Milligan & Fyfe, 2005, p. 418). While governments are seeking to promote active citizenship and more social engagement through volunteer work, there is a second reason for doing so: the rolling back of the state under neoliberalism. Governmental agencies have always needed to find ways to use their limited resources more cost-effectively to maintain service delivery (Brudney, 1990, pp. 36–40), but with the recent financial crisis which has seen rising budget cuts to government services all over the world (Raudla et al., 2015; Stuckler et al., 2010), this has become even more urgent. Thus, while Lipsky saw SLBs as playing a pivotal role in policy implementation, with greater budget cuts and subsequently fewer SLBs on the ground, volunteers are becoming even more vital a resource to fulfil at least part of the role previously undertaken by SLBs. The latter are facing severe budgetary restrictions in an era of continued austerity. In this sense, the line between SLBs as official agents of the state and unpaid community volunteers is increasingly blurred.

Beyond providing free labour for government agencies, citizen volunteers play a unique role in acting as a bridge between government service providers and clients. They are often members of the community in which they are volunteering (something not applicable to all SLBs despite the relationships that they might form with their clients), and giving back to their local community is one of the main reasons for their volunteer work (Milligan & Fyfe, 2005, pp. 424–425). Their embeddedness in the local community means that they have vital knowledge about what policy approaches are effective in the local context (Gassner & Gofen, 2018, p. 12), as evidenced in the case of private refugee resettlement programmes. In countries such as Canada, incoming refugees can be sponsored by the government, private actors or a mixture of the two. The Canadian system of private sponsorship is seen to have been very successful in allowing refugees to settle into their new homes (Labman & Pearlman, 2018, p. 447). One significant benefit of relying on private actors is that their embeddedness in the local community and investment in the wellbeing of the refugees that have been sponsored. As such, private sponsors play a crucial role in providing emotional support to facilitate integration into the local community. At the same time, these volunteers can take active steps to help contribute to their society on an issue that many of them feel strongly about – the plight of refugees (Lenard, 2016, pp. 304–305). Here we see the citizen-agent narrative at work in the context of volunteers: they identify with the plight of the refugees and feel that they as citizens of a developed country ought to help those in a less fortunate position. In turn, the volunteers' actions help to implement and shape policy in an everyday environment, allowing them to feel a sense of



pride in how welcoming Canada has been towards refugees.

### **Integration and Naturalisation Champions as Meso-Level Actors**

This dissertation provides two key contributions to the literature on migration integration. The first was regarding the conceptual overlap between nationalism and the multiculturalism, as outlined in Chapter Three of this dissertation. This chapter focussed on the second contribution: integration processes as occurring at the meso-level through a study of actors who bridge state and society. This second contribution is developed through a survey of INCs in Singapore. While introduced briefly in Chapter Two's discussion of the changes to Singapore's migration, integration and citizenship regime, it is helpful to revisit the INCs' role. Officially inaugurated in 2007, 640 INCs were appointed to spearhead integration efforts for new citizens in their respective neighbourhoods (Hong, 2017, p. 20). They are part of their local Integration and Naturalisation (IN) Committee, and the eighty-nine committees across the island are overseen by the national PA Integration Council which was started in 2012 (Hong, 2017, pp. 23–24). Three approaches can broadly characterize the INCs' role. The first is their involvement in the Singapore Citizenship Journey (SCJ) that all new citizens undertake after they receive in-principle approval for their citizenship application. INCs play a key role in the last of the three sections of the journey as outlined in Chapter Two. At this final event in the SCJ known as the 'Community Sharing Session' (CSS), INCs facilitate small group discussion where new citizens share about their citizenship journey and conceptions of national belonging. The SCJ culminates in a citizenship ceremony organised by INCs at the constituency-level during which citizens are given their national identity cards and pledge their allegiance to Singapore (National Integration Council, 2017a). While the SCJ is a more formal and prescribed approach, the second role allows local Integration and Naturalisation Committees to exercise more autonomy as they organise activities for their residents, with a particular focus on encouraging new citizens and PRs to get to know their neighbours and Singapore more broadly. These activities range from house visits by grassroots leaders to excursions to local landmarks which are heavily subsidised by the Integration and Naturalisation Committee. INCs also go further in their interactions with foreign-born residents, often using their personal connections to help the families and migrants that they have gotten to know through the first two approaches. For instance, a local INC leader for the constituency of Bukit Panjang heard about a family in his neighbourhood that was planning to return to India after the sole breadwinner lost his job. He then approached the family and suggested that they seek help from their local constituency, eventually resulting in the father of the family finding a new job (M. Z. Lim, 2017b).

INCs play a crucial role in showing how a culturally diverse nation-state like Singapore 'hangs together' (Kivisto, 2015, p. 583) because they are volunteers who are specifically tasked with aiding integration processes. Two conundrums face integration efforts in multicultural nations. Firstly, how can a sense of community be crafted in a society where people identify according to their particularistic and often exclusive cultural and ethnic groupings, such as the presence of Malays, Chinese and Indians in Singapore

who worship different gods, eat other foods and speak different languages? Secondly, if the state chooses to embrace these differences and promote a narrative that all cultural identities are equally important and to be valued, then seeking to encourage a distinct national culture appears to be at odds with its efforts to uphold the cultural pluralism that multiculturalism champions. Looking at everyday cases of ‘rubbing along’ in multicultural settings such as local neighbourhoods (Wessendorf, 2014) or everyday practices of nationalism in the home (Linde-Laursen, 1993) does not tell us how these dilemmas are negotiated even if they demonstrate that the twin phenomena of multiculturalism and nationalism are lived realities. For example, Wise and Velayutham discuss how everyday interaction through immersion in a culturally diverse context creates both the impetus and ability for individuals to live (relatively) harmoniously amid diversity (2014). While they provide a compelling argument for the development of an ‘intercultural habitus’ that allows individuals to co-exist, they do not suggest that there arises any sort of national identity that helps individuals move beyond merely getting along to feeling a sense of solidarity with their culturally different neighbours. On the other hand, studying INCs provides a vital insight into integration processes in Singapore. INCs deal primarily with new migrants to Singapore. Processes such as the Singapore Citizenship Journey, which rely significantly on the participation of INCs, provide a vital window into how national identity is constructed and understood. However, focussing on integration efforts through official processes such as the SCJ does not explain the need to focus on INCs, which leads to the second reason why focussing on INCs is so helpful in learning how multicultural nations cohere despite their differences: their role as grassroots volunteers.

INCs are volunteers who work with the state to aid integration efforts and hence function as key meso-level actors. Although integration does involve governmental actors, it also occurs through lived everyday experiences that allow individuals to develop a sense of place-identity and belonging to the community in which they find themselves (Isakjee, 2016, pp. 1345–1348). While street-level bureaucrats do play an important role in integration efforts, such as social workers (Suvarierol, 2015) or language teachers (Marrow, 2009), the reasons for their acts of discretion are hard to ascertain given that the terms of their employment constrain them, such as criteria for promotion. So while they do operate as ‘citizen-agents’ (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000), it is hard to separate their identity and values as citizens from their position as employees of the state. On the other hand, volunteers engage in their unpaid labour because they are more likely to be committed to the broad ideals of the organisation with which they are volunteering. In the case of the INCs, many of my interviewees chose to volunteer for years despite significant demands on their time and energy. Furthermore, given that they had alternative areas which they could volunteer in, such as sports, helping the elderly or promoting their own cultural identity (People’s Association, 2018a), the fact that they chose to volunteer as INCs would suggest support for state integration efforts.

While one might read INCs’ volunteer work as an expression of support for the state, the reality is more complicated. Volunteers are not always as enthusiastic and unquestioningly supportive of the state as a bureaucrat whose livelihood might be on the line if they did not act in accordance with state directives.

Due to their volunteer status, INCs are in a liminal position between the state and on-the-ground realities, INCs' role as members of the local and national community means that they are accessible sources of authority, allowing them to help new migrants integrate. As volunteers within a state agency, they are seen to be knowledgeable about state policy and have the backing of the state even as they act under the directive of the state-sponsored People's Association. Yet, because they are deemed to have frontline knowledge informed through residing and interacting with the new migrants that they are tasked with integrating, INCs are given a degree of discretion to carry out policies of integration. INCs volunteer with their local communities and hence understand the lived experience of integration and living amid diversity. Through their speech and actions, they demonstrate their conception of the nation which may differ from official top-down conceptions communicated through official integration policy and practice in more formal contexts such as state naturalisation processes. When INCs endeavour to integrate new citizens, they are not merely doing what the state is telling them to do. Instead, they exercise their agency in helping newcomers adapt to the local neighbourhood that they are in. In doing so, INCs communicate their understanding of the Singaporean national community that they have experienced through their everyday life: acting as a bridge between state goals of integration and the realities of everyday life.

But beyond the conceptual contribution of studying volunteers in aiding our understanding of the multi-faceted nature of volunteering, INCs are an essential group to study because the Singaporean model of relying on volunteers to help migrant integration is increasingly applicable in other contexts. This is due to two reasons. Firstly, as debates continue to rage on regarding the importance of migrant integration, state authorities will explore different ways in which they can facilitate integration. Experiences in successful cases such as private sponsorship of refugees (Valtonen, 2016) are likely to inspire states to explore other ways in which private citizens can help immigrants adapt to their new homes. Secondly, rising numbers of migrants combined with increased economic pressure on the government will mean that states will look towards volunteers as vital sources of labour to fill in gaps that would otherwise be filled by paid government employees. This shift to relying on non-state actors should be situated within a broader neoliberal move to privatise migration and integration regimes as a whole, outsourcing them from the state to non-state actors, such as private companies and the provision of border security and the running of detention centres (Menz, 2011). As such, the Singaporean grassroots volunteer model for integration is likely to become more prevalent over time.

### **Chapter Summary: INCs Bridging State and Society**

This chapter introduced this dissertation's second theoretical contribution to migrant integration. It argued that integration is not merely a governmental project but requires actors at different stages to ensure its implementation. Here individuals who are situated at the meso-level between state and society play a vital bridging role. In the Singaporean case, grassroots volunteers tasked with aiding the integration of migrants and new citizens or Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs) occupy this position. It is this

dissertation's central argument that the unique in-between position enables INCs to facilitate migrant integration. Chapter Six will go on to establish the INCs' liminal position. But before that it is vital to understand the methodological questions behind how and why INCs were made the focus of this study. To that end, Chapter Five will discuss this dissertation's methodological approach in collecting data on INCs' work before the following chapters discuss the empirical findings of the data collection.

## **Chapter Five: Methodological Approaches**

So far this dissertation in setting up its response to the research question: ‘What role do Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs) play in the integration of migrants into Singaporean society?’ has established the broad socio-historical context of migrant integration in Singapore and set out the two theoretical contributions that this dissertation makes to existing academic work on integration. This chapter continues this set-up by discussing the methodological approaches adopted in the research to answer the aforementioned research question. It begins by picking up where Chapter Four ended with a discussion about the methodological reasons for studying INCs. It then goes on to outline my strategies to recruit individuals for my study of integration, the methods employed to collect and analyse data, and finally concludes with a reflection on my position as a researcher. A running theme throughout this chapter is the reality of researching in the politically ‘closed’ context of Singapore and how I negotiated the challenges that such research posed. As this chapter was being written, it became apparent that the entire research process involved the negotiation of various ethical dilemmas. As such, instead of inserting a dedicated section to ethical considerations as is commonly done in methodology chapters in dissertations, this chapter intertwines its account of data collection and analysis with an engagement of the ethical questions surrounding the research process.

### **Studying Integration through the Eyes of INCs**

Chapter Four discussed how studying meso-level actors, like INCs, can enrich our understanding of integration processes through their position as a bridge between state and society. But beyond providing an invaluable insight into constructions of belonging, the choice to study migrant integration processes through the eyes of INCs was shaped in large part by questions of access in the closed research environment of Singapore. When this research project was being proposed, I wanted to study how belonging is formulated and understood in a multicultural society. To do so, I proposed looking at how the state constructs national belonging through official citizenship processes, such as citizenship ceremonies, drawing upon the approaches taken by other scholars who are interested in the same question (Aptekar, 2015; Byrne, 2014; Monforte et al., 2018). However, after talking to other researchers working on similar issues in Singapore, it became apparent there would be very significant obstacles to gaining access to official citizenship events such as citizenship ceremonies due to the politically sensitive nature of the topic of migration in a context of rising anti-immigrant sentiment in Singapore (T. Chong, 2015; Ortiga, 2015; Yeoh & Lam, 2016).

As discussed in Chapter Two, Singapore is centrally governed by the People’s Action Party (PAP) which has been in power since 1965. The PAP controls many areas of life, including grassroots volunteering in Singapore through organisations such as the People’s Association (K. P. A. S.-S. Tan, 2003, pp. 4–5). Singapore’s model of ‘competitive authoritarianism’ (Levitsky & Way, 2010) means that while there are elections, it is doubtful that the Opposition can defeat the incumbent PAP. The challenges of studying non-

liberal or what some scholars term ‘closed’ contexts are well-documented by a variety of scholars (See Gentile, 2013; Janenova, 2019; Morgenbesser & Weiss, 2018; S. Turner, 2013). As indicated by the hybridity of the Singaporean competitive authoritarian political system, the Singaporean state’s hold on power is not carried out by overtly oppressive means such as imprisoning journalists, rigging elections or using the secret service to monitor researchers (Gentile, 2013; Lasocki, 2016; L. H. Ong, 2018), instead political control is often exercised in a far more subtle manner. One way in which the PAP maintains its hold on power is to control information that is available to the public and limit the possibility of controversial issues challenging its public support and hegemonic position (George, 2012). This control of information extends to controlling access to data. Researchers do not have any legal right to public sector information (Png, 2017), unlike in more democratic contexts like the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States where researchers can use freedom of information requests to gain access to data for their research (Walby & Luscombe, 2017). The challenges of researching in Singapore are well-documented by national newspapers and in academic writing, with scholars highlighting the difficulties of getting historical information from the National Archives to finding data on current policies (Loh & Liew, 2010; Png, 2017). Unsurprisingly, finding detailed data on migration into Singapore is difficult given how migration is such a bone of public contention. For instance, a search for official data on the number of newly naturalised citizens and migrants who received permanent residency in Singapore according to their country of origin revealed that such detailed information was unavailable. Instead, the official statistics provided are vague, only giving broad categories of regions of origin, such as ‘Southeast Asian countries’, ‘Other Asian countries’ and ‘Others’ (Strategy Group, 2018a, p. 26). This means that estimations of exact numbers of particular migrant groups vary greatly. For example, recent estimates for how many Chinese nationals reside in Singapore have significant divergence, with a 2013 UN report providing an estimation of 380,000 (*Migration Profiles: Singapore*, 2013), while another assessment has put the number of Chinese nationals in Singapore between 700,000 and 800,000 (Yim, 2011).

Despite the challenges of gaining access to primary data such as public events or government documents, I wanted to rely on more first-hand sources on integration rather than news articles or public speeches that other writing on Singapore often primarily draw upon (See Chua, 2003; D. P. S. Goh, 2014; E. K. B. Tan, 2008). Hence, focussing on INCS was an opportunity to gain peripheral access to both the state and the everyday in a closed research environment. As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, INCs are a unique set of actors because they function as a bridge between state and society. On the one hand, they are volunteers who see themselves as embedded in their communities and volunteer as a manifestation of their desire to better the nation and neighbourhood. But they are not merely acting as private individuals, but instead function under the purview of the state which sets the broad policy agenda, setting budgets and overseeing INCs’ activities. To that end, INCs are uniquely placed to comment on integration efforts given their direct involvement in integration and so could be my ‘eyes’ into state processes. Yet, as I would discover through the course of my data collection, their position as volunteers meant that they also spoke as private Singaporeans with their understanding of what it meant to become

part of the Singaporean community. In short, INCs were key in providing me vital understanding of migrant integration processes in two ways: granting access and unique perspectives. However, getting access to the INCs, while useful for gaining insights into integration processes, was not without its share of challenges as I go on to discuss in the next section on participant recruitment.

To study INCs, I used two methods: narrative interviews and participant observation at INC-organised events. Both methods will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter. To supplement the interviews with INCs, I interviewed some newly naturalised citizens who had gone through the citizenship acquisition process within the previous six months. The reason for choosing to interview this secondary group is because they had gone through the process of acquiring the ‘contingent acceptance’ (Bridget Anderson, 2012) of being part of the national community and are thus gaining a first-hand experience of narratives and practices that seek to constitute and protect the national community. Moreover, since residence in Singapore for several years is required for a successful application, the new citizens have been immersed in and exposed to Singaporean society and state practices both before and during the citizenship acquisition process. This allowed them to draw upon and compare their experiences of informal social norms and attitudes and formal state rhetoric communicated throughout the application process, allowing me a better insight between the linkage between the state and the everyday. For instance, I was able to evaluate how new citizens reacted to the citizenship acquisition process, including events and activities organised by the INCs.

### **Questions of Access, Recruitment and Sampling**

When beginning the process of recruiting INCs to interview, I was mindful of the challenges of gaining access to interviewees who were willing to talk openly about the fraught issue of migration and the integration of migrants into Singaporean society. As Morgenbesser and Weiss note, the very nature of authoritarian rule means that ‘civilians may be apprehensive about talking to foreign researchers, unwilling to disclose their grievances openly’ (2018, p. 10). But regardless of the nationality of the researcher, reticence to be interviewed for any sort of research is quite likely. Hence, the issue I faced was how to gain access to interviewees and which gatekeepers I should approach. In a context where my interviewees volunteer under the purview of the PAP-run People’s Association (PA), authorities at the PA would be ‘ready-made’ gatekeepers who could introduce me to their pool of volunteers (King et al., 2018, p. 59). Yet, going to an official state-run organisation was not without its challenges either. On the one hand, if interviewees fear for their position if they say something out-of-turn, then one might argue that being granted official permission to research from the overseeing body would make them feel more assured that they could trust me since the authorities considered me credible enough to permit me to interview them. But at the same time, if I were permitted to interview INCs by the PA (an assumption that I could not make given the politically-sensitive nature of studying immigration in Singapore), such permission could also be counterproductive in ensuring interviewees spoke freely. Janenova documents this dilemma in her article

detailing her challenges while interviewing government officials in Kazakhstan. During her research, she was perceived as an ‘inspector’ whose purpose was to evaluate the officials (2019, p. 4). As a result, her interviewees were even reluctant to come forward or go off the official government ‘scripts’ because she was now demonstrably in touch with the higher authorities. I thus faced two dilemmas when considering how best to recruit INCs to be interviewed for my research. The first was an ethical dilemma: Would getting the PA involved help protect my interviewees from any potential fall-out? On the one hand, getting permission would alert the authorities to my research and cause them to keep a closer eye on what my interviewees said. This might happen anyway if and when my research is published, but applying for ‘permission’ would most certainly bring my research to their attention during the crucial interview stage. But on the other hand, if I did receive permission, my interviewees could point to it as ‘cover’ if they were ever questioned about what they said. In other words, they could say that since the authorities trusted me enough to grant permission, then they felt that they were permitted to speak freely to me. This sense that they could talk freely is tied to the second dilemma regarding the quality of data collected. If I got permission from the PA, would it make interviewees more willing to see me as trustworthy or would they simply toe the government line because I was now seen as having contacts with the government?

Resolving this dilemma was not a straightforward one. Unlike other authoritarian states where research visas or permits are required (I am also a local researcher so did not need a visa to work in Singapore) (Morgenbesser & Weiss, 2018, pp. 7–8) which would make the process of gaining access to the field somewhat clearer since conditions for research are often stated in such applications, albeit still posing other challenges, the Singapore government does not make its research protocols clear. Given the lack of clear directions from the state as to whether I needed permission to interview INCs and how I could go about getting such approval if it was necessary, I decided to approach my topic differently: to frame it as investigating INC volunteerism from a personal point of view instead of an institutional one. In other words, I asked individual INCs about their particular experiences as volunteers rather than what they were directed to do by the state. If the latter came up, it was incidental rather than intentionally worked into the way the questions were phrased.

Given that I was focussing on personal experiences, I thus decided to approach individual INCs rather than through the PA. I turned to social media, in particular Facebook, as a tool for reaching out to potential interviewees. Facebook is increasingly being used as a tool by social scientists to recruit subjects for academic study given its ubiquity and cost-effectiveness (Rife et al., 2016). Internet penetration in Singapore is 82%, with 64% of individuals having social media accounts (Kemp, 2016). I started by looking for Facebook Groups formed to connect INCs, finding a wide variety of open groups which posted announcements about upcoming activities, photographs from previous events and had publicly available lists of members. Most of the groups were organised according to their local constituency, such as ‘Pasir Ris INC’ (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/358121134257814/>) and ‘Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INC) – Nanyang’ (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/nanyanginc/>). I identified current volunteers by examining recent photographs that had been posted in which volunteers had been ‘tagged’.



I subsequently sent them a private message through Facebook Chat which detailed my research and invited them to be a part of the project. Cognisant of potential concerns over discussing such a sensitive issue, I made it clear to them that their identities would be kept confidential even before they agreed to the interview. I contacted sixty different volunteers through this method, with twenty-five individuals responding and eventually, thirteen INCs that I contacted through Facebook consented to be interviewed. The response rate of slightly over 20% can be explained in two ways. Firstly, most of the non-respondents simply did not read my message due to inactivity on their Facebook account or the fact that they had opted only to be notified of messages sent by individuals already on their Facebook Friends list. In the latter case, my message would have been sent automatically to their 'Message Requests' folder, which functions much like a 'spam' folder to prevent strangers from inundating their Facebook Messenger inbox. Secondly, amongst those who did respond, a number declined to be interviewed, citing a variety of reasons such as discomfort over talking to a PhD researcher or having stopped their volunteer work as an INC for undisclosed reasons.

On top of recruiting INC interviewees through Facebook networks, I also received a number of referrals from those I interviewed when I asked at the end of the interview if they could put me in touch with other INCs who would be interested in being interviewed. This resulted in an additional three interviewees being added to my list, bringing up the total number of INCs for my study to sixteen. The reason for this mixed sampling approach was that sampling via social media can lead to disproportionate representation of the population (Weiner et al., 2017) with internet usage being concentrated amongst the upper class and young (Poushter, 2016). As such, I wanted to be able to contact individuals who might not have been reached through my first sampling method. Admittedly due to the limited sample size, several biases might have been introduced. One of the most apparent biases being that individuals who agreed with the state policy and were enthusiastic volunteers would feel more comfortable being interviewed, but individuals who might have stopped volunteering due to disagreement with migration and integration policies would have chosen not to speak to me. While there is no way of knowing for sure the biases that resulted from this sampling method and the resulting sample size, my interviewees often expressed their frustration and ambivalence towards state policy which gave me a sense that they did not agree entirely with all the state directives despite being volunteers. This combined sampling strategy allowed me to interview sixteen INCs from a variety of backgrounds as indicated in the table below, which outlines certain pertinent self-declared characteristics which are accurate at the point of the interview in 2018. Five of my interviewees are also heads of their local Integration and Naturalisation Committees, which means that they are privy to national-level discussions on integration strategies. Still, they will not be flagged out explicitly as it will make them too easily identifiable. If it is necessary to speak about more senior INC figures in my analysis further in this dissertation, their seniority will be highlighted but without reference to their names. The age of interviewees was made more general to reduce the likelihood of identification, and their profession is not listed except where relevant at points where interviewees are quoted in the dissertation. However, the specific terms used by interviewees for their ethnicity was retained as their self-identified ethnic identity

was sometimes invoked in their discussion of migrant integration. This means that the ethnic categories do not follow a fixed format. The names of the interviewees have been changed to protect anonymity.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Citizenship Status</b>	<b>Years as INC</b>	<b>Mode of Recruitment</b>
Adil	Male	20s	Malay	Singaporean	3	Facebook
Aaron	Male	40s	Malayali	Singaporean	10	Facebook
Gwen	Female	50s	Chinese	Singaporean	5	Facebook
Melissa	Female	50s	Chinese	Singaporean	5	Facebook
Padma	Female	30s	Indian	Singaporean	0.5	Facebook
Parvan	Male	50s	Indian	Naturalised Singaporean (Originally from India)	4	Facebook
Patrick	Male	50s	Chinese	Singaporean	6	Facebook
Priya	Female	30s	Indian	Naturalised Singaporean (Originally from Malaysia)	5	Facebook
Rajesh	Male	60s	Indian	Naturalised Singaporean (Originally from India)	9	Referral
Rania	Female	40s	Indian-Muslim	Singaporean	6	Facebook
Reuben	Male	40s	Goan	Naturalised Singaporean (Originally from India)	4.5	Referral

Smrita	Female	50s	Mixed	Naturalised Singaporean (Originally from Malaysia)	6	Facebook
Sneha	Female	50s	Indian	Naturalised Singaporean (Originally from India)	10	Referral
Tony	Male	50s	Chinese	Singaporean	10	Facebook
Winston	Male	70s	Chinese	Singaporean	10	Facebook
Yong Wei	Male	40s	Chinese	Singaporean	4	Facebook

*Table 4: Profile of INC Respondents*

I was able to contact a significant number of prospective respondents without needing to get the PA involved, and my assurances that their identities would be protected ensured that they felt comfortable to speak freely. This was evidenced by a number of my interviewees speaking frankly about some of the shortcomings of state migration and integration policies discussed in later chapters. However, the question of PA involvement in my project returned midway through my interviews. As I was setting up my tenth interview, my interviewee messaged to ask if I had received ‘permission’ from the PA to interview INCs. She had mentioned my project in passing to a PA employee at her local Community Club, and the employee told her that my project required official approval from the PA authorities. This was the first that I had heard of this requirement, having found no information online and having conducted numerous interviews with INCs (including some very senior volunteers) without this being raised. This then posed a new conundrum for me as to how I should continue my research, given that I was halfway through data collection and recruitment of interviewees. If the PA refused to grant me approval to continue my project, it would be very likely that my interviewees, including those who I had already interviewed, would rescind their consent to be interviewed because the authorities in the PA had determined that I was not sufficiently ‘credible’. Yet, the PA already knew about my project, even if I was not making the organisation the main focus, and thus I could not continue recruiting INCs without permission from the PA.

After some discussion with my PhD supervisors and the department’s ethics committee, I decided to go ahead with the application for approval. In a context where academics are often critical of the state and its policies (Some examples can be seen in Chua, 2003; Holden, 2001; Pakir, 1993) and the academy is seen as one bottom-up source for liberal democratisation in Singapore (K. P. A. S.-S. Tan, 2003, p. 12), I was concerned that my request to research migrant integration processes in Singapore would be denied

immediately and hence developed a number of strategies to maximise the likelihood of getting approval from the PA gatekeepers. Firstly, I went down to the PA headquarters in person to make contact with the division in charge of research. A fellow PhD student who was working on a similar issue lamented the fact that in Singapore, most bureaucrats did not outrightly refuse to grant access to research sites and subjects, but often ‘bounced’ the researcher from government agency to agency. He hypothesized that it was done in the hope that the researcher would eventually give up in their efforts to get access. Janenova documents a similar phenomenon with government bureaucrats in Kazakhstan who will not openly refuse a request for an interview but ‘keep delaying it in the hope that the researchers would stop their attempts’ (2019, p. 4). I travelled down to the PA headquarters in the hope that meeting a civil servant from their research division in person would reduce the chances of my request for approval being refused. Sure enough, the civil servant that I met made sure to send me the appropriate research application forms. While the questions asked in the forms provided a fascinating insight into the mind of the state and how academics are viewed, such analysis would be far outside the purview of this dissertation. Nonetheless, I took Morgenbesser and Weiss’ advice to ‘frame research plans to increase the odds of approval’ by giving a ‘non-sensitive spin’ on my research (2018, p. 8). For instance, in the section outlining the ‘potential benefits of research findings to PA’, I presented my project as being mutually beneficial by drawing explicitly from official PA language about its goals and vision for its contribution to Singaporean society.

This project’s goal of studying how migration and national identity are managed is a timely one in a Singaporean society that is becoming increasingly diverse. This increasing diversity poses a challenge to the PA’s vision of building “a great home where every Singaporean feels a strong sense of belonging, pride and rootedness”. This project provides an in-depth and objective examination of how this home is being built and what can be done to continue to further this aim, a goal I share with the PA.

My approach to framing my project in a way that was acceptable to the authorities meant that it was harder to turn down my request to study INCs, and this strategy bore fruit. The response to my application was telling in its deeply ambivalent tone. On the one hand, I was thanked for sending in my application and then pointed in the direction of another government agency that deals with citizenship acquisition but not the INC volunteers themselves (this was even though the PA had been adamant that I had to seek their approval to interview any of the volunteers working under their purview). At the same time, I was also offered access to even more data for my research in the form of printed materials which I had been unable to access previously, such as a PA-produced comic book entitled ‘Desirable Social Norms for an Inclusive and Harmonious Society’ (*Desirable Social Norms for an Inclusive and Harmonious Society*, 2017) and a book detailing the history of the INCs and the personal stories of various volunteers (Hong, 2017). Upon receiving this response, I decided to continue with my interviews now that I had notified the authorities of my research, focussing instead on making sure that I received the explicit and ongoing consent of my interviewees (the consent form is attached in the appendices).

The prolonged and complicated process of recruiting INCs for my study provided me with several important lessons. Firstly, even when they are not directly involved in recruiting participants for research, institutional gatekeepers still play a vital role in ensuring the success of a project through sending out signals about whether a project is deemed ‘acceptable’ (or not) and positioning the researcher as trustworthy (Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). Secondly, gaining access for research is not merely about seeking consent from both respondents and gatekeepers, but how one asks. This requires sensitivity towards the context in which the research is being carried out. In my case, this was aided by drawing upon the previous experience of other researchers doing work in Singapore and on my insider status, the latter of which is discussed in the last section of this chapter.

The second group of interviewees that I recruited were the newly naturalised citizens that I interviewed to supplement my interviews with INCs. The focus of these interviews was to discuss their experience acquiring Singaporean citizenship, especially concerning their interaction with INCs throughout that process. Given that they were a secondary group of interviewees and I had already collected a sizeable amount of data from my sixteen interviews with INCs which I had to transcribe and analyse, I decided to keep this pool of interviewees small. I recruited eight newly naturalised citizens to be interviewed after putting out a call on social media. Despite the small number, as the table below shows, they were still a diverse group, representing a variety of migrants with different backgrounds.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Previous Citizenship</b>	<b>Year of Arrival in Singapore</b>	<b>Year Acquired S'porean Citizenship</b>
Claire	Female	20s	Malaysian	Born in Singapore	2018
Haoyi	Male	20s	Chinese	2004	2018
Jillian	Female	50s	Malaysian	1994	2018
Karen	Female	50s	British	1999	2015
Kieran	Male	20s	Malaysian	2002	2017
Ling	Female	30s	Chinese	2002	2018
Naomi	Female	20s	Malaysian	2000	2017
Yumiko	Female	40s	Japanese	1996	2017

*Table 5: Profile of New Citizen Interviewees*

Getting into contact with INCs was not just helpful for setting up interviews and being introduced to more interviewees, but the INCs themselves were gatekeepers to events that they organised. I collected data from participant observation at INC-organised events and other activities related to citizenship acquisition. I was a participant-observer at a total of seven events. Three were neighbourhood celebrations of cultural festivals often done in conjunction with other grassroots volunteering organisations such as the Indian Activities Executive Committee of the local area. These events were: Pongal, Holi and Chinese New Year. I attended the first two at the invitation of INCs that I interviewed, and I found out about the Chinese New Year event through an INC Facebook page that I was following. A further two events were not specific to one cultural event but were large-scale carnivals organised annually in every constituency called the ‘One Community Fiesta’. Before 2016, the event was organised by the PA at a national level. From 2016 onwards, the event was split up to sixteen different localities where local INC committees work with a wide variety of local groups, such as migrant groups, local businesses and schools, to hold a fair which showcases the various cultures in the neighbourhood, and, as a local newspaper put it, help ‘bridge the gap between locals and new immigrants in the heartlands’ (S. F. V. Koh, 2016). I attended two different One Community Fiestas after seeing them advertised on Facebook pages (much like in the advertisement shown on the right which was taken from the Sengkang Community Club’s Facebook page). Finally, I observed two activities related to the citizenship acquisition process known as the Singapore Citizenship Journey. I attended a Community Sharing Session at a local Community Club after being invited by a local INC volunteer whom I interviewed. I also observed a new citizen completing the online course which teaches newcomers about Singapore’s history, politics, public policies and social norms.



Figure 3: Advertisement for One Community Fiesta

## Data Collection

I employed two methods to collect data for my research: narrative interviews and participant observation, and used print and online sources to corroborate what I heard and observed. This was due to a relative paucity of on-the-ground research on constructions of belonging and identity in Singapore. Many pieces of

work on the subject have focussed on analysing state policy and rhetoric through studying media releases, public speeches and news articles (Y. T. Chia, 2012; Chua, 2009; A. Koh, 2005; Kong & Yeoh, 1997; Moore, 2000). Other studies that have moved away from analysing state policy have often looked at online sources to see how concepts of belonging are discursively constructed (Ortiga, 2015). While much has been written about the norms as developed by the Singaporean state, the literature on everyday lived experiences of individuals is generally neglected. Where there has been some sparse work on the topic, it is often focussed almost exclusively on localised experiences with little to no discussion of the role of the state in shaping these experiences (R. B. H. Goh, 2003; A. E. Lai, 2010; Wise & Velayutham, 2014), an oversight that cannot be overlooked given the extensive reach of the Singaporean state. Furthermore, where there is theoretical work on the general topic of multiculturalism and everyday life as discussed in the preceding chapter of this dissertation, academic writing is often written in the context of liberal democracies (Levey, 2010). This lack of well-developed academic work on the subject in the particular political and social context of Singapore meant that I was working with little to no pre-existing theory on the subject, but had to draw upon other tangentially related work, such as that on street-level bureaucrats. This meant that throughout the fieldwork process, I was simultaneously collecting, transcribing and coding data to find patterns and adjust my methodology to best capture the issues that emerge as I collected data.

### *Narrative Interviews*

Narrative interviews are fundamentally about prompting interviewees to tell a story about their lived experience, often through open-ended and unstructured questioning. The narrative interview form allows respondents greater expression of their agency and perspectives (Riessman, 1993) in which they can tell their own stories without being cut short or limited by structured questions which otherwise incentivise respondents to give succinct answers (Elliot, 2005, p. 21). The value of a story is twofold. Firstly, it is often told chronologically with interviewees choosing which events and memories to emphasize, providing a storyline that shows actors relating to each other in a sequence of events (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 47). Since stories are often told to make a point, the narrator takes the responsibility to communicate their experience, allowing the researcher a better understanding of the interviewee's perspective (Chase, 1995) rather than assuming that specific experiences are of particular importance and thus need to be asked about in an interview. In the case of interviews with INCs, I started by asking how they got involved in volunteering as an INC. For most interviews, this elicited a story about their involvement, allowing the interviewee to continue with little to no further prompting. This often led to unanticipated insights provided by volunteers which I would not have known to ask for. For example, one of my interviewees, Smrita, explained that she started volunteering when she and her husband first moved to Singapore. This was the first time that I had heard of non-local-born volunteers. Furthermore, her story made me start thinking about the value of volunteering as not merely being about helping new migrants feel at home in their new country but also making volunteers themselves develop a greater sense of rootedness. This in turn helped me resolve a question that I had been puzzling over about why the government spends so much time trying

to recruit new citizens as volunteers.

Secondly, stories are socially situated in specific contexts and thus, when interviewees talk about themselves, they position themselves within these settings, reflecting their perceived status, position of power and practices that they are allowed to perform given this status (Depperman, 2015, p. 371). Much like how narrative positioning is used by interviewees to show how they conceive of their position through gender structures (Hollway, 1984), interviewees' positionality regarding national and multiracial structures can be ascertained from the way they present their story vis a vis their portrayal of the larger context. Jane Elliot provides an incisive explanation regarding the value of a narrative:

If narratives become the focus of research not simply because they provide an insight into individuals' experiences and the meanings they make of them, but because their form tells us something about the cultural framework within which individuals make sense of their lives, then the close analysis of narratives produced by a relatively small sample of individuals may produce evidence that is considered to provide an understanding of the intersubjective meanings shared by the whole of a community (2005, p. 28).

The narrative interview research method prioritises the voice of the interviewee, showing how they situate themselves within the social context and discursively construct their own identity, thereby also revealing their perceptions of Singaporean society as a whole. For instance, when Karen, a new citizen who was originally British, discussed her experience acquiring Singaporean citizenship, she talked about how locals often did not believe that she was Singaporean because she was Caucasian. This demonstrated how Singaporean-ness is conceived of as a trait associated with Asian ethnicity. She also recounted the surprise that was expressed by her other Caucasian friends over the fact that she had given up her British citizenship to become Singaporean, suggesting that there was an assumed hierarchy of citizenship whereby British citizenship was deemed more desirable and valuable than Singaporean citizenship. Hence, Karen's story about the reception she experienced when she told others about her change in citizenship status revealed insights into perceptions surrounding Singaporean society as well as a global citizenship structure.

I began my interviews with two aims. The first was to collect data on INCs, but the second was to gain a sense of what I ought to be asking to better collect data for future interviews. To that end, I employed iterative coding of my interviews which saw me transcribing and coding interviews as soon as they were completed to allow myself to reflect on and refine my interview method (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000, p. 1490). After this initial process, the narrative interviews that I carried out followed the same general structure. I started by asking my interviewees to tell me about their journey to becoming an INC or a new citizen. The open-ended nature of my question allowed interviewees to decide where their story began and what direction it would take. Many of them required little to no further prompting. While this meant that interviews tended to be quite meandering, often lasting for over an hour and a half, I found that my interviewees often expressed their opinions about state policy more openly when such views were



unsolicited. For example, Paul, who heads his local INC group, detailed his years of involvement in the Community Sharing Sessions (CSS) by discussing how the format had changed over the years. Not being an INC myself, I would not have known to enquire about previous iterations of the event. Furthermore, his verbal and non-verbal cues, such as a sigh when talking about the state's decision to switch the facilitation of the event from INCs to commercial vendors, demonstrated his disappointment with the diminishment of the INCs' role in the CSS. On the other hand, if I had been explicit in asking him about his views on state migration and integration policies, it is unlikely that I would have received such a candid response. Interviews were carried out in a public place of the interviewee's choosing and, with the interviewee's consent, I created audio recordings of the interview to aid transcription afterwards which have been stored securely. Any reference to interviewees in my research uses their assigned pseudonyms and interviewees were reminded before, during and at the end of the interview that they were able to withdraw their consent at any point.

### ***Participant Observation***

While interviews were one of the main ways that I collected data, I functioned as a participant-observer at a variety of migrant integration and citizenship acquisition events. The reason for using such a mixed qualitative approach was to allow me to triangulate my data, with data gleaned from both interviews and participant observation helping to enrich the overall research process. For instance, one of my INC interviewees helped to organise a Pongal event that I attended which is a Hindu harvest festival celebrated by South Indians, especially Tamils (Cush et al., 2008, pp. 610–611), who are the predominant ethnic group amongst Indians in Singapore (Mani et al., 2017, p. 195). My interviewee had argued that the INC involvement in organising Pongal was useful in showing new citizens the rich diversity of Singaporean cultures, but I was able to ask her about how effective it was given that most attendees were of South Asian ethnicity and hence were likely to be already acquainted with the festival, its significance and practices. As such, attending INC-organised events allowed me to engage in more informed conversations with interviewees about their work.

Before detailing the process of my research, it is essential to note that my experience of 'participant observation' is quite different from that used by anthropologists, which is why I have intentionally refrained from calling my work 'ethnographic'. In the latter usage, participant observation refers to a long-term and intimate engagement with the group or individuals being studied (Shah, 2017, pp. 50–51) through immersion in the group (Moeran, 2009), such as Dick Hobbs' involvement in criminal gangs in East London (1994) and James C. Scott's fourteen-month stay in a Malaysian village to document forms of peasant resistance to authority (1985). While such immersive research would undoubtedly have yielded a treasure trove of data, this approach was not possible for a few reasons. Firstly, as discussed at length in the section on recruitment and access, Singapore's authoritarian political context meant that even the most 'cursory' of research, such as one-off interviews, was often challenging and met with suspicion by the

authorities. When I was invited to the Community Sharing Sessions by one of the INC leaders, they told me that I could collect data by observing from outside the hall where the CSS was being held. As it was a semi-public setting – the volume of the facilitators’ microphone was so loud that one could hear what they were saying from a nearby restaurant, I was still able to collect data from outside the venue itself. Despite being the head of his local committee, the INC that invited me was reluctant to have me attend the CSS in such an overt manner and hence he gave me the details of the time and place of the CSS while also instructing me to stay outside. Given this cautiousness over being studied at length, proposals to shadow INCs for a prolonged period was likely to be met with significant reluctance from both the INCs and the PA, thus I was limited to more ‘superficial’ means of collecting data. On the other hand, shorter interviews and one-off attendance at events was seen as less intimidating. Secondly, gaining sufficient trust unsurprisingly requires a significant amount of time even before one can ask for permission to carry out research. Given my PhD requirement of dissertation submission within four years from enrolment, fulfilling what is sometimes presented as the ‘archetype of fieldwork that idealizes anthropological/ethnographic practice as a lone activity in which the fieldworker lives for at least a year among the natives’ (Forsey, 2010, p. 564) would have been impossible.

Given the constraints previously outlined, my participant observation method simply involved me attending events and observing them frequently through the lens of a participant. To do this, I focussed on attending public events that allowed me to move freely without being concerned about the ethical and practical challenges of covert research, such as salting the field for future research for myself and others working in the area of migration and citizenship in Singapore (Bulmer, 1982). The five public events that I attended were in open, public spaces, such as a field in the centre of the neighbourhood and the local Cc, which allowed me to move around freely and simultaneously observe and participate in the festivities. For instance, when I attended a Holi celebration at the invitation of the local INC head of the constituency, volunteers thrust packets of coloured powder in my hands. They enthusiastically encouraged me to participate in throwing the powder at other attendees. They seemed especially enthusiastic to rope me into the proceedings given that I was one of the few visible non-South Asians. Evidently in such public settings where curious onlookers are commonplace, it is very easy to become a ‘lurker’ (to borrow a term from researchers working on online ethnography), sitting on the side-lines and simply observing all that is going on around me. Instead, I chose to engage in a form of ‘moderate participation’ (Spradley, 2016, p. 60) in which I functioned both as an insider and outsider. At the One Community Fiestas that I attended, I wandered through the events, taking turns to observe and participate in cultural activities, such as local games and watching cultural dances. Participation allowed me to appreciate how members of the public might view the event (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 14) as I was repeatedly approached by a variety of INC volunteers for a variety of reasons, from offering me food to asking for feedback for the event. More practically, participation in the event, allowed me to get into the centre of the activity which in turn let me observe how INCs described the cultural practices in an otherwise very noisy setting. In these cases, given the publicness of the event, I was unable to get consent from all who I observed or talked to, hence any

reporting of my observations will be done in a very general fashion, in contrast to the discussion of my interview data which involves me describing characteristics of the interviewee and often providing direct quotes.

In two other events that I attended, participation was not an option. These two events were related directly to the citizenship acquisition process – the Community Sharing Session and online course for citizenship applicants. As discussed earlier, my attendance at CSS, was as a literal outsider where an interviewee invited me but told to remain outside, only being able to listen to the facilitator on stage who was speaking with a microphone but not being privy to the small group discussions that new citizens were engaging in with each other and the INC in charge of their group. In these conversations, new citizens were asked to share their responses to three set questions that generally follow the following past-present-future format that one INC described for me: ‘Who was someone who welcomed you to Singapore when you first arrived?’, ‘Why are you becoming a Singaporean citizen now?’ and ‘What do you aspire for Singapore in the next ten years?’ While these conversations would have been a rich trove of information (one INC told me that the PA collects all the answers provided, which are written down on large sheets of paper by the INC facilitators, for their analysis), being outside the venue meant that I was neither able to hear nor gain consent to collect data on such conversations. For the online course, I watched a new citizen as she completed the course. The purpose was less to record her responses to the content, but to gain insights into what exactly was being communicated to new citizens given that the contents of the course are not publicly available.

## **Data Analysis**

Both during and after interviews, I sought to analyse the data that I was regularly collecting, engaging what Glaser and Strauss call the ‘constant comparative method’ (1967, p. vii). I coded from full interview transcriptions instead of notes. Unsurprisingly, using complete interview transcriptions was time and labour-intensive, with each hour of interview material taking at least three hours to transcribe. However, I chose to transcribe my interviews word for word for a number of reasons. Firstly, Singaporean English (colloquially known as ‘Singlish’), a creole of English, Chinese dialects, Tamil and Malay with Mandarin grammar (Ortmann, 2009, p. 36), was used by most of my interviewees, including naturalised citizens. The use of Singlish combined with strong accents, meant that I was unable to use professional transcription software since the pronunciation of English words was often unorthodox and interviews were interspersed with non-English words that a computer programme would be unable to decipher. Many of non-English terms do not have equivalents in the English language, although I do my best explain what they mean when they are used in this dissertation. For instance, a number of interviewees when describing particular behaviour deemed characteristically Singaporean used the term ‘*kiasu*’, which is defined as ‘governed by self-interest, typically manifesting as a selfish, grasping attitude arising from a fear of missing out on something’ (‘Kiasu, n. and Adj.’, n.d.). Transcribing the interviews word for word allowed me to capture

the nuance of what was communicated to me. The second reason for coding from full interview transcriptions was due to my commitment to ground my theory in the data available. As Charmaz points out, ‘coding full interview transcriptions gives you ideas and understandings that you might otherwise miss’ (2006, p. 70). In contrast, writing abbreviated notes instead of full transcriptions from which codes are drawn requires the researcher to decide what is important enough to note down, thus necessitating some preconceived idea of what is important enough to note and what ought to be disregarded, which is counter to the data-driven approach that I was taking.

With this approach in mind, I engaged in an iterative form of coding using NVivo. As I began my interviews, I started coding according to themes that emerged. As I coded more interviews, I started breaking down the themes into sub-themes, often returning to previously analysed interviews to recode them according to the new codes that I had added. I cross-referenced this set of codes with codes that referenced the interviewees’ emotional response to the discussed phenomena. This resulted in the creation of a codebook reflected in the table below.

Thematic Code	Interviewees’ Responses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Volunteering as an INC</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1. Motivations for volunteering               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1.1. Value-based reasoning</li> <li>1.1.2. Utility-based reasoning</li> </ol> </li> <li>1.2. Volunteering in the neighbourhood               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.2.1. Organising cultural events</li> <li>1.2.2. Excursions for residents</li> <li>1.2.3. One Community Fiesta</li> <li>1.2.4. Informal interactions with residents</li> <li>1.2.5. Other non-INC opportunities to volunteer</li> </ol> </li> <li>1.3. National-level events               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.3.1. National Integration Council</li> <li>1.3.2. INClusive Awards</li> </ol> </li> <li>1.4. Recruiting new volunteers               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.4.1. Challenges</li> <li>1.4.2. Benefits to new citizens</li> </ol> </li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Positive</li> <li>B. Negative</li> <li>C. Ambivalent</li> </ol>

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>2. <u>Acquiring Singaporean citizenship</u></p> <p>2.1. Moving to Singapore</p> <p>    2.1.1. Reasons to migrate</p> <p>    2.1.2. Initial impressions of Singapore</p> <p>2.2. Making the decision</p> <p>    2.2.1. Motivations to convert citizenship</p> <p>    2.2.2. Others' reaction to change in citizenship</p> <p>2.3. Formal citizenship process</p> <p>    2.3.1. Application for citizenship</p> <p>    2.3.2. Renouncing previous citizenship</p> <p>    2.3.3. Singapore Citizenship Journey</p> <p>        2.3.3.1. E-Learning</p> <p>        2.3.3.2. Learning Journey</p> <p>        2.3.3.3. Community Sharing Session</p> <p>        2.3.3.4. Citizenship Ceremony</p> <p>3. <u>Feeling a sense of belonging</u></p> <p>3.1. Belonging to Singapore</p> <p>    3.1.1. Characteristics of Singaporean-ness</p> <p>    3.1.2. Conflicting nationalisms</p> <p>    3.1.3. Continued ties to country of origin</p> <p>    3.1.4. Non-acceptance by locals</p> <p>3.2. Rootedness in the neighbourhood</p> <p>    3.2.1. Experiences of neighbourliness</p> <p>    3.2.2. Volunteering to boost belonging</p> <p>    3.2.3. Anti-social practices</p> <p>3.3. Ethnic identity</p> <p>    3.3.1. Everyday competent multiculturalism</p> <p>    3.3.2. Racist/xenophobic experiences</p> |  |
|---|--|

3.3.3. Experiences of Singaporean multiracialism	
3.3.4. Expressions of one's ethnicity	

*Table 6: Data Codebook*

This codebook provided a robust framework with which I was able to detect patterns and broad themes which would then form the basis for my overall argument.

### **Reflections on being In and Out**

In-betweenness is a significant feature of my dissertation, whether it is about the in-between process of integration where migrants transition from foreigner to Singaporean or the INC's position between state and society. Similarly, in-betweenness featured in the process of my research, particularly my position concerning the social phenomena and context which I am studying. There has been extensive discussion about the benefits and drawbacks of being an insider or outsider researcher (See Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Carling et al., 2014; Kerstetter, 2012). For instance, Robert Merton frames the debate as one between two doctrines of the Insider and Outsider (1972). In the former, the researcher's membership of the group being studied provides them with unique knowledge about the way the group functions that can only be achieved with insider knowledge. The latter argues that such intimate knowledge of the group undermines the researcher's objectivity. Instead, being an outsider allows a greater distance with which to study the group under scrutiny. While it is not the purpose of this dissertation to debate the pros and cons of either approach, there is a rising scholarship which challenges the dichotomy that such a framework imposes. Many a time, researchers find themselves on the spectrum of insider/outsider, with their position shifting relative to the specific characteristics that the researched focus on or what issues come to the fore during the research process (Mercer, 2007). Dwyer and Buckle make the argument for looking at 'the space between' the two positions. They forward the claim that 'holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference' (2009, p. 60). Through the course of my research, I found myself occupying that 'space between' and shifting between 'insider' and 'outsider' depending on the context at hand (not unlike the INCs that I studied for this research project).

Throughout my research, I was frequently navigating questions surrounding my identity. I started this project as a result of a sense of discomfort over negative sentiments expressed towards migrants by friends. Yet, I was told that I was not 'like them' because I had grown up in Singapore regardless of my foreign citizenship. This position of being in-between membership groups had several significant implications for this project. First and foremost, it motivated my research. For much of my life, I have found myself negotiating my place of belonging. Growing up in Singapore with a White Caucasian British mother and a Chinese-Singaporean father who moved to Great Britain when he was fourteen years old, I frequently found myself in contexts where I was surrounded by other children who one might term 'third

culture kids' or TCKs. The three cultures that such TCKs have to navigate are the culture of their parents' home country, the culture of their current residence and the transnational culture of expatriates (Starr et al., 2017, p. 508; Useem & Downie, 1976). An average week would see me going to a local Singaporean school where I would speak Singlish to my peers, return home to what some would consider a surprisingly British household where we would have baked beans on toast for tea. On Saturdays, I would go over to my father's workplace and play with missionary kids who were often transiting in Singapore. Church on Sunday was at a largely expatriate church, populated by mostly White, upper-class migrants (Beaverstock, 2011) who would often stay in Singapore for a few years before moving on to a new job posting or returning home. Despite possessing an ability to function as a 'social chameleon' (Ossman, 2004), my reality of residing in a British household in Singapore meant that there was no place where I felt I truly belonged. Instead, belonging involved an often performative act of putting on and taking off various identities at different points, best exemplified by my ability to 'code-switch' between different accents depending on the setting I found myself in (much to the amusement of my Singaporean friends who would often ask me to say something in my 'British accent') (Carnevale, 2013). This experience led me to intuitively understand that belonging to a community was distinct, albeit still related to, formal membership. For instance, I considered myself Singaporean despite not having Singaporean citizenship. So then the questions that underpin this study were formulated: How does one belong to a community? What is the relationship between formal membership and a more informal social belonging? Can one pick up the values, behaviours and attitudes associated with the group to which one seeks to belong?

But more than just motivating my study, my personal experiences of in-between-ness, had implications for my data collection and analysis. Through the course of my interviews, I often found myself employing Oakley's model of 'participatory interviewing' in which the interviewer invests their personal identity in the relationship with the interviewee (1981). For instance, my mixed ethnic background was often commented on ('Are you pure Chinese?' and 'Where are you from?' were common questions that I was asked). Smrita, an INC who described her ethnic identity as '*rojak*', a mixed salad dish commonly referred to in Singapore to refer to cultural diversity (Wagner, 2007), opened up about her experiences of racism in Singapore due to perceptions about her racial ambiguity. She explained that she felt comfortable speaking to me about it because I was 'not pure Chinese too' and thus understood what it felt like to not fit into the state's prescribed categories. On the other hand, if I were 'pure Chinese', she would not have felt comfortable sharing her experiences of racism at the hands of Chinese Singaporeans with me. In the case of my interview with Smrita, our shared mixed-race identity was an unintentional boon in gathering data. In other cases, I made the conscious choice to appear in a particular manner to make my interviewee more comfortable. For instance, when interviewing Karen, a woman who had moved to Singapore from Great Britain, I spoke to her with a British accent as I would with my parents, in contrast to my interviews with Asian interviewees where I spoke with a Singlish accent. My mixed background allowed me to function as an insider for multiple, often mutually exclusive groups.

However, my insider status in terms of having lived in Singapore has meant that I needed to be

more cognizant about not taking certain unspoken ideas and practices as the norm. Instead, I have had to make a greater effort to ensure that I am explaining what might appear self-evident to me in a manner comprehensible to a non-Singaporean reader. For instance, interviewees often referred to migrants from the People's Republic of China as 'PRCs' or 'mainlanders'. On the face of it, this might simply appear to be a neutral statement of a person's nationality. Yet, its usage in Singapore is often derogatory and used, especially by Singaporean Chinese, to distinguish between them and recent migrants from China who are often perceived to be uncouth and uncivilised (S. Ang, 2018). Similarly, when quoting interviewees who used Singlish extensively, I often had to 'translate' their statements due to the sentence structure that would otherwise confuse readers who were unfamiliar with the Mandarin grammar used by Singlish speakers.

### **Chapter Summary: Researching Integration Processes**

This chapter outlined the methodology that I employed for this project. It began with an explanation as to why INCs were chosen as the 'sites' for studying integration processes, in contrast to alternative sites, such as citizenship ceremonies. Central to this issue was a question of access in a context where research into the thorny issue of migrant integration is often viewed with a degree of suspicion. This theme continued in the section on recruitment and sampling. However, challenges surrounding access is only part of the story. The other reason for studying the INC role in migrant integration in Singapore is because of how such a new angle can contribute to broader discussions on migration and belonging. Given that the INCs' voices had been neglected in previous studies, I decided to prioritise their perspectives in my project, leading to a grounded theory approach which utilised narrative interviews and participant observation to collect data which was coded iteratively. These methods allowed me to gain valuable insights into how individuals can belong to a national community, a question in which I am personally invested. The subsequent chapters elaborate on these insights and the role that INCs play in facilitating the process of belonging.



## **Chapter Six: The In-betweenness of the INCs**

The earlier chapters in this dissertation introduced the individuals being studied in this piece of research: the Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs). Chapter Two showed how the development of the INC scheme since its inception in 2007 (Hong, 2017, p. 20) is situated in the broader Singaporean historical context of migration and ethnic diversity. Chapter Three and Four introduced the two contributions that this study of INCs brings to the literature on migrant integration. First, the development of national multiculturalism where a policy of recognising difference strengthens national identity. Secondly, a meso-level approach of studying actors who bridge state goals and everyday realities. Chapter five developed a methodological framework for studying INCs.

This chapter marks the first of three substantive chapters that answer this dissertation's research question: How do INCs use their position as grassroots volunteers to facilitate integration? I argue that INCs occupy a meso-level position in between state and society that allows them to facilitate integration into local neighbourhoods and the multicultural Singaporean context. This chapter focuses on establishing the liminality of the INCs' position between state and society in four sections. The first section outlines the concept of liminality, especially as it is used within the street-level bureaucracy framework. In the second section, I examine the motivations for INCs' volunteerism and argue that they are effectively serving 'two masters': the local community and the state as represented in public policy implementation. Serving two masters means that INCs are sandwiched between two sets of interests which sometime conflict, as I show in the next two sections that look at how INCs find themselves in between rising public antipathy towards foreigners and the state's continued defence for its open immigration policy. Overall, the purpose of the chapter is to show how INCs, straddling policy and everyday contexts, have to negotiate their ideological commitment to policy goals and the challenges of meeting those goals in the messy reality of daily life.

### **Liminality and Ambivalence**

The concept of liminality is used elastically across a wide range of academic disciplines. Arnold van Gennep, who is often attributed with developing the concept in his book *Rites de Passage* (Chakraborty, 2016; Thomassen, 2009), presented liminality as a process of transition, such as the rites of passage as one moves from child to adult. Victor Turner, building on van Gennep's work, saw the liminar, or those experiencing liminality, as between structures (1967), whether they be temporal, spatial or organisational. For instance, the teenage years are often portrayed as liminal periods in one's life, during which one is transitioning from childhood dependency to adult independence (Wood, 2012). Adolescence is thus not considered a standalone identity but one characterised by a change from one stage in one's life to another, such as from immaturity to maturity. Borders are often held up as an example of spatial liminality. Travellers moving between countries and regions often see airports as sites which exemplify the sense of being 'in-between', where one has committed to leaving the country by entering the airport and going through rituals such as security and customs checks and checking into one's flight and has not yet arrived at their destination (W.-

J. Huang et al., 2018). In her study of refugees who arrive on the Greek island of Lesbos, Tsoni shows how asylum seekers experience temporal and spatial liminality when they are physically stuck in a location which is perceived to be a processing area before they reach their final destination (2016). Here liminality is seen as temporary, even if it takes a prolonged period of time, like in the case of the refugees. In the case of this dissertation, the integration process of migrants to Singapore as they become naturalised citizens can be seen as a liminal process. They are transitioning from foreigner to citizen and, amid that change, are going through rites of passage to make that transformation, such as the Singapore Citizenship Journey, giving up their original passports to their embassies and receiving their new Singapore National Registration Identity Cards at the citizenship ceremony.

While liminality can undoubtedly be understood as transitory, other scholars have looked at situations where liminality takes on a more permanent nature. In these cases, positionality is key rather than the transitory nature. In studies of work practices, scholars have shown how freelancers are in a constant position of liminality, between teams and organisations (Tempest & Starkey, 2004), while marketing managers are in a place of ‘institutional liminality’ because they interact primarily with customers who are outside the firm. Thus, they see themselves as distinct from others within the firm (Ellis & Ybema, 2010). Liminality is also a key feature in the street-level bureaucracy literature, although not always using that terminology. For example, in the development literature, intermediaries tasked with communicating and implementing development policy on the ground often find themselves working in between communities and development authorities, whether they be governmental or non-governmental (Michener, 1998). As Bailur notes, this means that they belong to neither group and have conflicting feelings regarding both as they try to implement and communicate government policies to local beneficiaries of such policies (2010).

This focus on actors in liminal positions has several critical implications with which this dissertation is concerned. Firstly, the liminar finds him or herself in a unique position to negotiate between groups who occupy either side of the liminal position. For instance, former gang members are invaluable members in gang intervention projects because of their prior experience in gangs. They are trusted by the young members of gangs more readily than other actors, such as social workers, precisely because they occupy a position of liminality (Lopez-Aguado, 2013). Nonetheless, this in-between position is not an easy one to maintain as it involves balancing different and sometimes oppositional interests. A second implication results: the liminar is often ambivalent about their position as they find themselves outside the neat binaries of classification (Giesen, 2018). As such, they have to negotiate their identity in the light of such ambivalence (Beech, 2011). Going further, Lipsky argues that this in-between position leads to feelings of alienation amongst street-level bureaucrats. On the one hand, they are working face-to-face with clients and thus being aware of the challenges on the ground. Yet, they are not in charge of policy directives which come from above, even if they can exercise a degree of discretion within the top-down instructions that are disseminated to them (2010, pp. 75–79). The next section examines what liminal position the INCs find themselves in and argues that they are effectively trying to serve both the state and society as they are seeking to help migrants in the latter’s liminal situation as they become naturalised citizens, transitioning

from foreigner to Singaporean.

### **Serving Two Masters: State and Society**

In March 2017, an opposition party politician posted a picture on Facebook of a flyer distributed to residents of Fengshan constituency run by the People's Action Party that was used to recruit grassroots volunteers. It listed some of the 'recognition' that would be given such volunteers, such as special parking allocation and a position of higher priority in the primary school registration process for their children. The post sparked discussion surrounding the motivations of grassroots volunteers and led the People's Association to make a public post defending the volunteers as 'selflessly giv[ing] their time, talent and resources' (Z. L. Chong, 2017). The controversy highlights a common issue that arises when discussing the role of volunteer labour. Some scholars when writing about volunteer work have noted that volunteers occupy an awkward liminal space between carrying out unpaid labour for work that might otherwise be done by paid workers (in the case of INCs, bureaucrats) (Toraldo et al., 2019). To an outsider, it is hard to conceive of why an individual might give up time or energy without monetary compensation. Hence, the suspicion that grassroots volunteers must be volunteering for their self-interest, whether it be preferential treatment in getting their children into local schools or gaining social prestige.

Despite these allegations of self-interests, INCs, like many volunteers who see their volunteerism as a way of 'service' and 'living their values' (O' Toole & Grey, 2016), sought to explain that they were not motivated to by 'selfish' reasons. When asked about the controversy in Fengshan, interviewed INCs were quick to point out that they did not receive any material reward for their work. Tony, a grassroots volunteer for approximately fifteen years, spoke about how he began volunteering for 'selfish' reasons to clean up an unsightly junkyard opposite his home. He quipped:

So how I got into INC? I didn't even realise I was in INC. That was the joke of it. At that time, I was invited by Punggol Central, the one in charge of the CC [Community Club] to attend a dinner. And he told me to help the CC out but he didn't even tell me it was INC. And later I realised that he was starting the INC committee.

But as he volunteered, Tony found that he enjoyed the 'unpaid work' despite the significant time and energy that he had to put into it. For instance, as an INC, he finds himself engaging in activities almost every weekend, from judging *rangoli*<sup>2</sup> competitions organized for the Indian festival of Deepavali (known as Diwali in other parts of the world) to serving porridge to needy residents with new citizens and Permanent Residents (PRs) during *Iftar* when Muslims break their fast during the month of Ramadan. On weekday evenings Tony is often at various INC events, such as at the People's Association Integration Council where

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<sup>2</sup> Originating from South Asia, *rangoli* is an art form created from making elaborate patterns out of coloured rice and flour on the floor (Kaur & Singh, 2018).

he represents his constituency, meeting his fellow INCs to plan for upcoming events and at Community Sharing Sessions with new citizens which are held at least once a month in his constituency. Tony's work thus involves volunteering at various levels – national planning to form broad strategies which will guide INCs throughout Singapore and in his local constituency. Tony was not alone amongst my interviewees as many of them discussed the often onerous responsibilities of volunteering. Yet, they were also quick to explain that they felt happy to do so. They saw themselves as in a unique position to serve two communities: the first their local neighbourhood and the second was the national community of Singapore, embodied by the state.

When speaking about their service to the local neighbourhoods, several INCs referred to how they have been living in public housing for most of their lives and thus wanted to give back to the community. For instance, Melissa, an ethnically Chinese INC in her mid-forties recalled growing up in a *kampung*<sup>3</sup> in the neighbourhood before she was relocated to a nearby HDB flat where she continues to reside and bring up her children who are now in their late teens. Another INC, Winston, proudly declared that he had been staying in his estate for 'over thirty years'. This lengthy experience of living in an HDB estate allowed INCs to develop a sense of attachment to living in their particular 'heartland' neighbourhood<sup>4</sup> and to the neighbours living around them. This attachment to the area is often a reason commonly cited for their grassroots volunteer work. Padma, a kindergarten teacher who volunteers as an INC in her constituency, said

Actually, I'm very busy. But it's serving the community and giving back to the community. It's where I live, and so I can help my fellow members.

While some cite wanting to 'give back' to the community, others said that they started volunteering because they wished to improve the environment in the area, from ensuring that their apartment block's lift upgrading process was carried out smoothly without any disruptions to residents to cleaning up a 'junkyard' outside one's HDB block. While this may not seem as altruistic as wanting to 'give back', the act of volunteering to clean up and provide one's expertise in the running of the local constituency allows a greater sense of ownership in a community. For instance, Tony spoke about how he encouraged his children to participate in a neighbourhood vote on the design for a new playground. After their chosen design was selected through a majority vote and built, he said that every time he walked by the playground he would feel a sense of satisfaction that his children had played a role, albeit a small one, in its design. Central to INCs' reasoning was their local positioning within the neighbourhood. As grassroots volunteers, they are

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<sup>3</sup> *Kampungs* are traditional villages in the Southeast Asian region that were widespread before Singapore's industrialization in the 1970s and 1980s (Alhabshi, 2010, p. 1141).

<sup>4</sup> 'Heartland' in the most general sense refers to public housing estates developed by the Housing Development Board (HDB) in which 85% of Singaporeans presently reside. They are typically characterised by clusters of high-rise apartments located close by local amenities, such as public transportation links, food centres, playgrounds and Community Clubs (Poon, 2013, p. 560).

expected to work specifically within their residential locality to improve life for the residents who are also their neighbours.

On top of existing ties to the neighbourhood which motivates INCs to 'give back', their volunteer work reinforces their desire to serve the local community. Grassroots volunteers occupy a unique face-to-face role where they interact with fellow residents regularly. While the INCs primarily interact with new citizens through the programmes that they organise to facilitate integration and naturalisation, many of them volunteer in multiple different grassroots roles. One volunteer spoke about how she uses her substantial free time as a homemaker to volunteer as an INC and Pioneer Generation Ambassador. The latter role involves visiting the elderly and informing them about government-provided assistance to manage healthcare and other everyday living costs. The in-person interactions through their volunteer work facilitate the building of relationships and fostering of empathy with other residents. In turn, the rapport developed helps volunteers carry out their work more effectively. For instance, one INC explained how she has gotten to know the new citizens living in her neighbourhood through her volunteer work as an INC. These new citizens will contact her when they face any administrative issues related to life in Singapore or questions about cultural norms in Singapore, which in turn allows her to further facilitate their settling down into their new home. This echoes other work on street-level bureaucrats such as parole officers which found that when SLBs built relationships with their clients, the trust created increased their clients' amenability to efforts to implement state policy, such as efforts to reduce recidivism (Whittle, 2018). Volunteers feel a greater sense of attachment to individuals in the neighbourhood because of relationships that they form through their volunteerism which in turn creates a greater desire to help their neighbours with whom they feel a sense of camaraderie. Several INCs spoke about the increased visibility and recognition that they receive when they walk around the neighbourhood. Adil, who volunteers as an INC and in the Malay Activity Executive Committee in his constituency which organises cultural events for the local Malay community, summarised his experience:

Nowadays I can say I a bit popular, every time I walk around Simei, my house here, people will know me. They will say, 'Hi!' Even when I at the lift, my neighbour will know me and they will say 'Hi, How are you?'... I feel very fortunate to continue with this volunteering as a grassroots leader; everybody knows you.

Thus, beyond just a sense of physical rootedness to the local neighbourhood, volunteering also emanates from and strengthens embeddedness in the community which Korinek, Entwistle and Jampaklay define as 'social relationships that foster a sense of rootedness and integration in the local environment' (2005, p. 780). INCs thus use the language of local belonging, presenting themselves as situated 'citizen-agents' in their neighbourhood (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000) rather than government agents working to implement the government's policy of implementation. To them, their placement in their local community is key to their volunteering at the grassroots level because it is their home.

While most of the explanations for volunteering focused on INCs' senses of individual belonging in the local neighbourhood (a theme further explored as an integration approach in Chapter Seven), some interviewees spoke about their commitment serving the national community and its interests – the second 'master' as referred to at the start of this section (the first being the local community). For Adil, while he did appreciate the local ties formed through his volunteer work, when asked about why he continues volunteering despite the sacrifices that such volunteer work entails, Adil referred to his experience attending his constituency's Citizenship Ceremony.

Another event I go for is the citizenship ceremony... I meet a lot of them [new citizens] and they are getting ready to get the Pink IC<sup>5</sup>. I'm not sure, but I think that they are excited about it...When they walk out and take the IC, the most important, the most happiest thing that I ever see is that I sing '*Majulah Singapura*'<sup>6</sup> and say the [National] Pledge together with them. That's very exciting mood. Because they all become the new citizen and our new family. Because once you become Singaporean, you feel like we are bond[ed] together. No more 'Eh, you are a foreigner' but 'you are a family'. So I feel proud of that, like seriously you have a new family come over and be same like you, Singapore citizen.

Adil saw the political incorporation of new citizens as a source of pride for him as a Singaporean in general and in particular as a volunteer who played a role in facilitating that process. This connection to the nation is expressed even more clearly amongst naturalized citizens who volunteer as INCs. For instance, Priya, an INC who moved from Malaysia in 2013, drew upon her experience as an Indian in Malaysia. She argued that having previously lived in an environment where inter-ethnic integration was not a priority, especially since preferential treatment was given to the Malay majority, she felt compelled to contribute to the Singaporean project of integration which she felt was a worthwhile national goal. As Reuben, another volunteer who migrated from India, put it: 'It's just my way of giving back to society. You're giving back to this country, and we are so blessed out here to have so much.'

This sense of serving the nation, rather than just one's local needs, was felt much more keenly by senior INC figures who serve as the heads of their local Integration and Naturalisation Committee and sit on the national committee which oversees the INC activities. My interviewees spoke about how they communicated with Ministers in charge of integration efforts and heard about the detailed plans that the government has for social integration. As one interviewee mentioned, the government has plans for 'ten or even fifty years in the future' and hearing about these plans made him feel like he was part of something 'bigger' than just his estate. Yet at the same time, being in touch with the People's Association and

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<sup>5</sup> The 'Pink IC' refers to the pink-coloured national identity card that is provided to every Singaporean citizen. At Citizenship Ceremonies, every new citizen is given their Pink INC as a sign of their new citizenship.

<sup>6</sup> '*Majulah Singapura*' refers to the national anthem of Singapore and translated from Malay into English means 'Onward Singapore'.

politicians made the INCs aware that directives also constrain them from 'above'. Much like SLBs, while INCs have some discretion to act in their local neighbourhoods, there is a constant reminder that they do not decide their budgets, programme goals and overall strategy. This has led to some frustration and resignation on the part of INCs. For instance, a number of them complained to me about the manner of their involvement in the naturalisation process. They felt that the time that they could spend with new citizens at Community Sharing Sessions (CSS) was insufficient because the PA had changed the format of the sessions, outsourcing the organisation of the sessions to external events organisers in a bid to 'standardise' CSS across the country. This resulted in INCs feeling like they were side-lined yet still expected to take part, just on the PA's terms. However, for many of them, this did not stop them from continuing to volunteer as they still believed in the importance of helping with local and national integration efforts, even if they felt frustrated by the direction taken to carry out such measures.

For most of the INC volunteers, they drew upon non-material reasons for their volunteer work, often emphasizing that they wanted to volunteer despite its challenges. This is distinct from other actors implementing state policy, such as bureaucrats who are paid for their work. In this way, INCs' motivations seem to be 'purer', arising out of a greater commitment to the policy and community goals that they are involved in, which in this case is the integration of newer members of the community. Furthermore, interviewees did not consider themselves state-agents but instead framed themselves as members of their local neighbourhood. Nonetheless, INCs still saw themselves as fulfilling a national project of integration despite not being state-agents. Instead, they are liminal actors who are embedded in their local contexts while also recognizing their role in helping to facilitate a broader project of enabling new citizens to integrate into the Singaporean nation. They do so under the purview of the state which funds and gives general directives as to how integration ought to be facilitated at the local level. Thus, INCs find themselves serving two masters: the local and national communities. When these two actors have different and sometimes competing interests, INCs are caught in the middle, as the next two sections go on to discuss with regards to the thorny issue of immigration.

### **Sympathising with Public Anxiety over Immigration**

In January 2013, the Singaporean government released a publication entitled 'A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore: Population White Paper' which outlined a projected trajectory of population growth which would see Singapore's total population rise from 5.31 million in 2012 to between 6.5 and 6.9 million by 2030. Under this projection, the 2030 population would comprise approximately 2.4 million non-residents<sup>7</sup>, 0.6 million Permanent Residents (PRs) and 3.7 million citizens, fuelled primarily by boosting immigration rates in a context of falling local birth rates (*A Sustainable Population for a Dynamic Singapore:*

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<sup>7</sup> Non-residents refer to foreigners who are residing in Singapore for the purposes of education, work or family reasons but have not been given permanent residency, excluding tourists and short-term visitors (*Population Trends 2018*, 2018, p. 3).

*Population White Paper*, 2013, p. 6). News of the government's plans for this population increase was met with anger from Singaporeans, evidenced by a rare protest of over 4,000 people which was one of the largest in the tightly-controlled city-state's history ('Rare Mass Rally over Singapore Immigration Plans', 2013).

The rise of xenophobic rhetoric and sentiments has often taken distinctively racist inflections (Fenn, 2014). A 2015 post by Tan Kin Lian, the former CEO of a national trade union who ran as a candidate in Singapore's 2011 Presidential elections reflected this sentiment. He posted, albeit in a light-hearted tone, a picture of passengers on a bus that he had just boarded with the caption 'I boarded SMRT 857 and found that I was in Mumbai. Hahaha.' While his statement was met by criticism by some for making statements that were 'damaging to integration in a diverse Singapore' (Y. S. Ng, 2015), others who commented on Tan's Facebook post did not express the same anger. Facebook user Dylan Tang asked, 'What is so racist about it? Singapore is in fact a mini United Nation. You walk down Shenton Way<sup>8</sup> during lunch time, you will find that Singaporean is in fact a minority in their own country'. Hakim Omar concurred: 'Nothing wrong for telling the truth. I believe most of the Singaporean feel this way' (Aripin, 2015). While it is not this dissertation's aim to investigate the extent of xenophobia and racism in Singapore, I was taken aback when I heard one of my interviewees use similarly racially charged language to describe a scene in his neighbourhood. Winston, an INC community leader who has been volunteering in his constituency in various capacities for the past fourteen years and claimed that as an INC he is privy to the trends in immigration, claimed that Singapore is experiencing an 'overflow' of Indians who are often Permanent Residents. After I said that I had not felt that there had been any noticeable changes in demographics, he responded

It's because you don't stay in my estate. A lot of IT people stay here for the business park... one of the condo is flooded with the dark dark. About 70% are Indian. So they say on the weekend you can see the swimming pool full of them, like Little India like that.

Winston's negatively-charged language of a 'flood' of visibly different migrants is not merely reflective of the issue of a perceived overwhelming number of migrants but the attendant threat that such numbers are seen to bring (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008, p. 22). While such racially charged language is discomfiting in any circumstances, what set it apart was the fact that an INC who should be promoting the integration and acceptance of migrants into Singaporean society employed such exclusionary language.

Although Winston's explicitly racist language was anomalous amongst my pool of interviewees, there was a noticeable trend for INCs to display sympathy towards locals are critical of what they perceive to be an overly liberal immigration policy. Frequently, INCs find themselves in the hot seat of having to respond to residents' grievances about the state's immigration policy. This is for two reasons. Firstly, being specifically tasked to aid in migrant integration processes at the grassroots level, INCs are seen as the

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<sup>8</sup> Shenton Way is a major road in the Central Business District in Singapore.



grassroots figures who are most concerned with concerns over immigration and integration. Secondly, their embeddedness in the local community means that they are easily accessible figures for everyday, disgruntled citizens who want to air their grievances to, in contrast to bureaucrats or politicians who cannot be so easily approached due to their relative absence in the community. Interviewees spoke about how residents who recognised them as grassroots volunteers came to them in shared spaces in the neighbourhood, such as lift lobbies or food centres, to ask questions about integration processes or even to rant about their foreign neighbours. In these scenarios, INCs are placed in the hot seat of having to respond to these sentiments. Aaron, the head of a local INC committee, described one such incident. He had organised an excursion for residents of his constituency to a local brewery. On the coach journey back to the local Community Club, a local-born Singaporean who had had one too many drinks started ranting against foreigners. Clearly troubled, Aaron recounted:

Got new citizens and locals, and over there I had a very bad experience because after drinking beer, the whole things came out. This guy was openly saying this and everything. He was Singaporean and saying things about new citizens. He wants to beat them up and they were there. It was a very bad experience because I am organizing. The spirit brought out what was contained in them and it came up, so that's why I was thinking.

Aaron's account reveals a number of interesting observations. The first is that he attributed his discomfort to the fact that the incident occurred in a setting with both locals and new citizens present. The fact that there were individuals around who would have felt personally targeted made it particularly jarring. Yet, Aaron did not seem entirely surprised that the man held these feelings. He simply attributed their very public expression to the consumption of alcohol which brought out what was 'already there'. But as an INC leader, in a position of authority as the organizer of the excursion, he found himself having to mediate the situation. Borrowing Garfinkel's terminology (1964), the drunken outburst acted as a 'breach' to unsettle otherwise polite norms where locals, even if they shared the inebriated man's views, would not have expressed them in such a forthright manner. To that end, Aaron in his position as a grassroots leader charged with aiding the integration of foreigners into Singaporean society had to make sense of the expressed sentiments.

But more than just being caught in the middle of such 'uncosmopolitan' sentiments (F. C. M. Ong & Yeoh, 2013) and having to defuse such situations, INCs sometimes find themselves on the receiving end of anti-immigration and anti-government sentiments. Anti-immigration sentiments are underpinned by a larger undercurrent of frustration with the Singapore government. There is a sense that the ruling PAP's 'open door' policy to labour is coming at the cost to local-born Singaporeans and thus reflects a disregard for them. This anxiety over being forgotten by the state is similar to that discussed by Arlie Hochschild in her recent book on the rise of right-wing populism in the United States that has taken an anti-establishment slant (2016). In Singapore, this has been most obviously manifested in the rise of opposition politics that tap into these sentiments, from the creation of the Singaporeans First Party in 2014 whose party manifesto

for the 2015 General Election focussed primarily on reducing the country's reliance on foreign labour (A. Ong, 2014) to a major frontrunner for the Presidential Election of 2011 employing 'Think Singaporeans First' as his slogan (E. K. B. Tan, 2012, p. 266). INCs have not found themselves immune from such anti-foreigner and anti-government sentiments because the grassroots sector is often seen as an extension of the ruling party (K. P. A. S.-S. Tan, 2003). For instance, a new citizen, Yumiko from Japan, expressed this sentiment when she recounted an incident where she engaged in a heated discussion with an INC over some negative feedback that she had provided at the end of the Community Sharing Session during her Citizenship Journey. She recounted her subsequent conversation with her Singaporean-born husband after the incident.

After this I shared this with my husband. And he said, 'Wah, you dare to say this kind of thing to PAP one ah? Surely they don't give you the citizenship. They blacklist you and they don't give you to already. Wah, you dare to say this! I'm sure that everyone just say "agree, agree, agree" because you are under their mercy and you are waiting for this to be approved.'

In this case, INCs were seen as gatekeepers for citizenship, although they do not make decisions on who can or cannot become a citizen. Immigration officers make that decision before the Singapore Citizenship Journey begins, and the INCs meet the new citizens in their neighbourhood at the CSS. As a result of this perception, INCs often seek to distance themselves from the state. For example, Patrick, the head of a local INC committee explained that he usually takes great pains to stress that 'volunteering for grassroots, it is politically neutral', adding that 'you have to say that, in my books' because of the prevailing public belief to the contrary. It is therefore unsurprising that INCs, who are tasked with helping with the integration and naturalisation of new citizens, often find themselves in the awkward position of being seen as agents of the state, and enablers of a politically divisive immigration policy. Adil, a young Malay INC volunteer, spoke about how he had been called a 'government dog' by friends who see his involvement in the grassroots as a form of support for unpopular government policies of immigration and naturalisation. For another volunteer, Aaron, this took an even more personal turn with tensions arising between him and his extended family who support opposition parties. When it emerged that he was a grassroots volunteer and a supporter of the PAP, tempers flared and he had to leave the room. He now stays away from family gatherings except when they meet once a year to celebrate Christmas.

It is therefore surprising that, despite being tasked with encouraging integration and reducing anti-foreigner sentiment and being targets of anti-immigration sentiments themselves, a sizable number of my interviewees expressed sympathy with xenophobic discourses and even sought to justify such perspectives. For instance, Gwen, a middle-aged volunteer, said that she agreed with some of the sentiments expressed by other Singaporeans, including her sister, who believe that Singapore is too eager to allow anyone in and thus is not being more careful about letting in the 'right' immigrants who can and will integrate into Singaporean society. This expression of sympathy with anti-immigrant sentiments, despite their position as

INCs, can be attributed to their embeddedness within the local neighbourhood – one side of the liminal place between state and society that INCs find themselves in.

The neighbourhood is a central site for anxieties over immigration because the sense that one is becoming a ‘stranger in your own land’ (Hochschild, 2016, p. 144) becomes even more acute in a place that one considers ‘home’. Here the concept of ‘home’ is one associated with a place of security and comfort, or a haven (Mallett, 2004, pp. 70–71). This relies on the private/public distinction in which the comfort of the home is determined primarily by one’s ability to control and shape it to one’s preferences (Derrida, 2000, p. 54). When the environment that one expects to feel and look like home appears unfamiliar, this creates a sense of anxiety. This appearance of foreignness can range from changes to the physical landscape through the building of more ‘modern’ buildings through processes of gentrification (Atkinson, 2015) to an influx of newcomers through immigration flows. As established in the earlier section of this chapter, INCs’ identity as grassroots actors is tied to their embeddedness in the grassroots as residents of the neighbourhood in which they volunteer. Hence, the volunteers share the same spaces as the individuals, both local and foreign, who they are trying to bring together through their volunteerism. This means that they witness first-hand situations that cause the local residents to feel like their neighbourhoods are being changed beyond recognition. Priya, a Malaysian who became a Singaporean citizen in 2015, described her own experience in her neighbourhood, drawing parallels between the discomfort that locals must feel with her previous experience as a member of an ethnic minority in Malaysia.

I think that they [Singaporeans] felt left out. I can understand their frustrations in some way because you don’t feel at home in your home. Because the fact is that when I returned from Malaysia, I came down from the bus and walked to my new BTO<sup>9</sup> flat. We had to walk through this new estate. There was a whole bunch of North Indians occupying the playground. I had a huge shock. I asked my husband, ‘Where are we?’ This is the kind of experience that is overwhelming for Singaporeans, like you are overtaken. It looks and feels different because your home doesn’t feel like home anymore. I won’t blame them, because when you feel overpowered, you feel like you are the minority, you feel scared. I’ve been in a country where I was a minority and I feel very unsafe so I can relate to what they’re experiencing.

Priya’s account was situated in the innocuous setting of a playground in a public housing estate. While for many, a playground is a site signifying a place of familiarity and fun with children playing without a care in the world, Priya’s account evoked images of an unknown and unwanted presence in one’s neighbourhood and feeling ‘unsafe’ in what had become a seemingly foreign environment, filled with strangers. Priya’s show

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<sup>9</sup> BTO is short for ‘built-to-order’ and refers to brand new public flats bought by residents directly from the Housing and Development Board. After a mandatory minimum period of residence, owners of BTO flats can sell their flats on the open market and these are then known as ‘resale flats’ (*Buying a Flat - Housing & Development Board (HDB)*, 2018).

of solidarity with other locals who feel overwhelmed when out and about in their neighbourhood was rooted in her membership and everyday experiences in her neighbourhood. It must be highlighted that this reaction of feeling overwhelmed by immigrants is one that is very visceral and unfounded since the Singapore government enforces a quota limiting the number of non-citizens residing in public housing estates (*New Non-Citizen Quota on Subletting of HDB Flats to Prevent Foreigner Enclaves in HDB Estates*, 2014). Regardless of its validity, Priya herself participated in forwarding exclusionary discourses towards immigrants by using the trope of feeling 'unsafe' with the sheer presence of those who she identifies as 'foreigners' (Velayutham, 2009). Interestingly, Priya herself is a self-identified ethnic Indian who herself was a foreigner who moved from Malaysia less than ten years ago. Yet, she, who is also an INC who is supposed to promote integration, employed highly exclusionary discourses in her account of her walk through her neighbourhood playground. Her language echoes a familiar divide invoked by local Singaporean Indians when distinguishing themselves from newer migrants from India. Kathiravelu explains that the distinction between North and South Indians are based on a 'largely imprecise and arbitrary divide with specific inbuilt prejudices and values' which employ markers such as skin colour and language use (2020, p. 117). When locals use the term 'North Indian', they refer to newcomers in contrast to the more established 'South Indians'. Hence, when Priya used the same language to refer to the individuals as 'North Indians', she was thus identifying them as foreigners, and herself who felt threatened by their foreignness as a local Indian. In doing so, she implicitly laid claim to her membership in the local neighbourhood where she serves as a grassroots volunteer.

In addition to justifying negative responses to perceptions of an overly high number of immigrants with reference to their own similar experiences in the neighbourhood, INCs expressed sympathy with fears that the arrival of immigrants would threaten locals' material wellbeing. While there certainly are cultural issues at play in anti-immigrant sentiments, such as the racism shown by Chinese Singaporeans such as Winston and Tan Kin Lian against South Asian migrants (Chacko, 2017) or beliefs that migrants from mainland China are callous and uncivilised (S. Ang, 2016), economic factors such as perceived competition in the job market drive hostility towards immigrants (Dancygier & Laitin, 2014, p. 45). These fears are well-documented by various scholars whereby locals feel that the arrival of immigrants threatens their economic security, particularly highly skilled migrants known as 'foreign talent' who compete with locals for jobs. In such discourses, migrants are often vilified as being 'free riders' who come to Singapore, take up well-paying jobs which locals 'deserve' and depress the wages for others (T. Chong, 2015; Gomes, 2014). While some INCs were less sympathetic towards locals who cited economic anxieties over immigration, such as Rania who said that the fears that immigrants are coming in and 'taking a lot of jobs' was not 'their fault' but 'it's us', others tried to justify locals' anxieties. For example, Aaron, despite facing backlash from his extended family for his work that was perceived to support the government's integration policy, was quite circumspect about his experience. His explanation for the sense of economic insecurity that local Singaporeans faced with the entrance of foreign labour was more nuanced than merely looking at it from the perspective of competition for jobs. He explained that it has to do with the broader sense of insecurity and lack of safety

net that Singaporeans have to grapple with. Reflecting on why some Singaporeans express anti-foreigner sentiments, Aaron suggested one explanation:

The local residents don't have anything to fall on if something happens to them. If anything happens to them, who is going to take care of their health if there is no income coming in? If there is a universal kind of package for these people, that if you're out of a job, you will still have a certain basic salary until you get a job, or something like that, then this integration becomes more smooth.

While the Singaporean government has introduced greater welfare for the unemployed and underemployed, such as Workfare which supplements the income of low-wage workers as well as providing training to allow them to move to a better paying job (Ministry of Manpower, 2018d), Aaron's observation suggests that this may be seen as insufficient, resulting in the precarity of local workers who face competition from migrant labour. In fact, there have been calls by civil society activists and opposition politicians for policies to improve the material security of workers, from arguments for minimum wage (Seah, 2018) to the provision of retrenchment benefits through unemployment insurance (Abu Baker, 2017). Still, the state has largely resisted such calls by claiming that it is doing enough to ensure locals' wellbeing (L. Lim, 2016).

While much ink can be spilt about whether the state has and ought to do more to help, what is of particular interest here is the fact that there is sympathy amongst the INCs for locals' anxieties. Some of it might be attributed to INCs' discomfort over encounters with foreigners in their neighbourhood, but it also has to do with INCs' frontline position as volunteers who come face-to-face with the economic struggles that some locals face. Existing studies suggest that attitudes towards immigration are partially dependent on perceptions of economic precarity, not discounting cultural and social factors. For instance, unemployment increases one's concern over immigration and the perceived ills that it brings (Lancee & Pardos-Prado, 2013). Other factors can increase one's sense of precarity, such as employment in a vocation facing greater competition from immigrant labour, if one has a university education that boosts the likelihood of finding alternative employment even if one is laid off, or the state of one's finances so that an unemployed individual has some savings to provide an economic buffer while they look for work (Fetzer, 2010). While scholars are careful not to use the too broad and generic label of class to explain rising popular support for anti-immigration politics (Ahler, 2018; Manza & Crowley, 2017), an individual's economic position has a significant impact on whether they view immigrants as posing a 'real' threat (Stephan & Stephan, 1996).

In Singapore, the language that is often used to represent these socio-economic differences is one of the 'heartlanders' versus the 'cosmopolitans'. While seeking to make Singapore a 'cosmopolitan' city, characterised by an openness of different cultures and ways of life (Yeoh, 2004, pp. 2433–2434), there arose an image popularised by the then Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, in his 1999 National Day Rally speech of a Singaporean cosmopolitan versus a heartlander. He predicted that as Singapore became more globalised, there would emerge two mutually exclusive groups. As Goh explains

One group I call the ‘cosmopolitans’, because their outlook is international. They speak English but are bilingual. They have skills that command good incomes: banking, IT, engineering, science and technology. They produce goods and services for the global market. Many cosmopolitans use Singapore as a base to operate in the region. They can work and be comfortable anywhere in the world.

The other group, the heartlanders, make their living within the country. Their orientation and interests are local rather than international. Their skills are not marketable beyond Singapore. They speak Singlish. They include taxi-drivers, stallholders, provision shop owners, production workers and contractors... If they emigrate to America, they will probably settle in a Chinatown, open a Chinese restaurant and call it an ‘eating house’ (1999).

Goh was careful not to dismiss either group but instead argued that cosmopolitans were vital for Singapore’s economic success while the heartlanders were the ‘soul’ of Singapore, holding on to its core values, harking back to the government’s desire to balance a global image while being uniquely Singaporean, situated in an Asian context. The heartlander-cosmopolitan dichotomy has and ought to be engaged with care. For instance, the binary ignores individuals who occupy the middle ground, such as middle-class Singaporeans who choose to work in white-collar jobs in Singapore, live in larger HDB flats and are as comfortable speaking Singlish as they are speaking English. Brenda Yeoh refers to these people as ‘cosmolanders’ (2004, p. 2435). Furthermore, others have argued that Goh presented the heartlander ‘as an unproblematic political subject’ and ‘commodifie[d] him into a stereotype such that his individuality is transformed into a generic phenomenon that complements state interests’ (T. Chong, 2010, p. 514) which is to justify a form of ‘elite governance’ which places the PAP cosmopolitans at the head of political decision-making (Barr & Skrbiš, 2008, p. 514) and allows them to put in place a vision of a cosmopolitan Singapore characterised by an open immigration policy and economy.

Despite the criticisms that are rightfully levelled at Goh’s framework, those who are likely to be most economically precarious and thus feel that immigration poses a significant threat to them are those who stay in public housing estates and are less financially mobile (T. Y. Tan, 2019). I saw this class-based variation in response reflected in my interviews. INCs who worked with their Neighbourhood Committees in private housing estates tended to defend the government with little sympathy towards Singaporeans who express anxieties over immigration. For example, Yong Wei, who is currently between jobs and lives in a private condominium, was dismissive of concerns that immigrants threatened Singaporeans’ livelihoods. Instead, he insisted that they simply did not understand how the government was working. On the other hand, INCs living and volunteering in their HDB estates are situated in these ‘heartland’ constituencies. Through their work as INCs and in other volunteer opportunities in the neighbourhood, such as going on door-to-door visits with local politicians or becoming befrienders to elderly residents who are often alone at home, interviewees working in the ‘heartlands’ often have to help residents who are facing economic

hardship. For instance, one Integration and Naturalisation Committee worked with the local Malay Activities Executive Committee to serve rice porridge to the needy every evening during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan when they broke fast. Another volunteer, Rania, explained that through these encounters, the reality of socio-economic hardship in Singapore hit home where it had previously seemed far removed. When faced with real cases of economic disadvantage in their neighbourhood, INCs are more likely to be sympathetic to the claims that the arrival of immigrants has resulted in increased job competition and lower wages, regardless of their veracity.

When asked about public anti-immigration sentiment in Singapore, INCs opened up about how they have been witness to expressions of resentment, anger and despair over the state's immigration policy. INCs' position on the ground played an integral part in allowing them to witness such feelings. Living in the neighbourhood in which they volunteer, they engage in face-to-face interactions with other residents, listening to their grievances, sometimes as a source of sympathy and help, and for others, as a target for anger. Furthermore, while they do experience antipathy due to perceptions of their support for state immigration policy, their role as volunteers means that they are in a unique position to hear their fellow citizens' complaints. On the one hand, they are perceived as fellow residents due to their volunteer work in their neighbourhood. This means that they are seen as one of 'us' who are more likely to understand and empathise with concerns on the ground as opposed to politicians or bureaucrats who make policy and are often seen as far removed from the everyday worries of individual Singaporeans. Yet, due to their perceived connection with the state and involvement in state policy, INCs are also seen as possessing some authority which translates into neighbours, family members and friends feeling that they can and ought to approach these grassroots volunteers with their complaints. Melissa, an INC who has been volunteering for a few years, explained how this assumption of authority works. She recounted how one of her neighbours discovered that an elderly couple needed financial aid after their children moved out. The couple were told to contact Melissa because it was assumed that she would know what government policies were available or would be able to consult someone else who would. In this case, Melissa was a familiar face who was assumed to understand government policy, given her connection with the state due to her grassroots volunteerism. This embeddedness in the local community gives them insight into locals' anxieties over immigration, which in turn has ignited a sense of sympathy for those who have such views. But this is only one side of their position as grassroots volunteers. As discussed extensively at the start of this chapter, INCs are in a liminal position of being between society and the state. The next section deals with INCs' relationship with the state and how this fuels an almost paradoxical desire to also defend state policy.

### **Defending State Immigration Policy**

INCs find themselves situated between state and society on account of their liminal position as grassroots volunteers. The previous section discussed how their embeddedness as residents and volunteers in their local neighbourhood has contributed to INCs feeling increased sympathy for local residents' concerns about

the rate of immigration and its implications for their wellbeing. However, these sentiments are complicated by INCs' role as grassroots volunteers who work with the state and are committed to helping the state realise its goal of migrant integration. To that end, they do not merely see themselves as helping their local community but also serving a national purpose in the form of implementing state policy. Returning to the case of Aaron, his conflicting feelings regarding immigration were briefly discussed earlier. On the one hand, as someone who felt 'foreign' due to his growing up in India before returning to his country of birth: Singapore, he still sought to understand the economic anxieties of Singaporeans facing increasing competition from immigrants. When faced with anti-immigrant sentiments, he said,

This kind of conflicts I have encountered many times. But locals are also partly to blame because they are not open, but they must also be open, and they must think that they were once part of the immigration. Their fathers came before, if there is no immigration, then your country will tend to stagnate, and the economy won't grow, and there won't be jobs for everyone, unless you want to be a real island nation, just grow coconut trees and be isolated very fast. So there must be immigration as well.

Here Aaron expressed ambivalence regarding the anti-immigration sentiments that he encounters. He tried to be sympathetic but ultimately made two broad arguments to counter such anti-foreigner views: the economic necessity of immigration so that Singapore can evolve into an economy that does more than grow 'coconut trees' and Singaporeans' migrant background that creates a basis for commonality between locals and immigrants while eroding locals' claims of greater legitimacy based on indigeneity.

The narrative about the economic necessity of immigration is not a new one. Having inherited an open immigration policy from the British (Lian, 1995), independent Singapore pursued an extensive industrialisation strategy which involved the attraction of foreign investment through tax incentives, infrastructure development and the implementation of laws to make doing business in Singapore easier. The success of these industrialisation efforts saw rates of unemployment of 6% in 1970 plummet to the point where there was a labour shortage which further pushed the government to allow the entrance of foreign labour to reduce pressures on wages (S.-B. Chew & Chew, 1995, pp. 191–192). This argument about needing to import labour forms the basis for the 2013 Population White Paper. The need for immigration is framed within a narrative that since many neighbouring cities are 'modernising' and 'catching up' on Singapore, the city-state has to 'continue to develop and upgrade to remain a key node in the network of global cities, a vibrant place where jobs and opportunities are created. A dynamic economy will provide us with more resources and room to pursue inclusive growth strategies to benefit all segments of our society' (2013, p. 2). This issue is made even more urgent by Singapore's ageing population and falling birth rate which saw the resident total fertility rate drop to 1.16 in 2017 ('Number of Singaporean Babies Born Last Year Lowest since 2014', 2018), even lower than Japan's rate of 1.43 (Watabe, 2018). As a new citizen, Haoyi noted, immigration is one way to reduce a shrinking workforce:



I fully agree with what the Singapore government is doing, and they're doing it at this kind of rate because of ageing issue is going to bother Singapore very soon. Even Japan, I mean, this year they just revised their national policy to open up to foreigners, last time they didn't open to foreigners, you won't believe that now in Japan within a year you can get a PR because they are really desperate for a working force. So look at the national levels and economy and social levels, for sure bringing in new citizens is one of the way to resolve the issues.

The use of immigration to address the labour shortage should be understood through two broad approaches: to fill jobs that locals *cannot* fill and those that they *do not want* to fill.

In 1997, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong claimed that there needed to extra measures implemented to attract foreign professionals because the local universities were 'close to the limit of what we can generate ourselves' (1997). This focus on the need for foreign professionals led to the provision of special treatment to attract them to move to Singapore, such as allowing Employment Pass (EP) holders<sup>10</sup> to apply easily for Dependent Passes for their spouse and children, and Long-Term Social Visit Passes for other family members, such as parents and adult children (Rahman, 2016, pp. 41–42). Several INCs I spoke to reiterated the argument that Singapore needs immigration to fill positions requiring technical and professional expertise that Singaporeans may not have. At least three of my INC interviewees spoke of how they worked in contexts where a large proportion of their colleagues and superiors were EP holders from 'Western' countries. One works in a shipping company with an Australian boss. Another works in an international audit and tax firm where she is the secretary to an Irish boss, and yet another INC interviewee spoke about how he worked in a 'multinational bank' where most of his teammates, managers and subordinates were from Europe. While these experiences are anecdotal (the exact numbers of EP holders filling top managerial positions are unavailable due to their politically sensitive nature), the significance here is that INCs' lived experiences of working with non-Singaporeans confirm the narrative that the immigration of high-skilled workers fills in gaps in expertise in the labour market. Tony, a self-employed INC, echoes this sentiment when he says, 'We need the talent and whatever to drive the economy. We are not producing enough talent in certain areas and skills.'

While the filling of professional positions is one aim of Singapore's immigration policy, immigrants are also seen as vital for filling positions that Singaporeans do not want to fill. When reflecting on the 2013 protests over the projected increase in Singapore's population to 6.9 million by 2030, Rania, who has been an INC for the past six years, was critical of the perception that immigrants were threats to Singaporeans' livelihoods.

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<sup>10</sup> Employment Passes (EPs) are given to foreign professionals who have a job offer to work in Singapore, will earn a fixed monthly salary of at least S\$3,600 and possess professional and/or higher educational qualifications (Ministry of Manpower, 2018a).

Do you remember a few years ago when there is a lot of new immigrants coming in, and workforce they are taking a lot of jobs, and the Singaporeans protest and everything? But sometimes when you are looking into it, it is not their fault, but it's us. We are demanding, we expect so much and then we can't produce sometimes. If you ask Singaporeans to be cleaner, they don't want. If you don't want to be a cleaner, you don't want this or that, then what can you do? Shake leg at home and ask government for money? That's also not fair for the government. It's true facts. They're being choosy. I've heard when there is cleaners and contractors jobs, they will say, 'Oh, that's not meant for Singaporeans to do.' We will get these people from Bangladesh or wherever to do. To me, it's not fair also. If we can save some money there. You can have more Singaporeans in construction, like now say [out of] 20: 3 or 4. Maybe the foreman, but most of the construction workers are from Malaysia, Bangladesh and China.

The jobs that Rania identifies that Singaporeans consider below them are cleaners and construction workers. These are traditionally seen as 'lower-skilled' positions and are seen as less socially and economically desirable. The common term for these jobs is '3D' jobs which refer to 'dirty', 'demeaning' and 'dangerous' jobs (S. Y. Chia & Ng, 2011) which is used widely in common discourse and academic literature (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014; Berkelaar et al., 2012; Ukwatta, 2010). Rania's observation that locals are 'choosy' reflects work by scholars studying how the entrance of migrants into the labour market results in its segmentation. Michael J. Piore, in recognising that jobs are not merely about earning money but also about social status, argued that migrants are more willing to take up less socially prestigious jobs because their social status is (at least initially) tied to their countries of origin, and measured in money, not work (1980).

Under the visa system in Singapore, such low-skilled workers would be brought in primarily under the Work Permit (WP) system. The WP system is much more constraining than the EP system, with WP holders not being able to bring their family into the country, denied the opportunity to apply for permanent residency status regardless of how long they have been in Singapore and having their right to stay in Singapore tied to their employment which means that they will have to leave the country when they leave or lose their job (Ministry of Manpower, 2018c). According to the Ministry of Manpower, most of the non-residents in Singapore are in the country with a WP by the end of 2017, with close to a million WP holders out of a total foreign workforce of 1,368,000 workers. More than half of the WP holders are domestic or construction workers (Ministry of Manpower, 2018b). Based upon their sheer numbers, it is not hard to see their invaluable role in Singapore's economic success. The construction sector is a huge part of the Singaporean economy, with building contracts projected to be between S\$24 billion and S\$31 in 2018 (Derek Wong, 2018). Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) play an equally important, albeit less direct, role in the Singaporean economy. Their role in carrying out the domestic work has facilitated the entrance of Singaporean women into the workforce, a vital contribution in a labour-scarce society (Yeoh et al., 2004).

In a survey, over three-quarters of interviewed women who employ at least FDW in their home said that they would not be able to cope without employing women who provide cheap labour from around the region (S. Huang, 2006, p. 72).

INCs' awareness of the need for immigrants to fill gaps in the labour market that locals are unwilling or unable to fill is partially drawn from their own experiences, such as their interaction with non-local colleagues at work or reading about the issues as reported in the state media. However, their volunteer work, especially when they come into contact with state actors, informs their opinion about the necessity and value of immigrants for the Singaporean economy. For instance, a few leaders of the local Integration and Naturalisation Committees told me that when they attend meetings for the national People's Association which oversees INC activities, they were often told about the government's future policy direction regarding immigration and integration. During such sessions, government representatives would provide the reasoning behind such policy changes, such as population projections based on current birth rates. These leaders will in turn explain the state's policy shifts to the volunteers from their respective constituencies. One leader explained to me that being informed about government policy made him feel like an 'insider' to policy implementation, much like a bureaucrat who is informed of a policy before its announcement to the public. To him, the insights provided to INCs to help them understand state directives increased their appreciation for the government's approach, in contrast to the public who (in his words) 'don't always understand what is going on.'

While INCs did express some sympathy with local residents' fears over immigration flows as highlighted in the previous section, the belief that such concerns are borne out of ignorance tended to fuel a dismissiveness amongst some INCs when faced with arguments about issues such as increased job competition. For instance, despite admitting that it is understandable that locals do not choose the lower-paying jobs often filled by migrants because they do not pay enough to cover the cost of living in Singapore, Rania criticised Singaporeans for complaining about the influx of immigrants who do the undesirable yet vital work that contributes to the Singaporean economy and the wellbeing of its citizens. In her eyes, such citizens simply want to 'shake leg'<sup>11</sup>, rather than take up the positions that they claim are being taken by foreign immigrants. Her reaction to complaints by Singaporeans about the threat of competition from incoming foreigners was not isolated. Adil, the young Malay INC, called such Singaporeans 'keyboard warriors', expressing his disdain for them since all they can do is 'complain', emboldened by the anonymity of the internet which, to Adil, demonstrates their real-life impotence given their need to hide behind a computer screen. Both Rania and Adil's dismissals of locals' complaints about immigration revealed a seeming lack of care for these anxieties over the increased competition for jobs. Tony, the self-employed INC, revealed this position when he said matter-of-factly

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<sup>11</sup> 'Shake leg' is a Singaporean colloquialism to refer to idleness which is a literal translation from the Malay phrase '*goyang kaki*' (Norizam, 2014, p. 131).

That's how the system works. Now when you see the new citizens come you see them working and working, Saturday also working Sunday also working. if I am an employer that is also the person I want. that is why Singaporeans are complaining that they can't get jobs. Sorry ah, you want five days, but he's willing to work seven days.

The INCs' seemingly callous response to the concerns of their fellow Singaporeans reflects an internalisation of the strong 'survivalist' narrative forwarded by the Singaporean government. As Terence Chong argues, there is a nationalist rhetoric forwarded by the state that Singapore is a small, precarious island that needs to remain economically competitive in a globalising world (T. Chong, 2015, pp. 219–220). While he argues that it forms the basis for the anxieties that Singaporeans have over immigration as was discussed in the prior section, this survivalist mentality also informs the INCs' response to anxieties over immigration. There is a sense that everyone has to be responsible for themselves, whether it be countries on the global economic arena or individuals in the local job market. To that end, if individuals lose out, it is because they have not been as competitive as the foreigners who are better qualified or more willing to take more challenging jobs. And even if there are costs at the individual level, this is a necessary trade-off for the country as a whole to remain competitive.

The survivalist narrative of taking charge of one's fate was a point made by Adil when commenting on 'keyboard warriors'. He felt that if one had an issue with the government policy, sitting down and complaining about the government on the internet was unhelpful, instead, he argued that dissatisfied individuals should take steps to help in more concrete ways. Adil cited an example of people complaining about migrants failing to integrate and said that if this was such a concern, then Singaporeans ought to volunteer as INCs to help facilitate this integration rather than just complain but do nothing 'constructive'. For INCs, their volunteer work with the state cements their belief that they are doing important work to help the nation. This is affirmed by interactions with state authorities which boost INCs' sense of pride in what they are doing. One INC leader proudly told me that being brought in as an 'insider' during national meetings where INCs were told in advance about policy changes was a sign about how important INCs are to the integration process. This narrative is emphasized at various events where INCs are recognised for their efforts and in public reports. For instance, at the PA INclusive Awards Presentation Ceremony in 2018 which recognises the various innovations made by outstanding Integration and Naturalisation Committees, Minister of Manpower Josephine Teo spoke glowingly about the 'key' role that INCs play 'by serving as bridges to bring together new immigrants and Singaporeans in the neighbourhood' (*Speech by Minister Josephine Teo at the PA Inclusive Awards Presentation Ceremony on 13 July 2018*, 2018). Similarly, local newspapers regular feature the work of INCs in facilitating migrant integration (M. Z. Lim, 2017a; B. Y. Seow, 2018). Being recognised for their engagement with migrants has meant that some of my interviewees felt that local complaints about the state's immigration and integration policies were not merely unjustified because of the economic need for immigration, but also because those complaints were unconstructive whining.

However, the INCs' reluctance to accept anti-immigrant sentiments wholesale is not just borne out of embracing an economic ideology but is tied to much deeper identarian reasons which manifest both at the individual and the national level. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the anxieties over immigration flows in Singapore were ignited first by the announcement of the 6.9 million population projection for 2030, with over 35% of the population being non-resident migrants ('Rare Mass Rally over Singapore Immigration Plans', 2013). Here the concerns were over the sheer number of migrants and the sense of that locals would be overwhelmed. In this case, numbers played a significant role in shaping the response. By aggregating people into statistical groups, such as non-residents, individual characteristics and stories are removed, making them just a number to be feared (H. Jones et al., 2017, p. 72). In contrast, INCs through their volunteer work interact with new citizens at events such as at the Community Sharing Sessions, learning journeys and at HDB block parties. Smrita, a housewife who spends a lot of her free time volunteering at the grassroots level, spoke about how she met a Malaysian mother through her work as an INC. The mother approached Smrita to ask if she would babysit her child while she went to work after they met through an INC event. In Smrita's words, 'So from there, our friendship will keep going and going. Without the realisation that you only know each other for a few months, but it feels like you know them for a long time.' Much like the experience of SLBs who engage directly with their clients, the face-to-face interaction that INCs have with new citizens allows them to learn about their migration journey, thus humanising members of a group who are often just reduced to a statistic to be feared.

Where previous discourses highlighted in this chapter, such as migrants stealing jobs from locals or being threatening strangers in the local neighbourhood, dehumanised migrants, INCs' volunteer work re-humanises them. The process of humanisation allows INCs to identify with migrants on a personal level. For instance, Aaron, in his interactions with new citizens, would often find commonalities with individuals that he had not expected. For instance, he started identifying with Filipino migrants because 'most of them is Catholics, and I am a Catholic too, and there is commonality... I will get them into talking about Christmas, Easter and get them into singing groups.' Furthermore, as these friendships are formed, INCs learn about the reasons for migrants moving to Singapore. This has extended to informal interaction for Smrita who recounted:

When you go to the food court, there is one Vietnamese coffee lady become friends. They will know your drink. They are so, their mind thinking, got so many people drinking, but when my family come, they will say, "Oh, *Kopi, teh*<sup>12</sup>..." They seem to know what we like. We are nice to them in a way that they are feeling more secure. They come all the way here; they got no friends, so even drinking coffee we can make friends with them. So I want them to feel that this one is also their home, even if they are foreigners, they are working, they are sending back their money to care for their family, but I want

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<sup>12</sup> *Kopi* and *teh* are Malay words used to order coffee and tea in Singaporean coffeeshops.

them to feel that there is their family home, but this is their second home for them.

Through her interaction with the Vietnamese lady, Smrita learned about her family back in Vietnam. The lady's desire to provide for her family is one that Smrita connected due to Smrita's role as a homemaker. Given that providing for her family in Vietnam is the primary reason for the lady's migration to find work in Singapore, her move to Singapore is legitimised in Smrita's eyes, leading to Smrita wanting to make the Vietnamese migrant 'feel at home'. The immigrant figure is now no longer simply perceived as an impersonal figure, part of a larger movement that threatens to overwhelm the Singaporean populace, but an individual with a human face, desires and dreams that she can identify with. INCs' volunteer work thus gives them ample opportunity to form bonds with migrants which often challenge any pre-existing stereotypes or prejudices.

This identification with immigrants does not merely occur at the individual, relational level, even though that is a critical element. Singapore's national narrative emphasizes Singapore's migrant past, where individuals from all around the region moved to make a better life for themselves. For instance, a history textbook assigned for teaching Singaporean history to all fourteen-year-olds in the public school system details the stories of different groups of migrants who came to Singapore and 'helped Singapore to grow', such as the Chinese *samsui* women who undertook hard construction labour and Arab merchants (*History of Modern Singapore*, 1994, pp. 42–55). Many Singaporeans can trace their ancestry to migrants who came to Singapore during or after British colonial rule. Tony, in his interaction with new citizens, talked about their motivations for moving to Singapore:

I think at the first level like our grandfathers: [they] come here for economic reasons or because they have no choice. You look at Singapore's history, and all the traders come for economic reasons.

Tony's invocation of Singapore's history serves two purposes. The first one is to establish a common identity similar to that experienced by Smrita and Aaron in their interactions with the Vietnamese and Filipino migrants, respectively. The second is more subtle. If Singapore and her citizens find their origins in migrant stock, then they cannot discriminate against other immigrants. Here Singaporeans are told that since they too were once migrants and owe their current material comfort to being able to work and settle in Singapore, they cannot begrudge others who want to do the same. John F. Kennedy made a similar argument in his 1958 essay 'A Nation of Immigrants' where he highlighted that 'every American who ever lived, with the exception of one group, was either an immigrant himself or a descendant of immigrants' to argue against national origin quotas since they went against the spirit of the nation (2008, p. 2). Since immigration forms such a significant part of the national narrative of the country's origin story, to go against the processes that were instrumental to its creation and success would be very 'un-Singaporean'. To that end, this highlighting of Singapore's migrant past functions almost like a rebuke to Singaporeans for forgetting that they too were recently foreigners.

## **Chapter Summary: Caught Between Two Positions**

This chapter highlighted INCs' liminal position. Unlike bureaucrats or politicians who have clear affiliations with the state, INCs are unpaid volunteers, working in their local constituencies with neighbours who they form relationships with and whose concerns they often share. Yet, INCs are not the same as these neighbours or other volunteers who volunteer in non-state sectors because they work hand-in-hand with state agencies, receiving funding and top-down directives from the state as to the direction integration projects ought to take. When straddling state and society through their roles as grassroots volunteers, INCs find themselves caught between two contradictory positions on the issue of immigration and integration. On one hand, they witness and are often sympathetic (even echoing the same views) towards locals' anxieties over the arrival of immigrants, which often take on a xenophobic and/or racist tone. On the other hand, through their first-hand interaction with immigrants INCs find their resentment towards migrants challenged. This uncomfortable position that INCs find themselves in echoes a tension highlighted in Chapter Two of this dissertation when it comes to integration policy in Singapore: Migration is seen as destabilising and dangerous to the very society that is heavily dependent on migrant labour for its very economic survival. Faced with this conundrum, it is unsurprising that individuals at the frontline of such an issue have mixed feelings towards the issue of immigration and the integration of new citizens and migrants. But rather than experiencing this ambivalence passively, the next two chapters will discuss how INCs use this in-between position to aid migrant integration in two ways. Firstly, Chapter Seven discusses how INCs use the local neighbourhood as a site to develop rootedness to the wider Singaporean nation. Secondly, Chapter Eight shows how a sense of national belonging is developed in multicultural Singapore through a recognition and promotion of particularistic ethnic identities. Ultimately, this indicates that the local works together to form a larger identity with INCs playing a pivotal role in negotiating and facilitating such cohesion.

## **Chapter Seven: Good Neighbours make Good Singaporeans**

As grassroots volunteers who straddle the dual positions of supporting the Singaporean state's integration efforts for migrants and being embedded in everyday life in Singapore, Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs) find themselves having to negotiate the tensions of state policy and public sentiments. Chapter Six highlighted the liminality of the INCs' position and how they contend with the thorny issue of immigration. This liminality plays a crucial role in INCs efforts to help with migrant integration efforts. This integration is carried out in two ways. Firstly, rootedness to the local neighbourhood is encouraged as a way to develop ties to fellow Singaporeans. Secondly, the recognition and celebration of cultural identities make newcomers feel welcomed into multicultural Singapore. By examining the first form of integration, this chapter argues that INCs use their meso-level position between state and society to introduce migrants to everyday life in Singapore and build relationships between locals and newcomers with the broader aim of contributing to the national project of integration.

Chapter Three discussed at length about how integration is a two-way process in which migrants and the local population are encouraged to adapt to each other (Modood, 2013). For migrants, integrating into the nation-state comes with an expectation that they adjust to the national culture in some manner, whether it be through carrying out the political duties expected of a citizen such as voting or paying taxes, supporting the national sports team (Raman, 2014; Sibley et al., 2011) or speaking the primary language of communication (Remennick, 2003). The expectation of adaptation is encapsulated through the naturalisation process, which highlights the distinction and linkage between substantive and legal citizenship. When acquiring legal citizenship, applicants are often evaluated on how well they exhibit the values that are seen to be vital to the nation, such as obeying the law and knowing about the national culture (Michalowski, 2011). These values are also emphasized throughout the process, especially during citizenship ceremonies (Byrne, 2014). But rather than just expecting new citizens to organically acquire the knowledge of how to live in their new home, states often undertake efforts to educate their incoming members, much like 'civic learning' lessons carried out in schools to ensure that children grow up to be 'good citizens' (C. Han, 2000; Msila, 2007). For instance, Western European states are using sex education classes to teach refugees from the Middle East and North Africa about the different gender norms in the countries in which they now live ('Europe Is Trying to Teach Its Gender Norms to Refugees', 2016). Similarly, in Singapore, the People's Association (PA) National Integration Council published a book in 2017 entitled 'Desirable Social Norms for an Inclusive and Harmonious Community' which detailed a range of local norms, such as not mixing utensils for halal and non-halal certified food stalls at hawker centres (Yong, 2017), a practice that is also highlighted in the online course that every new citizen has to complete before officially receiving Singaporean citizenship. On top of making efforts to help migrants adapt to their new home, integration also goes the other way in which the host community adapts to their new members. This might take the form of changing official policy and practices to accommodate the different languages spoken by migrants (Aliverti & Seoighe, 2017) or adapting national narratives to include the experiences and contributions of migrants (Modood, 2018).



However, official state efforts are often insufficient to achieve integration at a level expected of migrants. Instead, such measures must be accompanied by intercultural education in everyday contexts of interaction. This chapter argues that INCs use their embeddedness within their local neighbourhoods to help newly naturalised citizens feel more at home in Singapore and thus assist in the state's efforts to promote migrant integration. Rather than focus on how conceptions of belonging are constructed at the level of the state as other scholars on Singapore have done (Barr & Skrbiš, 2008; T. Chong, 2010; A. Koh, 2005), this chapter sees belonging and two-way integration as tied fundamentally to local settings and the people who inhabit them. While the local is often used to refer to city-level structures whereby locality is taken as synonymous with urban life where governance structures are decentralised so that local policies often differ from national policy approaches towards migrant integration (Caponio & Borkert, 2010b; Penninx, 2009; Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008), the use of the term 'local' to delineate the urban from the national or rural is not useful when talking about a city-state with centralised governance like Singapore. As such, when the term 'locality' or 'local' is used in this chapter, it refers to neighbourhoods which are served by grassroots volunteers who reside in the same ward. These grassroots volunteers, while having a degree of autonomy, have their activities managed, overseen and funded by the state-run People's Association (People's Association, 2018b). Fundamentally tied to the idea of the local is informality and the everyday as sites where a sense of belonging can be developed amongst newcomers.

The concept of belonging to a nation-state is often too abstract for individuals to deeply identify with given its geographical size and population even for a country as geographically small as Singapore. Instead, individuals feel tied to localities that evoke memories, such as their local school or places where they meet friends and family on the weekend (Isakjee, 2016, pp. 1345–1350). Similarly, feeling a sense of affinity with individuals who you have never met, although you share the same nationality, is much harder to achieve than those with whom you have grown up with or at least have had some semblance of interaction, which is why states often use imagery of soldiers protecting their families and homes in times of war rather than merely relying on more abstract concepts of the nation-state and a citizenry of millions. Given that migrants, when they move, often do not have networks beyond that of other migrants from their home country, they must create bonds with locals and a sense of belonging to the place in which they live to feel a sense of affinity to the broader national collective. Networks formed in neighbourhoods function as a vital source for social capital (Putnam, 2000). Such networks are essential for a wide variety of reasons, such as the diffusion of knowledge, creating structures of social support, and the inculcation and maintenance of positive behavioural norms (Kawachi & Berkman, 2014). To that end, the local neighbourhood is one such site of what Oosterlynck et al. refer to as 'relationally constituted spaces' (2016, p. 776) where bonds are developed through everyday interaction and individuals can learn how they can become part of the broader community. This learning to be part of a larger community is especially important, given that most neighbourhoods in Singapore are ethnically diverse. As mentioned in Chapter Two, all public housing is required to house a mixture of residents of different ethnic backgrounds through the implementation of an ethnic quota. As such, neighbourhoods become important sites in which

naturalised citizens, who might otherwise remain cloistered in their ethnic groupings or with individuals of the same national origin, can meet other Singaporeans from different racial backgrounds. This allows them to build ties with other citizens that transcend ethnic identities, creating commonality based on belonging to local communities and the larger Singaporean nation.

This chapter discusses how INCs use their situatedness in these local contexts to help migrants living in their midst integrate into the local community. It first begins by highlighting the formal role of INCs prescribed by the state in which their local participation is, in many ways, a top-down directive. Yet, this is not an uncomplicated process as the section goes on to discuss. As INCs are involved in the everyday realities of migrant integration, they become aware of the shortcomings of state policy and the messiness of the implementation of policy on the ground. As a result of these insights, INCs use their embeddedness in the community to engage in two informal forms of integration. The first is a welcoming of migrants to the neighbourhood and promoting interaction between local and foreign residents. The second shows a less than convivial side of the INCs' informal role, which highlights how they correct what is deemed to be anti-social behaviour. These informal integration efforts are capped off with the recruitment of newcomers to the ranks of grassroots volunteers, which further strengthens networks between locals and foreign-born residents as the final section of this chapter discusses. Ultimately, this chapter argues that rather than seeing integration as occurring separately at different scales as some work on city/local versus national integration does (Amin, 2002; Isakjee, 2016; Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008), local integration needs to be seen as a vital step towards integration into the nation-state even if it is still challenging to incorporate newcomers to the local community.

### **Issuing a State-Directed Welcome**

The grassroots sector in Singapore is one that is in large part overseen, directed and funded by the state (Weiss, 2017, p. 275). This close relationship that grassroots actors, such as INCs, have with the state harkens back to the image of the street-level bureaucrat discussed in Chapter Four who works to implement state policy in the ground (Lipsky, 2010). While INCs carry out a range of roles under the state's direction, such as organising cultural events in their neighbourhood and excursions to local landmarks for newly arrived residents, a central part of their volunteer work takes place during the naturalisation process for new citizens. In particular, they are heavily involved in the Community Sharing Sessions (CSS) which is part of the Singapore Citizenship Journey that all individuals whose applications for Singaporean citizenship are approved are required to complete. Every constituency in Singapore organises a monthly CSS for the new citizens residing in the various neighbourhood wards in the constituency. While there is no written documentation about how each CSS operates, interviews revealed that there was a general programme that was followed across every session in the various constituencies. Each new citizen is required to attend one CSS session before the citizenship ceremony, where they receive their national identity card, which signifies them officially becoming Singaporean citizens. Most of the CSS sessions last for approximately two hours

and take place on a weekday evening or during the day on a weekend. The general structure is as follows: Firstly, pre-registered participants arrive and are organised to sit in groups according to the area in which they stay. For instance, a volunteer from the West Coast Group Representation Constituency (GRC) spoke about how participants are first split according to the four divisions within the GRC: Ayer Rajah, West Coast, Boon Lay and Telok Blangah, and then subsequently into smaller geographical sub-sections if necessary.



*Figure 3: Community Sharing Session held at Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC on the 18th of June 2019. Taken from the public Facebook Group for the Pasir Ris East INC (YM Raymond, 2019). None of my respondents is shown in this picture.*

They sit in their assigned groups for most of the event (reflected in the photograph above) which were facilitated by INCs from the area and start by playing games that are meant to break the ice and introduce them to the other members of their group. For instance, three interviewees from different constituencies described a game where groups would race to line up according to a range of categories, such as height and duration of residency in Singapore. The CSS that I witnessed had a game where groups competed to see who had the greatest amount of general knowledge about Singapore, such as its history, cultural practices of its various ethnic groups and its structure of government. The purpose of these games was to introduce new citizens to their neighbours and also to Singaporean life. After breaking the ice, new citizens participate in a group activity directed by an external private organisation hired to lead the session. During this time, new citizens are asked to brainstorm their answers to three questions given to them, and the INC in charge of their small group leads their discussion and records the new citizens' responses on a flip chart (shown in *Figure 3*). These questions are broadly structured chronologically: past, present and future. For instance, 'Who was someone who welcomed you to Singapore when you first arrived?', 'Why are you becoming a Singaporean citizen now?' and 'What do you aspire for Singapore in the next ten years?' After the small group discussion, a senior INC is given fifteen minutes to give a short presentation which normally

introduces new citizens to life in the constituency, such as volunteer opportunities, the geography of the area and the Members of Parliament representing the GRC. The event officially ends after the presentation and participants are encouraged to mingle over food and drinks that are provided. The various Community Clubs in each constituency take turns to host each CSS which can see up to 100 participants, depending on the size of the constituency and the number of new citizens from the area who signed up for that month's CSS.

The CSS is run at the local level for two reasons. Firstly, in terms of logistics, having a nation-wide event would result in too many attendees for meaningful participation. As it is, each monthly local CSS regularly sees approximately 100 participants which is a challenge in itself. Nonetheless, keeping the sessions relatively small allows participants to interact with each other and build social networks amongst fellow residents. A number of the new citizens that I interviewed shared that they exchanged phone numbers with other residents who stayed nearby and subsequently arranged to meet up for their children to play together. They contrasted this with the half-day outing that new citizens are also required to go for as part of the Singapore Citizenship Journey. One new citizen told me about how he visited the Land Transport Authority Headquarters with approximately twenty other new citizens who lived all over Singapore. To him, there was no need to interact with the other participants, except to exchange pleasantries, since it was unlikely that he would see them again.

Secondly, localising the event allows an emphasis to be placed on how individuals can be part of their local community. In contrast, if the CSS were run as a nation-wide event where participants attended from all over Singapore, talks could not be tailored to the particular locality nor would local grassroots leaders play as large a role. Instead, this formal directive to hold CSS at local constituencies necessitates the involvement of grassroots leaders who have unparalleled knowledge of their neighbourhoods as many have stayed in the area for many years. For instance, Winston, who has been volunteering for an INC since the programme's inception in 2007, spoke about how he used his fifteen-minute slot during the CSS towards the end of the session to introduce the neighbourhood to new citizens.

It's a short one for them to know our own constituency. Like what our constituency have and what they can look out for. So these are the things. Especially once they are citizens if they have any problems where they can go to. For citizens, they can look out for the MPs to help out. A PR cannot. These are the things that we will let them know. Do some highlight to them our estate, what do we have and what they have seen. Some of them stayed for more than five years, and so when we ask, 'Do you know how many buses there is?' Not all of them will know. I check with them how many hotels we have... Whether they know where the hospital is, the fire station. Can understand our estate. These are the things that they do not know, they stay for over five years, but just in-out and MRT [Mass Rapid Transit]. We also bring out events like what are have over three or six months. Highlight those

events that we have. We also request them; we invite them for tea sessions so to talk about the estate and see if they want to do a service in the community.

Here Winston's focus is evidently on the local neighbourhood, whether it be concerning constituency services available to residents, activities being held at their local Community Club or neighbourhood landmarks. The reasons for his focus on the neighbourhood rather than Singapore as a whole are two-fold. Firstly, he proudly stated that he had lived in his 'estate' for over thirty years and has volunteered in his local community for over a decade. As such, he saw himself as an expert on the goings-on in the constituency due to both his experience in the area and authority as a grassroots leader who is privy to activities being organised at the local level, such as the tea sessions that he invites new citizens to where grassroots volunteers meet residents. Secondly, he saw integration into the local community as key to helping new citizens adapt to life in Singapore. This was supported by several new citizens who were interviewed. For instance, Haoyi, a newly naturalised citizen who moved to Singapore from China, explained how he felt more Singaporean after participating in the local Toastmaster's Club at his local CC. He said that he made closer friends with his fellow residents at these events and during supper outings that the members of the club go for after their evening meetings. He contrasted these friendly interactions with less positive experiences that he has had with other Singaporeans such as his colleagues who are often in a rush to go home after work. As indicated in the previous introductory section for this chapter, such 'bonding social capital' is vital for newcomers to acquire behavioural norms. For Haoyi, his integration was a multi-step process. He first attended a CSS event where an INC leader explained that the local Community Club hosted a variety of activities for interested residents of the neighbourhood. After that, Haoyi joined the CC-hosted Toastmasters' club and made friends. Going out with them informally after sessions for supper introduced him to the typical behavioural norm of going out for a late supper at the local coffee shop.

Through the CSS, INCs form networks with new citizens residing in their neighbourhood. This allows them to continue to keep in touch with newcomers in formal and informal ways. Beyond their involvement in the Singapore Citizenship Journey, INCs also organise regular excursions to various places of interest and events for their local residents. For example, the INCs from Jalan Kayu, a neighbourhood in the Pasir Ris-Punggol constituency organised an outing to the popular tourist attraction – Gardens by the Bay for their residents (the image on the right shows the poster that advertised the outing). Such excursions are heavily subsidised using



Figure 4: Poster advertising an outing to Gardens by the Bay which was posted on the public Jalan Kayu INC Facebook Group (Chit Chat Session & Garden by the Bay Tour, 2018).

funds allocated to the Integration and Naturalisation Committee by the Singaporean government. This can be seen in the outing referred to in the poster above. Adults are charged S\$8 for the entire outing (approximately US\$6 or £4.50), including a buffet lunch and transportation (usually via chartered coach) to and from the Gardens. In contrast, if residents visit the site on their own, adults would have had to pay over twice that amount for a ticket to the Gardens alone (*Gardens by the Bay Web Store: Ticket Selection*, n.d.). Given that such a sizeable subsidy comes out of the budget allocated to the Integration and Naturalisation Committee, interviewees explained that they were required to reserve at least one-fifth of the spots for new citizens, defined as residents who have received their citizenship within the past three years. Given that such subsidised events are often in high demand, the policy of reserving spaces for new citizens has unsurprisingly led to some ruffled feathers amongst local-born residents. Local-born INC, Gwen recounted how she and her fellow INCs have been on the receiving end of criticism by local-born residents who say, 'Why always new citizens? I think INCs spend too much on new citizens already.' Gwen agreed with the sentiment that giving new citizens priority was 'unfair' but admitted that 'we want them to join us more often'. In this case, much like in the case of immigration discussed in Chapter Six, INCs find themselves caught between state directives and challenges of implementing such directives on the ground. The state provides the funding and thus expects that funding be used to help their target audience: new citizens, integrate into the local community. Yet, INCs in interacting with residents, realise that the very act of prioritizing new citizens creates resentment amongst the local population whose welcome the INCs are supposed to encourage.

The challenge then is how to balance the need and top-down directive to make special efforts to facilitate new citizens' integration into the local community while not appearing to give them special treatment which might rile up local-born residents. Some INCs found innovative ways to minimize grievances amongst residents. For instance, two INCs from separate constituencies detailed a similar approach where they exercised their discretion even as they balanced top-down requirements and on-the-ground sentiments. They would call and send WhatsApp messages to new citizens who had provided their contact details at recent CSS events to invite them for the outing. Only after the designated quota for new citizens was filled, then the event would be advertised to the entire neighbourhood online and through posters put up in common areas, such as ground floor lift lobbies. The reason for trying to balance these competing interests is because of the INCs' commitment to migrant integration, despite some of their misgivings over how integration policy is implemented. On the one hand, running events that involve both local-born and naturalized citizens boosts interaction across the groups, and thus new citizens must be given the opportunity to sign up, especially if they might not otherwise know what is going on in the constituency due to their newcomer status. But on the other hand, the INCs recognise that a failure to mitigate the concerns of local-born Singaporeans adequately is likely to cause greater resentment towards new citizens and further inhibit the latter's incorporation into the neighbourhood as a whole.

It is important to note that such localization of integration activities, such as the CSS, occurs within a broader policy directive which recognizes the importance of the local context in promoting integration.

Yet, while it does have some effectiveness, these formal efforts to promote local integration were criticized by a number of my interviewees as too little, too late. Such criticisms emerge out of INCs' on-the-ground experiences as volunteers at these events. As individuals who spend significant time interacting with local residents who participate in the events organized and run by INCs at the government's behest, INCs have invaluable insights into the effectiveness of such formal integration efforts. The first criticism about the ineffectiveness of such local integration efforts can be seen in the case of one of the flagship events that each Integration and Naturalisation Committee organizes each year: the One Community Fiesta. Every Integration and Naturalisation Committee organizes their version of it every year, and its primary aim is to, as the name suggests, forge bonds and create one community. At the One Community Fiesta that I attended, activities involved educating residents on Singapore's various cultural practices, from playing traditional games of marbles to learning about how a local snack of glutinous rice, known as *muh chee* is made. Before 2016, the Fiesta was organised at the national level, but this was changed so that each constituency hosts their own smaller version organised by the local Integration and Naturalisation Committee. The reasons for this change was twofold. Firstly, overall attendance for all the local Fiesta was expected to be higher than a much larger single national event due to the proximity to people's homes. Secondly, local events would allow residents to meet their immediate neighbours instead of going to a bigger national-level event which attracted participants from all around the country but at lower total numbers than the cumulative attendance of all the locally-based iterations (S. F. V. Koh, 2016).

Despite these changes to the scale of the event, some INCs expressed scepticism as to the effectiveness of the constituency-based One Community Fiesta in facilitating interaction and the building of community ties. For instance, Aaron, the head of the Integration and Naturalisation Committee in his constituency, asked, 'Where is the integration in that? Nothing happens.' Adding on to that, he said, referring to the One Community Fiesta, 'So for me always it is not these programs, big programs doesn't work. They dilute it. The people don't talk. The family goes there, they see and then walk off.' His observation cohered with my own experience at the Fiesta that I attended. It was hosted at a large open area at a local sports centre which saw a lot of foot traffic from local residents as they walked to and from the train station and shopping mall. While some individuals did participate in the games that were organized and watched the performances put up by dance groups, numerous passersby simply looked over as they walked by but did not stop to participate. Furthermore, out of those who did participate, many did not mix with those outside the groups that they arrived with. This observation could only be made by individuals who spent significant time at the event, either volunteering for the entire day as the INCs did or observing the proceedings for a number of hours as I did. Local politicians and technocrats who drop in as Guests of Honour at such local events often do so fleetingly. They are thus unable to evaluate the effectiveness of these gatherings meaningfully. The Community Sharing Session is also another formal process that is criticized as being ineffective in promoting local integration. A number of INCs expressed dissatisfaction with the current format, saying that they were not given enough time to chat with new citizens, compared to the previous format that was in place two years ago where INCs had about forty-five minutes with new citizens, rather



than the current fifteen. One INC went as far as to argue that one session alone was insufficient, regardless of how much time INCs spent with new citizens during that session. She suggested that the programme of welcoming and integrating new citizens take place over a couple of days instead of a single two-hour session.

On top of criticisms that formal approaches do too little to encourage integration, other INCs suggested that when they do make contact with migrants in their neighbourhood, their focus on new citizens and Permanent Residents is ‘too late’ for any meaningful integration to take place. They argued that efforts to teach new citizens about Singaporean norms were simply, to quote the proverb, ‘preaching to the choir’. The INCs I interviewed confirmed that many migrants were already well-acquainted with Singaporean norms and practices by the time they undertook the SCJ. Yong Wei spoke about the indistinguishability of new citizens who reside in Singapore for decades before applying for citizenship from locally born Singaporeans.

But for those who stay over thirty, over forty years, I can tell you that they know better than some of the Singaporeans because they have been here for so long. They can almost be Singaporeans if you don’t tell others that they are foreign talent, nobody will know. They don’t have the tone; they don’t have the look; it’s just that they don’t have the IC [Identity Card], that’s all.

Rajesh and Sneha, a couple who became INCs after they settled in Singapore after moving from India, when talking about the lengthy period of residence before citizenship application and acquisition for many migrants, went as far as to call many of the applicants ‘old citizens’, before quickly correcting themselves to say, ‘No, formally new citizens.’ Yet, Rajesh conceded that the SCJ was ultimately a formality in cultural exposure since ‘when you go for the community sharing, there are a lot of questions and everyone knows the answers, it’s easy for them.’ New citizens concurred with this observation with one going as far as to say that the Community Sharing Session was ‘painful’ because it was asking about things that she already knew about, having lived in Singapore for most of her life after moving from Malaysia as a toddler with her family and learning about much of the information shared during the SCJ in school. Simply put, formal integration efforts appear to be focused on migrants who do not need much help integrating at all because – one, they are already well-integrated due to their lengthy stay prior to applying for and receiving citizenship. Two, they have already committed to accepting Singaporean norms and values by the fact that they have actively chosen to become Singaporean citizens and have renounced their previous citizenship status due to Singapore’s policy of prohibiting dual citizenship (Citizenship by Naturalisation, 2018).

INC’s criticisms of the state policy of integration are borne out of their liminal position between state and society. At the direction of the state, formal integration efforts have shifted over the years to more local implementation at the level of the constituency. This has meant that INCs have a direct hand in state integration efforts, such as running large-scale events or volunteering during the naturalisation process for new citizens. This involvement has given INCs first-hand experience of the limitations of state efforts and the messiness of everyday implementation. While expressing their frustration over the inadequacies of state



integration policy, many of the interviewees also suggested alternate approaches to improve on-the-ground integration, such as working with newly arrived migrants rather than waiting until a small proportion of them choose to apply for Singaporean citizenship. However, when pressed about whether they would propose these changes to the People's Association (PA) authorities in charge of organising the CSS, the INCs would often express a sense of frustration and helplessness over the seeming futility of the situation. One told me that it was 'pointless' to suggest that the INCs work more with newly arrived migrants because the government did not want to 'sink in' money to a group of individuals who may end up leaving after a few years. The interviewee described the question of when to initiate integration efforts as a 'calculated gamble' – if you start too early, then you might 'invest' in a group of individuals who may not be interested in settling down in Singapore and thus the money would be 'wasted', but if you leave it 'too late', then you are expending money on individuals who are already relatively well-integrated.

An interviewee when asked about whether she had told the PA representatives about the problems regarding too the inadequacies with the current format of the CSS simply shrugged in response, saying that the INCs had already given feedback about the insufficient time. Her sense of helplessness and frustration echoes other work on street-level bureaucrats who find that top-down policy, while well-intentioned, is ineffective, vague and inconsistent due to it being formulated by individuals and institutions who are not in touch with the realities on the ground (Barberis & Boccagni, 2014; Cuadra & Staaf, 2014). Yet, when those who are working at the street-level to implement government directives try to suggest changes, they are met by indifference or outright resistance. This can result in SLBs feeling policy alienation and a sense of fatalism that their efforts to push for more systematic change will not amount to anything (Loyens, 2015). Despite these frustrations, as argued in Chapter Six, the volunteers that I interviewed did not simply stop volunteering, mostly because they were still committed to the project of migrant integration even though they were frustrated by the challenges of implementation. Instead, they, in the words of public policy scholars studying a similar 'coping' phenomenon amongst SLBs, 'moved towards clients' and sought to find workarounds to help integration rather than simply throwing in the towel. In particular, they 'used personal resources' (Tummers et al., 2015, pp. 1108–1110), such as time and personal networks, to engage with newcomers in their neighbourhood, going beyond their formal role prescribed by the People's Association.

### **Building Informal Relationships with Neighbours**

While INCs do indeed spearhead the events that they are required to by the overseeing People's Association, such as the One Community Fiesta and the CSS, they are not always convinced of the efficacy of such methods, often seeing them as too little, too late. But rather than simply leave things as they are, the INCs take matters into their own hands, engaging with new citizens in their neighbourhood through more informal methods, thus going above and beyond what is expected of them. Their ability and desire to take the initiative is informed by their proximity to everyday life and the foreign and local-born residents who people it. INCs often make use of the contacts that they form through the CSS as a springboard to

what they see as more meaningful interaction. For instance, Yong Wei detailed his efforts to facilitate greater communication between new citizens and grassroots leaders:

I seek their permission to create a WhatsApp group for all the community sharing session participants. Those that give me their consent, I group them together, and they form a CSS WhatsApp group. In fact this WhatsApp group... very surprisingly I realised that different participants from different months in the year – we hold on every month for the whole year so there are twelve groups in total – I can see the February group asking the January group what their experience is, how they do this, how they do that. The January group will tell them how to apply. They are sharing knowledge to each other because they know each other's problems because they are all new citizens. They are from different batches. So I get to know better when these new citizens are having problems because when they help each other, we are also inside the group, we may not reply, but we can see how they reply to each other. So when I have International Friendship Day<sup>13</sup>, I will post in the group and say that we have this event and the people in the group will say that they want to join, they want to get their parents, their children to join. So I sell my tickets to them, and from there we can get to know them better because they come for the event and they come to join the activity.

Yong Wei used technology to connect new citizens to strengthen their ties to other members in the community by facilitating interaction with other new citizens as well as local residents through inviting them to participate in local activities. Other INCs detailed how they too interacted with the new citizens that they met through their volunteer work. For instance, Gwen, an ethnic Chinese INC, explained how she would have coffee with naturalised citizens who have moved from China to find out about how they are adapting to Singaporean life. Aaron explained that he would organise 'floor parties' for residents living in his block to celebrate social events. He explained, ' [when] it's my birthday or somebody's birthday, we do it together, and all these groups come in. So this is also an informal kind of thing which I also consider is integration which is outside the scope [of the formal INC role]'.

Others engage migrants who have yet to become Permanent Residents or new citizens. For instance, Smrita, a housewife who uses most of her free time to volunteer in her neighbourhood in various capacities, spoke about how she would leave her front door open. Living in a public housing estate means that if you leave your door open, people will be able to see you as they walk along the common corridor to their apartments. She said:

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<sup>13</sup> International Friendship Day is an annual celebration in Singapore which is 'dedicated to the understanding of Singapore's relations with its neighbours, and aims to nurture in students the spirit of friendship and collaboration among different people' (*Launch of National Education*, 2014).

But I don't like closing my door; it's like you're staying in a secluded area. This way, when people pass by, they can say 'hello'. Especially when the neighbours see the grandchildren, and they like standing there to see the flowers. When they look at my orchids, the grandparents will tell their grandchildren, 'Call Auntie!' So that's how from young, we mingle, mingle. But for me, it's very easy to get on with people. Even if I sit by someone and we see each other, just say 'Hello', and then we have communication.

For Smrita, the simple act of leaving her front door open was a literal representation of her openness to meeting her neighbours. While it inevitably means a loss of privacy, she saw it as an opportunity to build friendships, especially with individuals that she might not otherwise meet. She also spoke about how she met new migrant parents through the Parents' Support Group at the primary school in her neighbourhood. She would then invite them to her house to learn how to cook. For her, she saw these informal interactions as an extension of her role as an INC and a means to create an environment that helps individuals who would otherwise not put down roots, do so. This contrasts with the official approach, which waits for people to put down roots before integration efforts are initiated. As Smrita noted:

We, as Singaporeans, can welcome the foreigners by being more nice to them. Maybe be more friendly and accepting [of] them. Of course, they are coming to this country for work also, maybe their company transfer them here. Then slowly, slowly as they work here, they will feel that Singapore is a nice place to stay on. Then they started to get their PR. Some they really want to come because they heard from people that Singapore is a very nice place to live.

Similarly, Rajesh and Sneha, who moved from Chennai over fifteen years ago, used their contacts with the migrant Indian population to help answer questions that their friends and acquaintances have about becoming Permanent Residents and eventually naturalising. Drawing upon their own experience of becoming Singapore citizens, they responded to questions about enrolling children in local public schools and the processes of citizenship acquisition. They also sought to allay fears that other Indian parents had about sending their sons for National Service, a compulsory two-year stint of military service for all young male Singapore citizens and PRs. The first task of integration is to welcome newcomers into the community. INCs make use of their placement in the local community as a means to informally extend a welcome to newcomers through mundane acts, such as leaving their front door open or in everyday conversations about their own experiences of integration. In the same way that social networks promote political incorporation of migrants in Canada and the United States (Bloemraad, 2006, pp. 79–80), the bonds formed through INCs' informal efforts to welcome and include newcomers into the local community aim to help migrants build up a sense of belonging in their new home.

While INCs are seeking to promote interaction between locals and migrants, integration is not a one-way street as many of my interviewees highlighted. They argued that the success of their informal approach is contingent upon the willingness of newcomers also to build friendships and INCs acknowledged that, despite their best efforts, whether through formal or informal means, some migrants were unwilling to integrate. The group that INCs referred to as being less than willing to integrate are the expatriates who often come to Singapore but never intend to settle there. In these cases, the INCs and even the state's reach is limited in promoting integration. The term 'expat' is used in postcolonial Asian societies and carries significant racial and class connotations. It is typically used to evoke an image of a white highly-skilled migrant, brought in to manage the local, lesser-skilled population working in a multi-national company (MNC) (Berry & Bell, 2011; Fechter & Walsh, 2010) although it is now used more expansively, covering a more comprehensive range of ethnicities and nationalities. To attract such skilled labour and encourage them to migrate, expats are given 'expat packages' where companies would provide higher salaries than those offered to locals in the same position, rental for private housing, school fees for children to attend international schools and a travel allowance to return home for holidays (S. B. Chew, 2018). As some INCs noted, many of these expats are segregated from the local population, living in private housing estates, sending their children to expensive international schools and going to expat enclaves to socialise, such as Holland Village and exclusive community clubs whose clientele were generally identified by their nationalities, such as Tanglin Club for the British expats, the American Club, the Swiss and German clubs (Beaverstock, 2011, p. 721). These observations were confirmed by a number of the newly naturalised citizens that I spoke to. For instance, Yumiko, a naturalised Singaporean from Japan but who converted her citizenship status after marrying a Singaporean and living in Singapore for over fifteen years, spoke about how many of her Japanese friends simply stayed in their Japanese community in Singapore, living in neighbourhoods frequented by other Japanese and so forth. She gave the contrasting examples of her cousin and his wife to illustrate the very different approaches that expats can take.

Y: I had my cousin, my Japanese cousin, who worked for Fujifilm. He was here for six years as an expat. His wife totally, she just didn't like it at all. She never taken the MRT, never taken the bus. I asked her, and she doesn't eat the local food. Kids went to the international school. My cousin was really into the local food and the culture. Of course, he needs to work, but I didn't really understand why she was so unhappy and against so much of the local customs.

R: Did you try to introduce it to her while she was here?

Y: Yes, but I don't think that she liked it. And because my cousin knew that the wife wouldn't like it, so whenever we are with her, I try to avoid the local food and things. They used to live in River Valley and the Orchard area, behind Cairnhill. So maybe the location also, but I couldn't see why so hostile. Like why so distant. I don't know why.

Similarly, Karen, a white woman originally from the United Kingdom, noted that she was one of the rare 'white expats' who would go to local coffee shops and venture outside expat enclaves. For many of these expats, they often see themselves as sojourners, planning their return to their home country when their contract in Singapore ends or when their children need to return home for university. Thus, it is unsurprising that they do not see the need to put down roots. Of course, as Yumiko's example of her cousin and the examples of the naturalised citizens that I interviewed, this is not the case for every expat, but the well-integrated expatriates tend to be the exception rather than the norm and often were choosing to settle down in Singapore because they married a local or someone else from around the region, such as Yumiko with her Singaporean husband and Karen who married a Malaysian who became a naturalised Singaporean citizen at the same time that she did.

However, even amongst migrants who choose to settle down for the long-term in Singapore, become Permanent Residents and eventually citizens, segregation is still an issue. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, class differences remain an issue. For the expats who become Singaporean citizens, some still choose to live different lives from their locally-born counterparts. For instance, Karen opted to send her children to an international school and lives in a private housing estate, separate from the almost 80% of Singaporeans who live in public HDB estates (Strategy Group, 2018b, p. 19). Tony, a middle-aged INC, was candid in his observation about the challenges of getting new citizens and local-born Singaporeans to interact. Speaking of new citizens, he said:

We have a problem because a lot of them don't integrate, they don't mix around with us they go and drink around, they don't do most things that Singaporeans do. Singaporeans drink at coffee shops, at hawker centres. So I think when people don't mix, that's where a lot more misunderstanding of any kind come along. [If] you can start convincing people to come to coffee shops and laugh with the Singaporeans, I think after a while people will accept them. But right now we have one group drinking in a pub, the other group drinking somewhere else. It is a bit difficult.

On the surface, Tony's observation appears banal. However, in Singapore food and drink play a significant role in the fabric of Singaporean society, with coffee shops and hawker centres forming the heart of public housing estates (A. E. Lai, 2010) and are sites for informal integration of Singaporeans across racial groups. As such, if migrants and locals are indeed segregated according to where they socialise, this indicates that there is little mixing across groups. While there have been efforts to reach out to individuals living in private housing estates through the setting up of grassroots organisations known as Neighbourhood Committees (NCs) (*Neighbourhood Committees*, 2018) to serve private housing estates (Residents' Committees [RCs] are the public housing equivalent), INCs expressed doubts over the extent to which residents in private estates would interact with those living in HDB estates. Yong Wei, an INC who is also an NC member and lives in a private condominium, drew upon his own experiences:

I am in the condo committee for ten years. I am quite well-versed in condo situation. In fact, in the condo, not always the foreign talent that don't want to mix with the Singaporeans, even the Singaporeans themselves don't want to mix, so it's unfair to say that it is just the foreign talent that don't want to mix. When those people want to stay in the condo, I realised that when they feel that they are higher grade than those who stay in the HDB, because they are condo, they are higher grade. Just like the SAP school<sup>14</sup> and the normal school. The better grade won't have the *kampong* [village] spirit where they look out for each other. For those condo ones, it is more difficult if they have the concept of their higher grade compared to others. They often don't mix with each other, unless they have common interests with each other. I do create some activities in the condo for them to participate, and they do have some of them who can mix along. In Chinese we got a saying, '*chou wei xiang tou*' [臭味相投] which is if their interests are the same, they will stick together. They don't mix because they don't see the need. Some will ask if they get anything out of it, like 'do I get money or knowledge, if not, why do I need to do all these things?'

Yong Wei's observation that private housing estates as sites for class enclaves was not an isolated one, though most of the INCs I spoke to worked primarily within HDB estates. Prakash, another INC originally from India who volunteers in his NC and stays in a condominium with many other North Indians, illustrated the challenge of encouraging mixing across classes. He noted that if he organised an event for just his NC within a condominium, he would see at least 300 participants per condominium estate represented by the NC, bringing up total participation to at least 1,200. But if he organised an event with a broader reach that involved residents from private and public housing estates, participation rates from private estates would drop by about three-quarters in contrast to the more exclusive events.

However, segregation does not merely occur on the side of the migrants, but can also be attributed to the locals' behaviour. INCs were quick to point out that local Singaporeans were often unwilling to engage with newcomers. INCs saw themselves as the exception rather than the norm. For instance, Melissa an INC, lamented the fact that younger, local-born Singaporeans would often be staring at their mobile phones in the lift, refusing to engage with neighbours from their HDB block. She contrasted this to migrants who were often more open because they came from societies where neighbourliness and openness to others, even if you did not know them, was more commonplace. Similarly, Adil noted that his friends who were

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<sup>14</sup> SAP schools refer to Special Assistance Programme Schools. They were created to preserve Chinese language and culture in Singapore and make up some of the most elite schools in Singapore (National Library Board, 2016), and as such are *de facto* segregated, almost entirely comprised of ethnic Chinese students since only students who have taken Mandarin as a subject in the Primary School Leaving Examinations are eligible to apply for entry into a SAP school (Ostwald et al., 2019).

frequently the most critical about foreigners were unwilling to make friends and mix with their foreign-born counterparts due to their prejudiced views. This lack of interaction allowed them to continue to believe in their stereotypes about foreigners since they did not have any interaction which would allow these views to be debunked, thus creating a self-perpetuating cycle of misunderstanding and segregation. Hence, in the same way that integration is a two-way process in which both newcomers and the host society adapt to each other, segregation cannot be merely attributed to foreigners choosing not to interact with locals but an unwillingness of locals to embrace these newcomers. This debate has recently emerged as migrants are finding themselves in an increasingly precarious economic position in a context of a recession as a result of the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (Sim & Kok, 2020). Expatriates who are traditionally associated with being in privileged positions within the labour market are starting to speak publicly about how this precarity combined with expressions of anti-foreigner sentiment has meant that Singapore has become an increasingly difficult place for them to live and work (Liotta, 2020). While it is undeniable that these highly-skilled migrants are by no means the most disadvantaged of migrants, what this demonstrates is that, while expatriates are accused of being unwilling to integrate, rising anti-foreigner sentiment has meant that migrants feel unwelcome even if they try to adapt to their new home.

Despite the challenges of welcoming newcomers to their new homes, encouraging migrants to get to know their neighbours and put down roots is a critical way in which new migrants can feel more at home in the nation. INCs play a key role as ‘transversal enablers’ in this regard. As Amanda Wise explains, transversal enablers are ‘individuals who typically go out of their way to create connections between culturally different residents in their local area’ (2009, p. 24). But unlike the individuals that Wise documents who function entirely as private citizens and concerned neighbours, INCs have official ‘backing’ which enables them to build more extensive networks. For instance, their involvement in naturalisation processes allows them to know who in their neighbourhood is foreign-born and gives them access to these otherwise hard to find networks, especially in densely populated HDB neighbourhoods where one can easily remain anonymous and unknown. But it is also precisely the perceived inadequacies of the official approaches that leave INCs to exercise discretion and extend an informal hand of hospitality to those who are new arrivals to their neighbourhoods. To that end, INCs use both their official position as grassroots volunteers who work with the state and their embeddedness in the community that they serve to extend a welcome to newcomers to the neighbourhood.

### **The Limits of a Neighbourhood Conviviality**

Although the previous section presented a positive image of INCs’ integration efforts as being a mostly welcoming endeavour, it is not a simple picture of happy and largely unproblematic conviviality (Valluvan, 2016) Although a welcome is extended to many new citizens living in their new homes through formal and informal means outlined in the prior sections of this chapter, it is vital to remember that power and

hospitality are deeply intertwined, and expressions of hospitality are often conditional. As Derrida argues, the host exercises power in

choosing, electing, filtering, selecting their invitees, visitors, or guests, those to whom they decide to grant asylum, the right of visiting, or hospitality. No hospitality, in the classic sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one's home, but since there is also no hospitality without finitude, sovereignty can only be exercised by filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence (2000, p. 55).

In the case of INCs, this means that their practice of hospitality, whether formal or informal, is limited in two ways. Firstly, the welcome that they can extend to migrants is uneven. Secondly, for the migrants that they can welcome, this welcome is predicated on newcomers demonstrating their willingness to be 'good neighbours' by respecting the norms of the neighbourhoods. This conditional welcome should be viewed as a way in which the boundaries of the nation are employed to include those who fulfil the desired conditions while excluding those who do not.

On the first point of an uneven welcome, as Derrida notes, the welcome extended to migrants is selective with not all foreign-born residents being given the same experience of Singaporean hospitality. Chief of these necessary but unwelcomed migrants are workers who arrive in Singapore on temporary visas. These Work Permit holders are considered the lowest skilled workers, often employed as foreign domestic workers or in the construction industry, and are barred from applying for Permanent Resident status, and thus, by extension Singaporean citizenship (Immigration and Checkpoints Authority, 2018) even if they have stayed in the countries for years. This existence of a second-class of residents was recently brought into stark relief during the COVID-19 pandemic in which thousands of migrant workers working primarily in the construction industry came down with the virus as a result of poor and crowded living conditions. This was in contrast to the treatment of citizens and other non-local residents who were put up in hotels for a period of quarantine when they returned from overseas travel (K. Han, 2020). Speaking before the COVID-19 outbreak, Rania, an Indian-Muslim INC, recalled a case where there was a great outcry by local residents when the construction of a dormitory for construction workers was proposed near their private housing estate (H. Y. Tan, 2008). She saw it as a classic case of NIMBY or 'not in my backyard' syndrome where Singaporeans, while relying heavily on foreign labour for the construction of their houses, offices, roads and public buildings, do not want them to be living nearby, citing reasons such as public safety, the negative effect on the resale value of houses in the estate and public aesthetics. Troubled by the discrimination that these workers faced, she said, 'You can see how we treat each other, which to me is not fair. Yeah, they can just be a construction worker, but they are just as much a human being as you and me.'

At numerous integration events that I attended, there were always migrant workers around. Yet, they were conspicuously excluded from the event, from the mainland Chinese cleaner who was emptying the trash cans filling up with rubbish accumulated from the ongoing One Community Fiesta to the South



Asian gardeners sweeping up leaves as a Holi celebration was taking place in the same park. These workers will never have the chance to reside permanently in Singapore, and hence, state investment in their integration is deemed unnecessary. This sends a message that these individuals will never be part of the community and thus Singaporeans see no need to treat them as equal members of the community. Smrita, an INC of mixed Indian, Malay and Chinese ethnicity, highlighted a personal experience which illustrates such sentiments. As someone with a mixed racial background, she explained that she is often mistaken for a foreign domestic worker, also more commonly known in the more derogatory local term as a 'maid'. She recounted an incident where she encountered racism based on the assumption that she was of a lower social status.

So one day me and my husband, when we first got married, we went to a shopping centre. So they didn't write the price tag, so I asked in English, 'How much is this?' This lady went to go tell friend working with her, speaking in Chinese, 'This lady, she's just a Filipino maid... No money, she keeps asking how much but she never want to buy.' I straightaway look at her and answer her in Chinese. 'What are you trying to say? Of course I have to ask you the price because you never label. I cannot just take and take and then the thing cost me one, two hundred dollar then I won't pay.' She said, 'Oh you can speak Chinese?' 'Yes, actually I'm a Chinese.' So my husband came and said, 'Dear, what is the problem?' 'This two ladies tell each other that I am a Filipino maid and I cannot afford to buy anything.' My husband was damn mad and asked to see the manager. She said, 'Sorry, sorry! I didn't mean it!' My husband said, 'You don't need to apologise. Just call your manager come. I want to talk to your manager.' So the manager came and my husband said, 'I'm not trying to say that your staff is bad or something but please ask your staff... She is a salesgirl, so please answer to the questions of people who want to buy. Whether she is the maid or whatever she is, she is still a human being.'

Smrita's account, unfortunately, is illustrative of the disdain with which many Singaporeans treat domestic workers and other foreign labourers they deem to be lesser than them. Part of this is informed by racist, classist and xenophobic stereotypes (S. Huang & Yeoh, 2007), but this is also fueled by messages sent by the state that these temporary migrant workers are undesirable to the point that the state will actively bar them from being able to settle down in Singapore with their families and become part of Singaporean society (E. K. B. Tan, 2010, p. 108). As Bridget Anderson highlights, when the state creates a 'tiered' migration regime, much like that in Singapore, it sends the message that lower-skilled migrants are 'tolerated, effectively permitted entry to the territory but not into permanence, with no possibility of acceptance into the community of value' (2006, p. 61). Simply put, these workers are, in the words of Zolberg, 'wanted but not welcome' and while the use of foreign labour is vital for the functioning of a

capitalist economy, the impermanence of these workers' status means that they can be easily disposed of when they are not needed (1987, p. 62). This means that integration efforts do not target this group since there is no perceived purpose of seeking to promote the integration of a group whose settlement is deemed undesirable.

Even for the more desired migrants who are given the option to settle more permanently in Singapore through being given the opportunity to live rent or buy homes in Singapore or take up Permanent Resident status with some eventually converting to Singaporean citizenship, the hospitality extended to them by INCs as representatives of the Singaporean state is also conditional, albeit not on legal or socioeconomic status, but on a mutual willingness to make their neighbourhood their home. While an integral part of integration efforts, welcoming newcomers to the community is insufficient, especially if the welcome by the state and INCs is not extended to everyday life. The reality is that receiving citizenship is only but one part of becoming part of a national community. Mark Wong, a Singaporean writing in the national broadsheet, *The Straits Times*, argued that 'being a Singapore citizen is not the same as being Singaporean. One can be born here but one's heart is not... A feeling of identity is defined and nurtured by one's social affiliations, having immersed in its culture, history and people' (2008). This delineation between legal citizenship and social belonging coheres with other scholarship on migrant integration. For instance, Bridget Anderson conceptualises nation-states as 'communities of value' comprising people who possess shared values, practices, traditions and attitudes, which simultaneously function as mechanisms for exclusion (2013). These common values can include traits such as the enjoyment of a national sport, being law-abiding, speaking in a particular manner or partaking in banal practices like queuing or talking about the weather. Since the community of value is about a collective identity, belonging becomes more complicated than a simple legal binary of citizen versus foreigner. For instance, a criminal, even if he or she is a citizen, is often considered a 'failed citizen' and may be less socially accepted than a hard-working and law-abiding migrant (Bridget Anderson, 2013, pp. 4–5). For new citizens, this may mean that they are not considered as having membership in the community of value despite their legal status as members of the political entity based on the behaviour that they exhibit. This echoes a common refrain against newcomers that pass judgements on those who do not act like 'one of us', whether it be Muslim women's unwillingness to uncover their faces in public in France (Hancock, 2015) or Indian migrants supporting the Indian cricket team instead of the English one (Raman, 2014). In much of the writing on migrant integration, Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' is invoked (Bauder, 2005; Noble, 2013; Trzebiatowska, 2010). Habitus refers to 'a system of schemes of perception and thought' which organises and guides one's behaviour (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 18). This habitus provides a framework of a 'behavioural repertoire' (Hymes, 1981) deriving from the social positioning of a person, such as one's class, ethnic or national identity. In turn, one's status within that social group is signalled by an ability to understand and act within the behavioural repertoire. For instance, one's membership in a national group is often signalled through one's ability to enact certain behaviours, such as cooking and consuming 'Russian' food (Caldwell, 2002) or being able to competently perform the tea ceremony as a Japanese (Surak, 2013). For immigrants, their move to their new host country

means that their habitus may end up clashing with the habitus of other inhabitants (Wise, 2010), especially when newcomers do not know the new ‘rules of the game’ (Bauder, 2005) and thus act in a way that offends the established social norms in their new home and signals their lack of belonging in the community of value in which they reside.

The local neighbourhood is a crucial setting in which new citizens are evaluated based upon how well they play by the often unspoken rules of belonging since it is in the context of the mundane interactions that individuals are seen as acting as their ‘true selves’, in contrast to official settings such as immigration interviews, citizenship ceremonies or Community Sharing Sessions. A well-known case of such breaching of social norms can be seen in what has been termed ‘The Curry Incident’ which took place in 2011. A family who migrated from mainland China complained about the smell of curry emanating from the flat next door which was home to a local-born Indian family. The incident escalated to the point where the two families went for mediation to resolve the dispute, and it was reported in the Singaporean media. Reports of the incident generated significant public furore because the Chinese family were seen to be infringing the unspoken norm of accepting cultural difference in Singapore (discussed further in Chapter Eight of this dissertation) (A. E. Lai, 2012, p. 7). HDB estates are a classic example of what everyday multiculturalists have termed ‘contact zones’ where previously separated groups come into contact with each other, share common spaces and live in close proximity (Pratt, 1992). Given that a large proportion of the Singaporean population (both naturalised and local-born) live close to each other in blocks of public housing apartments, it is unsurprising that conflicts occur in ‘semi-public’ spaces in HDB estates, such as lift lobbies and playgrounds (Wessendorf, 2014).

INCs as grassroots volunteers often are in a position to witness and sometimes be called in to mediate situations where individuals who have not grown up in Singapore are deemed to have stepped on the toes of the locals due to their cultural foreignness. Patrick, a senior INC in his constituency, recounted an incident where he was asked to intervene in a dispute between local-born and newly naturalised Singaporeans in his neighbourhood.

In the playground we have those metal bars for children to climb, and then there were again certain families from our neighbouring countries who come here and they are not used to the fact that there are proper places for them to do the laundry, they just put the laundry there. So how do the children enjoy the activities and amenities? Very simple things like these, they become these situations where you need to explain that on this side, yes, they don’t understand, on the other end, we need to tell people that you cannot assume the worst about their neighbours.

Patrick’s account clearly illustrates the habitus underlying the dispute between the neighbours: to locals the climbing frame in the playground is meant to be used as a children’s play area, yet, the newcomers who were less appreciative of the concept of respecting a public space, instead used the frame to hang up their laundry.

In this case, Patrick was brought in as a grassroots leader to defuse the situation. His position as an INC put him in a unique position to do so. First, he was trusted by the locals as being sufficiently 'local' to understand and empathise with their concerns, despite how trivial the issue might have appeared on the surface. Secondly, as an INC whose role was to interact regularly with newcomers to Singapore, he was assumed to have the requisite skills and experience to help communicate the message to the migrant family who might otherwise have been less than receptive to their neighbours. Third, as a grassroots leader, Patrick was seen as an authority figure, drawing legitimacy both from his position as a community leader and a local who was knowledgeable about local norms and expectations to be taken seriously by the migrant family. Patrick was not the only INC who stepped in to tell migrants that their behaviour was socially unacceptable. Others corrected actions deemed 'anti-social' such as queue jumping, defecating in public and bringing takeaway containers to a buffet organised at the local Community Club. When INCs get involved, the hope is that they will defuse the situation before it escalates further as it did in the curry incident.

One reading of these actions by the INCs is that they function as disciplinarians, albeit without any coercive force on their side beyond their informal authority as grassroots leaders. One might even see them as engaging in assimilationist behaviour given that they assume that their way of living in *the* way that individuals ought to live in local communities. This has an element of truth to it. In many of their accounts of foreign-born residents breaching unspoken social norms, I detected a sense that INCs felt that it was their duty to educate these otherwise ignorant foreigners. In Patrick's accounts, he spoke about how migrants did not know any better because their behaviour, while unacceptable in the Singaporean context, was 'okay in their home country'. Sometimes these accounts took a distinctively classist tone with some INCs saying that if the migrants had travelled out of their home countries before settling in Singapore, they would have realised that behaviour such as queue jumping was unacceptable in many other, 'more developed' countries. To that end, INCs saw themselves as an educational, almost civilizational force for the newcomers to Singapore, often taking a patronising tone when discussing the behaviour of newcomers.

The correction of anti-social behaviour is not a one-way street, though, as Patrick's account demonstrates. He points out that rather than simply asking the migrant family to change their behaviour, he asked the complainants also to be understanding towards the newcomers and not 'assume the worst' about their overseas-born neighbours. In doing so, the burden of integration is shared between the locals and newcomers, echoing arguments by proponents of integration that it is a two-way process, albeit spoken of in the context of multiculturalism (discussed further in the next chapter) (Modood, 2013, p. 44). Many INCs talked about how locals needed to be more 'open' towards their migrant neighbours, making an effort to welcome them into the community and be more accepting of the challenges of living with others who might have different values and norms that you do. This was suggested as a means of mitigating the otherwise unwelcoming tone taken when correcting the anti-social behaviour of migrants unfamiliar with the norms in the neighbourhood. More broadly, encouraging locals to be more accepting of their foreign-born neighbours should be viewed as part of their wider remit to promote two-way integration. We can see this remit in play in events and activities that INCs organise which local and foreign-born residents are

encouraged to attend, such as excursions to local landmarks. As discussed in the first section of this chapter on formal efforts to welcome newcomers, all INC activity must have a minimum proportion of new citizens in attendance. However, this does not mean that INCs want the events only to be attended by new citizens. Many of them spoke about how it was vital that both local and foreign-born residents attend integration activities as such activities are vital spaces where cross-cultural interaction can take place and bonds between residents can be formed. As one interviewee put it, ‘this way, locals can learn to accept foreigners’ because they will see that ‘we are not so different’.

The work that INCs do in correcting bad and encouraging desirable behaviour to promote integration parallels findings by other scholars on the disciplinary role that other SLBs play. These SLBs might be teachers who seek to inculcate good behaviour in their students (Tomal, 2001) or social workers who encourage mothers to be self-sufficient (Hand, 2018). INCs play a key role in promoting integration because of their position as members *and* leaders of the local community in functioning as what Wise terms ‘transversal enablers’. INCs function by ‘creating threads of connection across cultural difference – for themselves, and for their local communities’ (2009, p. 24). But does not necessarily appear as convivial as Wise describes in her picture of friendly, cross-cultural exchanges in the Australian suburbs. Still, enablers can use their position to engage in corrective action which helps promote integration by allowing newcomers to signal their willingness to accept and adapt to local norms while reducing tensions that might otherwise pose an obstacle to them gaining the acceptance of locals in the neighbourhood. In this case, INCs’ liminal position puts them in a unique position to encourage neighbourly behaviour that, in turn, justifies the extension of Singaporean hospitality to newcomers. On the one hand, their role as grassroots leaders gives them an air of authority which leads them to be called in to defuse local-level conflicts. Yet, it is precisely because they are functioning at the ‘grassroots’ that they are brought in rather than neighbours calling in the official authorities, such as the police. Their role demonstrates that integration is not merely an uncomplicated, warm affair of welcoming in newcomers but is fraught with tensions as to how a foreign-born individual can learn to belong while simultaneously feeling like they are welcome in their new home.

### **Migrant Volunteerism to Promote Integration**

Being welcomed into the community is often premised on being seen as ‘one of us’, this can be facilitated by a change of behaviour to adapt to the local practices. Still, migrants can and often do go one step further of demonstrating their membership to the community by ‘giving back’. But rather than merely functioning as a way to signal one’s commitment to the neighbourhood, volunteering can be an essential tool to facilitate greater migrant integration. To that end, a significant role that INCs play is to encourage new citizens to volunteer at the grassroots level. At the Community Sharing Session, new citizens are given information about events happening in their local community and are encouraged to participate in said events; they are also encouraged to sign up to be grassroots volunteers. After the fifteen-minute session which concludes the CSS, INCs mill around with the new citizens, sharing about their personal experiences as volunteers.

New citizens are also given feedback forms at the end of the session, where they can provide their contact details and indicate their willingness and availability to volunteer. From there, INCs will contact these new citizens whenever a volunteering opportunity presents itself. Melissa, an INC who also volunteers with her local Residents' Committee, spoke about contacting a new citizen from China who moved to Singapore with his parents when he was a student. He eventually volunteered to help with the local MPs' house visits over the Chinese New Year period. Apart from the CSS providing a 'captive audience' of new citizens, new citizens also often prove to be willing volunteers. For instance, Haoyi, the new citizen from China who just received his Singaporean citizenship in 2016. Despite renting an apartment in a local HDB estate for several years as a PR, he only began volunteering at his local CC after applying for citizenship because he felt that he needed to get involved in Singaporean life after committing to be part of the Singaporean community, in contrast to the temporal nature of being a tenant. It is this logic that forms the narrative used by INCs and other officials to encourage new citizens to volunteer: that now that they have committed to the country, they ought to contribute to the life of the neighbourhood. Here volunteerism is not used in a national sense, in that one is giving back to the nation per se, but is localized, so that one is giving back to one's local neighbourhood and fellow residents.

New citizen volunteers can often be seen as being 'more legitimate' citizens because they are seen to be contributing back to their community. While this was not explicitly stated, many local-born INCs spoke critically about citizens who would participate in the various activities organized for them, and just 'take' without giving back. Gwen observed this occurring at a local event.

Some of the new citizens, they come and grab food, goodie bags. We have ever come across during events, our food is all wiped out in half an hour because they pack to go, and then they come back again. It makes the locals feel very angry because it's not right. Not just new citizens will do that; sometimes locals also do the same. And some more the new citizens and not new citizens, they are the parents of the citizens. They'll stay for a while, wait for the food to be ready. Actually, it's very sad to say so about these things.

While the example was about something as inane as behaviour on a buffet line, these sentiments were more broadly communicated when INCs were asked about rising ill-will amongst local-born Singaporeans towards new citizens and immigrants. While there was some attribution to ignorance and a lack of interaction between locals and foreigners, INCs spoke of the perception that immigrants were just in Singapore for their gain. This is not an isolated sentiment but is fueled by the belief that migrants are entirely self-interested and come to Singapore to take advantage of the benefits of living in a well-run country, such as a world-class education system and a strong passport, without making the necessary sacrifices to 'deserve' such benefits. For instance, there is often much public anger over stories of Permanent Residents who choose to give up their residency status to avoid having to serve the mandatory two years of military service, known as National Service (NS), which is seen as a sacrificial rite of passage for all Singaporean men (Lay, 2014). Hence, one might postulate that if new citizens volunteered in their local community, then they might

be more readily accepted as members of the Singaporean nation given that they are contributing to its well-being, thus challenging the image of the parasitic migrant that often permeates anti-foreigner discourses in Singapore (T. Chong, 2015). A brief survey of the mainstream news media coverage on non-local volunteers demonstrates this very narrative. For instance, a news article in the national broadsheet, *The Straits Times*, highlights how an Indian-born volunteer sought to ‘give back to the community’ through organizing a book drive for the needy in his neighbourhood (B. Y. Seow, 2018). In this case, he was held up as a shining example of what a ‘contributing’ member of Singaporean society ought to look like.

Furthermore, this act of volunteering becomes a self-reinforcing cycle in which new citizens by demonstrating their rootedness through volunteering, in turn, further their integration into their local community. My findings cohere with other studies on volunteering as a way to facilitate rootedness through granting opportunities for migrants to pick up vital language skills and socio-cultural capital (Handy & Greenspan, 2009). Priya, an INC volunteer originally from Malaysia, spoke of a Vietnamese lady she often volunteers with.

Like one of my Grassroots leaders (GRLs) is Vietnamese, she really has communication gaps with my other GRLs, so I’ll be the middle person. Sometimes there have been issues then I’ll come in and say that there was miscommunication because she couldn’t understand what they were saying. So maybe language barriers, even gestures and body language is different. I go in as a mediator and go in and solve it.

Through this interaction, the Vietnamese volunteer can pick up English and other non-verbal cues. But beyond just language skills, perhaps what is more important is the social networks that new citizen volunteers can form beyond the social circles that are often created with other migrants from their homeland. Smrita gave an account of parents who arrive in Singapore as chaperones for their children who enter Singapore to study in school and their entrance to the school’s Parents’ Support Group as volunteers.

So for the China parents who brought the kid here under long-term pass, they are not even PR. They brought their kids here to study here. So they are feeling at a loss, don’t know what to do. So they also join the Parents’ Support Group. When they came for registration, we saw them and we asking them, ‘You are from China? Are you a Permanent Resident here?’ ‘No, I’m on a Long-term pass for my kids because my kids is studying here and as long as my kids is getting the pass, I have the pass.’ So from there onwards, we invite them to join the group. So from the moment they become Parents’ Support Group, every function they are sure there. And they are willing to learn, like sometimes we have a cooking session to learn how to cook local food. They are willing to come and learn. So they are more, more able to make them feel at home. So since they are this type of persons, we should go forward to them

more, to make them feel more comfortable and like ‘Wah, at least I come all this way to a foreign country, at least I am not a foreigner.’

In this case, volunteering becomes an avenue through which migrants can interact with local Singaporeans and form bonds. From these everyday experiences, they are made to feel more at home in Singapore and this eases their anxiety over living in an unfamiliar country, enabling them to better integrate into Singaporean society through processes like learning to cook and becoming comfortable consuming local food. In the absence of these social bonds, one might imagine that learning to adapt to Singapore’s varying cultural context would be a much greater challenge for newcomers.

Several INCs that I met are themselves naturalized citizens. After benefitting from the interactions with their local INCs when they were becoming citizens, these foreign-born volunteers have sought to pass it on as INCs to help other new citizens integrate. Reuben is one such volunteer who moved to Singapore from India and started volunteering as an INC. He speaks of the head of his Residents’ Committee, Tony (who I also interviewed) as an individual whose example he wanted to emulate.

I met Tony at one of the events, it was an event by the INC, and I met Tony in the past, so I knew that he existed because he did take me in my journey as a citizen, we did go for some events. He took us to Semakau Island<sup>15</sup>. I love to join people who can walk the talk, rather than having someone who will be only just talking and you're not doing... So when I met is Tony at one of these events, it was an INC event, a joint event, I said, ‘I can sort of give my experience, given that I also transitioned from a nobody, an outsider so-called.’

Rajesh spoke more concretely about the help that he provided migrants and new citizens he met, particularly drawing upon his experience as a naturalized citizen, with two sons who grew up in Singapore, with one who attended a local school and being conscripted for mandatory National Service (NS) in the military.

So there are many questions from our friends who are EP holders or who are here for one year or later... For example, admission priorities... We advise them that the best way is to apply for PR and what the requirements for PR... For example, the best questions asked are about NS, people are very anxious about NS. Because from their home country, NS may not be a very compulsory thing, but here it is, and so they ask many anxious questions. I think that it helps them to take in addition to whether they want to apply for PR or not, knowing about the schooling and the benefits, all that helps them a lot. So when we have the perspective very clearly, we let them know that

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<sup>15</sup> Semakau Island is an island off the southern coast of Singapore which has been converted into a self-sustainable landfill site (*Semakau Landfill*, 2018). Individuals who visit Semakau Island are taught about how the National Environment Agency ensures that the landfill is still environmentally friendly with coral reefs and mangrove swamps thriving around the landfill (L. Lai, 2018).



this is what it is. We let them know that NS there is nothing to be anxious about. They are just feeling anxious over nothing.

To that end, INCs who are naturalized citizens play an invaluable role in facilitating the integration of new citizens given the fact that they have gone through the same process of leaving their home country and taking up Singaporean citizenship. This means that their experience of going through the liminal process of naturalisation becomes not merely an experience to be viewed as something that is completed and in the past but is a defining experience which they can use to help other new citizens adjust to life in Singapore. This is in contrast to local-born volunteers who may know about Singapore and its policies but cannot speak to new citizens' anxieties as effectively given their lack of first-hand experience of adapting to a new culture. To that end, naturalized citizens who go on to volunteer as INCs do not merely rely on their grassroots experiences of policy implementation to inform their efforts to facilitate integration at the local level but use their experience as a naturalized citizen to help rectify shortcomings of policy and everyday efforts that rely on the perceptions and experiences of local-born policy-makers and volunteers. New citizens are encouraged to volunteer at the grassroots level to give back to the community that has taken them in. Furthermore, they often volunteer as INCs because they believe that they have unique perspectives and experience that helps them contribute to other new citizens' integration journeys. In this way, the INCs who are naturalized citizens also straddle another liminal identity, between being a Singaporean citizen and foreign-born.

### **Chapter Summary: Local Integration to Facilitate National Integration**

This chapter discussed how the local context of the neighbourhood is a fundamental site for migrant integration in Singapore. It demonstrated how the INCs' liminal position plays a vital role in local integration efforts. INCs are organised into local committees and most integration efforts, even those initiated and funded by the state, are tailored for the more intimate context of the local community and day-to-day interaction between residents. But much like other street-level actors involved in policy implementation, INCs' experience on the ground makes them aware of the limitations of formal local integration efforts. While the state does seek to promote integration, it is often unwilling to invest sufficient resources to facilitate an integration process that begins early and is sustained enough to develop the deep interpersonal ties that INCs deem necessary to for migrants to feel a sense of belonging. Instead, formal efforts appear to simply be a formality, targeting individuals who have already lived in the country for many years and have chosen to become Singaporean citizens. Those who fall out of this narrow set of criteria are deemed as 'undeserving' of state investment in their integration. Faced with what they see as state policy failures, INCs use their position as grassroots volunteers to interact with new migrants in a more informal capacity, going above and beyond what is expected of them (Tummers et al., 2015). This coping mechanism can take the form of a positive extension of a warm welcome to the neighbourhood and building friendships with newcomers. Still, it can also involve correcting anti-social behaviours that would otherwise lead to increased

social conflict in the neighbourhood. Thus, even INCs' welcome is a conditional one, premised on a principle of reciprocity that migrants are expected to accept and adapt to societal norms before being deemed worthy of being extended a hand of friendship. Nonetheless, INCs' informal efforts stem from a desire to better one's home, both in the local and national sense, and they seek to encourage others, including newly naturalised citizens to participate in the project of grassroots volunteering. However, this is by no means a smooth sailing endeavour. Local integration efforts are only as effective as there is the willingness and opportunity to integrate. When foreign and local-born residents are physically and socially segregated due to a combination of structural reasons and individual choices, integration both at the local and subsequently at the national level is hindered, despite the INCs' best efforts. This segregation highlights the very apparent divides according to nationality and class endemic to Singaporean society, and in many cases, exacerbated by state policy. Nonetheless, neighbourhoods are vital sites where everyday interaction occurs, and one's foreignness or belonging is highlighted through your behaviour. In particular, grassroots volunteering becomes a vital way in which new citizens can signal their belonging-ness to the community and help facilitate other new citizens' integration into the neighbourhood. Thus, rather than focussing on national integration which is an abstract and often overly ambitious project, local and foreign-born INCs use their position at the local level to help new citizens navigate the liminal process of naturalisation.

## **Chapter Eight: Unifying the Nation through Recognising Cultural Difference**

This dissertation is investigating the ‘problem of integration’, that is: ‘How can a political system achieve stability and legitimacy by rebuilding communal bonds of civility and tolerance – a moral social order – across the conflicts and divisions caused by the plurality of values and individual interests?’ (Favell, 2001, pp. 2–3). It argues that to understand how Singapore engages with this ‘problem’, we need to examine the role that meso-level actors play, in particular grassroots volunteers known as Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs). Studying this group reveals that they seek to promote integration by encouraging the incorporation of newcomers into smaller sub-units within society – local neighbourhoods and ethnic groupings. Chapter Seven discussed how INCs use their position as grassroots volunteers to integrate newcomers to the local neighbourhood through formal and informal means. The creation of bonds between neighbours is seen to be instrumental in developing a sense of belonging to the national community, especially since such bonds promote a civic sense of community that transcends ethnicity in a culturally diverse society. However, this does not mean that ethnicity is irrelevant to the nation-building project, as some civic nationalists argue (Kuzio, 2002; Lecours, 2000; Shulman, 2002; Stilz, 2009). Nor is the recognition of cultural difference likely to fragment and balkanise the national community into smaller, exclusive ethnic groupings as critics of multiculturalism claim (Goodhart, 2004a; Wright & Taylor, 2011). Instead, as argued in Chapter Three, when individuals and groups feel that their ethnic identities are being given due recognition, a sense of belonging to the nation is likely to be increased, and multiculturalism can become a touchstone for national identity in a diverse society. While Chapter Three forwarded this argument in a theoretical manner, this chapter will demonstrate this empirically.

In the case of Singapore, multiculturalism is an extensive part of the Singaporean lived experience and identity. In 2017, the Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, in a speech on racial relations in Singapore, invoked Lee Kuan Yew’s vision of a society where difference would be embraced. Lee Hsien Loong spoke glowingly of Singapore’s multicultural nature:

I posted a picture on Instagram of myself, President Halimah and Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon. A Chinese, a Malay, and an Indian – only in Singapore. During the F1, one international visitor from Brazil saw the picture and commented on it. He said it was most amazing what we have in Singapore. He could not imagine it happening anywhere else.

In fact, it is amazing. It shows what Singapore is - multiracial, meritocratic, one flag, one people. That is what makes us Singaporean. (H. L. Lee, 2017)

Beyond political rhetoric, multiculturalism pervades many areas of Singaporean life. In school, students celebrate Racial Harmony Day once a year where they dress up in ethnic costumes of the four main ethnic groups: Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian and they learn about the multi-ethnic character of Singapore through their history and social studies education (C. Han, 2000). Various cultural and religious festivals are celebrated across the country, ranging from Chinese New Year to Hari Raya Puasa, with local grassroots

leaders organising events publicised with posters depicting residents of various ethnic backgrounds. For many Singaporeans, the cultural diversity of the nation is a lived reality which they are proud of (Mathews, 2013), seeing it as part of the country's 'DNA' (Chua, 2009, p. 243).

Despite the central role that Singapore's cultural diversity plays in everyday life, public policy and national identity, it is not always clear how one ought to live amid such diversity and 'rub along' with others of different cultural backgrounds (Husband et al., 2014). As the public furore over the Curry Incident of the Chinese migrant family complaining about their local Indian neighbours cooking curry illustrates, immigrants can and do make cultural faux pas when they move to Singapore. One of the new citizens that I interviewed who moved from China described how she had mixed up dishes meant for serving halal food with those for non-halal cuisine at the local food centre because she did not know that they were meant to be kept separate and that the green dishes represented those from stalls selling Muslim food. Much like how INCs help to introduce migrants to everyday life in the neighbourhood and the often unspoken norms that permeate interaction amongst residents, this chapter demonstrates the vital role that INCs serve as integrators in introducing migrants to multicultural Singapore. It argues that this is done in two key ways. Firstly, INCs embody the constituent cultures that make up Singapore's particular version of cultural diversity. Secondly, they demonstrate the underlying ethos of multiculturalism which is to accept cultural difference in their interactions with migrants. While both strategies are mutually reinforcing, the entrance of new migrants and their accompanying cultural difference pose challenges to Singapore's multicultural character which the third and final substantive section of this chapter discusses before proceeding on to the chapter summary.

### **Embodying Singapore's Constituent Cultures**

While ethnic diversity is not an uncommon reality in many countries, Singapore's brand of multiculturalism – multiracialism, plays a very prominent role in national narratives regarding Singapore's history and identity. The image of Singapore as comprising a wide variety of races and cultures is prominent in messages provided to new citizens. One of the most obvious ways that Singapore's multicultural character is communicated to new citizens is by the visual imagery presented by the state in its materials for new citizens, reflecting a broader strategy to ensure that images of a Singaporean community incorporate all racial minorities, not dissimilar to publicity efforts by universities and other corporate bodies to demonstrate their ethnically diverse make-up (Prichep, 2013). For instance, in annual National Day Parades (NDPs) which celebrate Singapore's independence from the British, the country's multicultural character is a central recurring motif (Kong & Yeoh, 1997, p. 231). The NDP 2018 Theme Song features a racially diverse cast of singers who represent Singapore's official racial groups, such as Vanessa Fernandez who is Eurasian, Charlie Lim and Joanna Dong who are Chinese, Aisyah Aziz who is Malay, and Shak'thiya Subramaniam who is Indian (Sholihyn, 2018). NDP songs regularly feature in events that new citizens attend, such as Citizenship Ceremonies and Community Sharing Session, and thus is it inevitable that new citizens would

have some exposure to this image that is shared at a national level each year on the ninth of August. In addition to nationally produced imagery, in materials crafted specifically for new citizens' consumption, a similar mixed image is communicated. At the online login page for the Singapore Citizenship Journey that applicants use after receiving in-principle approval from the ICA for their application for Singaporean citizenship, there is a prominent image of six new citizens of varying ethnic descent that is accompanied by quotes about Singaporean shared values (*Login - SCJ*, n.d.). This message that one can share in Singaporean-ness regardless of one's ethnicity is even more explicitly communicated in a video created by the National Integration Council which is shown to all new citizens at the citizenship ceremony which is held bi-annually in each constituency. In the video, against a backdrop of interethnic interaction, the narrator asks, 'What does it mean to be Singaporean?' He then goes on to ask, 'Shall we make it about the colour of my skin? Or the sound of your voice? What if we are just the ones who made a promise, a pledge to stand together, a commitment to live as one people?' The video then culminates in an image of primary school children saying the national pledge together as the camera pans across a sea of different faces and races (National Integration Council, 2017b).

This multiracial image of Singapore is one that stuck with several new citizens that I interviewed. For instance, Ling, a naturalised citizen from China, while noting that her country of origin is home to a wide array of cultural diversity, highlighted how there was often little public discourse on diversity as a source of national pride. Diversity was often invoked as an opportunity for tourism whereby the majority Han Chinese would visit ethnic minorities in rural areas of China, but not as a fundamental part of China's national identity. Similarly, Yumiko, hailing from Japan who converted to Singaporean citizenship after living in Singapore for over fifteen years, noted the stark contrast between Japan and Singapore. While Singapore frames its multicultural character as a fundamental part of what it is as a nation, Japan instead emphasizes ethnic homogeneity, which some critics have argued erases ethnic minorities such as the Ainu (P.-E. Lam, 2005). When prompted about the narrative of racial and linguistic sameness in Japan, Yumiko was quick to respond:

Yes, similar and somehow not speaking any other language make your Japanese-ness strong, I feel. So like maybe now it's different. But when I was growing up, thirty or forty years ago, sometimes there are kids who live overseas because of parents when they return they are actually fluent in English, but they purposely pronounce with a Japanese accent or purposely don't use it, so that they won't be sticking out and it's like an acceptance. Although they learn English, it's just that they somehow cannot use it to communicate, maybe see it as one of the exam subjects, so if you speak other languages, it's as if you're losing part of your Japanese-ness, that kind of idea.

She noted the stark differences between the environment she grew up in with her children's context where they celebrate Racial Harmony Day in the Singaporean schools that they attend. To her, she was pleasantly surprised that racial difference was celebrated in Singapore rather than minimised in the name of

maintaining national unity. A number of my INC interviewees corroborated the finding that some new citizens found Singapore's approach to cultural diversity to be novel. Adil, an INC, was quick to point out that migrants who hail from countries where there is a strong belief in the racial homogeneity of the nation often found the racial diversity in Singapore a new experience. Realising that Singapore's multicultural character was not something that all new citizens are familiar, Adil felt the impetus to use his position as an INC to introduce newcomers to Singapore's varied ethnic demography. Adil and Yumiko both explained that the representation of Singapore as ethnically heterogeneous was an important signifier to newcomers that Singapore was welcoming of all individuals regardless of the colour of their skin, their religious beliefs or the country that they or their ancestors came from. For immigrants who might otherwise feel like an outsider, Yumiko said that this knowledge about Singapore's multiculturalism made her feel as if she too could be included in the Singaporean community despite being born in Japan.

Despite a sweeping reference to diversity that is often presented front and centre in representations of Singapore and its population, Singapore's multiculturalism is understood as being constituted by a very particular set of cultures which places it in tension with the sense that Singapore's multicultural image has space for a wide range of diversity. In other words, Singapore, while embracing its diversity, has its own 'brand' of diversity. This is much like how cultural diversity in the United States is often portrayed as constituted by African-American, whites and Hispanic. Similarly, South Asians are the quintessential representation of British cultural diversity to the point that Chicken Tikka Masala was declared to be the 'national' dish of Great Britain and is held up as a sign of British multiculturalism (Cook, 2001). The image of multicultural Singapore is encapsulated in the 'CMIO' framework of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others (normally invoking the image of individuals of mixed European and Asian heritage known colloquially as 'Eurasians' who are also seen as one of the 'founding races' of Singapore) (Rocha, 2011; Rocha & Yeoh, 2019, p. 6). Priya, a naturalised citizen from Malaysia who volunteers as an INC, when talking about the CMIO system said that 'we need to recognise these four major groups' because they are the 'forerunners in this country', indicating the primacy that these groups are accorded within understandings of Singaporean multiculturalism. This image of Singaporean-ness percolates down to the grassroots level. For instance, I attended a parade for Chinese New Year organised by the INCs in Punggol-Pasir Ris Constituency. At the event, floats displaying images representing the three main ethnic groups were on display from the red God of Fortune with a dragon on the Chinese float to the Indian float which hosted dancers dressed in Indian clothing known as *saris* and the green float representing the Malay community with models of *ketupat* or Malay rice cakes hanging from the side.

At the parade, representations of Eurasians were conspicuously absent, rendering them invisible in a public spectacle which was meant to celebrate Singapore's cultural diversity. This was a broader issue recognised by Priya, the INC who spoke about Eurasians being one of the four 'forerunners' in Singapore. She pointed out that Eurasians tend to be overlooked because they are a relatively small group and are effectively 'unlabelled' since they are placed under the 'Others' category, echoing complaints made by Eurasians that they are often rendered invisible under the CMIO framework (S. Lam, 2017). As Rocha and

Yeoh observe, 'This non-recognition is particularly difficult in Singapore, where race is a primary indicator of a person's identity, positioning them within the Singaporean social fabric as belonging to the nation' (2019, p. 9). Given that INCs organised this event, one might argue that their choices of how to represent Singapore's cultural diversity without adequate recognition of non-Malay/Indian minorities make INCs complicit in the erasure of these groups, such as Eurasians. Furthermore, it illustrates just how much an issue this non-recognition is for minorities that actors who are specifically tasked to promote integration amongst Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans of all ethnic backgrounds, neglect Eurasians as well. If INCs forget to include Eurasians in their representation of Singapore's cultural diversity, then it would come as no surprise, however unfortunate, that Eurasians face misrecognition amongst everyday Singaporeans, often being mistaken for foreigners because they do not fit into people's ideas of what members of a multicultural Singapore look like (B. Ang, 2014).

While CMIO is a very particular structure of racial categorisation which places race as the category for social organisation, race functions as a proxy for the preservation of cultures as a whole. The example of the floats in the example of Chinese New Year parade illustrates this. Apart from having a float representing the three biggest ethnic groups, each float had specific representations of culture, such as certain foods for the Malay community and clothing for Indians. This close linkage between racial categories and other cultural characteristics permeates many parts of everyday life and public policy, such as the bilingual education policy which requires Singaporean students to learn the language associated with their designated ethnic group (Pakir, 1993). Similarly, race is often conflated with religion. In the state's efforts to grant each of the four major racial groups equal treatment major religious holidays are national holidays in Singapore – 'two Islamic holidays, two Indian-related religious holidays... the first two days of Chinese New Year, Good Friday and Easter' (Chua, 2003, p. 60). This conflation persists even though a growing number of Chinese are converts to Christianity (D. P. S. Goh, 2015, p. 148) and there is a sizable Muslim-Indian population in Singapore (E. K. B. Tan, 2008, p. 58). Regardless of its accuracy, Singaporean multiracialism is a policy which uses ethnic labels to communicate particular cultural practices and diversity associated with the group, using the power of the state to perpetuate such ideas, including to new citizens.

As actors who work with the state to promote integration into the multicultural community, INCs help to propagate this message regarding the content of Singapore's multicultural nature. This state-prescribed linkage of ethnicity with certain cultural practices was demonstrated clearly in the Community Sharing Session (CSS) that I attended at the local CC which is facilitated by local INCs. Games designed to break the ice amongst about 120 participants split into eleven smaller groups according to the divisions that they live in within the bigger constituency emphasized Singapore's racial and cultural diversity. Participants played charades, acting out eating their favourite local food, cultural festivals and places of interests for their group members to guess. While the participants were miming eating chicken rice or visiting the zoo, local folk music played in the background. This music is often played in schools, NDPs and other events, and is sung in the various vernacular languages of Singapore, such as *Chan Mali Chan* in Malay and *Munnaeru Vaalibaa* in Tamil. These songs have been selected through the 'Sing Singapore' programme, which began

in 1988 and has continued to be held every subsequent two years (Kong, 2000). Yeo Ning Hong, then the Minister for Communication and Information in his message for the Sing Singapore songbook in 1988 explained the purpose of such songs:

Singing the songs will bring Singaporeans together, to share our feelings one with another. It will bring back shared memories of good times and hard times, of times which remind us of who we are, where we came from, what we did, and where we are going. It will bring together Singaporeans of different races and backgrounds, to share and to express the spirit of the community, the feeling of togetherness, the feeling of oneness. This, in essence, is what the 'Sing Singapore' programme is about (*Sing Singapore*, 1988).

This sense of nostalgia is not likely to be evoked amongst new citizens whose introduction to Singapore's cultural diversity is relatively recent. However, there is still a strong association with the racial categorisation implemented by the state and the specific cultural practices tied to each group. The INC involvement in the naturalisation processes whereby new citizens are introduced to Singapore's multicultural character confirms the state narrative about multiracialism being a reality of everyday life. As new citizens view INCs' grassroots position as indicative of sharing a common lived experience with a majority of ordinary Singaporeans, when these INCs speak of Singapore's multicultural make-up, this account is not merely taken as state narrative but as a reality that all Singaporeans experience and understand.

In addition, when aiding in state-mandated naturalisation processes for new citizens, INCs' translate state ideology and general policy of multiracialism into concrete practices when they organise events and activities to celebrate key cultural holidays. My interviewees described several activities that they had organised, with dumpling making workshops to celebrate the Chinese dragon boat festival and *rangoli* design competitions during the celebration of Deepavali or the Festival of Light associated with the Indian community. These activities are paid for using funding provided to the INCs from the Singaporean government. As an interviewee who is the local head of his Integration and Naturalisation Committee and a sitting member of the National Integration Council, highlighted, the INCs have some of the most generous budgets available to grassroots organisations, eclipsing the amount allocated to other committees, such as the Youth Executive Committee. The INCs' large budget is indicative of the relative importance that the Singaporean state places on inter-racial integration efforts. It is important to note that these funded cultural events are not singularly for the preservation of culture; otherwise, the government would simply channel funds to exclusive ethnic grassroots organisations, such as the Malay Activities Executive Committee or its Indian equivalent. These events have a broader role in educating residents from outside the cultural communities who celebrate these festivals, especially new citizens. INCs are tasked to invite new citizens to these cultural events which allow the latter to learn about the various cultural practices of the ethnic groups in Singapore and meet members of these groups. In this way, INCs are an integral part of the state's efforts to turn their policy plans into reality. At a *Holi* celebration that I attended, I met Ling, a newly naturalised



citizen. I asked why she, an ethnic Chinese individual originally from China, was at the event. She explained that a local INC had sent her a WhatsApp message about the event and she thought that it would be 'something interesting to attend'. When I asked if she had seen the posters advertising the event all over the neighbourhood, she replied that she could not remember if she had. Instead, the message from the INC that she knew caught her attention and brought her to the activity. Almost one and a half thousand INCs provide the hands and feet to run such events and use the networks that they develop through their formal and informal interactions with new arrivals in their neighbourhood to invite foreign-born residents to such events. The aim of inviting new citizens is to allow them greater exposure to the multiplicity of cultures that co-exist within Singaporean society and meet representatives of these cultural communities.

Beyond such official means of educating migrants about the various ethnicities that comprise Singapore's population, INCs play a significant role in embodying their own cultures and using their positions as both grassroots leaders and members of cultural groups to teach others about the variety of Singaporean cultures. The first way in which INCs embody multiculturalism is as representatives of their own cultures and organisers of cultural events that seek to educate local residents on Singapore's rich cultures. Here multiculturalism is presented as constituted by a range of ethnic groups with their specific cultural practices. Adil, a young Malay INC who also volunteers with his local Malay Activities Executive Committee, spoke about how he was asked to demonstrate how to make and wrap a Malay rice dumpling, known as *ketupat*. His demonstration took place at an INC-organised One Community Fiesta in his neighbourhood which is an annual constituency-level event that celebrates Singapore's cultural diversity which sees over 1,000 residents in attendance.

Like you can see Malay in Singapore you can say they have a bit successful. We are here, so we have good education, we have a good life. Even though there's the high cost of living here, we are fortunate here in Singapore. That's why I want to teach foreigners, the new citizens what the Malays are about, what our culture is, what is the games we play – like *congkak* [a game of logic played in many parts of Southeast Asia (B. Tan, 2016), five stones & spinning top. For now, I focus on *ketupat* because they also want to do *ketupat*.

Another INC, Priya, a naturalised citizen from Malaysia of Indian ethnicity, proudly told me about how she started dance classes in her local neighbourhood to teach her neighbours, including other new citizens, *bhangra* dancing which she saw as her 'forte' and a way in which she could use these skills to engage non-Indians in her constituency. Interestingly, *bhangra* dancing originated from rural Punjab (Leante, 2004) which is quite far removed from Tamil Nadu from which Priya's ancestors hailed when they moved to Malaysia (much like the majority of Singaporean Indians who are of Tamil descent). But rather than seeing the use of *bhangra* by ethnic Tamils as a return to a pan-Indian identity that started waning in favour of a 'Tamil cultural separatism' after World War Two (Solomon, 2012), *bhangra* is specifically presented as representing Indian culture specifically for non-Indians who are unlikely to be familiar with the internal nuances of Indian regional cultures. Similar scenes of INCs representing their entire ethnic community

through their volunteer work played out at the One Community Fiesta that I attended where volunteers of South Asian descent were applying henna designs to residents' hands, which is a form of temporary body art that involves the staining of the skin using dark dyes. At the same event, Chinese volunteers were preparing *muh chee*, a glutinous rice and peanut snack with its origins from Southern China, which scholars are arguing is disappearing from Singaporean cuisine due to rising prices and changing tastes (F. K. Han, 2017). At a Pongal event that I attended which was jointly organised by the constituency's INCs and the Indian Activities Executive Committee (IAEC), I was taught by grassroots volunteers from the Indian community about the significance of celebrating the harvest, including the practice of drawing *rangolis* or decorative patterns drawn with rice flour. These examples demonstrate that INCs function as vehicles to represent their own cultures, thereby showing the variety of cultures that constitute Singapore's multicultural character.

INCs are brought in precisely because they are a ready supply of volunteers, already committed to the aim of integration and communicating these state-level discourses to would-be Singaporeans. By embodying their ethnic identities in their volunteer work, INCs achieve two outcomes. Firstly, they affirm their own particular racial identity and the cultural practices that are ascribed to it. This 'performance' of one's cultural traditions to outsiders creates a sense of pride in their own identity, much like how Adil saw himself as a proud representative of the Malay community. Secondly, this racial and cultural categorisation is communicated to new citizens who learn that what the INCs are doing as representatives of their racial group is *the* way to 'do' race. Even though the INCs who are carrying out such embodiment of their cultural identities at cultural events are members of the group that they are representing, their representation falls into some of the existing pitfalls associated with broader top-down narratives. For instance, as discussed earlier in this section, the state structure of Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) tends to ignore complexity within each category, such as dialect groups amongst ethnic Chinese or regional identities amongst Indians. Similarly, when INCs fulfil their role as INCs at official events, such as the One Community Fiesta, they also tend to simplify their cultural identity such as in the *bhangra* case where a Punjabi dance was simply represented as 'Indian'. This lumping together of cultural identities reflects a broader state practice and is a result of INCs having to toe the state line. As Adil stated, he was 'doing' *ketupat* at the One Community Fiesta instead of showcasing Malay games because that was what was required of him. Despite being an INC and a member of the Malay community, he could not decide how he wanted to represent his community but was told by senior grassroots leaders what Malay practice he should showcase during the INC event.

However, this is only part of the story. Much like how INCs move beyond official state integration efforts in their local neighbourhoods as discussed in Chapter Seven, INCs often embody their cultural identities when interacting with migrants in more informal settings, such as in conversations. Rania, an Indian-Muslim INC volunteer, found herself in one such conversation with a Swiss man who was volunteering to give out rice porridge to the needy during Ramadan as part of a jointly-organised activity between the local INC committee and the Swiss Association of Singapore.

Like we were sitting down after we distribute the porridge. We were sitting down and talking about the significance of Ramadan and why we fast during Ramadan. It's something good. They want to know, they ask, and then I'll explain, since I'm not a religious teacher, but this is my own experience, and I will share what we do. They will say, 'Wow, interesting. Why do you want to fast? Won't you feel hungry?' I say, 'I guess God is great. This is why he wants us to fast.' They will say, 'Wow, I want to try that.' Some of them they do fast, but theirs is the water fast where they can drink but not eating food. So like for us we don't eat or drink from sunrise to sunset. But maybe because we've been doing it since young so the belief is there and you know how to do it. You prepare before sunrise; you'll be drinking and eating. Then for the whole day you won't be eating or drinking, just don't think of food! Direct your attention to something else. For us, the older generation, even if we see food, it's okay. They also asked why we pray five times a day, so I explain.

In this case, the Swiss man came from a country that itself is diverse. However, he was unfamiliar with the particular nature of Singapore's cultural diversity. While recognising that she was not a religious teacher, Rania still saw herself as a representative of her culture and religion based upon her own life experiences. Such mundane interactions are a vital source of education on Singapore's various constitutive cultures because education through more 'official' means, such as outings to mosques during Ramadan, while organised and attended by some in the community, may not reach everyone and certainly not in as personable a manner as face-to-face interaction and conversation. In the case of Swiss gentleman that Rania found herself talking to, he may not have learnt about the practices of Muslims in Ramadan if he had not met Rania through her volunteer work.

Ironically while Rania's act of sharing about her culture was an essential act of intercultural education for the Swiss man and precisely what the government hopes INCs will do in their roles as ambassadors both of Singapore and the cultures that it is comprised of, as a self-identified Indian Muslim, she confounds the CMIO model that the state prescribes. Her experience of being at the interstices of the prescriptive CMIO framework is a reality that other Indian Muslims, particularly Tamil Muslims, negotiate in everyday life (Singh, 2016). Yet, when elaborating on her ethnic background, Rania explained that her father was an Indian and her mother Malay. She does not speak Tamil despite being half Indian. She followed a trend that I noticed amongst my interviewees. For those of mixed ethnic heritage or ethnicity that did not fit the racial structure that is used to govern everyday life in Singapore, they would often explain their ethnic background, such as Aaron who was quick to tell me early in the interview that despite being an Indian he was a practising Catholic. On the other hand, others from more 'typical' ethnicities within the CMIO framework took it for granted that I, as an interviewer, knew that they spoke certain languages and had certain cultural practices. For the INCs who did not fit neatly within the racial categories prescribed by the state, they found that this posed challenges in everyday life where their failure to meet the expectations

of others to be a certain way, such as Rania not speaking Tamil despite appearing to be Indian, would often confuse those who met them and sometimes cause outright incivility. One case of such incivility was described to me by Smrita. An INC for over six years, she described herself as coming from a '*rojak*' background, a reference to a salad dish with Indian and Chinese variants which involves the mixing up of a variety of ingredients brought together with a tasty sauce, a common food analogy used colloquially and in local literature to refer to cultural diversity in the Malaysian and Singaporean contexts (Wagner, 2007). Her father was of Punjabi descent, her mother was Peranakan – a term typically referring to individuals of mixed Chinese and Malay heritage (J. Koh, 2013). On top of her mixed parentage, her sister married an Indian while Smrita married a Chinese before moving to Singapore from Malaysia and becoming a Singaporean citizen. In Chapter Seven, she described a situation where she was refused service in a clothing store because the salesperson assumed that she was a Filipino domestic worker due to the darkness of her skin. Following on from that story, Smrita recounted a case whereby she was once again mistaken for a domestic worker.

One incident I brought my daughter to school to pick [up] the brother, then my daughter fall down. As a mother, I scold her, 'I ask you not to run. Why you run?' So just stay there and smack her. One passer-by nearby come and scold me, 'Excuse me. You are only a maid here. How can you scold your boss' kid? How can you spank your boss' kid? You know that you are being paid to do a maid job? You are not paid to beat them.'

I said, 'Aunty, this is my daughter.'

'How can this be your daughter? This is Chinese, and you are Filipino!'

I cannot express to her. I keep saying, 'Aunty, this is my daughter. You ask my daughter calling me 'Mummy'.'

'I cannot believe. She may say 'Mummy, Mummy', but you are not the Mummy, you are the maid.'

Ten to fifteen minutes, I try very hard. They don't want to believe me. They don't want to leave me also. People pass by they also say, 'You see this maid beating the kid.'

Lucky, thank god, my friend came, and my friend know her. So my friend said, 'Aunty, what's the matter? Why are you scolding this lady?'

'No! She is a maid here! And she beat the girl!'

And my friend said, 'Aunty, you have mistaken her. She is the mother of this kid. I know her, she is from Malaysia, she is not a maid.'

Then she started to apologise to me. I said, 'Aunty, that's why I started to explain to you. You have to accept my explanation.'

Of course, if I am a maid, I will say I am a maid, but I'm not a maid. She say,  
'Sorry, sorry, sorry.'

Smrita's account is instructive about how race is conceived of in Singapore. Her mixed ethnic background meant that she was not recognisably from one of the main ethnic groupings in Singapore. This meant that she was assumed to be an outsider despite hailing from ethnic backgrounds commonly found in Singapore. The essentialisation under the CMIO framework which assigns individuals a label based on their patrilineal ethnic heritage presents race as fixed and impermeable, rendering invisible significant numbers of individuals whose mixed-lineage is not recognised. This had ramifications for her daughter as well who is also of a mixed ethnic background. As Smrita was assumed to be a 'maid' due to her 'foreign' mixed appearance, the lady she met at the school could not conceive of the idea that her daughter who looks 'Chinese' was related to her, leading to the racist and classist exchange that Smrita recounted. The intersection of race and class in treating domestic workers as inferior has been well-documented by scholars who study the role of foreign domestic workers in Singapore (S. Huang & Yeoh, 1998), and it was this intersection of racism and classism that led to Smrita being discriminated against.

Returning to the discussion about racism targeting mix-raced individuals, even though the state has recently allowed the ethnic hyphenation of mixed-race individuals on official documents (Rocha, 2011, p. 163), the legacy of decades of requiring individuals to be slotted into one racial group has ingrained the idea into society that individuals can only really belong to one group or the other. Thus, to be of mixed heritage is to be seen as 'abnormal' (to quote Smrita). Moreover, the hyphenation of identities still requires individuals with backgrounds comprising more than two ethnic identities, such as Smrita and her daughter, to pick and choose which identities she chooses to prioritise. For Smrita, there is a plethora of questions to negotiate – Is she Punjabi or should she describe herself as Indian although Indianness is associated with being Tamil? As a part-Peranakan, is she ethnically Chinese even though her family has never spoken Mandarin for generations? The racial categorisation of people in the name of multiculturalism, is necessary for the implementation of policies such as ethnic quotas in public housing, ensuring the representation of minorities in parliament and providing funding for the preservation of cultural heritage. Yet, the CMIO structure has also meant that race is accorded a very static nature in policy and everyday life in Singapore, leading to situations like Smrita's where she faced everyday racism due to her not fitting in. Of course, racism is by no means simply the result of the CMIO framework which has been tweaked to address the issue of inter-ethnic mixing through marriage (Tay, 2010), but the rigidity of the framework certainly contributes to it.

For most INCs, the issue of racial classification was not something that they were overly bothered by. Even Smrita who found herself in an unpleasant, racially charged encounter outside her son's school, attributed it to a misunderstanding and did not feel that there was anything more problematic about what happened. She believed that such misconceptions could be 'cleared up' by greater intercultural education, not merely for new citizens but local-born Singaporeans too. Much like her welcoming of her neighbours into her home, Smrita proudly shared that she used her mixed background as a resource to help educate

others around her. She explained that she invited neighbours, including migrant mothers who arrive in Singapore with their children who come to study in local schools, to come to her house to learn about the different kinds of curries that she can cook, whether it be Peranakan, Malay or Punjabi curries. Similarly, other INCs who did not fit neatly into racial categories used their identities to help reach out to newcomers. Aaron, an ethnic Indian INC, explained that his Catholic faith enabled him to connect to Filipino residents in his neighbourhood who are predominantly practising Catholics. INCs, rather than being critical of the state's CMIO policy, were largely supportive of it even though they did not always fit neatly into the prescribed categories. As Singaporeans whose lives have been shaped hugely by the policy, they just saw it as a banal fact of life. Yet, when these INCs do engage in such informal interactions with new citizens, as individuals who do not fit into the state categorisation of their cultural identities, they inadvertently complicate the picture of multiracialism in Singapore forwarded by the state. The reality is that, much like street-level bureaucrats, who often bring their identity into their frontline work of policy implementation (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000), INCs cannot divorce their own cultural identity but are encouraged to bring it in to better act as embodiments of the cultural groups that the state presents as part of Singapore's multicultural character.

The INCs' role in the integration process is not merely to welcome newcomers to Singapore, but to provide an introduction into life in Singapore, a significant part being its multicultural character. They serve a function much like street-level bureaucrats, whereby they take state multiracialism policy and translate it into practice (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2007). Through acting as intermediary agents of integration, INCs work through formal and informal means to translate Singapore's policy of multiracialism into practices that help newcomers see how it is manifested in everyday life rather than simply in state narratives. Beyond being told that Singapore is culturally diverse, new citizens are shown the precise nature of Singapore's cultural makeup which functions in two ways: firstly, the general structure follows the CMIO framework which sets out Chinese, Malay, Indians and Others (or Eurasians). Secondly, the racial categories function as containers for a particular set of cultural practices, such as language usage, the celebration of festivals and so forth. This is communicated through INCs not merely organising events but acting as representatives of their own culture, which is often a source of individual pride. On top of demonstrating Singapore's particular multiculturalism, INCs send a broader message to new citizens: that Singapore recognises and supports the cultural plurality that makes up its social fabric, with the state channelling material and non-material resources to encourage the preservation of the multiple ethnic identities represented in its populace. This shows that there is official support for hyphenated identities (Modood, 2013), that one can be both Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian or some other ethnicity and Singaporean, thus negating the need for a trade-off between one's ethnic and national identity. But more than just educating newcomers about the constituent cultures in multicultural Singapore, INCs carry out a second task which demonstrates the second element of multiculturalism: they model an ethos of multiculturalism.

### **Modelling an Ethos of Multiculturalism**

When INCs introduce newcomers to Singaporean multiculturalism, they do not merely teach them about the various composite cultures that constitute Singapore's diverse character, but also seek to demonstrate the underlying ethos of multiculturalism: accepting and celebrating difference. In other words, it is not enough to know about the various cultural groups in Singapore, but one has to appreciate and acknowledge that diversity to embrace multiculturalism and its place in Singapore completely. This can be seen in multiple cases where individuals were shown not to be sufficiently open to difference. In 2012, an Assistant Director of the national trade union was fired from her job and faced tremendous public backlash for offensive comments that she made deriding the common practice for Malay couples to hold their wedding celebrations in public spaces in public housing estates (J. Tan, 2012). Such social censure for perceived racist attitudes is not confined to Singaporeans but has been extended to non-citizens residing in Singapore as well. The Curry Incident discussed in Chapter Seven led to widespread public condemnation and discussion about the place of the Chinese migrant family who was seen to be unwilling to accept their Indian neighbours' practice of cooking and consuming curry. It was followed by a large-scale show of solidarity when a Cook-a-Curry Day was organised and gained a sizable following on social media (Mathews & Soon, 2015, p. 69). This show of solidarity was not limited to local Indians, but involved local-born Singaporeans from different ethnic backgrounds. Liu uses this case to illustrate how intra-diasporic conflict can lead to inter-ethnic solidarity (Liu, 2014, pp. 1231–1232). For instance, Mr Brown, a popular, ethnic Chinese local blogger with over 102,000 followers on Facebook currently (*Mrbrown - Home*, n.d.), posted a song entitled 'Curry Night'. The lyrics provide interesting insights into how the incident was viewed:

Curry, curry night  
 Close the windows, shut the door  
 Neighbour got complain before  
 Their foreign noses cannot stand the smell  
 It's our favorite dish  
 Sometimes chicken, sometimes fish  
 What happened to our right to live  
 Our right to cook the things we like to eat  
 They did not understand  
 Why we have to eat curry  
 They suggested we try *Hokkien Mee*<sup>16</sup>  
 That one also got chilli  
 Their skin as thick as a *xiao long bao*<sup>17</sup>  
 They're not in China now (Mr Brown, 2011).

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<sup>16</sup> *Hokkien Mee* refers to *Hokkien Prawn Mee* which is a Chinese stir-fried noodle dish readily available in local hawker centres and coffee shops (*Hokkien Prawn Mee*, n.d.).

<sup>17</sup> Known commonly in Western countries as 'soup dumpling', *xiao long bao* is originally from just outside Shanghai but now is a feature of many Chinese restaurants across the world (Reinfrank & Chan, 2020).

These lyrics are instructive in several ways that will be further explored in this section. Firstly, cultural practices, such as eating particular foods, are held as a national practice to be upheld regardless of one's ethnic background, indicated by the fact that Mr Brown, a man of Chinese ethnicity, speaks of curry as 'our favorite dish', going as far as to claim that eating is a 'right'. Thus, to fail to accept cultures different from your own is cause to be considered un-Singaporean. This is evidenced by the 'us versus them' language that permeates the lyrics of the song, such as pointing out that the complainants were 'foreign' who could not stand 'our favourite dish' and that 'they could not understand' Singaporeans' need to eat curry. This emphasis on the need to embrace cultures different from your own is what I term the 'ethos of multiculturalism', and it was a trait that was highlighted repeatedly in integration and naturalisation efforts. As discussed in the previous section, INCs explained that for many migrants, Singapore's strong multicultural policies and identity was something that they had not experienced in their home countries. While there was cultural diversity in their country of origin, Singapore was different in two ways. Firstly, individuals are expected to engage in cultural exchange as a sign of one's membership in the national community. Secondly, the cultural make-up of Singapore is unique, thus requiring new citizens to experience a new range of different cultures even if they had migrated from ethnically diverse countries. For example, Adil makes this point when he says that Malays in Singapore are different from those in Malaysia and Indonesia, thus for migrants from these countries, Singaporean Malay-ness, while similar to those at home, is still a relatively new experience.

Since an ethos of multiculturalism requires that individuals be willing to partake in cultural practices different from their own rather than staying ensconced within their own insular culture, INC events demonstrate this cross-cultural engagement. A key element of INC-organised events is that they do not merely show one culture at a time, but often include the involvement of other ethnic groups. This is also true for events that appear to be tied to one culture. For instance, at the Pongal event that I attended at the constituency of Woodlands, a Chinese dance group performed on stage despite the event being tied to an Indian harvest festival. Similarly, at a Chinese New Year *Chingay* celebration at another constituency, floats representing the three most prominent ethnic groups were on show, ranging from the Chinese float which incorporated images of the Chinese God of Fortune to the Indian float with dancers dressed in *saris* and the Malay float decked out in green which is often associated with Islam, the religion that most Singaporean Malays adhere to (Beam, 2009). Furthermore, events are often jointly organised by groups from different ethnic backgrounds. For example, I attended a *Holi* event at West Coast after being invited by one of my interviewees which was collaboratively organised by the local Integration and Naturalisation Committee, the Indian Activities Executive Committee and the Malay Activities Executive Committee. As a senior volunteer explained at the event, bringing in another ethnic group to co-organise the cultural event was a deliberate attempt by the INCs to bring in a group not traditionally associated with *Holi*. Thus, Singaporean multiculturalism is thus deliberately demonstrated not to merely celebrate singular cultures, but to show that cultural groups are not insular and do in fact mix in the Singaporean context.

On top of organising events that provide sites to demonstrate such an ethos, INCs themselves



adopt and display an attitude of intercultural acceptance. This means working together to preserve and celebrate the different cultures in Singapore even if they are not from the particular group in question. For instance, Tony, a senior INC volunteer described how he was invited to be a judge for a community *rangoli* competition for Deepavali and volunteered to distribute rice porridge to needy residents for *iftar* during the month of Ramadan. The importance of having different races represented at this event is to show that all races are welcome even if it is to celebrate a particular group's culture. As another interviewee explained, newcomers can sometimes feel a bit awkward attending events which celebrate what might be a 'foreign' culture to them. However, the very visible presence of INCs from a variety of ethnic backgrounds in attendance would reduce the sense that the new migrant was 'intruding' on another group's celebration. As such, the presence of INCs, even if they do not interact directly with every attendee at the event encourages those who might otherwise feel like 'outsiders' to participate. But more than simply sending the message that cultural events are welcome to all through their attendance, INCs' make deliberate efforts to ensure that the activities that they organise are accessible to all residents regardless of their ethnic background. One of my INC interviewees explained that this often meant engaging in seemingly innocuous but vital planning. He cited the example of catering food for various diets. Halal food is always catered for events and INCs had to make sure that there are also adequate food options for strict vegetarians who avoid honey, garlic and onions. The discussion of how to accommodate various dietary requirements has been one that is mirrored in debates in Western European countries over how to include the rising Muslim population in public spaces such as schools where students require halal food options (Jensen, 2016). While there continues to be a debate about how to accommodate cultural difference in countries such as the Netherlands, in Singapore, this answer seems to be broadly settled, at least in the minds of INCs. The interviewee who spoke about catering for different dietary requirements admitted that while it was challenging to be as inclusive as possible, he argued that INCs could not purport to be supporting the integration and interaction of all races if participants could not consume something as essential as the food provided at an event. In this way, INCs are not merely carriers of the state's ethos of multiculturalism but translate it into concrete practices to ensure and also demonstrate that the events that they organise are accessible to everyone regardless of their cultural background. This is also why such events are held at publicly accessible areas and not in private spaces, showing that public spaces in neighbourhoods are shared by everyone, rather than the singular domain of one group. This does not mean that there is no tension between groups when activities are organised. Senior INC leader, Aaron described a case where an Indian dance group booked a function room at the local Community Club for a performance. A Chinese group who had been looking for a location to rehearse complained that they had been trying to book the same room for months with no success. Aaron thus had to step in to smooth over ruffled feathers and explain that there was no favouritism between groups.

Beyond showing the variety of cultures that exist side by side in Singapore, when INCs represent their cultural identities both in the formal and informal approaches outlined in the prior section of this chapter, such as Rania who explained the practices of fasting during Ramadan to the Swiss man that she

met, they demonstrate openness to engage with others different from themselves through the answering of their questions. In other words, it is not enough to know about the various cultures, but one must be willing to participate in the varied cultural life in Singapore and share one's own culture with those who do not share the same cultural background. Thus, multiculturalism is intricately intertwined with acts of engagement and recognition at the everyday level of which INCs function as vital agents. Cross-cultural interaction and acceptance are vital elements of multiculturalism. Proponents of multiculturalism argue that the process of cultural adaptation in a culturally diverse setting must be a two-way process of integration in which both migrants and the receiving society adapt to allow the incorporation of cultural difference (Modood, 2013, p. 44), rather than simply placing the burden of change exclusively on the entrant to assimilate into their host society. Hence, INCs model the multicultural ethos of accepting difference through learning about the cultural background of the newcomers that they meet. For instance, Smrita, a middle-aged housewife of mixed ethnic descent, proudly explained that she used her knowledge of the different cultures to introduce new citizens to the various foods available in Singapore. In particular, Smrita often invites the new citizens that she meets through her volunteer work as an INC to her home where she teaches them how to cook curries from the different groups that she is affiliated to. Unsurprisingly this all takes significant time and energy, to the point that her husband once jokingly said to her, 'You really are superwoman. Anything anyone will ask you will also do for them.' Nonetheless, she explained that inviting these guests to her house was an opportunity not merely to show them her culture, but so that they too could share their cultural background with her. Other INCs shared similar experiences about adopting and learning about different practices through their cross-cultural interactions. Padma, a local-born Indian INC, explained how she learnt more about North Indian cuisine through interacting with newer migrants from India, many of whom come from the North while she finds her roots in South India though she now identifies primarily as Singaporean Indian.

It is good to go out and get to know people, to network, to share interests or to learn a new interest. I've learnt a lot from Indian ladies and more about my own culture, like cooking styles. Because when they come from there, they come with a lot of their own experiences because in India, they really are very culturally different. But in Singapore, we are so-called modernised and there are lots of things that we don't follow. So I get to learn a lot and they share with me. Like cooking, meals. Different kinds of cooking. Like for us, local Indians we always eat rice, but for them it's always very light food, which is why they are thin. We do eat with them also.

Padma's experience, unlike Smrita's, was about learning from individuals who one might consider to be from the same ethnic grouping as her, albeit from different regions of the country of origin. This is not confined to the Indian community in Singapore, but others as well. Gwen, a local-born Chinese INC, recounted her experience with adapting to incoming Chinese cultures as she interacted increasingly with immigrants from mainland China. Speaking about her own changing identity, Gwen explained that her taste

in food has changed as she has been introduced to alternative Chinese cuisine by migrants from mainland China. She has learnt to appreciate *mala xiang guo*, which is a spicy dish associated with Sichuanese cooking. It was brought over to Singapore in 2009 and has become synonymous with new waves of migrant Chinese hailing from all parts of China, instead of predominantly the South where most Singaporean-born Chinese have their roots (Pan, 2019). Despite being quite different from typical Singaporean Chinese food, it has increased in popularity amongst local-born Singaporeans in recent years. Gwen also explained that even her speech has adapted to reflect her changing social circles. She explained, ‘When I speak Mandarin, when I talk with them, I will [use] slang, I will talk their way. Some hawker centre uncles will ask me, “Are you from China?”’ In a sense then, Gwen’s adapting culinary tastes and speech patterns reflect a broader acceptance of different interpretations of what it is to be Chinese which has been brought with waves of migration over the past few decades. This willingness to adapt to the new cultures that her mainland Chinese friends introduce to her is an ethos that she is also modelling to them in her everyday interactions.

As INCs model an acceptance of new cultures for new citizens, new citizens also are shown that they too need to be part of the community that embraces all difference. For instance, in the ice breaker games at the CSS I attended, new citizens were required to act out different cultural elements in Singapore in front of other new citizens and INCs. These quite literally involved a performance of new citizens’ awareness and consumption of local multicultures. For instance, they would demonstrate a willingness to eat Singaporean cuisine when they spoke about their favourite food, ranging from Indian *roti prata* to Malay *satay* or Hainanese Chicken Rice. Given the centrality of food to Singaporean national identity (Henderson, 2014), a willingness to try local food, including food identified as outside one’s ethnic grouping, such as a Chinese eating Malay *nasi lemak*, or a European migrant drinking *bandung*, a rose cordial drink, would demonstrate one’s Singaporean-ness. This would be demonstrated to fellow new citizens who would also be in the group, reinforcing the sense that to be a ‘good’ Singaporean, one needs to go beyond the food normally consumed in one’s home country. New citizens also mentioned their willingness to try different food. For instance, Haoyi, a new citizen who moved from mainland China to Singapore as a teenager, spoke about how he would eat Malay and Indian food with his colleagues and friends at local food courts and coffee shops, stressing how he ‘can’ eat such different cuisines despite not having grown up with this diversity of cultures.

A similar phenomenon of cultural adaptation and hybridisation can be seen in language use in Singapore. Singlish is the creole of Singapore in which the official English is combined with Chinese and Malay grammar, including words from Mandarin, Tamil, Malay and other Chinese dialects (Ortmann, 2009, p. 36). As with many other places, speaking as the locals do is a sign of one being part of the community (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2008) and in the case of Singlish, it is held up as a potent sign of Singapore’s multicultural identity and a point of pride for many Singaporeans due to its unique mish-mash of the various language groups represented in the local population (Gupta, 1994, p. 4). Many of my INCs used Singlish in their interviews. For instance, Rania, the Indian Muslim INC that I interviewed, used the term ‘*ang mob*’ to refer to Caucasians. ‘Ang moh’ is taken from a Chinese dialect, *Hokkien*, and means ‘red hair’. Karen, a

British woman who became a Singaporean citizen in 2015, recalls the challenges that she faced as a white woman in gaining people's acceptance despite having lived in Singapore for almost twenty years. She notes wryly, 'Obviously, I'm British, but I speak Singlish, and they'll be like, 'Wow!' They just really get amazed.' This is in contrast to the Yumiko, a Japanese lady who became a Singapore citizen in 2017. She found that local taxi drivers would often assume that she was a local until she spoke and then they would ask Yumiko if she was a foreigner and where she was from. Similarly, INCs were quick to point out that the new citizens who were most integrated into Singaporean society often were indistinguishable from local-born Singaporeans when one heard them speak. Interestingly, this marker of Singaporean identity has been a source of contention between everyday citizens and the state. The usage of Singlish has often come up for much debate, with public officials often discouraging its use, such as teachers in the classroom (Rubdy, 2007). Recently, in response to an op-ed in the New York Times on Singlish, the press secretary to the Prime Minister argued that Singaporeans needed to speak 'standard English' to 'make a living and be understood not just by other Singaporeans but also English speakers everywhere' and that speaking Singlish would impede achieving that goal (Au-Yong, 2016). As such, we can see that the state's efforts to encourage English to create a cosmopolitan city and attract foreign investment clashes with the conceptions of what it is to live in a diverse society that come from the ground-up. One might view the development of a common lingua franca that Singaporeans value and see as an essential part of their national identity as a sign of the success of multiculturalism. Yet, the state's single-minded efforts to promote English often clash with these organic sentiments, causing public frustration and resentment as the state is perceived to be micro-managing national identity. Nonetheless, using Singlish is a sign to indicate one's membership in the Singaporean community and willingness to embrace the cultural milieu that makes up life in the multicultural nation-state. Yet, as Robbie Goh also argues, attempts by foreign-born individuals can also backfire if speakers are seen not to be doing it 'authentically' and instead are trying to put on an act of appearing more Singaporean than their Singlish reveals (2016, p. 753), so newcomers are having to find a delicate balance between being authentic and, in the words of one of my interviewees, 'trying too hard' to fit in.

While a willingness to embrace cultural practices other than your own is an important first step in demonstrating an ethos of multiculturalism, a number of questions must be raised regarding this act. First and foremost is how authentic these acts are perceived to be. An account by Adil, a young Malay INC, illustrates this point clearly. He was asked to teach attendees at his constituency's One Community Fiesta how to make Malay rice cake known as *ketupat*, but Adil questioned how he could truly do this since it took him over a year to learn how to do so from his father and, in his words, he 'learned until [he] cried'. According to Adil, at such cultural events, attendees could only learn from his demonstration how to make *ketupat* at a very superficial level, if they learnt anything at all. As such, he was sceptical as to how effective cultural demonstrations are in communicating cultural practices and norms to those from other cultural backgrounds, such as immigrants to Singapore. This echoes a broader critical literature on cross-cultural learning which argues that such superficial acts of intercultural exchange can sometimes become a kind of

‘consumerist multiculturalism’ whereby individuals simply engage in a middle-class act of consuming another’s culture without genuinely engaging in questions about how minorities are treated in society (Martin, 1998). These ‘diversity seekers’ often purport to favour diversity over ethnic homogeneity, yet do not have particularly diverse networks nor do more to support ethnic minorities (Blokland & Eijk, 2010). Some argue that consuming of other cultures is an opportunity for elites to ostentatiously display their apparent openness (Parzer & Astleithner, 2018, p. 1128). This is no different in Singapore, where signs of one’s willingness to integrate into multicultural society are tied to an ability to consume alternative cultures, such as consuming food in food centres without necessarily having a deep appreciation for that culture.

A study by the Institute of Policy Studies found that Singaporeans claimed to believe in the value of multiculturalism, such as the importance of according respect to individuals of other ethnicities. Yet, the survey also found a high rate of in-group preference where a majority of individuals across all racial groups preferred to marry, work with or share personal problems with people of the same racial background. More concerning, two-thirds of Indian and Malay respondents reported having experienced adverse treatment based on race (Mathews, 2016). Anecdotes from my interviewees corroborated this, such as Smrita with her example of how she had been on the receiving end of racist exchanges when mistaken for a Filipino. Rajesh and Sneha, a couple who both volunteer as INCs when they become Singaporean citizens after migrating from India, recounted incidents where taxi drivers would periodically drive past them despite being flagged down and not having any passengers. They felt that it was due to the belief that Indians are considered ‘dirty’ and ‘smelly’. Rajesh and Sneha’s experience is not an isolated one but reflective of the everyday racism that many racial minorities in Singapore have (Velayutham, 2009, 2017). Others explained that their experience of exclusion was not as overt as that experienced by Rajesh and Sneha but by simple thoughtlessness on the part of the ethnic majority Chinese around them. Priya, an ethnically Indian INC who moved to Singapore from Malaysia, explained why she started learning Mandarin. She shared that when she was working and spending time with colleagues and other volunteers, they would often converse in Mandarin with each other, thus excluding her, the only non-Chinese individual in the group. While seemingly banal and innocuous, Priya shared that it made her feel invisible, like her presence was not noticed nor appreciated by the group. In some of my interviews, some of the ethnic Chinese INCs used racially charged language that surprised me. For instance, Winston, a very senior INC volunteer of Chinese ethnicity, used the term ‘dark dark’ to describe Indian migrants. I was taken aback by his comment because I had expected that of all people, an INC who is tasked with facilitating inter-racial integration would be more racially sensitive than he was in his remarks to me. All these examples back up the claim that an ethos of multiculturalism is not as much a reality as multi-ethnic images of smiling Singaporeans on public posters in local neighbourhoods would suggest. While Singaporeans may eat a wide variety of food and borrow words from other languages, the development of sustained cross-cultural exchange, authentic appreciation and sensitivity towards the feelings and experiences of ethnic minorities still has a long way to go.

For INCs, they are faced with a conundrum: On one hand, they are expected to demonstrate to newcomers the importance of an ethos of intercultural acceptance and racial harmony as part of the

Singaporean lived experience and identity which is a major part of government rhetoric. Yet, there is a lot of everyday evidence that this ethos has not taken root amongst many Singaporeans who have lived in the country all their lives. The question that then arises is: How can you effectively communicate the importance of a value to new citizens as being a crucial part of being Singaporean when Singaporeans themselves do not practice it? In many of my interviews, this sat uncomfortably with INCs to varying degrees and the cognitive dissonance caused from such double standards required them to engage in 'coping' behaviour to try to make sense of the situation that they found themselves in (Tummers et al., 2015). For several ethnically Chinese INCs, much like the case with many other cultural majorities in other countries (Solomona et al., 2005), they simply were untroubled by the issue. To them, like in the case of Winston, insensitivities towards ethnic difference were caused by simple misunderstandings between individuals and not a function of anything systemic, and any statements that sounded problematic (like Winston's use of the pejorative term 'dark dark' to describe South Asians) was for him a statement of fact. For INCs who had personally experienced or knew someone who had experienced racism in Singapore, many of whom were from ethnic minority backgrounds, they often expressed resignation as to the likelihood of radical change. Some of them argued that at least it was better than in other countries. For instance, Priya said that at least there were policies that did not outrightly privilege the majority Chinese in Singapore, unlike in her home country of Malaysia where ethnic Malays are accorded special privileges. Rajesh in recounting the case of taxi drivers refusing to pick him and his family up, said, 'But it's gotten a lot better over the years'. They continued with their INC work despite evidence that racial integration is not a lived reality for many of them because they saw it as their opportunity to do something to change society. Adil, a young Malay INC, argued that when he interacted with other residents, they could see that Malays are not all 'the same'. Hence, even if an ethos of multiculturalism was not always a lived reality for these INCs, they still felt motivated to embody it for the new citizens in the hope that these newcomers would learn from their example about how to be a 'good Singaporean'.

### **The Expanding Multicultural Experience**

The significance for emphasizing Singapore's multicultural character as an integral part of its national identity is important because the message sent is that since Singapore is already so diverse, it will welcome people no matter their ethnic or national background. As Reuben, a naturalised citizen from Goa who signed up to be an INC as soon as he received his Singaporean citizenship, puts it, 'It gives people an opportunity to say that we are small, but we are diversifying, and we care.' Put differently, if Singapore is to remain consistent with its ethos of multiculturalism – that cultural pluralism is welcomed, and it recognizes the various cultural identities of its population, it thus follows that incoming Singaporeans and the ethnic diversity that they bring with them are similarly welcomed. The ethos of being accepting of cultural difference has led to various innovations in the practice of multiculturalism in Singapore. In the same way that local-born INCs are vehicles for their specific local cultures, naturalised INCs too are given opportunities to bring their own cultures to the broader Singaporean community. For instance, in a book

recognising the work of INCs entitled 'Our Journey, Our Stories' the case of Mrs Suchavadee Chua is highlighted. Initially from Thailand, Mrs Chua helped organise various Thai events, such as a celebration for *Songkran*, for multiple constituencies in her capacity as an INC (Hong, 2017, pp. 101–102). But opportunities to share one's culture with the Singaporean community is not confined to INCs, but extends to non-INC volunteers, particularly those from immigrant associations that INCs regularly partner with for other events, such as giving out food to the needy (*Integration and Naturalisation Champions Recognised for Their Tireless Efforts in Bringing Together Local Singaporeans and New Immigrants*, 2017). Similarly, at the One Community Fiesta that I attended in November 2017, there was a Thai dance and an exhibition on the national dress of various migrant groups in the constituency with costumes provided by individual members of the local community, such as a blouse and skirt combination from the Philippines known as the *barot saya* (Roces, 2005) and a Vietnamese costume comprising long tunic dress worn over trousers known as *áo dài* (Lieu, 2000, p. 128). Rania, when describing her constituency's One Community Fiesta, proudly spoke about how a group of middle-aged local Chinese women managed to learn a Nepalese dance which they subsequently performed at the event.

This lady from the Nepalese Association they brought down their costumes, all the jewelries and everything, so they really dressed up beautifully. I loved the performance. because the moves and everything, It's not a 100% Indian dance and it's also not like Chinese dance, it's like an in-between kind of dance.

Apart from bringing in individuals from cultural backgrounds that fall outside the traditional CMIO structure (Chinese, Malay, Indians and Other (which is usually used to refer to Eurasians of mixed European and Asian descent)), new waves of migration are bringing migrants from countries that have been traditional sources of migrants in Singapore, such as China and India, affects multicultural practices even for established ethnic groups. For instance, a few INCs noted that with the arrival of more North Indians to Singapore, Indian festivals that had not been widely celebrated in the past, such as *Holi*. The festival, which marks the beginning of Spring, involves the throwing of coloured powder and spraying of water amongst participants. While its practice has become more common outside of India due to celebrations by the Indian diaspora (Kidangoor, 2020), *Holi* too is becoming part of the local Singaporean neighbourhoods' schedule of cultural events.

Despite these changes and the supposedly welcoming nature of the Singaporean community towards cultural difference, some of my interviewees, new citizens and INCs who are naturalised citizens, reported cases where they found that their cultural practices and identities were not as welcomed as they had expected. This can be attributed to the existence of a fixed conception of what Singapore's diversity looks like, primarily through the lens of the CMIO framework which presents a picture of the Singaporean population being made up of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian individuals discussed in the second section of this chapter. The CMIO framework poses two particular challenges for the welcoming in of new migrants in two ways. First is how new migrants from the three main categories of Chinese, Malay and

Indian challenge conceptions of pre-existing categories, and the second is how immigrants and new citizens from different ethnic backgrounds are not reflected in the categorization as it is formulated presently.

The first issue reflects a similar observation made by scholarship on co-ethnic migration. In this literature, migrants of similar ethnic background as the host population find that they are not accepted despite their ethnic similarity (Tsuda, 2009a, p. 9). This can be seen in the case of Indian migration to Singapore. Singapore's local Indian population are primarily from the south of India, mainly Tamil Nadu. This informed the state's bilingual policy which is focused on the provision of a comprehensive programme of language instruction in all public schools for the three biggest linguistic groups: Chinese, Malay and Tamil speakers (Schiffman, 2003, p. 106). To that end, Indianness has become mostly synonymous with speaking Tamil in Singapore. The lack of focus on Hindi as the language of Indianness surprised a number of the naturalized citizens from India that I talked to, who are also INCs, when they arrived. In fact, Rajesh and Sneha, two naturalized citizens who are from North India spoke of the challenges that they faced when they sought to volunteer with the Indian Activity Executive Committee:

Until we joined, it was completely local south Indian community. When we joined, we were the only North Indians, but luckily we knew Tamil. And some of them were against [us joining] and two of them quit... Probably those people thought that it was too much. But after we joined, the number of other new Indians also joined... So when you look at the Deepavali function, they don't allow us. The local IAEC members won't let us create it like a North Indian function. They'll say, 'No, don't call it Diwali, call it Deepavali.' So they force that in. The reason is quite clear, the locals won't even look at it if it's Diwali. If it's Deepavali, then they will all join in.

Rajesh and Sneha point out that while they identify as Indian, they discovered that the conception of Indian-ness has a particular ethnic mould which they as North Indians did not appear to fit into. In this case, this appeared in the form of different ideas of how a festival should be labelled and whether it should be spelt 'Diwali' or 'Deepavali' on publicity materials. More than simply not fitting in, Rajesh and Sneha's entrance to the grassroots volunteering community was seen as threatening the *status quo* for a Tamil-centric understanding of Indian-ness in Singapore and they were met with a degree of unfriendliness from Tamil-Singaporeans although they were all volunteering in the neighbourhood. Speaking from the alternative position of a local-born Singaporean, another INC, Padma, highlighted some of the other differences that she had found in her interaction with newly naturalized Indian Singaporeans at sites where, in her words to refer to their place of birth, 'Indian-Indians' and 'Singaporean-Indians' came into contact.

But yes, you can see people sticking with others like them, like when you go to the temple. You will see the Singaporean ladies in one place. Because it's easier to talk and sometimes they don't like each other's mannerisms. You can identify who is a foreigner and who is local. Maybe the dressing and the way we educate



our children? Like the social behaviour and social responsibility outside. Like we Singaporeans are fiercer [with our children], but they are like, 'Go ahead, do what you want to do.' So it's very easier to spot one. Religion is quite different, especially since the North and South are so different. You can see two groups, each scrutinizing each other.

While the tension between local-born and foreign-born Indians was not very overt, Padma explained that there was segregation and judgement of the other group's behaviour and attitudes, such as in the banal case of different approaches when it comes to disciplining one's children.

But more than merely affecting everyday interaction, the arrival of newcomers has led to challenges to the state's policy on multiculturalism, particularly how it defines what cultural practices are to be protected. This can be illustrated by the case of the bilingual policy in public schools. As the number of Hindi-speaking Indians have risen through more recent flows of migration, there has been an increasing demand for the offering of Hindi in government-funded schools as a second-language for Indian students and in 1989, the Ministry of Education started offering Hindi, together with Bengali, Punjabi, Urdu and Gujarati, as a second language option (Tang, 2017). This change to public policy continues to be met with a degree of resentment by some of the members of the local Indian community. They have felt that the Hindi-speaking population has been prioritised over the Tamil-speaking population. In a post on the Facebook page for Heng Swee Keat, the then Minister of Education, Smitha Prabhakaran, a Tamil-speaking Singaporean complained about the lack of primary schools in her neighbourhood offering Tamil as a second language. Instead, Hindi was being offered. In her post, she asked indignantly and with unintended irony, 'Whatever happened to the PAP's preaching on racial integration?' (Prabhakaran, 2014). Priya, an INC who migrated from Malaysia, grapples with the issue of who counts as 'Indian'. Discussing the issue of language education, she says:

One of the main problems is the four languages. For example, for Tamils there is not so much Tamils as before. For the Hindi-speaking, they want to push in Hindi as one of the main languages. Everyone wants to push in their languages. Why do they give these four languages these criteria? We need to explain to them these were the forerunners in building up this country. Maybe policy will change in the years to come and my children's time I don't know what will happen. For now, we will respect those four cultures who contributed.

As Priya notes, with new waves of migration and many of these migrants becoming Singaporean citizens, they too want to share in the multicultural ideal that their cultural identity ought to be protected and recognized in everyday life and public policy. Yet, because a particular image of the Singaporean Indian has been inculcated through state policies and their internalisation local-born Singaporeans, the entrance of self-identifying Indians who do not fit into this category creates tensions about who is legitimately a 'Singaporean

Indian'. Similar tensions within categories can be found with the entrance of mainland Chinese migrants who are often ostracised by local Chinese for being uncouth and ill-mannered (S. Ang, 2018; Liu, 2014; Yeoh & Lin, 2013), a sentiment that some of my local-born ethnic Chinese INCs echoed in their interviews. For instance, Patrick, an INC volunteer of Chinese ethnicity, spoke disparagingly of new Chinese migrants' lack of manners and 'uncivilised' behaviour, citing a case of them defecating in a public area in his neighbourhood. Thus, the arrival of migrants from countries such as China, India and Indonesia, challenge the content of the well-defined 'CMI' categories which have been established in everyday practice and public policy as contained a specific set of cultural traditions.

On top of the challenges of integrating migrants who do not fit perfectly within the prescribed and understood ethnic groupings, new citizens with ethnic identities entirely different from that captured in the CMIO model find it difficult to find their place in the prescribed Singaporean model of multiculturalism. For instance, Karen, a former British citizen spoke about how her whiteness meant that local Singaporeans often did not accept her claim to Singaporean citizenship because she did not look like what they expected a Singaporean to look like, in other words, 'Asian'.

I met this woman on Sunday. I went over to a friend's house, she just had surgery, so I went there. She had a friend there who is an older Singapore lady, and of course, she went through all of the motions like 'Have you tried durian before? Do you like spicy food?' This just drives me nuts. I say, 'Yes, I've tried durian.' 'Oh, you've been here a long time?' 'Yes, 20 years.' And they go, 'Oh! Are you PR?' 'No, I'm citizen.' And she goes, 'No, you're not. You're not.' 'I'm not?' 'No, no, no, you're not. You can't be. There's no way you can be. No way. You're lying.'

For Karen, she explained that the sense that she would never 'fit' the image of Singaporean-ness, no matter how multicultural it is, has meant that she has given up on telling people that she is Singaporean. Instead, she now says that she is 'British' to those who ask because it is too much effort to convince people that she is a Singapore citizen. Even for cases of individuals who appear to be well-integrated into Singaporean society, such as Mrs Suchavadee Chua, they may not be as welcomed as it initially appears. In the case of Mrs Chua, she attributed the success of the Thai festivities that she organised in local Singaporean constituencies to the fact that Singaporean residents were more 'receptive' to taking part because they see Thai festivals as 'neutral territory' not occupied by established ethnic groups. To that end, the fact that Thai culture is seen as 'neutral' is because it is viewed as foreign and not fitting within the CMIO image that Singaporeans have of multicultural Singapore. Priya, an INC, when discussing the challenges surrounding the inclusion of individuals who do not fit within the existing CMIO framework, suggested that the four groups be given priority over others in policy-making decisions because they were the 'first'. Yet, historically that is not necessarily true. For instance, Arabs arrived in Singapore during the same colonial period as the Chinese and Indian migrants (Talib, 1997). Yet, they are not considered one of the named groups with special recognition under Singapore's model of multiculturalism. Furthermore, to suggest that some groups

be given primacy over others contradicts with a fundamental premise of multiculturalism in Singapore that all groups are considered and treated as equals.

What these cases show is that inherent within Singapore's multiculturalism is a tension that the inclusion of new citizens of different ethnic backgrounds reveals. The cultural diversity that is extolled in Singapore is prescribed and fixed both in policy and in the national imagination. Yet, the message sent by the state is that the evident reality of multiculturalism in Singapore means that the country embodies an ethos that welcomes all cultural difference. However, those grappling with the question of what it is to belong, whether they be migrants or INCs seeking to facilitate integration, find that the rigidity of the CMIO framework can hinder integration into the Singaporean community of value. Even when the state tries to increase the flexibility of categories, the image of a certain kind of multicultural Singapore is so ingrained in everyday life and Singaporeans' imagining of themselves that changes to such an image are often met with resistance. While the CMIO framework has always been criticised as overly rigid, ignoring the existence of mixed-race individuals and so on, the arrival of even greater ethnic diversity as a result of newer flows of migration simply adds to the complexity of the situation further, as noted by politicians and academics who have asked whether the CMIO system is simply obsolete in today's day and age (Yahya, 2018). This complexity is thrown into even sharper relief when naturalised citizens begin to volunteer as INCs. As they seek to embody Singapore's multicultural ethos and share their cultural background with other newcomers, they challenge the state narratives of what it is to be a member of multicultural Singapore given that they do not fit into the heavily prescriptive CMIO structure that they too propagate through their volunteer work as INCs.

### **Chapter Summary: The Relationship Between Ethnic Diversity and National Solidarity**

Singapore's cultural diversity is an inescapable reality of everyday life. Rather than ignoring it, the Singaporean state has chosen to place cultural pluralism front and centre to the Singaporean national identity, making it a key and recurring feature of the integration process which all new citizens undergo. Two elements of Singapore's model of multiculturalism were discussed in this chapter: first was Singapore's very particular form of cultural diversity encapsulated in its CMIO framework. The second was a broader multicultural ethos of embracing difference that is presented as a fundamental characteristic of being true 'Singaporean'. INCs play a vital role in communicating and perpetuating these understandings of Singapore's character by being vehicles for their own cultures in their interaction with new citizens and exhibiting the desired acceptance of cultural difference. In these ways, INCs take the state ideology and policy of multiracialism and translate it into concrete practices so that new citizens can better integrate into the multicultural society to which they now belong. The reasons for teaching new citizens about Singapore's multicultural character are twofold. One, by learning about Singapore's cultural diversity and its ethos of multiculturalism, migrants can better understand the society that they have moved to and can adapt to local behavioural norms, whether they be separating cutlery and crockery from halal food stalls or accepting that

their neighbours may make curry. Two, knowing that Singapore is open to cultural diversity can lead to new citizens feeling that they too are welcome despite being of a different national background. However, in seeking to communicate these ideas to new citizens, INCs have to grapple with the uncomfortable realisation about the limitations and negative effects of Singapore's form of state-led multiracialism. For a number of INCs, they are faced with the realisation that they do not fit neatly within the state's multiracial framework and that their identities are rendered invisible by the very policy that they are promoting through their volunteer work. For some this failure to fit within the existing racialised framework results in experiences of racism that call into question how accepting of ethnic difference Singaporean society truly is. Others find that their identities are reduced to what the authorities deem as useful and palatable for public consumption in portrayals of cultural practices.

However, the very process of bringing in and incorporating migrants that INCs are tasked with aiding is fundamentally altering the racial make-up of Singaporean society. This is brought into even sharper relief as naturalised citizens begin to volunteer as INCs in their neighbourhoods and thus seek to express their own cultural identities through their volunteerism. Naturalised citizens, therefore, challenge the pre-existing structures of multiracialism in two ways. Firstly, they unsettle prescribed and widely assumed cultural traits within the established Chinese, Malay and Indian groups. Secondly, they expand the 'Others' category to include groups, such as Thais or Nepalese, to create an even more colourful multicultural image of Singapore. This raises questions about whether such a method of multicultural governance is sustainable and what changes can be made. On the ground, migrants are laying claim to the rhetoric that their cultural identity ought to be recognised and respected, as equals to already established groups in Singaporean society, suggesting that they feel welcomed enough in Singapore to settle down and assert their own cultural identity in public spaces. Yet, in doing so, they challenge state narratives of multiracialism. The challenge that thus arises is how the integration of pre-existing groups into one nation can cohere with the integration of newer groups as migrants are also incorporated into this already diverse society.

## **Chapter Nine: Wrapping Up and Looking Ahead**

The concluding chapter of this dissertation seeks to do three things. Firstly, it looks back at the arguments advanced in the previous chapters and how they highlight the path that this dissertation has taken in its examination of the role that Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs) play in migrant integration processes in Singapore. Secondly, it looks beyond the specific case study of INCs in Singapore to examine the implications that this study has for broader areas of research on migration, integration, multiculturalism and national identity. Finally, it looks forward into potential directions for future research.

### **Looking Back on the Argument**

When I began work on my PhD in 2016, I was motivated by a broad puzzle facing most contemporary societies in a globalised world: How can one find commonality and solidarity in a culturally diverse and continuously changing nation-state? To study this question of integration, I turned to the case of one nation-state, Singapore, which has been negotiating this issue since its inception as an independent state and a group of volunteers who act as ‘integrators’ for newcomers known as Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs). Chapter One thus presented the research question underpinning this dissertation: **What role do INCs play in the integration of migrants into Singaporean society?**

As Chapter Two’s overview of the Singaporean context illustrated, INCs are but one part of Singapore’s story of migration. It has had a long history of cultural diversity which began in earnest under British colonial rule and has continued with an open immigration policy to support an economy heavily dependent on foreign labour. In response to the high rate of immigration and the corresponding cultural diversity that has resulted, the Singaporean state has embarked on a journey of integrating a multicultural population to form a cohesive national identity. This approach has been a top-down one that often ignores the lived experiences and unique ethnic identities that Singaporeans possess, instead distilling Singapore’s ethnic diversity into a simplified racialised framework of multicultural governance in order to build a story of unity in the midst of ethnic diversity. Situated within this broader policy of building national solidarity, INCs were introduced as grassroots volunteers who work to help newly naturalised citizens integrate into Singaporean society.

But more than simply providing an insight into the particular case study of Singaporean integration, studying INCs’ role in the integration process contributes to a broader theoretical understanding of migrant integration in two ways which were discussed in Chapters Three and Four. In Chapter Three, integration was presented as a process which occurs at the intersection of nationalism and multiculturalism. Rather than seeing the nation-building project as one that emphasizes commonality while erasing difference or multiculturalism as fragmenting the nation-state into different cultural silos, it was argued that nationalism and multiculturalism are complementary in the integration process. When the state recognises and protects individuals’ cultural varying cultural identities, this fosters a sense of belonging to the national community that ‘sees’ you rather than seeks to erase your difference. Chapter Four discussed this dissertation’s second

contribution to the literature on integration by conceiving of it as being a process between state and society. Where questions of how to manage ethnic diversity while maintaining a cohesive identity are often presented as either a state, policy-driven endeavour or situated in the realm of everyday, mundane interactions between individuals, this dissertation's second contribution was to argue for an examination of a third, middle approach. It argued that integration could be understood from the perspective of meso-level integrators who straddle society and state. Using the framework of street-level bureaucracy, INCs were introduced as such meso-level actors. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that to fully understand how integration works (and does not work) in Singapore we cannot merely focus on the role of the state, nor just the perspective of everyday life, but neither can we see integration as a national or a multicultural project. Instead, we need to focus on the role of INCs, the linchpins of integration, connecting the state to society and vice versa, delivering – and also subverting – state ideologies of both multiculturalism and nationalism through their grassroots volunteerism.

Chapter Five brought in how exactly INCs were studied through a methodological discussion of the data collection and analysis processes employed for this study. While Chapters Three and Four provided the theoretical framework for studying INCs' role in the migrant integration process in Singapore, Chapters Six, Seven and Eight forwarded the empirical answer to the research question. This answer was that INCs occupy a liminal space between state and society which enables them to encourage migrant integration into subnational units of local neighbourhoods and ethnic groupings.

Chapter Six introduced the liminal position of INCs. Much like street-level bureaucrats, the role of the INC is far from clear cut. While they are officially tasked with facilitating the integration and naturalisation of new citizens, they often find themselves caught between policy objectives and realities on the ground. The issue of immigration illustrated this. Due to their position as grassroots volunteers, INCs are seen as individuals who are acting on behalf of the state to implement its integration policy amongst migrants. This means that, when INCs meet fellow residents as they often do through their volunteer work, they are often on the receiving end of xenophobic complaints about the high rates of immigration for which they harbour some sympathy. Yet, the very fact that they volunteer to aid with the integration of migrants indicates their support for the presence of migrants in the local community. This support for immigration is further strengthened by their volunteer work that gives them vital insight into state policy and allows them to form friendships with migrants in their neighbourhood. Thus, the fact that INCs are simultaneously embedded in their local community while being tasked to fulfil the state policy of migrant integration leaves them negotiating competing interests. On one hand, migrants are seen as the vital lifeblood for the Singaporean economy through which migrants are often reduced to simple economic units of labour. But on the other, their very presence is viewed as a threat to the nation in which they now reside. Simply put, Singapore wants foreigners, just not the 'wrong ones' and them settling down in visibly high numbers. Immigration and integration policies thus become a negotiation of these competing aims. INCs with their intermediary role between state and society take on the challenging task of translating state policy direction into concrete reality in their local settings which means that they are faced with the messiness of everyday

life and the limitations and contradictions of state policies. How INCs negotiate this messiness is what forms the central role of the subsequent empirical chapters.

Chapter Seven argued that INCs' role as both residents and grassroots volunteers in their local neighbourhood enables them to welcome new citizens and encourage good neighbourly behaviour which in turn strengthens new citizens' sense of rootedness to their neighbourhood and bonds with their Singaporean neighbours. But this welcome often appears to be grudging, limited only on the premise that one is deemed to be a worthy member of Singaporean society on two counts: the state has decided that you have the requisite skills to be allowed to even settle in Singapore and you demonstrate a willingness to adapt to the cultural norms of living in Singaporean society. In the latter case, there are few meaningful efforts to encourage locals to adapt to newcomers living in their neighbourhoods, but instead the responsibility of integration is almost wholly borne by migrants. Taking its cue from Chapter Seven, Chapter Eight too focussed on subnational units of belonging. But rather than focus on location, Chapter Eight shifted to focus on modes of incorporation: ethnicity and cultural collective identities. Through a discussion of how multiculturalism is understood, taught and performed through the INCs' volunteer work, it argued that embracing the various cultural identities that a pluralistic society like Singapore plays host to helps to boost a sense of national belonging and feeling like one is welcomed because of one's difference. Much like the case of neighbourhood integration, multiculturalism in Singapore has its share of contradictions and failings. Its heavily prescriptive approach downplays cultural diversity within its population and individuals' own cultural identifications, which is further exacerbated with continued inflows of migrants and efforts to integrate them into Singaporean society. Several broad arguments should be drawn from the empirical findings of this study as discussed in Chapters Six to Eight. Firstly, rather than seeing other 'smaller' sites of identity and belonging as undermining one's national belonging, the former can strengthen and give shape to the latter in more tangible ways. Secondly, this translation from smaller units to the national collective does not simply occur by chance nor always unproblematic, but through the hard work of meso-level actors who use their position as members of neighbourhoods, ethnic groups and the nation to facilitate the process of migrant integration and negotiate between different and often opposing interests.

All in all, this study of INCs demonstrated how they are key actors in the integration process. As grassroots actors who have strong ties to their local communities, they understand the everyday realities of living in culturally diverse settings and the imperative for integration. This means that when they work with the state to facilitate the latter's policy goals of promoting migrant integration, INCs are uniquely placed to see how integration efforts should be tailored and use their discretion to do so accordingly. This means that INCs are not merely carriers or passive implementers of state integration policy, but actively make sense of and give shape to government policy in practice, much like street-level bureaucrats. Moreover, given that integration is a process that is concerned with what constitutes the nation, when INCs carry out their volunteer work, they too communicate their conceptions of the nation to newcomers, showing that the Singaporean nation is one that is experienced through living in local neighbourhoods and appreciating its multiracial character. As individuals with their own sense of what the Singaporean nation ought to look

like, INCs bring their own share of biases and exclusionary ideas of who can or cannot belong, or what behaviour qualifies or disqualifies one from membership in the Singaporean national community. Nonetheless, even though INCs are agents who make sense of integration policy, they are still constrained by state policy. Thus, studying INCs' work has highlighted the contradictions and constraints within policy, from pre-emptively excluding low-wage migrant workers deemed undesirable from applying for legal membership in the Singaporean nation to a multicultural policy and framework that coercively forces individuals into racial categories that may not cohere with their own ethnic identity and lived experiences. Through their volunteerism in conjunction with the state, INCs do sometimes push back against what they see as policy failures, but more often than not are helpless to achieve meaningful change or even perpetuate such problematic policies.

### **Contributions to the Scholarship**

While this dissertation was focussed on the single case study of integration processes in Singapore, it has a number of broader implications for the academic literature to which I am speaking. In particular, I identify two primary contributions to the existing literature on multiculturalism and nationalism. Firstly, this dissertation forwarded the argument that multiculturalism and national identity form a mutually reinforcing relationship. Work on the linkage between the two concepts has been mostly theoretical and normative regarding disagreements over whether the 'differentialist' discourse (Brubaker, 2001) forwarded by multiculturalism's emphasis on cultural pluralism fragments society into smaller, exclusive ethnic identities, thus threatening national cohesion (Barry, 2002). This has been contested by proponents of multiculturalism, such as Tariq Modood, who argue that individuals' ethnic identities can co-exist with their national identity through hyphenated identities (2013). While these debates are undoubtedly important, my study furthers empirical work by scholars such as Irene Bloemraad whose work on multiculturalism in Canada shows how multiculturalism, whether manifested in official state rhetoric of politicians or in funding given to minority groups to set up their community organisations, can strengthen a sense of national identity amongst migrant minorities, and encourage their political incorporation (2006). It does so through a focus on the practices of multiculturalism, nationalism and integration as carried out by INCs, thus showing how previously theoretical debates play out in on-the-ground realities. In contrast, much of the work on Singaporean nation-building and multiculturalism is often positioned within broader narratives about Singapore's political system, seeing state policies regarding cultural diversity and national belonging as forms of corporatist social control (Y. T. Chia, 2012; T. Chong, 2011; Chua, 2003; D. P. S. Goh, 2019; Ortega, 2015). While Singapore's political system is important, this framing has meant that work on Singapore has not always spoken to other literature in the same field and Singapore's policies of multiculturalism and nationalism are presented as authoritarian 'outliers'. This can be seen in the literature of multiculturalism which has often been focused on liberal democracies, such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia (Kymlicka, 1995; Levey, 2010; Modood, 2013; Parekh, 2006). With Singapore being primarily characterised as authoritarian, it is easy to see it as having little to say to liberal democracies who are grappling with



questions about maximising freedom and equality. Instead of focussing on normative questions surrounding Singapore's multiculturalism and nation-building projects, this dissertation has centred the mediating role that INCs play in facilitating integration, seeing them as agents rather than simply subjects of the state. This focus on practice allows theorisation to take place in a manner that expands our conceptual understanding of multiculturalism and nationalism, much like how Teo uses the case study of Singapore to point out present theorisation's blind spots when it comes to multiculturalism (Teo, 2019). By focussing on practice, this dissertation was able to highlight some of the challenges that the two policies of nation-building and multiculturalism can have for each other. For instance, nation-building in a culturally diverse society often invokes images of the various groups that are represented, creating a particular, albeit mixed picture of the national community. However, an examination of how INCs in their efforts to help migrants adapt to life in multiracial Singapore reveals a tension between welcoming newcomers and their various cultural backgrounds while seeking to communicate a particular image of the nation that does not include these newcomers. This national imaginary is thus challenged with the arrival of newcomers who do not fit established understandings of the multicultural nation, such as CMIO in Singapore. This unique contribution to the literature on multiculturalism is vital because it goes beyond the 'happily ever after' narrative that proponents of multiculturalism tend to forward whereby any failures of integration have to do with a failure to properly implement multiculturalism rather than problems with multiculturalism itself.

The second and perhaps more critical contribution to the academic literature that this dissertation makes is its conceptual framing of the meso-level in discussing processes of integration. The meso-level approach seeks to pull together two approaches often taken in discussing ethnic diversity and nationalism: a macro approach that emphasizes state action and policy, and a micro approach that emphasizes the everyday and mundane interactions. While purporting to discuss similar phenomenon, these two approaches very rarely engaged with each other in a sustained manner, instead choosing to critique each other before developing their own separate epistemological and methodological approaches for understanding the issue at hand. By studying INCs who bridge the macro and micro, this dissertation presented integration as a system incorporating these two perspectives. It began with the premise that macro and micro approaches are complementary and engaging with both policy and everyday settings can give us a more holistic understanding of how a nation or multicultural society is experienced and developed. The question that is focussed on is how these macro and micro levels can engage with each other. To that end, this dissertation studied what I termed as meso-level actors who occupy both positions, furthering state policy in its implementation on the ground in acts that these grassroots volunteers considered mundane, whether it be talking to others about their faith or mediating neighbourhood conflicts about where wet laundry can be hung up. The INCs are placed in a unique dual-position which allows them to mediate between the state and the citizens. On the one hand, they are acting under the purview and with the support of the state, granting them greater authority than the average citizen who may also act in a private capacity to help in migrant integration, a group that Amanda Wise has termed 'transversal enablers' (2009). Yet, because they are volunteers within their local community, they are likely to be seen as embedded

members of the neighbourhood, local actors rather than state actors, such as bureaucrats or politicians. It is through their liminal position that they enable integration in everyday practice and the implementation of state policy, often adjusting both to achieve what they see as the most effective results. Of course, this is not without its share of difficulties. INCs themselves perpetuate exclusionary discursive frameworks of belonging where they seek to extend the necessary aid to facilitate integration to those who they deem worthy of their efforts, such as migrants who have the legal opportunity to settle long-term in Singapore and become 'contributing members' of society.

Studying grassroots volunteers who help to implement policy is important for two reasons. Firstly, understanding the bridging role that they play fills a gap in the literature that often did not explain how integration policy was translated on the ground. Much of the work on areas such as multiculturalism and nation building, including research on Singapore, either prescribe state policy (Barr & Skrbiš, 2008; C. Han, 2000; Modood, 2013; Parekh, 2006) with little reference to how the targeted audience of such policies receive, adapt or even reject the policy at hand or they look at everyday experiences and how individuals give meaning to the nation and live in cultural diversity with scant attention paid to the role that government policy plays in shaping those experiences (Husband et al., 2014; Semi et al., 2009; Surak, 2013; Wise & Velayutham, 2014). Putting the spotlight on liminal actors who straddle the areas of policy and the everyday, show how there is a back-and-forth between the two. This builds upon the literature on integration by bringing in research on street-level bureaucracy which presents bureaucrats as agents who exercise their agency as they implement public policy while having direct contact with the public (Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000).

However, this dissertation did not merely reproduce the main contribution of the street-level bureaucracy scholarship but further added to it by its focus on grassroots volunteers as agents in the implementation of integration policy. Work on street-level bureaucrats has focussed almost exclusively on paid employees of the state, but this dissertation suggests that more focus should be placed on the role that citizen volunteers can and do play in policy interpretation and implementation. In studies on Singapore, little empirical work has been done on grassroots volunteers in Singapore despite their pervasiveness. If there has been writing on the grassroots, it is often done through a study of public policy documents and media reports which provide a broad overview but do not centre the voice of volunteers themselves (Haque, 1996; K. P. A. S.-S. Tan, 2003; Weiss, 2017). On top of extending the existing literature on Singaporean grassroots volunteering, the importance of studying volunteers more broadly is highlighted. While at first glance, this meso-level approach might appear novel and seemingly an isolated case unique to Singapore, the presence of citizen volunteers is not as rare as it would seem. Volunteers are increasingly recruited by the states across a variety of countries to carry out a wide range of activities, such as helping in gang violence reduction efforts in the United States (Lopez-Aguado, 2013) or building community bonds through gardening projects in Germany (Rosol, 2012). Due to budget cuts to social services, this trend is likely to continue where volunteers fill spaces that the state has ceded (Humphris, 2019). Hence, this dissertation makes a vital intervention in the literature on integration policy and street-level bureaucracy by

showing how everyday citizens can work with the state to strengthen their communities and also make policy.

### **Looking Forward to New Research Trajectories**

While this dissertation sought to contribute to the study of migrant integration and national belonging in multicultural societies in new ways, it opens up several questions for further research. Firstly, it only focussed on volunteers working in the area of migrant integration. In Singapore, grassroots volunteers are widely involved in other areas of social concern, such as in cultural preservation groups, engaging the youth and in promoting sports in local communities. If one were interested in the role of volunteers as intermediaries and how they help implement state policy while being embedded in their local community, one way to move forward would be to expand the study to encompass a broader range of volunteers. Apart from simply increasing the number of interviewees, an in-depth ethnographic study which follows these volunteers instead of simply interviewing them could provide vital insights into how they carry out their volunteer work and interact with representatives from the state, other volunteers and residents. This expanded study could look at several interesting questions. For example, how is the state reconceptualised with the bringing in of ‘laypersons’? Do volunteers simply act as conduits of the state, extending its reach and power (Hu, 2020), or do they become the ‘face of the state’ in areas where the state has little to no control (Humphris, 2019)? This can lead to other theoretical questions surrounding governance. For instance, how do these unelected actors work within a structure of an electoral democracy? How can they be held accountable if they are neither elected representatives nor paid civil servants? Are they an extension of an authoritarian state, acting as part of networks of surveillance and enforcers of desirable behaviour in neighbourhoods (E. Ong, 2015; K. P. A. S.-S. Tan, 2003)?

A second way that this research can be expanded within the context of Singapore is to broaden the study of the integration process. While studying INCs gave a vital insight into the grassroots implementation of integration policy after individuals have received in-principle approval for their Singaporean citizenship, this can be supplemented by studying the process more holistically. A number of different strategies can be employed to provide a complete picture of migrant integration in Singapore. Firstly, a longitudinal study can be undertaken to examine how migrants settle down in their new home, put down roots and eventually apply and receive citizenship. Secondly, instead of looking at one set of actors – INCs – another project could study a range of other grassroots actors, such as immigrant associations and non-governmental organisations who engage with migrants. Thirdly, a reconceptualization of integration would allow for new research directions and insights. This dissertation focussed on naturalised citizens as the actors who are targets of integration efforts, albeit looking at more substantive conceptions of citizenship, such as the adaptation of behaviour to better fit in with Singaporean society. But what about those who may never receive citizenship either due to structural barriers, such as those deemed too ‘low-skilled’ to be put on the path to residency, or individual choice, such as the ‘expats’ who

might live in their insular communities? Integration might thus be seen as a spectrum rather than a simple binary of integrated or segregated.

But more than just allowing a deepening of a study into Singapore, this research opens up an exciting path to studying integration beyond Singapore. While many countries do not have the same formal system of grassroots volunteers as those present in Singapore, other non-state actors serve a similar ‘street-level bureaucrat’ function of carrying out state policy, such as the religious groups in the United Kingdom that Humphris examines (2019). While there may be a challenge to identify and define who these actors are in settings where they are less organised, they can still provide essential lessons on how citizens can contribute to integration processes through working with the state. For instance, a comparative study of private refugee programmes in Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, would be instructive to see how volunteerism affects the integration of migrants. Alternatively, Singapore’s integration processes can be compared with another established multicultural society such as Canada or the United Kingdom to see how they are negotiating the contemporary arrival of migrants who are from ‘newer’ minority groups.

## **Conclusion**

With increasing rates of migration across the world, the question of how to maintain stable bonds of solidarity within increasingly diverse communities is one that every country has to grapple with. Integration is a dynamic and iterative process and hence to study its outcomes, or even its constituent manifestations in state policy and everyday life merely present a static snapshot of the phenomenon. By studying Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs) and their role in migrant integration in Singapore, this dissertation focussed on the integrators – individuals who are situated in the centre of this process, helping to bring people together. They provide an integral link between the impersonal state and the realities of everyday life, demonstrating to newcomers and locals what it is to be part of a national community amidst significant difference. And in so doing, they play vital but often overlooked roles in shaping and maintaining the nation-state through their work in practising and enacting integration.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Consent Form for INCs



#### **Consent for Participation in Interview Research (INCs)**

I volunteer to participate in a PhD research project conducted by Ms. Rebecca Grace Tan Tian En from the University of Bristol. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about how multiculturalism, integration, and national identity are understood in Singapore, particularly by local volunteers otherwise known as Integration and Naturalisation Champions (INCs). I will be one of approximately thirty people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer the question or end the interview.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by Ms. Rebecca Tan. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The audio of the interview will be recorded through the use of a voice recorder for the purposes of transcription after the interview, and notes will be made by the researcher over the course of the interview. All audio recordings and subsequent transcripts will be encrypted and stored securely to protect my privacy and maintain confidentiality.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using the information obtained during this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
5. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies of the University of Bristol. For research problems or questions pertaining to the research process that cannot be answered by the researcher or that I am uncomfortable raising to her, the school's ethics committee can be contacted at [spais-ethics@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:spais-ethics@bristol.ac.uk).



6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to be part of this study.
7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

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Name

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Signature

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Date

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Signature of Researcher

Name: Rebecca Grace Tan Tian En

Email address: rt16420(at)bris.ac.uk

Contact number: +65 xxxx-xxx



**Consent for Participation in Interview Research (New Citizens)**

1. I volunteer to participate in a PhD research project conducted by Ms. Rebecca Grace Tan Tian En from the University of Bristol. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about how multiculturalism, integration, and national identity are understood in Singapore. I will be one of approximately thirty people being interviewed for this research.
2. My participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
3. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer the question or end the interview.
4. Participation involves being interviewed by Ms. Rebecca Tan. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The audio of the interview will be recorded through the use of a voice recorder for the purposes of transcription after the interview, and notes will be made by the researcher over the course of the interview. All audio recordings and subsequent transcripts will be encrypted and stored securely to protect my privacy and maintain confidentiality.
5. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using the information obtained during this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies of the University of Bristol. For research problems or questions pertaining to the research process that cannot be answered by the researcher or that I am uncomfortable raising to her, the school's ethics committee can be contacted at [spais-ethics@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:spais-ethics@bristol.ac.uk).
7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to be part of this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

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Name

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

Name: Rebecca Grace Tan Tian En

Email address: rt16420(at)bris.ac.uk

Contact number: +65 xxxx-xxx