Everyday Nationhood: Complexities of Identity and Belonging Among the Chinese Minority in Brunei Darussalam

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This article underscores the diverse and often toned-down experiences of everyday nationhood among the ethnic Chinese minority in Brunei, highlighting the complexities of their identity and belonging. This marginalized ethnic minority simultaneously experiences aspects of everyday nationhood while being excluded from many of its facets. These exclusions are shaped by authority-defined narratives of nationhood that influence interpretations of citizenship and create dilemmas of identity and belonging. At the grassroots level, the study demonstrates how everyday nationhood is both expressed and contested through a sense of (non-)belonging by the ethnic Chinese, stemming from non-conformity to the dominant national discourse rooted in ethno-religious homogeneity.

Keywords: everyday nationhood, Brunei, MIB, ethnic Chinese minority, identity and belonging.

Like many countries, Brunei is a plural society (King 1994, p. 182), but in recent years it has been priding itself on being a non-secular Islamic nation, placing significant emphasis on its ethnic Malay identity, devout adherence to the Islamic faith, and the central role of the monarchy in national affairs, which form the basis of its national identity. Referred to as *Melayu, Islam, Beraja* (Malay, Islam, Monarchy, abbreviated as MIB), this concept comprises three fundamental components claimed to represent the essence of the Brunei nation (Ooi 2021, p. 13). MIB embodies Brunei's ethno-religious nationalism and reflects its aspiration for a homogeneous

nation. But Brunei's ethno-religious approach to nation-building has marginalized non-Muslim and non-indigenous minorities, leading to contested claims of identity and belonging, particularly among ethnic minority groups.

In nationalist discourse, nationalist ideology demands that the state manage differences, diversity and minority identities (Hoon 2006, p. 3), subsuming all other identities under the framework of an imagined homogenous nation, especially in the case of an ethno-nation.[1] When constructing national identity, politically dominant groups in Brunei privileged the Malay and Muslim identities over other ethnic and religious identities, rendering ethnic Chinese in Brunei as the "Other" (Sahrifulhafiz and Hoon 2021, p. 35). Thus, the othering of ethnic Chinese minorities is perceived as integral to Brunei's self-construction and a key aspect of its nation-building politics.

Since the 1970s, scholars have debated the origins and causes of nationalism and the proliferation of nation-states (Smith 2008, p. 563). The resurgence of scholarly interest in the study of nationalism reflects its pivotal role within modern societies, making it a powerful framework for the structuring, demarcation and regulation of modernity (Antonsich 2020, p. 1232). By the 1990s, scholars had begun to broaden nationalism studies to include the "banal" everyday expressions of nationalism, moving beyond what Billig (1995, p. 139) referred to as "hot nationalism". This shift from an elite or state-centric approach marks a paradigm change in the field, emphasizing micro analytical perspectives that focus on the ordinary people or citizens, "who are conspicuously absent" in conventional studies of nationalism (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, p. 537).

Expanding on banal nationalism's exploration of the everyday (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, p. 557)—which includes "the mundane details and daily realms of social interactions, habits, routines, and practices" (Edensor 2002, p. 17)—studies on "everyday nationhood" or "everyday nationalism" have emerged. Inspired by Hobsbawm's (1992, p. 163) advocacy for nationalism from the grassroots, everyday nationhood takes a bottom-up approach to examine how ordinary

people, private citizens, individuals and groups adopt, consume and (re)produce nationhood in their daily lives (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, p. 537).

Yet everyday nationhood has shortcomings. Anthony Smith (2008, pp. 565–67) outlines three key criticisms that could restrict its appeal and utility. First, the generalization of the social category of "ordinary people" by everyday nationhood scholars is problematic. This categorization is overly homogeneous or "unsociological", overlooking the diverse statuses and classes of groups within a given social category. Second, Smith critiques the ahistorical approach of everyday nationhood, which emphasizes the "here and now" over a causal historical methodology. Third, everyday nationhood tends to overlook pre-existing structural constraints that shape and limit social action.

Since the study of everyday nationalism intersects with research on national identity and belonging, it is essential to explore how national identity is discussed, experienced and interpreted in diverse ways by various groups within the nation (de Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak 1999, p. 155). This intersection between everyday nationalism and national identity illustrates how ethnic minorities draw on their own logics, backgrounds and habitus[2] to interpret their experiences of nationhood. Simultaneously, authority-defined dominant narratives, such as national ideology and public discourse, exert a significant influence on individuals' identity construction and their sense of place within the nation.

This article adopts a two-pronged approach. First, it examines the macro, top-down phenomenon of authority-defined nationalism based on MIB. This includes the use of concepts such as nationalism (an ideology emphasizing loyalty to the nation and state) (Suryadinata 2015, p. 32), nationhood (the conditions for inclusion in the nation) (Smith 1991, p. 57), and legal citizenship (a legal status granting rights and benefits of citizenship). The macro level analysis explores how structures of the nation and their narratives shape and influence individual identities, senses of belonging, grassroots understanding of citizenship and perspectives towards the nation.

At the micro level, the study focuses on the grounded, everyday-defined and diverse experiences of nationhood as they manifest through the discussion on identity and belonging. It is important to recognize that identity and belonging are not static entities but discursive constructs—products of the ways people talk about and interpret the world (Lee 2009, p. 31). Consequently, the study examines the motives and everyday accounts of ethnic Chinese individuals to uncover how they construct meanings around their identity and belonging as lived social realities.

Building on Anthony Smith's (2008, pp. 565–68) observations on the limitations of everyday nationhood, the article is organized into three main sections, following a brief account of the methodology employed. First, it offers a socio-historical context essential for understanding the background of the "othering" of ethnic Chinese people in Brunei.

Second, this article highlights two competing Chinese communities in Brunei as distinct social categories that complicate the classification of ordinary people. Their uniqueness stems from their lack of the usual ordinary experiences and interactions with nationhood, marked by struggles with citizenship, misalignment with national identity, dilemmas of multiple identities and a sense of lost belonging.

Finally, the study examines the contested discursive claims of "talking about" and "choosing" the nation (Fox and Miller 2008, pp. 538–39, 542–45), focusing on ethnic Chinese identities and belonging as manifestations of everyday nationhood. The concluding section conceptualizes the complex dialectical relationship between the top-down and bottom-up consumption and (re)production of nationhood, highlighting the diverse and discontinuous ways everyday nationhood is articulated.

Methodology

This article draws on data from seventeen semi-structured interviews conducted both online (August–November 2021) and in person (January–May 2023). Among the seventeen informants were six Chinese Bruneian citizens (whose families have been Bruneian

citizens for several generations), four naturalized Chinese Bruneians (locally born and stateless but later naturalized), four Malaysian citizens holding Brunei permanent residency, two stateless individuals, and a senior government official. All the participants requested to remain anonymous.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling of close contacts, followed by snowball or chain-referral sampling. The seventeen informants were from diverse backgrounds, varying in age (ranging from late twenties to late sixties), educational attainment (from secondary school certificate holders to those with master's degrees), occupations (teachers, researchers, lecturers, business owners, civil servants, professionals and retirees), and languages spoken (English, Malay, Mandarin and, in some cases, their respective dialects). Both males and females were represented.

Participants were generally asked about their backgrounds, experiences and perspectives on discrimination as well as how they perceived themselves as both Bruneians and Chinese. Topics covered included family and migration histories, sense of belonging, citizenship status and struggles to achieve naturalization, Chinese identity in relation to national identity, and experiences of discrimination. These narratives were analysed to identify themes that suggest the existence of social groups whose experiences of nationhood are "not-so-ordinary" compared to those of the "ordinary people".

The analysed data also contribute to understanding the formation of the "othered" ethnic Chinese identity and sense of belonging as manifestations of their experiences and perceptions of everyday nationhood. This study focuses on a small group of ethnic Chinese currently or formerly residing in Brunei, and as such the findings may not be fully representative of the broader Chinese Bruneian community.

MIB Nationhood and the Othering of the Chinese Minority

Brunei is a predominantly Malay society; ethnic Chinese people represent the largest non-indigenous minority in the country. Ethnically, Brunei consists of two primary social groups: the *puak*

jati (recognized indigenous groups, also referred to as *rakyat jati* or indigenous citizens), similar to Malaysia's *bumiputera* (sons of the soil), and the non–*puak jati*, which includes unrecognized indigenous groups and non-indigenous populations. As of 2023, *puak jati* made up 73.8 per cent of the total population (Department of Economic Planning and Statistics 2024). This category encompasses Brunei Malays, Belait, Bisaya, Dusun, Murut, Kedayan and Tutong ethnic groups, all of which are collectively classified as the Brunei Malay race in the national census (Fanselow 2014, p. 104; Maxwell 2001, p. 189). In contrast to Malaysia, where being Malay is closely tied to professing the Islamic faith, Brunei recognizes five non-Muslim indigenous ethnic groups—the Belait, Bisaya, Dusun, Murut and Tutong—as categorically Malay under the Nationality Act of 1961 (Fanselow 2014, p. 98). Assimilation and inter-ethnic marriages have, however, led many members of these groups to convert to Islam, with the exception of the Bisaya and Murut.

Ethnic Chinese, comprising 9.6 per cent of the population, form the majority of the non–*puak jati* category, alongside smaller indigenous groups such as the Iban and Penan (Department of Economic Planning and Statistics 2024). The maintenance of the *puak jati* and non–*puak jati* categories perpetuates layers of differentiation between indigenous and non-indigenous populations, reflecting subtle forms of othering and unequal citizenship within Brunei's nation-building framework.

As part of nation-building strategies, the Sultan of Brunei and the Brunei Malay elites promoted the national philosophy of MIB, which envisions a state and society characterized by traditional Malay culture, strict observance of Islamic teachings, and undivided loyalty to the monarchy. MIB is presented as a justification for the status quo in Brunei, binding the nation's traditional past with its present-day life. Thus, MIB serves as the guiding principle for nationalistic discourse in Brunei, shaping all aspects of life, including values, traditions, governance and institutions, reflecting the imagined identity of the Brunei nation (Ooi 2021, p. 11).

MIB circumscribes Brunei's nationhood to privilege the dominant Brunei Malays, prioritize Islam, and demand loyalty to the monarchy

(Sahrifulhafiz and Hoon 2021, p. 41; Naimah 2020, p. 147). Despite local scholars' defence of MIB as a universal concept (Abdul Hamid 2008, p. 8; Asiyah, Ahmad and Abu Bakar 2021, p. 440), many academics contend that MIB represents an essentialist, fixed and unchanging notion of national identity (Sahrifulhafiz and Hoon 2021, p. 37; Maxwell 2001, p. 181) that elides ethnic diversity (Ho 2021a, p. 13) and fails to reflect realities on the ground (Ho and Ho 2021, p. 156). The promotion of the majority's cultural norms perpetuates the marginalization of individuals who do not adhere to, possess, or overtly display characteristics of "Bruneiness". This includes proficiency in speaking Malay, particularly Brunei Malay, and possessing a deep understanding of Malay culture (Abdul Hamid 2008, pp. 8–10); having a fundamental knowledge of the Islamic faith and demonstrating profound respect for Islam (Asiyah 2011, p. 63); and displaying unwavering and performative loyalty to the Bruneian monarchy.[3]

As noted by Triandafyllidou (1998, p. 600), the identification of a significant other threatening national unity often emerges during nation formation when identity is evolving. Ethnic Chinese were targeted for othering after the Second World War amid rising ethno-religious nationalist sentiments among Brunei Malays (Hussainmiya 1999, p. 289). During the peak of the nationalist movement in the 1950s and 1960s, ethnic Chinese were portrayed as *urang asing* (aliens) or *urang luar* (outsiders) by the Brunei Malays, reflecting local perceptions of them as *pendatang* (newcomers) and *penumpang* (boarders), blending ideas of foreignness and temporariness amid the increasing influx of Chinese immigrants (Hoon 2006, pp. 272–79).

The issue of the legal status of ethnic Chinese in Brunei was debated as early as 1953 during constitutional negotiations. While the British proposed granting citizenship to ethnic Chinese, the idea was opposed by the monarchy and nationalists advocating for a narrower definition of Brunei citizenship (Steiner and Müller 2019, p. 17). In 1961, the Nationality Act established citizenship based on *jus sanguinis* (right by blood), automatically granting it to seven recognized *puak jati*, which included the Belaits, Bisayas, Brunei Malays, Dusuns, Kedayans, Muruts and Tutongs. Consequently, the

nationality law effectively disqualifies second-generation, locally born Chinese immigrants and other indigenous minorities from claiming automatic citizenship (Maxwell 2001, p. 177). But the Brunei government offered an extended grace period from 1962 to 1984, allowing non-indigenous individuals, especially ethnic Chinese and indigenous Iban, to apply for citizenship under a streamlined naturalization scheme. Through this scheme, an estimated nine thousand non-indigenous individuals were granted blanket citizenship between 1962 and 1983 (Zhao 2013).

After independence in 1984, however, the eligibility criteria for citizenship became increasingly stringent. As Cheong (2014, p. 76) and Md Zaidul Anwar (2021, pp. 20–26) highlight, the naturalization process is often opaque and marred by discriminatory practices, discouraging many potential applicants. It was reported in 2022 that there were 25,800 permanent residents, with approximately 13,000 of them likely being stateless ethnic Chinese (Department of Economic Planning and Statistics 2023).[4] Additionally, over the years, the state has restricted the naturalization of its Chinese population, further exacerbating the protracted statelessness that has persisted for generations (Md Zaidul 2021, p. 5). Consequently, citizenship is seen as a symbolic denial of belonging, reinforcing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

Furthermore, the interplay between racialized nation-building, citizenship and belonging among the "othered" minority is complicated by the various legal statuses of the ethnic Chinese population. There are four distinct legal categories of ethnic Chinese, each experiencing nationhood differently. First, there are Chinese Bruneian citizens who, in theory, should enjoy full citizenship and its associated benefits. In practice, however, they are treated as semi-citizens, reflecting the partial and unequal nature of their status. Next are naturalized Chinese Bruneians, who, despite being entitled to citizenship benefits, often face denial of certain entitlements, such as property ownership, because of their ethnicity. Another category comprises Malaysian citizens with Brunei permanent residency, who enjoy specific benefits such as almost free healthcare, although the extension of such welfare is being gradually restricted. The final

category consists of stateless ethnic Chinese, primarily the Belait Chinese, who face significant difficulties in accessing citizenship benefits and opportunities (Md Zaidul 2021, pp. 19–21).

In the economic dimension, the Chinese communities in Brunei have made undeniable contributions to the country's economy (de Vienne 2011, p. 37; Ho and Ho 2021, p. 153). But their economic success and bourgeoning numbers have also attracted hostility and jealousy from the local population and suspicion from the authorities, driven by perceptions of labour-market distortions, their economic dominance and their portrayal as being difficult to assimilate (Cheong 2017, p. 198; de Vienne 2011, p. 45).

Indirect othering of Chinese Bruneians is also evident through educational and cultural restrictions. Under the latest education framework, the National Education System for the Twenty-First Century (SPN21), Mandarin is no longer permitted as a medium of instruction in Chinese schools, being relegated to an optional subject and co-curricular activity (Md Ali 2013, pp. 58–59). Additional restrictions include bans on activities such as lighting fireworks during Chinese New Year, muted celebration of Chap Goh Mei[5] and the Hungry Ghost Festival, and limitations on Chinese arts and culture, including lion dances, traditional martial arts, Chinese calligraphy, and public displays of Chinese New Year decorations (Parameswaran 2015).

The socio-historical context presented here highlights the complexities of belonging and the tensions between the need for recognition and the constraints of the state's racialized policies (Thompson 2001, p. 19). At the same time, it also explains how the state's top-down narratives of nationhood influence the way the ethnic Chinese think of their citizenship and interpret their identity and sense of belonging.

Beyond the Category of "Ordinary People"

In his critique of everyday nationhood, Smith (2008, p. 565) warns against portraying the nation as stable or homogenous by using the

blanket category of "ordinary people". This section proposes and examines the experiences of nationhood among different social groups beyond the "ordinary people", focusing on othered groups, whose experiences of nationhood can be viewed as "non-ordinary" compared to those of their fellow citizens. The focus is on the marginalized ethnic Chinese minority in Brunei, exploring their heterogeneity and their divergent experiences of nationhood in relation to MIB. At the same time, this section illustrates how everyday nationalism based on MIB influenced and shaped the way the ethnic Chinese "talk" and "choose" the nation (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, pp. 530–45). As Brunei promotes cultural bonds between those who identify with MIB and those who do not fulfil its identity criteria (Ho 2021a; p. 7), MIB-based nationalism conditioned competition among these othered social groups to negotiate their place and belonging within the MIB nation. This competition illuminates the complex relationship between the state and marginalized communities in relation to identity and belonging.

The heterogeneity of the ethnic Chinese community in Brunei is evident in the differences in lifestyle, dialect, socialization, subtle cultural distinctions from mainland China, and adaptation to the local environment. Based on interview data, it can be discerned that there are two primary Chinese communities in Brunei. The first is the Bandar Chinese community, which is predominantly Hokkien-speaking. This community resides mainly in the Brunei-Muara District, with some in Tutong and Temburong districts. Many of them have acquired Brunei citizenship, granting them access to citizenship rights and benefits. Originating from Quemoy/Jinmen island in China, they historically worked as labourers, traders and farmers in and around the capital, Brunei Town, now Bandar Seri Begawan (Ho and Ho 2021, p. 151).

The second group is the Belait Chinese, consisting of dialect groups such as Hakka, Cantonese, Hainanese and Fuzhou. They reside in the oil-rich Belait District, particularly in Kuala Belait Town and Seria Town. Many of them originated from neighbouring Sarawak and were attracted by the oil boom of the 1970s (de Vienne

2011, p. 30) or arrived to establish businesses in the early years of independence in the 1980s (Ak. Moh. Khairi et al. 2011, p. 12).

The Bandar Chinese, with a long history of settlement and assimilation in Brunei, are generally accepted and recognized as Bruneians. In contrast, the Belait Chinese, influenced by factors such as geographical separation and sociocultural distinctions, are often perceived as outsiders or foreigners. This perception is reinforced by the significant number of stateless Belait Chinese across multiple generations (Md Zaidul 2021, p. 7). These two communities harbour resentment towards each other, as observed in the study by Hoon and Zhao (2023, p. 358).

The primary distinction between the two communities lies in their divergent patterns of socialization. For instance, the Bandar Chinese exhibit a greater degree of assimilation into Bruneian society. One of the interviewees, Mr H, attributes this assimilation to their century-long residence among Malay communities in areas like Kampong Ayer, Muara and Berakas in the Brunei-Muara District. This prolonged coexistence has facilitated extensive intermingling and intermarriage between Malays and Chinese, resulting in many Bandar Chinese becoming fluent in Brunei Malay.

Mr H highlights the ability of the Bandar Chinese to assimilate into mainstream Brunei society through their willingness to undergo a process of localization, which involves appreciating and practising local cultures to align themselves with Bruneian identity.[6] He is referring to the discourse of "Bruneiness" that emphasizes qualities non-Malay/non-Muslim individuals must exhibit to be recognized as Bruneians and belonging to Brunei. These qualities include loyalty to the sultan, appreciation of Malay cultures and languages, and a basic understanding of Islam, coupled with profound respect for the Islamic faith.[7]

Mr H makes the above claims based on his background as a person of mixed Hokkien Chinese and indigenous descent: his grandfather was a Chinese trader who settled and engaged in agriculture upstream of the Tutong River and later married an indigenous Dusun woman. He explained that, as a coping mechanism for survival,

the offspring of mixed marriages such as that of his grandparents adopted indigenous culture and lifestyles to navigate between their Chinese identity and the dominant Malay culture, a phenomenon most commonly observed in Tutong District.

Interviewee Ms. L, a Hokkien Bandar Chinese who works as a teacher in a Chinese school serving the Chinese–indigenous community in Tutong District, attributes the familiarity between the Bandar Chinese and the Malay community to intermarriage between these two communities. Many of her own extended family members chose to marry Malay partners, and she observed that the *mualaf* (converts to Islam) among them easily participated in Chinese family gatherings, such as Chinese New Year or weddings, as halal dishes were always prepared separately. Similarly, she and her family always felt welcome and comfortable attending weddings, funerals or other events hosted by their Malay-Muslim friends. She claimed that, for her, no boundaries existed between the two communities where cultural or religious ceremonies were concerned as long as mutual respect and consideration for each other's sensitivities were maintained.[8] Similarly, Mr SO, a prominent Hokkien Bandar Chinese real estate businessman, attributes this familiarity to extensive socialization between the two communities. His close relationships with his Malay friends, business partners, the community in general and living among them are what give him a strong sense of being part of the Brunei nation.[9]

The Belait Chinese, in contrast, were either brought into the district by the British or voluntarily migrated to capitalize on opportunities in the flourishing oil industry during the 1970s (de Vienne 2011, p. 30). After the Second World War, British reconstruction of Kuala Belait Town and Seria Town segregated Chinese from Malay settlements, hindering integration and intermingling, with intermarriage being uncommon. In terms of the population, ethnic Chinese, along with Ibans, Melanaus and expatriates, outnumbered the Malays (de Vienne 2011, p. 31).

The gap between the two ethnic Chinese communities is accentuated by socio-historical factors, particularly the regional divide.

Historically, Belait District was geographically isolated from the rest of Brunei because of its distance from the capital. Unlike residents of Tutong and Temburong, who could travel to Brunei Town via river routes or by driving along the coastline, travel from Kuala Belait Town was only possible by driving on the sandy shoreline. Despite the construction of a trunk road in the 1950s, Belait District remains geographically remote and isolated from the capital city (Nani Suryani 2007, pp. 96–98).

Mr G, who works as a lecturer at the University of Brunei Darussalam, found through his research that Kuala Belait Town and Seria Town were initially established not as part of Brunei but to support oil exploration and the development of the oil industry in Seria. British oil interests in the area spanned from Seria in Brunei to Marudi and Miri in Sarawak, with the headquarters located in Miri, where all industry-related decisions were made. Kuala Belait Town was developed in the 1930s to facilitate communication between Miri and Seria, acting as an intermediary service area and accommodating the growing population in land-limited Seria.

This regional separation significantly influenced the differences between the Bandar Chinese and Belait Chinese communities. Mr G emphasized, "KB [Kuala Belait] town and Seria Town were satellite towns of Miri. We [the Belait Chinese] are more closely related to Miri than Bandar [capital city]." He further claimed that Belait District was historically so detached from the rest of Brunei that the authority of the Brunei regime became visibly established only after the country's independence in 1984.[10]

Poulgrain (1998, p. 89) supports this claim, observing that the British Malayan Petroleum Company, responsible for oil extraction, operated as a "state within a state". The company independently provided infrastructure, housing and services for oil workers and their families, functioning largely separately from the Brunei state. This separation created a distinct environment in Belait District compared with the rest of Brunei, which persists today.

Moreover, internal differentiation between the two communities deepens the gap. The Bandar Chinese use differences in socialization, lifestyle, ethnicity/dialect and regional distinctions to distinguish

themselves from the Belait Chinese. This effort to draw a distinction enables them to assert stronger claims of belonging to Brunei by seeking recognition as a "model minority" (Ho 2021a, p. 14) among the non-indigenous citizens of Brunei.

Motivated to challenge narratives of *pendatang* and *penumpang* in their adopted country implied by MIB, the Bandar Chinese redirect these narratives towards the Belait Chinese. This intra-community differentiation persists, conditioned by a state that promotes ethno-religious nationalism. As changing one's ethnicity is not feasible, and converting to Islam does not confer Malay identity (Asiyah 2011, p. 39; Ho 2021a, p. 12), the Bandar Chinese resort to the tactic of internal differentiation to assert a stronger claim of belonging.

Many Belait Chinese are aware of the othering attempts by their Bandar counterparts. They assert that Bandar Chinese perceive them as unsophisticated and low-class "bumpkins" compared with the Bandar Chinese people's self-perception as cultured and status-conscious. Mr YG, a librarian and a former stateless individual fluent in Malay, expressed his sentiments, stating, "The Bandar Chinese always looked down on us, the Belait Chinese. They see us as remote, far from the city, and village people. They themselves are quite arrogant."

Coming from a disadvantaged background and facing the stereotype of residing in the "periphery", Mr YG admitted to having a strained relationship with his Bandar Chinese cousins because of these differences. He said, "Sometimes, I think having friends is better than having relatives." To compensate for the internal othering he experienced, Mr YG formed friendships with Malays and developed fluency in Malay, which proved advantageous when applying for naturalization. He said that acquiring Brunei citizenship opened numerous opportunities previously inaccessible to stateless individuals like him, ultimately enabling him to secure a well-paying job. Acquiring Brunei citizenship was the ultimate form of "revenge" against his Bandar cousins, who now look up to him as a role model.[11]

In a parallel experience, Mr G too faced discrimination as a former stateless Belait Chinese. Upon joining the University of Brunei Darussalam in 1994, he and another lecturer from Seria were

isolated and marginalized by the other staff, who saw them both as aliens and different from the Bandar Chinese that they were used to. At one point, indigenous staff even delayed his application to pursue a master's degree abroad, citing excuses like he was "not friendly" and was "difficult to communicate with". But he was not upset with the staff, and he gradually warmed up to them by participating in various activities organized by the faculty and the university.

Based on these experiences, Mr G opined that because of the stereotype of Belait Chinese as rural folks, their distinct differences from Bandar Chinese, and limited social mixing with Brunei Malays, they were often labelled as the "new breed" of Chinese. They were perceived as more alien and foreign compared with the Bandar Chinese, who were more familiar to the majority of Bruneians.[12]

In relation to the differentiation between the two communities, Mr H, who grew up in a mixed Chinese-indigenous household, opined that limited understanding—both among Bruneians and the Bandar Chinese—has fostered the perception that the Belait Chinese lack "Bruneiness".[13] Yet this perception is also reflected in the views of the authorities. During our interview, an officer of the MIB secretariat suggested that the state questions the loyalty of many stateless Belait Chinese as there appears to be a noticeable lack of concerted efforts from the Belait Chinese to actively demonstrate loyalty, unlike initiatives seen from the Bandar Chinese.[14]

Unsurprisingly, Ms JA, a Malaysian citizen who was raised, worked and lived in Belait District all her life, considers such perspectives to be biased. Advocating for her adopted community, she highlighted a sense of dissatisfaction among key Belait Chinese leaders regarding the lack of state recognition for their contributions to the economy, both in Belait District and throughout Brunei.[15]

Based on the points presented above, it is quite clear that the category of "ordinary people" is neither homogenous nor stable. The othered ethnic Chinese minority in Brunei represents a distinct social category beyond "ordinary people". Similar to indigenous citizens, they experience some aspects of "ordinary" nationhood experiences, while simultaneously lacking other aspects, including

equal rights and benefits and the recognition and protection of their cultural spaces and identities. These disparities significantly affect their legal and emotional sense of citizenship and their perception of nationhood.

This section suggests that there are two main Chinese communities in Brunei. The Bandar Chinese, through their long history of assimilation with the Malay community, have adapted more easily to Brunei's MIB nationhood and are recognized as Bruneians. To distance themselves from negative stereotypes, they differentiate themselves from the Belait Chinese to bolster their claim to MIB nationhood. Meanwhile, the Belait Chinese are perceived as having a lower level of assimilation in the eyes of both the state and Brunei society. Refusing to succumb to internal othering by the Bandar Chinese, the Belait Chinese have adopted a pragmatic approach by maintaining a balance between preserving their Chinese identity (Ho 2021a, p. 30), advocating for recognition within the MIB nationhood framework (Ho 2021b, p. 137) and managing competition from the Bandar Chinese (Hoon and Zhao 2023, p. 367).

Undeniably, the official narrative of nationhood based on MIB has shaped how these two communities interpret their identity and define their sense of belonging, ultimately fuelling competition between these marginalized minorities. This competition to negotiate their place and belonging within the national framework exemplifies the dialectical relationship and complex interplay between macro and micro discourses of everyday nationhood (Edensor 2002, p. 171). The competition to belong in this context suggests that ethnic minorities are not merely passive consumers of nationhood but also its creative producers (Palmer 1998, p.183). As such, the nation is conceptualized as both a product of structural forces and a product of social realities constructed by ordinary individuals (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, p. 554). This approach enhances understanding of a nationhood's complexities at both the macro and micro levels, showing how Brunei's nationhood resonates differently among different groups.

Contesting National Identity and Belonging:
Everyday "Talking" and "Choosing" of the Nation

Based on the discussion in the previous section, the citizenship status of ethnic Chinese can be characterized as "semi-citizenship", a concept that reflects the unequal and partial nature of their rights and benefits as citizens (Cohen 2009, p. 29). In Brunei, this concept of semi-citizenship applies to all ethnic Chinese residing in the country, granting them certain rights and protections but withholding the full privileges and entitlements enjoyed by other citizens. This unequal citizenship status profoundly shapes minority perceptions of nationhood, influencing their identity and their sense of belonging to the nation-state.

Generally, the interviewees' ways of talking about and choosing the nation are dynamic and subjective. Their narratives reflect individual logics, rationality and personal backgrounds, which they draw upon to justify their perspectives and responses. As illustrated in the following discussions, ethnic Chinese individuals in Brunei transform their socially constructed inner realities comprising perceptions, ideas, beliefs, attitudes and feelings into socially observable outer realities through actions and discursive acts, manifested in their grounded yet contested claims of identity and belonging.

Chinese Bruneian Citizens and Naturalized Chinese Bruneians:
"We Belong, but We Are Second-Class Citizens"

For Chinese Bruneian citizens, the conflation of national identity with MIB, the consequent sense of incongruency with Malay-Muslim elements of nationhood and the unequal nature of citizenship rights and benefits affect the way they identify with the MIB nation. For example, Mr F, a Hokkien Bandar Chinese businessman who grew up within the Brunei Malay community in Kampong Ayer, adopted aspects of local lifestyle, learned the local dialect of *belandih*,[16] and eventually converted to Islam, highlighted the disadvantage of his ethnicity in shaping his experience of nationhood. He revealed that Chinese people's acceptance as citizens is conditional, stating,

"We [Chinese Bruneian citizens] have to constantly demonstrate our loyalty on a daily basis to maintain that privileged status as citizens." Loyalty for the Chinese community entails a continuous outward display of allegiance, often manifested through financial and social contributions. Examples include participation in and sponsorship of National Day celebrations and the Sultan's birthday celebrations, sponsoring charity drives and initiating infrastructure projects such as rebuilding homes for the poor. These actions not only elevate their social status but also serve to demonstrate their commitment to the state. They reflect a sense of duty, loyalty and gratitude towards the monarch and the nation, serving to compensate for the perceived absence of Malay and Muslim elements in their identity.

Although this implicit requirement to contribute financially did not feel burdensome at first, he was nevertheless concerned with the rising cost and its effects on his business. He admitted that he had to be creative in what to give as compensation for the financial contribution he could not provide. Thus, although he always felt a Bruneian at heart, the daily reminder of his "outsider" status and the need to accommodate MIB have led to a contradictory sense of belonging.[17]

Another example of the contradictions in the sense of identity and belonging was shared by Mr SO. His family was among the earliest Christian Chinese families to settle in Brunei, and he gradually became wealthy through an import business. Mr SO explained that being part of the early local-born Chinese who were granted Brunei citizenship has instilled in him a sense of privilege and attachment to Brunei society. But he has also experienced first-hand numerous government policies that are not fair to ethnic and religious minorities, such as double standards and differentiation in business processes, taxation issues, and lack of accommodation of cultural and religious matters that are deeply important to the Chinese community. The everyday experiences of nationhood for Chinese Bruneian citizens like him are further restricted by what he refers to as his "dual minority" status, which stems from being marginalized because of both his ethnicity and his Christian faith. Mr SO's views illustrate

the complicated and paradoxical character of belonging for ethnic Chinese in Brunei, as they are expected to blend in while often facing systemic barriers that exclude them from full participation in both social and national life.[18]

Mr A was born to a Malay father and a Malaysian Chinese mother. He was raised solely by his Chinese mother but claimed that his social circles consist of Malays. Consequently, he asserted that he is Bruneian first and Chinese second, perceiving no conflict in identifying with MIB nationhood. Yet his experience of MIB nationhood, augmented by his "hybrid" ethnicity and his mother's nationality—which prolonged the transferring of his father's house to him to a lengthy fourteen-year process—prevented him from fully feeling a sense of belonging. For him, inheriting the house was not merely about having a roof over his head but was also deeply connected to a sense of homeliness and belonging. He said,

> A house is a very intimate and private place of our lives, which again relates to where we belong or spend most of our lives. Without a home, we are literally homeless; our belonging to Brunei suddenly went unrecognized and was being questioned. It is sad.

In this context, "home" encompasses more than just a physical dwelling offering privacy, security and shelter; it also embodies sociocultural dimensions such as a sense of place, roots and emotional aspects like belonging to family, community or a nation-state (Mallett 2004, p. 72). Therefore, "home" is a deeply ingrained and emotionally charged concept that profoundly influences an individual's perspective of identity, membership and belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006, p. 206). Mr A's reflection on the idea of home highlights the intimate connection between one's living space and their sense of belonging. He implied that, without a home, one becomes homeless, contributing to an ongoing struggle to belong despite affinity with the MIB nation.[19] Mr A's experience illustrates a common concern in Brunei, where it is a challenge to transfer property from a Bruneian parent to a mixed child, particularly if one of the parents is a Chinese Bruneian (Cheong 2017, p. 201; Lim 2020, pp. 33–34).

For naturalized Chinese Bruneians, obtaining citizenship is just one step towards full belonging and does not mark the end of the struggle against discrimination and the quest for equal recognition. Mr YMS, a former stateless Belait Chinese from Labi in Belait District who acquired Brunei citizenship and became a naturalized Chinese Bruneian, argued, "Even though I feel like I belong, I still feel somewhere in between everything. Still better than the red IC [identity card denoting statelessness], but my citizenship is not as equal as the seven *puaks*."[20] His statement highlights the liminal status many Chinese Bruneians experience despite their citizenship. The narrative of being newcomers and outsiders persists even after naturalization. This liminality within the MIB nation positions them between the privileged indigenous Brunei citizen and a foreigner. Mr YMS embodies this liminal identity and sense of belonging through his experiences while attempting to secure housing from the National Housing Scheme. He discovered that his applications were deferred multiple times primarily because of his single status and secondarily because of his ethnicity, which reflected the prioritization of indigenous applicants. He responded with indifference, fully aware of the constraints imposed by his ethnicity and informed by previous experiences of discrimination as a stateless individual.[21]

In contrast, there are others who express positive views of nationhood following naturalization. For example, Mr SH, a Hakka Belait Chinese and a model teacher, took pride in representing Brunei in a secondary schoolteacher exchange programme with a neighbouring country. The host country had expected a Malay representative from Brunei and was surprised to receive an ethnic Chinese instead. Recognized by both his school and the Ministry of Education for his dedication to teaching, which earned him numerous teaching excellence awards, the opportunity to represent Brunei on the international stage shaped his experience of everyday nationhood, reinforcing both his identity as a Chinese Bruneian and his sense of belonging to the country. Consequently, he perceives the national belonging of the Chinese community in Brunei as unproblematic, believing that minorities can achieve success and contribute to and

represent the nation.[22] Mr SH is one of the few among the informants to align his experience of nationhood with the MIB nation.

Another participant, Mr YG, attributed his sense of identity and belonging to growing up within the Malay community in Kuala Belait Town. He said, "I may look Chinese, but I am Bruneian at heart. The Malays accepted me very well, and we can converse naturally even though we are strangers." He also remarked on the perceived lack of Bruneian qualities among the Belait Chinese, stating, "They don't have Malayness in them. After immersing yourself in the local culture for so long, you are influenced by or gain a deeper understanding of that culture." He made this claim based on his observations and his own experience growing up in the Malay community and attending public school, in contrast with his Chinese friends, most of whom attended Chinese schools. He said that enrolling in a Chinese school creates a "bubble" that limits inter-ethnic encounters and socialization, a point confirmed by many informants who attended Chinese schools.[23]

The way both Chinese Bruneian citizens and naturalized Chinese Bruneians talk about and choose their nation can be interpreted as reflecting the notion of second-class citizenship. The concept of everyday identity and belonging, as explained by them, is shaped by their self-identification in comparison with the "privileged" indigenous ethnic groups. Years of living in Brunei have fostered a strong habitus and attachment to the country, although this is restricted by the ideology of MIB. These Chinese Bruneians believe that, as citizens, they should be entitled to the same rights and benefits as other Bruneians. However, as discussed above, their everyday experiences of citizenship and nationhood are marred by double standards and inequalities because of their ethnicity, complicating their claims to belonging and affecting their sense of identity.

For naturalized Chinese Bruneians, "upgrading" their legal status positively influences how they identify with the nation. They also recognize, however, that they remain trapped in the politics of othering imposed by MIB. It is therefore not surprising that some have developed a sense of ambivalence towards the MIB state as

a coping mechanism against the reality of everyday nationhood for ethnic minorities.

Malaysian Citizens with Brunei Permanent Residency: "We Always Belong as Most of Our Lives, We Are Here"

The case of Malaysian citizens with Brunei permanent residency provides a unique perspective on everyday nationhood that diverges from conventional nationalist doctrine. Given that they are Malaysian citizens, the Brunei state naturally perceives that their loyalty and allegiance lies with Malaysia. But, as long as they function as "productive guests", actively contributing to the country's economy and development, the state tolerates their substantial presence within Brunei, essentially allowing them to reside indefinitely (de Vienne 2011, p. 46; Cheong 2017, p. 206).

Yet their claim of everyday nationhood defies the conventional understanding of nationality, which typically confines individual attachment to one nation for external differentiation and internal identification. The way they "talk" and "choose" the nation redefines the discourses of national identity and belonging. For them, their everyday identity and belonging are not tied to their status or legal identification at birth, but rather to subjective and affective experiences (Ho and Ho 2021, p. 162) of nationhood that represent their lived citizenship (Kallio, Wood and Häkli 2020, p. 714).

All of them proudly assert their loyalty and belonging to Brunei, counting their years of residence in anticipation of qualifying for the citizenship test and naturalization. For example, Mr S, a sixty-year-old principal at a private Chinese school in Belait District, has lived in Brunei for the past forty years in search of better opportunities. Over the last decade, he has taken the citizenship test[24] three times without success. Mr S said,

> Even though I am considered Malaysian, I will always be a Bruneian. All my life is here. Someone may ask if I am a Bruneian. I willingly said yes, although on paper it is stated I am a Malaysian.[25]

Mr S's affective claim of belonging illustrates that for many Malaysian citizens with permanent residency in Brunei, nationality and one's sense of belonging are not inherently aligned.

Another informant, Ms JA, a Hainanese teacher in her forties, works at a government secondary school in Belait District. She moved to Brunei at a young age, following her parents, who established a noodle stall in the centre of Kuala Belait Town. Practically her entire life has been in Brunei as her immediate and extended family reside there. She received her education in Brunei and eventually secured a teaching position in the country. Getting a government job is a common aspiration among Bruneians. Thus, securing a coveted government teaching position reinforced her sense of belonging to Brunei. Fuelled by this sense, she recently purchased a property for herself and her parents, and she plans to retire in Brunei. Ms JA shared sentiments similar to those of Mr S, stating, "I always feel like I am local because all my family and friends are here."[26] Her use of the term "local" underscores her strong connection to Brunei, suggesting that Brunei—rather than her birthplace, Miri, in Sarawak—is the place she feels most familiar with.

Another informant, Mr SP, a Hokkien businessman specializing in the curtain-making industry, also claims that he is a Bruneian and that he belongs to Brunei. He said,

> In essence, we [Malaysian citizens with Brunei permanent residency] are Bruneians. We are here to stay. That is why we want Brunei to be better economically. If Brunei makes progress, then it will be a good benefit to our business.

As a business owner, Mr SP noted that business owners holding red ICs could relocate to more easily acquire citizenship. But they opt to remain in Brunei and pursue naturalization, demonstrating a commitment to belonging.[27]

The commitment demonstrated by the Malaysian informants singled out above in their claims to belong to Brunei—evident through their efforts to become naturalized and contribute to Brunei's economy, and their home purchases as a symbolic act of rooting

themselves in Brunei—represents a "breach" in the conventional concept of nationality (Fox 2017, pp. 5–8). This act of "breaching" challenges traditional understandings of nationality and nationhood while also redefining and broadening the definitions of national identity and belonging as reflected in the everyday discursive narratives of nationhood of such respondents. It highlights the fluid nature of identity and belonging, signifying that one's sense of identity and belonging is continuously negotiated and redefined throughout one's life.

The detachment of the concept of nationality from everyday realities is most evident in the case of Mr W, a researcher in his late twenties. Mr W moved to Brunei with his parents at the age of nine and has lived there ever since. He commented, "I always thought of myself as a very happy Chinese Bruneian. My Malaysian identity has nothing to do with my life except giving me a good citizenship."

At first glance his claims may appear arrogant. But they are deeply influenced by the internalization of various factors, such as through everyday socialization and habitus, which have shaped his perception of his identity as a Bruneian and his sense of belonging to Brunei. At the same time, his remarks imply a fading national identity and attachment to Malaysia alongside an increasing sense of identification with Brunei.

Throughout the interview, Mr W expressed frustration at his inability to be recognized as a Bruneian. He said that he had actively followed up on the requirements for naturalization and was eager to take the test, only to be told he would need to wait another decade before being eligible. Such inconsistencies in counting years of residence as part of the test requirements shattered his resolve to pursue naturalization.[28] He believes that by the time he obtains Brunei citizenship he will be of advanced age and the benefits of citizenship, such as scholarships and career stability, would have already passed.[29]

Most informants emphasized emotional attachments to familial ties, childhood memories and the cultural environment of Bruneian

society as primary reasons for viewing Brunei as their home.[30] Despite experiencing alienation and othering because of their nationality, their desire for Brunei citizenship remains strong (O'Hara-Davies 2015, p. 102). They express deeper connections with Brunei and its people than with their relatives or fellow citizens in Malaysia. For example, both Mr S and Mr W, who still maintain close contacts with relatives in neighbouring Sarawak, find it challenging to stay overnight at their relatives' homes because of cultural differences, a sense of inferiority stemming from their inability to communicate in their own dialect, and a certain pride instilled by years of living in Brunei.[31] In short, Malaysian citizens with Brunei permanent residency challenge traditional narratives of nationality and belonging while simultaneously reshaping and broadening the definition of national identity and belonging.

Stateless Ethnic Chinese: "We Always Belong, No Matter What"

Stateless ethnic Chinese in Brunei experience the most contentious sense of identity and belonging compared with other groups. Despite being labelled as "permanent residents" to suggest non-expulsion, Brunei dismisses their contributions and claims of belonging because of their stateless status (Cheong 2017, p. 195), constantly reminding them that they do not belong anywhere. However, the informants emphasized that Brunei is the only place they know, since it is their birthplace and the place where they have spent most of their lives, and they thus see it as their motherland.

    Ms A comes from a humble background and lives in the suburbs of Kuala Belait. As a third-generation stateless individual in Brunei, she faces limited opportunities. Unlike other informants who attended Chinese schools and were shielded from the realities of statelessness, she attended public schools and became aware of her "unique" status from an early age. As a stateless person, she stays informed about new regulations on naturalization, but each time such news emerges it reinforces her feeling that naturalization may remain just a dream. For instance, she noted frustratedly, "We have been living in Brunei since forever; even both of my parents were born here. Even though

I passed the test, it does not mean we have all the rights to get the yellow IC [denoting citizens]. It hurts."

The above remark reflects a well-known issue among stateless Bruneians. From 2012 to 2022, the Brunei government halted the granting of citizenship to candidates who had passed the test during that period without providing any proper explanation. As a result, many felt helpless as their efforts to belong were being blocked without any clear justification. Their protracted status of being stateless (Flaim 2017, p. 148) perplexes many second- and third-generation locally born Belait Chinese.[32]

For Ms A, she is reminded every day that she does not belong to Brunei through banal reminders of the implications of being denied the benefits of citizenship, such as not having education-related allowances or scholarships, accumulating debts for college fees, limited employment opportunities and mobility, restrictions in accessing government loans, and many more. Nevertheless, she insists, "No matter what, I am not going anywhere, and Brunei is my forever home", asserting her claim of belonging to Brunei.[33]

Another informant, Mr M, a third-generation stateless individual from Belait, is an ICT specialist with a company based in Singapore, and he is on track to acquiring Singapore citizenship this year. He sees no conflict between his stateless status and his claim to Bruneian identity. He commented, "I don't feel any complications in my identity. I was born here [in Brunei] so I always feel that I am a Bruneian. As for my [legal] status, that is about the law; it is a separate issue." His views reflect an astute understanding of the distinction between abstract, rigid concepts of nationality and national identity and the emotional, subjective sense of belonging.

Although the prospect of acquiring Singapore citizenship looks promising, he claims he will always belong to Brunei. He said, "I was born here [Brunei] so I always feel that I am a Bruneian. Even though I will become a Singaporean citizen, I will always think that I belong to Brunei as all my life was in Brunei."

Mr M explained that his current sense of belonging stems from the habitus he developed during the years prior to moving to Singapore,

including the community he grew up with, his socialization patterns in Brunei and the influence of MIB on his perspective of nationhood. He did not deny, however, that this sense of belonging may fade as he builds his new life in Singapore, further proving that changing social realities play a role in shaping his agentic sense of belonging.[34] In the case of stateless ethnic Chinese in Brunei, therefore, despite their status of non-belonging, their everyday narratives of nationhood suggest otherwise.

The diverse narratives of nationhood discussed above underscore the multiple registers through which nationhood is expressed, illustrating that individual understandings of the nation are inherently heterogeneous. Its form, content and meaning remain open to varied interpretations and negotiations (Thompson 2001, p. 19). A discursive examination of the everyday experiences and interpretations of nationhood by marginalized minorities sheds light on the tensions and contradictions embedded in the homogenizing narratives of nationhood propagated by nationalist rhetoric (Antonsich 2018, p. 7). Ultimately, the contested and multifaceted everyday nationhood narratives articulated by ethnic Chinese minorities in Brunei reveal the limitations and contradictions of dominant MIB nationhood discourses, emphasizing their active role as co-producers of nationhood.

The everyday nationhood narratives articulated by ethnic Chinese minorities illustrate an ongoing contestation that challenges the narrow confines of MIB nationhood narratives. Rather than accepting their othered status, they actively reject or deconstruct narratives and stereotypes of otherness (Wood 2022, p. 20), developing instead new narratives grounded in personal experiences, habitus and life stories. As a result, national identity and belonging transcend official nationalist discourses, becoming rooted in individual experiences and actions (Youkhana, 2015, p. 10).

The claims made by ethnic Chinese minorities in Brunei essentially challenge the notion that belonging necessarily aligns with being (Anthias 2002, p. 492). This is evident from their strong sense of identity as both Bruneians and Chinese as well as their claims to

belonging. Similarly, the assertions of belonging by Malaysian citizens residing in Brunei defy conventional understandings of nationality. These dynamics reveal that identity and belonging at the grassroots level are fluid, dynamic and subject to negotiation—contrasting sharply with the exclusive and fixed MIB national identity promoted by the state.

In summary, ethnic Chinese minorities in Brunei (re)interpret the meanings of their citizenship, identity and belonging based on what holds emotional significance for them (Staeheli et al. 2012, p. 631), reflecting their prioritization of lived citizenship over legal citizenship. They adopt multiple identities situationally, both as a coping mechanism and as a way to assert their sense of belonging. Furthermore, they view rejecting or dismantling narratives of otherness as essential (Wood 2022, p. 8), enabling them to feel "at home in the nation" (Ahmed 2000, p. 23).

Conclusion

This study sought to address Anthony Smith's (2008, pp. 565–68) critique of the limitations of everyday nationhood by providing a discursive analysis of everyday nationhood as experienced by ethnic minorities in Brunei. These minorities, while being integral members of the nation, often face scrutiny regarding their national identity and belonging. The study demonstrates how everyday nationhood at the grassroots level is manifested through the interpretation of their identities and claims of belonging, emphasizing the diverse ways everyday nationhood is experienced. At the same time, the article highlights how everyday nationhood is expressed and threatened through a sense of (non-)belonging because of non-conformity with the dominant discourse of nationhood based on ethno-religious homogeneity.

Furthermore, the grassroots assertion of everyday nationhood through identity and claims of belonging challenges conventional understandings of nation and nationality, which often tie individual attachment to a single nation as prescribed by nationalist rhetoric.

For ethnic Chinese in Brunei, identity and belonging are shaped not by ethnicity, legal status, nationality or birth identification, but by subjective and affective experiences, as well as lived citizenship within Brunei.

Isin and Turner (2002, p. 311) emphasize the importance of examining not only the legal-political dimensions of citizenship but also its emotional and experiential aspects, often referred to as "lived citizenship". This study contributes to the broader literature on citizenship by highlighting the emotional dimensions of citizenship through the lens of everyday nationhood, focusing on the lived citizenship of those who are othered within the nation rather than on ordinary individuals enjoying full citizenship rights and benefits. By examining the everyday nationhood of this "non-ordinary" social category, the study offers a framework for future research on lived citizenship, highlighting the connections between minorities' experiences of citizenship and their daily encounters with nationhood.

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NOTES

1. Suryadinata (2015, p. 19) distinguishes between two types of nations: ethno-nations, which are based on the dominant ethnic group, and social or civic nations, where multiple ethnic groups collectively form a nation. As a result, it is possible for some nations not to adopt a single language or culture as the basis for national identity.
2. This refers to the internalized structures and schemes shaping how individuals perceive and respond to the social world (Bourdieu 1977, p. 86).

3. Interview with Tuan R, Gadong, Brunei, 6 March 2023.
4. Between 2015 and 2016, Brunei quietly reclassified stateless individuals into the category of permanent residents. This move followed repeated criticism by the United Nations regarding Brunei's perceived lack of efforts to address the issue of statelessness.
5. Chap Goh Mei marks the fifteenth and final day of the Chinese New Year celebrations.
6. Interview with Mr H, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, 29 March 2023.
7. Interview with Tuan R, Gadong, Brunei, 6 March 2023.
8. Interview with Ms L, Lambak Kanan, Brunei, 27 April 2023.
9. Interview with Mr SO, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, 28 April 2023.
10. Interview with Mr G, Gadong, Brunei, 16 March 2023.
11. Interview with Mr YG, Gadong, Brunei, 7 March 2023.
12. Interview with Mr G, Gadong, Brunei, 16 March 2023.
13. Interview with Mr H, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, 29 March 2023.
14. Interview with Tuan R, Gadong, Brunei, 6 March 2023.
15. Interview with Ms JA, Kuala Belait, Brunei, 27 February 2023.
16. *Belandih* is a prestigious dialect of Brunei Malay, formerly used by Kampong Ayer elites. It is noted for its soft, slow intonation. It has now largely been supplanted by standardized Brunei Malay.
17. Interview with Mr F, Serusop, Brunei, 20 March 2023.
18. Interview with Mr SO, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, 28 April 2023.
19. Interview with Mr A, Serusop, Brunei, 15 March 2023.
20. The identification cards in Brunei are categorized by colour, as follows: yellow for citizens, red or purple for permanent residents, and green for temporary residents.
21. Interview with Mr YMS, Kuala Belait, Brunei, 11 February 2023.
22. Interview with Mr SH, Kuala Belait, Brunei, 2 March 2023.
23. Interview with Mr YG, Gadong, Brunei, 7 March 2023.
24. The Brunei citizenship test is divided into two categories: a written test for applicants below the age of sixty, and an oral test for those aged sixty and above. It assesses proficiency in the Malay language and knowledge relevant to MIB. The written component includes sections on comprehension, affixation, sentence construction, summarization, numeral classifiers, and essay writing on topics related to MIB.
25. Interview with Mr S, Seria, Brunei, 9 March 2023.
26. Interview with Ms JA, Kuala Belait, Brunei, 11 March 2023.
27. Interview with Mr SP, Gadong, Brunei, 14 March 2023.
28. Permanent residents are required to reside in the country for a minimum of twenty-five years before becoming eligible to take the citizenship test.
29. Interview with Mr W, Gadong, Brunei, 3 May 2023.

30. Interview with Ms JA, Kuala Belait, Brunei, 11 March 2023; Interview with Mr S, Seria, Brunei, 9 March 2023; Interview with Mr G, Gadong, Brunei, 16 March 2023.
31. Interview with Mr S, Seria, Brunei, 9 March 2023; Interview with Mr W, Gadong, Brunei, 3 May 2023.
32. For more insight on this issue, please refer to Md Zaidul (2021).
33. Online interview with Ms A, 16 August 2021.
34. Online interview with Mr M, 17 March 2023.

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